

What are the requirements for apparel to enter the European market?

If you want to sell apparel on the European market, there are several requirements that you need to comply with. Some legal and non-legal requirements are mandatory. Others are voluntary, but meeting them can give you a competitive advantage. Some requirements only apply to certain niche markets. This report will help you understand what the most important requirements are on the European market. You will also learn what your company must do to comply with them and how you can use them to your advantage.

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1. What are mandatory requirements?

There are several mandatory requirements that exporters to the European market need to comply with. This includes legal requirements concerning product safety, the use of chemicals (REACH), quality and labelling. Check the [EU's Trade Helpdesk](#) for an overview. Additionally, many buyers have created non-negotiable terms and conditions which all their suppliers need to respect. These requirements are non-legal, but still mandatory. Both categories of requirements have become stricter in recent years. This trend will likely continue.

Product safety

Any item on sale in Europe must comply with the EU's General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) 2001/95/EC. In addition, certain textile and apparel products have specific safety requirements (see below). Product-specific requirements take precedence over the GPSD. National governments will check if your product meets the applicable safety requirements. If your product is considered unsafe, it will be rejected or withdrawn from the European market.

If your buyer has supplied the product design, it is his or her responsibility to make sure it is legally safe for consumers to use. However, if you have any doubts that a design is not compliant with the EU's GPSD, always discuss this with your buyer before you start production.

Tips:

Read more about the EU's definition of safe apparel in the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Ask your supplier of fabrics, trims and accessories if they have supplied to the EU before and if they are familiar with the legal safety requirements for apparel export to the EU.

Learn from previously rejected apparel items in the EU's [RAPEX database](#). Click 'Search all notifications' and select 'Clothing, textiles and fashion items' for a list of rejected apparel items with detailed descriptions of safety risks.

Standards are regularly updated or added. Check pending requests in [the Single Market and Standards database](#) (type 'textile' in the search field).

Learn from the winners of the [EU Product Safety Awards](#) about how to successfully conform to both legal and non-legal safety standards.

REACH and the use of chemicals

The best known legal requirement for exporting apparel to the EU is [REACH](#) (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals). This regulation restricts the use of a large selection of chemicals in apparel (fabrics and trims). Restricted chemicals that are sometimes used in apparel are, among others: certain Azo-dyes; flame retardants; waterproofing and stain-repelling chemicals and nickel (in metal trims and accessories); and Chromium VI in leather. Check the [complete list of chemicals restricted by REACH](#).

Some EU countries have additional national regulation on specific chemicals. For example, Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands have specific regulations for formaldehyde in textiles; Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands also have specific regulations for PCP, while Germany also has regulations for disperse dyes in textiles. Switzerland has its own regulation on chemicals, the [ORRChem](#).

Restricted substances lists (RSLs)

On top of REACH, many fashion brands and retailers have formulated their own restricted substances lists (RSLs), which are stricter than REACH. Your product needs to comply with these buyer-specific RSLs if you want to do business with them.

Buyer-specific RSLs are often inspired by the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC) guideline on safe chemicals use. The ZDHC is a foundation that came out of the 2011 'Detox my fashion' campaign by Greenpeace, which was aimed at safer chemical management practices in the apparel industry. Download the ZDHC [Conformance Guide](#) to learn how to comply with the ZDHC guideline.

Tips:

Familiarise yourself with the [complete list of chemicals restricted by REACH](#).

Check the [Q&A section on the website of the European Chemicals Agency](#) for answers to the most common questions about REACH and the use of chemicals in textiles and leather.

For more background information on the use and characteristics of all types of chemicals, check the freely accessible [Chemexper database](#).

Check [H&M's restricted substances list 2020](#) to get an idea of the specific requirements fashion brands can have. Search the Internet for other examples of RSLs by entering the name of a major brand in your search engine in combination with 'RSL'.

Read more about the [ZDHC programme](#) and check [which brands are working with ZDHC](#).

Get the latest notifications on national and EU regulations and bans on products on [EPingalert](#).

See the niche requirements section in this report for more information on chemicals use.

