



# The Best of BoF 2024: Fashion's Sustainability Pullback

This year offered up a jarring reality check for players seeking to improve the industry's environmental and social impact, with brands deprioritising sustainability efforts even as the risks of inaction have become more apparent. Sustainability is falling down executive agendas, supplanted by concerns about the global economy, geopolitics and trade tensions. At the same time, the risks of inaction for fashion are growing.

That tension was at the heart of many of the stories we covered in 2024. This year was the hottest on record, with soaring temperatures giving rise to deadly and chaotic weather extremes. In manufacturing hubs in Asia it got so hot this spring that workers sickened and machinery stopped working. But the industry still isn't really treating climate change as an imminent threat, with most companies lagging on environmental targets and investments

In fact, it's proved a brutal 12 months for many sustainability-minded fashion businesses, with high-profile brands like Mara Hoffman closing shop amid a "slow fashion recession" and material innovators struggling to commercialise. Patagonia, one of the industry's most ardent advocates for climate-friendly capitalism, is still trying to figure out a business model that resolves the contradiction between its environmental goals and the damage caused by its operations.

Elsewhere, we chronicled the cost of a business-as-usual approach. Luxury brands, beset by a market downturn, saw excess inventory levels balloon into a billion-dollar problem — one made much more challenging by new rules that forbid the destruction of unsold goods. A scandal that linked Dior and Armani to Italian sweatshops added fuel to growing skepticism about luxury's value proposition. Shein, one of the industry's most successful brands in recent years, has also become its most polluting, according to data the company published in August.

The situation puts fashion on track for a sustainability reckoning and raises the risk companies could slip even further behind on their targets in the coming year.

## Top Stories

**AI, Outlets, Recycling: Can Luxury Solve Its Billion-Dollar Excess Inventory Problem?:** LVMH and Kering wrote down billions of dollars of unsold inventory last year. What to do with it has become an increasingly complex challenge.

**Inside Luxury's Italian Sweatshops Problem: An Italian probe linking luxury labels including Dior and Armani to labour exploitation** — with the supply chains of up to a dozen more brands under the microscope — has exposed a seedy practice deeply embedded in the luxury system, creating an unpredictable PR crisis at a precarious time for the sector, a BoF investigation has found.

**What's Behind the Slow Fashion Recession: The closure of Mara Hoffman and other brands that built ethical consumption into their business models** is raising questions about whether there's room in the market for brands that put sustainability first.

**What Happens When It's Too Hot to Make Fashion?: The deadly heatwaves that have swept manufacturing hubs across Asia in recent months highlight a challenge the fashion industry is not prepared for.**

**'In Business to Save the Planet': The Patagonia Paradox: The American outerwear giant's profits are meant to fight climate change, but its means of generating them do the opposite.** CEO Ryan Gellert talks to BoF about the contradiction at the heart of



Patagonia's business, why he's gambling on resale and the company's efforts to curb consumption.

Chanel's Latest Legal Battleground: Upcycling: As they move to protect their intellectual property, big brands are coming into conflict with a growing class of up-and-coming designers working with refashioned designer gear.

Where Is the Money to Make Fashion More Sustainable?: Decarbonising the industry is expected to take \$1 trillion over the coming decades. Where that money will come from and how it's distributed remain open questions.

Fashion Recycling's Second Act: The nascent textile-to-textile recycling industry is emerging from crisis with fresh momentum, as Swedish pioneer Renewcell is rescued out of administration and Sri Lankan manufacturing giant MAS pledges to buy thousands of metres of recycled polyester.

Shein: Fashion's Biggest Polluter in Four Charts: The ultra-fast-fashion giant's planet-warming emissions have nearly tripled in the last three years as its growth far outpaced other major fashion companies. In Shein's latest sustainability report, CEO Sky Xu says tackling emissions is "particularly critical."

Is Fast Fashion Worth Recycling?: As the EU seeks to crack down on a growing glut of clothing waste, the rise of low-value ultra-fast-fashion, along with increased competition and geopolitical disruption, are putting pressure on the economics of collecting, sorting and recycling used textiles.

More from Sustainability

How fashion can do better for people and the planet.

A fragmented fashion industry needs to cooperate in order to avoid falling further behind on decarbonisation efforts, according to the BoF-McKinsey State of Fashion 2025.

Big brands are focused on buzzy, marketable 'solutions' and face little accountability for failing to deliver on decarbonisation targets, but there are ways to unlock more effective action, writes Kenneth P. Pucker.

