



## The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment

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# The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment

Policy brief

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## Introduction

The collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of textiles are largely unregulated in the Nordic region and there is a combination of serious actors, with a majority of charity organisations, and grey and/or illegal market players. This not only creates scepticism from consumers to donate their used textiles but also limits the collected amounts of textiles for reuse and recycling.

The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment aims to engage stakeholders in committing to common goals of reducing the environmental impact from textile consumption and increasing the competitiveness of the Nordic

region. It provides a third party certified system for legitimate sustainable collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of textiles by the participating actors.

Increased collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of textiles enable growth in the market of used textiles and textile waste. It creates job opportunities mainly in sorting, second hand sales and recycling while increasing the resource efficiency within the Nordic textile sector.

The voluntary commitment is not a voluntary system for producer responsibility and does not

replace other measures for a more sustainable management of textiles in the Nordic countries.

This policy brief includes key results and findings from the project *The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment* as well as key recommendations for action. The project is part of the Nordic Prime ministers' initiative, *The Nordic Region – leading in green growth*.

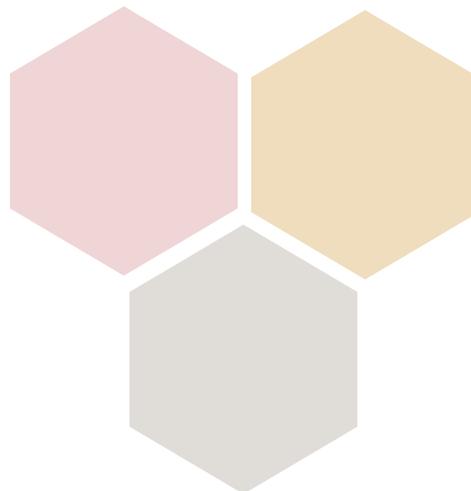
## Key messages for policy makers

The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment has been developed in close relation to textile industry, collectors, municipalities and waste companies to ensure reasonable criteria. Criteria are possible both to achieve and to control while still setting clear ambitions for the management of used textiles and textile waste.

### **The goals of the commitment are to:**

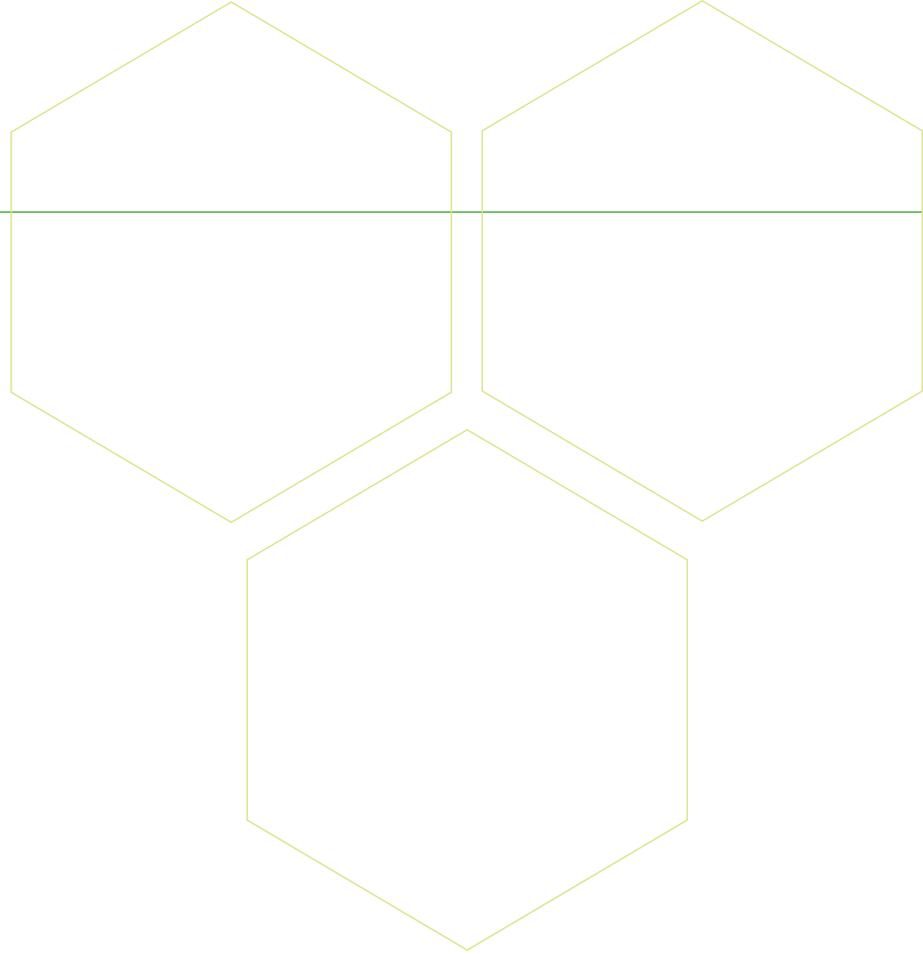
- Enable legitimate actors to collect, sort, reuse and recycle textiles in cooperation with producers, importers and authorities
  - Eliminate the illegal collection, export and trading of post-consumer textiles
  - Increase transparency on the fate of collected textiles and the purpose of the collection and increase public confidence in collecting organisations
  - Within ten years double the share of post-consumer textiles that are collected separately across the Nordic region compared to 2012
  - Strive towards a ten year goal of at least 50% of collected textiles are reused (either in Nordic countries or abroad) and 90% of the total is reused or, where reuse is not possible, recycled.
- Aim towards closed loop recycling rather than downcycling.
- Ensure that all actors comply with third party verified social code of conducts

