

How To Tell If A Child Made Your Clothes

LONDON PEOPLES

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Word on the street is that [brands are embracing sustainability](#). Some are going [fur-free](#), too. Today, it's more common than ever to find round-ups of ethical fashion brands in your favorite publications (including on sites like [this one](#)), as fast- to mid-level and luxury labels are attempting to bring more transparency to their pre- and post-production processes. And while that's certainly progress, we may never reach the goal of a quality/quantity equilibrium — at least, not in our lifetime. In fact, by 2030, the industry [could reach a standstill](#) — with natural resources becoming so jeopardized that any move towards a more sustainable future will be near impossible.

But after polling some of the world's top ethics and sustainability organizations, there's another sector of the industry that deserves more attention and resources: child labor.

While you're reading this, [over 218 million children are hard at work](#) — [73 million of those are working in](#)

[hazardous conditions](#) that "directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development." Crazy, right? Not really, when you take into account that consumers — you and me — contribute to this number with [every \\$20 pair of jeans we buy](#). And when those jeans are hand-dyed by very tiny hands, that discount actually comes at a much higher cost.

While it's much easier to track the life of clothing once it's already made, retracing its origins is another story. That's why transparency, at every level, is crucial. And though we may never know just how much of the industry's clothing is made by children, here's what information *is* currently available.



PHOTO: MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES.

Fashion Brands Aren't Being Open & Honest With You

JAKE HALL

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Fashion is beaten only by the oil industry for the tarnished crown of being the dirtyest industry in the world. In recent years, fashion's impact – on both people and planet – has been documented in innumerable news reports and exposés of garment factory fires, workplace sexual violence, and widespread pollution. Just last week, British parliament launched an inquiry to measure the true carbon footprint of fast fashion. But things are changing: Brands have started to pay attention and make efforts to change their exploitative and polluting ways. Or...so it seems.

The collapse of [Rana Plaza](#) in Bangladesh in 2013 — which killed 1,134 garment workers — along with other high-profile tragedies, finally gave influential, trailblazing NGOs the clout they needed to pressure brands into investigating and reporting on their supply chains. More scrutiny would create more transparency, and brands could be held accountable. It sounds great, but the resulting ‘transparency’ drive isn’t quite what it seems. And since there are no minimum requirements for reporting — just how open and honest are brands actually being?

It is a question often asked by the activists behind [Fashion Revolution](#), the nonprofit responsible for much of the positive change since Rana Plaza. To encourage transparency, they collate an annual Transparency Index, which calculates how much information brands make available and aggregates it into a ranked system. Sarah Ditty, Fashion Revolution’s head of policy, explains that research such as this urges brands to disclose more. “When we compare the 98 brands and retailers in both the 2017 and [2018 Index](#), we have seen an average increase of 5% in their level of transparency,” she tells Refinery29. “Sixty-four percent of brands have disclosed more policies and commitments than they did last year, and all but 10 brands are disclosing at least one relevant social or environmental policy.”

