



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 18 March 2024
(OR. en)

7881/24

ENV 319
RELEX 341

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Stricter controls on exports of textile waste to developing countries
- Information from the Danish, French and Swedish delegations

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Danish, French and Swedish delegations on the above subject, to be dealt with under ‘Any other business’ at the Council (Environment) meeting on 25 March 2024.

Stricter controls on exports of textile waste to developing countries**- Information from the Danish, French and Swedish delegations -**

In 2022, the European Environment Agency reported that over the past 20 years there had been a threefold increase in textile waste exported from the EU. In 2019 alone, 1.7 million tonnes of textiles were exported outside the EU, mainly to countries in Africa and Asia without the capacity to ensure proper waste management. Mismanaged textile waste frequently ends up in landfills or in nature, where it causes harm to humans, animals and the environment.

The textile sector is considered the fourth most environmentally harmful sector in the EU. The production of textiles requires large amounts of energy and water and the use of chemicals, as well as taking up large areas of land for cotton production, which can harm biodiversity. The textile sector is also a significant contributor to climate change, as it accounts for 10 % of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The import and export of waste are regulated at the global level under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. The Basel Convention does not currently require an exporter to obtain prior informed consent from the importing state when exporting textile waste, which is the case for other highly problematic waste streams like household waste, plastic waste and electronic waste. There is also no requirement to ensure that the importing country has the capacity to manage the textile waste in an environmentally sound manner.

There are initiatives under way at EU level to address the growing problem of textile waste, e.g. in the Commission's proposed revision of the Waste Framework Directive and the recently agreed revision of the Waste Shipment Regulation. The proposed common classification criteria and definitions under the Waste Framework Directive would make it possible to more clearly distinguish between textile *waste* and *used* textiles. This would contribute to ensuring that textile waste is not incorrectly classified as used goods when exported from the EU.

However, even with the implementation of the proposed changes to the Waste Framework Directive and the recently agreed revision of the Waste Shipment Regulation, textile waste can still be exported freely under the Basel Convention. There is now an obvious opportunity to ‘complete the circle’ and ensure more harmonious regulation at the EU and global level by subjecting textile waste to the controls of the Basel Convention. Following the approach taken to regulate electronic waste under the Basel Convention, this would mean 1) requiring prior informed consent to be obtained for the import and export of textile waste, and 2) banning the export of hazardous textile waste (e.g. stained with chemicals or paint) altogether.

This approach could bring about significant environmental and health benefits in developing countries, and be a way for the EU to show global leadership and responsibility.

For the EU to formally propose an amendment to the Basel Convention, the Commission has to propose a draft Council Decision authorising it. The next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention is to be held in the spring of 2025, and the proposal would have to be tabled by the Commission well in advance of that.

Denmark, France and Sweden urge the Commission to put forward a draft Council Decision on a common EU proposal on subjecting textile waste to the control mechanisms of the Basel Convention at the 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in the spring of 2025.