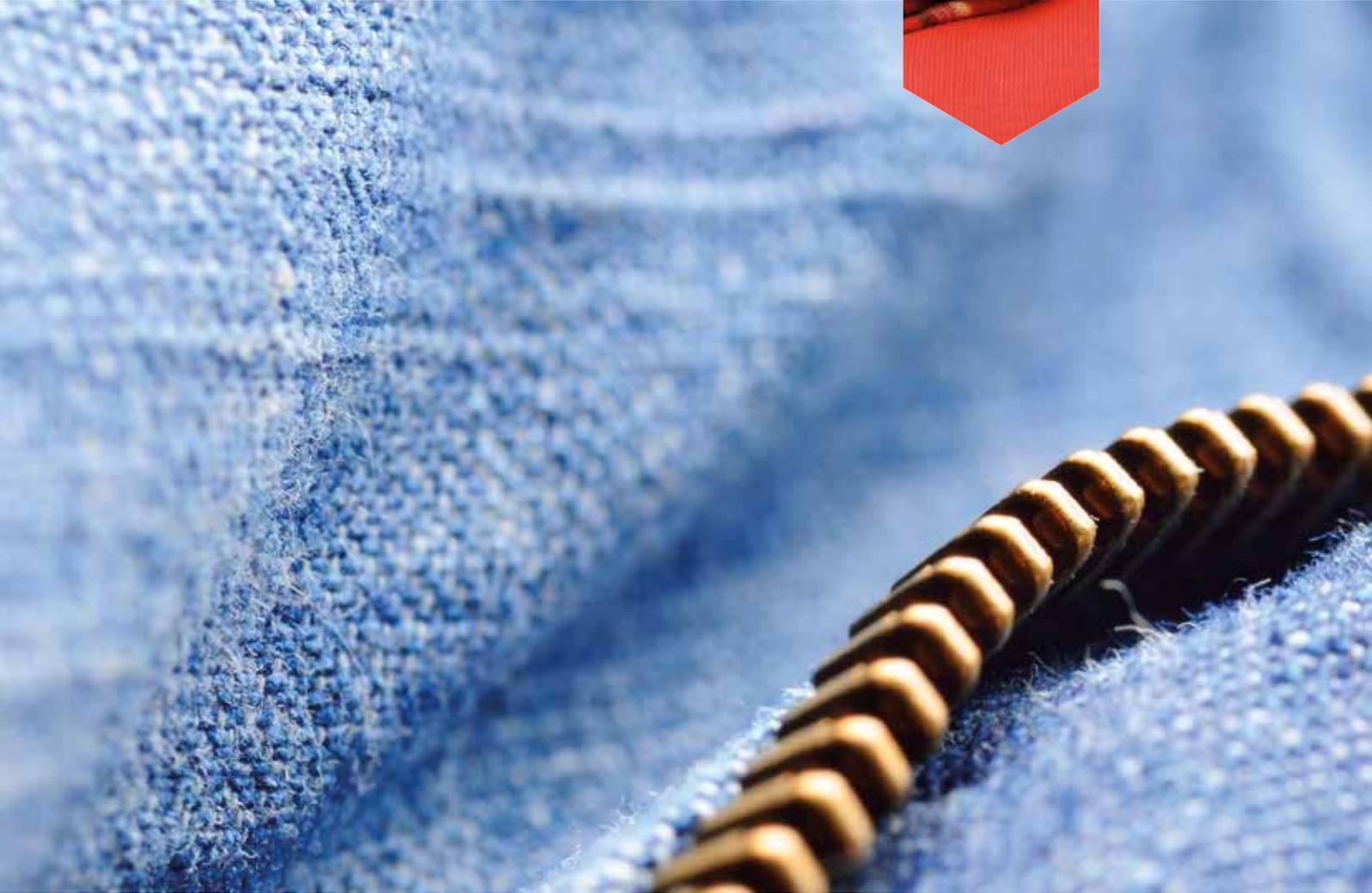
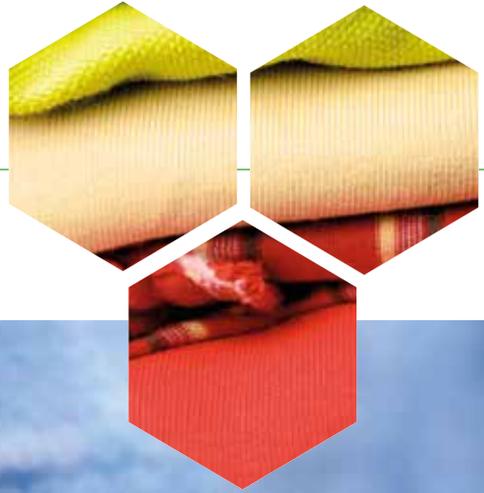
The main principles of the Voluntary commitment have been developed together with a Code of Conduct that combined cover details for collectors, sorters, reuse traders, recyclers, municipalities, waste companies and producers/importers of textile. A certification and system operation document covers criteria for the operation and development of the system including fees and audits.