How to become REACH compliant

If you export apparel to Europe, you must be compliant with REACH and other relevant regulations. Always expect your buyer to ask for proof that your product is indeed compliant. Any reputable supplier of yarns, dyes, fabrics and leather, labels, prints, trims and accessories should be able to show you a testing report, a REACH compliance certificate or a REACH compliance declaration for the chemicals they have used.

Tips:

Make sure you only work with suppliers of yarns, dyes, fabrics and leather, labels, prints, trims and accessories that are REACH compliant. Ask for proof that they are.

In addition, create a contract with your supplier in which the EU legal requirements are specified and indicated.

Perform random product test to ensure your supplier has indeed fulfilled his contract. Always use a certified testing laboratory. The most used competence standard for laboratories is [ISO/IEC 17025](#).

The future of REACH

REACH is updated twice a year, which means ever more substances become restricted from use in apparel production. The latest update to REACH (November 2020) lowers the restriction limit of 33 chemicals that are considered carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction. Another amendment to REACH concerns the restriction of microplastics in textiles, which will likely be put to a final vote in 2021.

Tips:

Check the [restriction limits for CMR chemicals](#) on the website of the European Chemicals Agency.

Check [this article on Textile World on the future of REACH and microplastics](#).

Keep yourself up to date on REACH by checking the [candidate list](#) of the substances of very high concern, which are under consideration of being restricted by REACH.

Most online search engines will let you create a news alert on a topic, so you can automatically follow the latest news on REACH and its updates.

Special requirements for children's wear

The EU has a [specific standard for the safety of children's clothing and babywear](#). This standard contains requirements to ensure that cords and drawstrings are placed safely on apparel for babies and children up to 14 years old. This is to avoid strangulation and choking hazards.

Tips:

Do not use cords or strings in the neck area of babywear (hoodies are allowed).

Do not use accessories like buttons that can come loose and cause a choking hazard.

Perform a small parts cylinder test to check which parts are allowed, such as [this online example of a small objects tester](#).

Check the EU's [2019 Guidance Document](#) for extra information on safety requirements for children's clothing and babywear.

Flammability

The EU has no specific legal requirements regarding apparel flammability, but several individual countries do, including the [UK](#), [Ireland](#), the [Netherlands](#) and [Switzerland \(in German\)](#). The EU has a voluntary standard concerning the [burning behaviour of children's nightwear](#), which helps in complying with the GPSD.

Tip:

If you use flame-retardant chemicals in your apparel, be aware that you need to conform with REACH regulation for the use of chemicals (see above).

CE marking

If you want to export personal protective equipment (PPE) to the EU, for example, safety garments or gloves, you have to comply with specific EU [safety standards](#) for the design, manufacturing, material use, testing and user instructions concerning PPE. You are obliged to affix [CE marking](#) to PPE as a visible indication that your product conforms with the PPE safety requirements.

Tip:

Check the EU's '[Blue Guide](#)' on product rules applying to the CE marking (see pages 60–64 in the document).

Biocides

If you add biocides to textiles to protect humans, animals, materials or articles against harmful organisms, such as pests or bacteria, you have to comply with the EU's [Biocidal Product Regulations](#) (BPR) as well as REACH (see above).

Tip:

Read more about biocide regulation and testing on the website of the [European Chemicals Agency](#).

Labelling your product

You must specify the material content of every apparel item that you export to the EU, in accordance with EU [Regulation 1007/2011](#). A fibre which accounts for up to 5% of the total weight of your product, or fibres which collectively account for up to 15% of the total weight, may be designated by the term 'other fibres', immediately preceded or followed by their total percentage by weight.

Tips:

Check the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#) to find out which apparel items need to be labelled and how to do it.

Labelling the country of origin 'Made in' or labelling care instructions are not yet legally required in

the EU. Including care labels in your apparel is highly recommended though. Consumers expect it, and the EU may find manufacturers liable for defective products under the [Product Liability Directive](#) if you do not provide this information. [ISO 3758: 2012](#) is the preferred standard for care labelling.

The care label symbols are property of the company [GINETEX](#). If you export to countries like Belgium, Luxembourg, France or Switzerland, you need to pay a fixed compensation to GINETEX for the use of these symbols.