The proposed system has been very well received by the Nordic textile sector and municipalities involved in the development. The next step will be to implement the developed system with trials to ensure that the certification has the intended effect and work towards the set goals for the commitment.

To ensure future legitimacy of the commitment it is of most importance to have continued support from the Nordic governments both nationally and within the Nordic cooperation.





## Key recommendations for action

To ensure an increase of legitimate collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of textiles in the Nordic region for a more sustainable textile sector, Nordic decision makers are called to:

**1. Provide continued support for the certification system** both in terms of initial funding and participation in the certification committee as well as the implementation phase. To ensure credibility and trust in the developed system it is crucial to have the Nordic governments as patrons of the system.

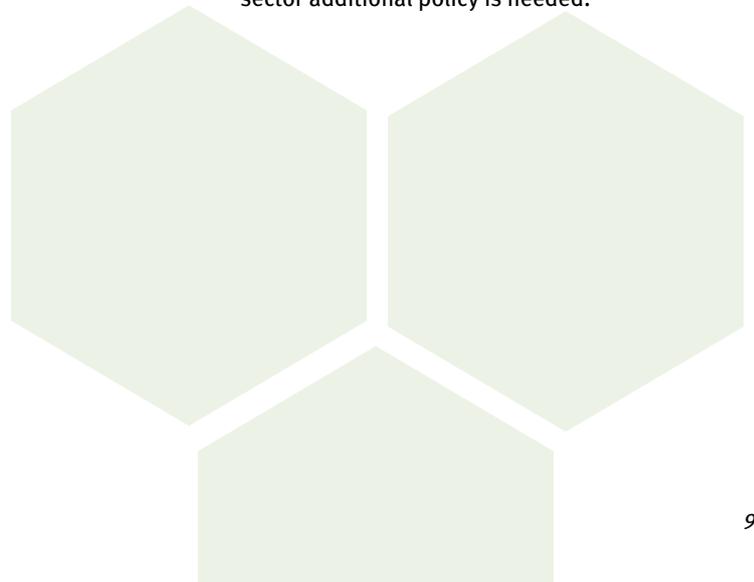
**2. Clarify ownership of used textiles and textile waste** and which actors are allowed to collect and manage used textiles and textile waste. Consumers are not capable of separating reusable from recyclable textiles. Both fractions therefore need to be collected in one single fraction.

**3. Ensure a clear competitive advantage for certified actors** by e.g. demanding all actors in the collection and management of textiles to be certified within the developed system or by other means live up to the specified criteria. In an extended producer responsibility system, the criteria can be used for approved collectors within the EPR.

**4. Introduce policy measures towards production of high quality textiles** to limit the consumption of new textiles and to increase the profitability of collection and second hand sales of textiles within the Nordic region. A situation where the quality of textiles is too low for even one user makes all subsequent uses impossible.

**5. Acknowledge the social value of charity collectors** while still allowing for commercial collectors of textiles. Charitable collectors provide an additional value to society and policies introduced should acknowledge this value to ensure the possibility for these actors to remain as actors in the textile sector.

**6. Introduce policy for other areas of the textile sector** that complement the actions taken within the commitment. The developed commitment is focused on the collection and sorting actors and has only a very limited effect on producers and retailers. To move towards a more sustainable textile sector additional policy is needed.



## Objective of the research performed

The objective of the research project<sup>1</sup> was to develop a common quality requirement system for textile collection, reuse and recycling companies based on a voluntary commitment system organized by a Nordic body or by national bodies.

The developed commitment describes a general framework for a voluntary commitment between actors in the textile value chain and authorities in the Nordic countries. It includes commitments related to environment, social performance,

communication, cooperation and compliance with laws on a general level as well as specific commitments for actors in the different stages of the reuse and recycling of textiles. Textiles included are clothing and home textiles.

### **Structure of the voluntary commitment**

The developed voluntary commitment includes three parts. The core is a code of conduct with criteria for actors involved in collection, sorting, reuse and

recycling of textiles. The criteria range from management of collection points to transparency in the management of collected textiles. Overarching this is the voluntary commitment with goals for the entire textile sector and commitments also for producers, municipalities and waste companies. A certifying organisation ensures that commitments are kept and manage the future development of the system.

<sup>1</sup> As written in the original tender for the project by the Nordic Waste Group

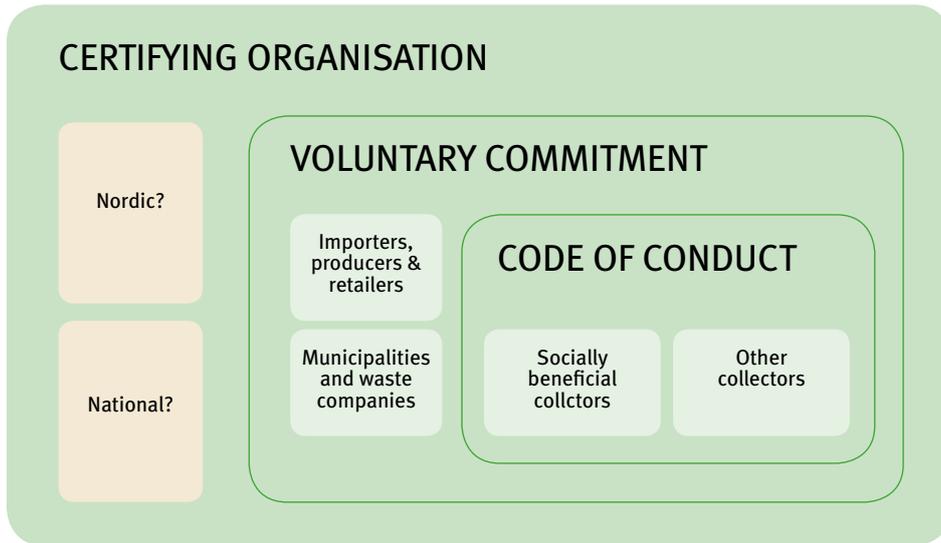


Figure 1. Structure of the Voluntary Commitment





### **Criteria in the code of conduct**

Criteria are given for collection in general and specifically for in store collection, kerbside collection and container collection. Criteria are also given for sorting, recycling, reuse and sales of reused textiles, export of used textiles as well as environmental performance, transparency and reporting. Criteria are divided into *may* and *shall*, where *may* are aspirational criteria and *shall* should be fulfilled and documented.

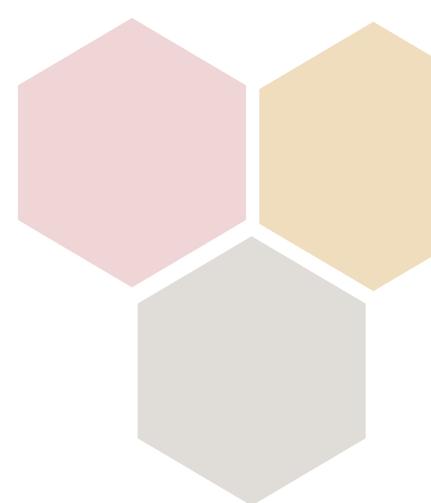
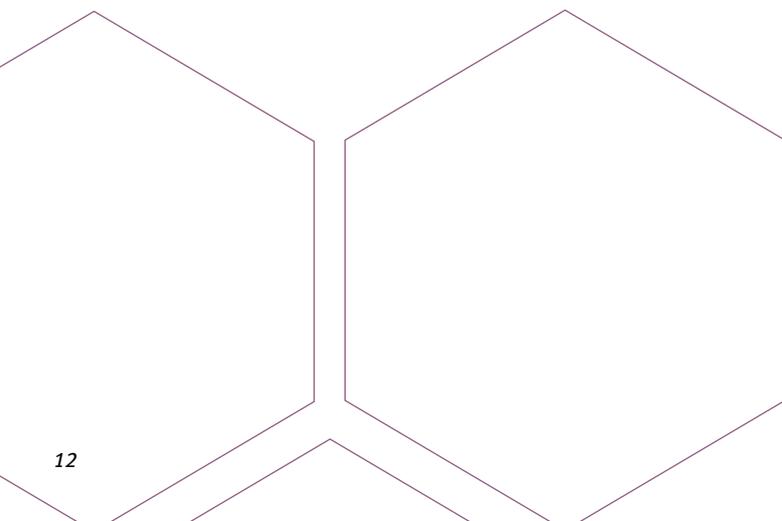
For actors claiming status as socially beneficial actors a list of ten criteria of which six must be fulfilled is provided. This enables “charities” in a broad definition

to show consumers that they are providing an additional good beyond sound environmental management of textiles while still allowing for commercial actors to be part of the certification system.

### **The certification system operator**

The certification system operator is the organisation running the certification system in all practical aspects with appointing accredited verifiers, development of the system, information and maintaining registers of certified actors and fees. The certification operator does not perform certification audits, but approves organisations and individuals that do, based on predefined criteria.

A certification committee consists of representatives for the various stakeholders affected by the system and aids the certification operator in the development of the system. It ensures that the system is able to adapt to changing conditions and has a continued relevance for the reuse and recycling of textiles.



### **Support for the voluntary commitment**

The Voluntary commitment has a large group of actors supporting further development and implementation. Some of the main supporters are:

- Myrorna, Sweden
- Swedish Red Cross, Sweden
- UFF Denmark
- UFF Finland
- Human Bridge, Sweden
- TextilRecycling, Sweden
- Kirkens Korshær, Denmark
- Trasborg, Denmark
- City of Göteborg, Sweden
- City of Stockholm, Sweden
- City of Malmö, Sweden
- Mepex, Norway



## Potential for green jobs

Increased reuse and recycling of textiles and textile wastes have potentials to create new green jobs, particularly in terms of collection, sorting, second hand retail and recycling of textiles.

Calculations on job creation are highly dependent on which types of organisations that will manage the increased collected amounts, on the amount of reusable items on the Nordic market and several other factors. Nevertheless, an example for reaching the collection goal stated in the voluntary commitment can

serve as an indication for potential increases in employment.

- Doubling the share of separate collection would correspond to about 120,000 tonnes of used textiles additionally collected. Using employee figures for Myrorna, the largest collector of textiles in Sweden, and putting it in relation to their collected amounts would imply 4,400 new jobs and 30,000 additional work training opportunities, internships and community service opportunities.



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This policy brief on The Nordic textile reuse and recycling commitment is part of the Nordic Prime Ministers' overall green growth initiative, *The Nordic Region – leading in green growth*. Read more in the web magazine *Green Growth the Nordic Way* at [www.nordicway.org](http://www.nordicway.org) or at [www.norden.org/greengrowth](http://www.norden.org/greengrowth)

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