Many EU buyers nominate label suppliers, to prevent differences in quality and colour. If you are ordering the labels, note that communication and on-time delivery are your responsibility.

Intellectual property rights

If you are selling your own designs on the European market, you must make sure you are not violating any intellectual property (IP) rights. If your buyer provides the design, they will always be liable if the item is found to violate a property right. Complying with intellectual property rights also means you cannot copy or share successful or other designs from one buyer with another potential or existing buyer.

Tips:

Check the EU's Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) website for examples of [designs](#) and [trademarks](#) and a database containing some of the designs protected by IP rights in the EU. For a database of protected designs outside the EU, check the [World Intellectual Property Organization's \(WIPO\) website](#).

If you want to protect your design in the EU without paying registration fees, you can use an unregistered community design (UCD), which provides protection from copying only for a period up to three years. In this case, your design is automatically protected without any formality after it is first publicly disclosed, which means it has to be published, used in trade, be part of an exhibition or somehow become reasonably known in the apparel sector.

If you want to officially register your design in the EU, you can [register it online at the EUIPO](#). You pay €350 for 5 years protection. For international protection outside the EU, you can register your design with the [WIPO](#), which protects your design in [193 countries](#).

CITES

The use of endangered species of animals and plants or parts thereof in your product is restricted by the EU wildlife regulatory measures [EC 338/97](#). This regulation is based on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)). Some species of animals and plants are excluded from use in apparel altogether, so you cannot use them in your products. Others are subjected to severe importing restrictions.

Tips:

Check which animals and plants are restricted on the website of the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#).

If you're not sure about a certain type of species listed by the EU Regulation, the CITES website offers [a photo gallery to determine the restricted species](#).

Non-legal mandatory requirements

In addition to the legal requirements mentioned above, you may come across non-negotiable terms and conditions that buyers have created for dealing with suppliers. Such requirements are non-legal, but still mandatory, meaning you cannot get any business if you don't comply with them. They can be categorised by requirements that concern your supply chain and requirements that concern your product.

Corporate social responsibility

Many buyers in Europe are increasing their demands regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR). The minimum requirement is that you open up your factory for inspection by the buyer and that you sign a code of conduct in which you state that you respect local labour and environmental laws and avoid corruption. In addition, buyers may require you to get certification concerning fair and sustainable production.

Often — but not always — buyers that are strict on CSR are also strict on the quality of your product. They may require rigorous testing for REACH compliancy and anything from tear force to colour fastness.

Northern European countries the strictest on CSR

Companies from Northern and Western Europe are considered relatively strict on CSR and quality in general. German and Scandinavian companies are well known for being very strict on working conditions and living wage, meaning not the legal minimum wage, but the minimum income workers need to meet their basic needs. Most companies in Germany and France will also demand relatively rigorous testing for REACH compliancy and product quality. Companies in the UK tend to be a bit more lenient, with the Netherlands and Belgium somewhere in between.

The future of non-legal mandatory requirements

Within the next three years, expect buyers to require you to: trace the origins of your materials; use more recycled or regenerated materials; reduce your carbon footprint and chemical use (or select suppliers that do so); measure the environmental impact of your production process, and ensure a living wage and safe working environment for your employees.

Supply chain transparency, social compliance and the '[circular economy](#)' are top priorities for both the EU and national governments. For instance, check the German fashion industry's [sustainability agreement](#) and the similar Dutch [fashion industry agreement](#), calling for members to disclose their factories. Both initiatives are considered a prelude to legislation at either national or EU level. Regarding the circular economy, the EU is set to introduce [new legal and non-legal measures](#) to increase circularity in textiles.

Tips:

Read about how to comply with transparency requirements on the websites of the [Clean Clothes Campaign](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#).

Provide buyers with as much information on your product as possible. The more information you can give about the origin of your materials, the better.

Check Fashion Revolution's [transparency index](#) to see how European brands are rated.

Check the [Open Apparel Registry](#). Many European companies have published their suppliers here.

Watch this short [video by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation on the 'circular economy' in textiles](#).

Train your design team in how to develop new styles that are easy to reuse, repair, refurbish, repurpose or recycle. Read the [CBI report on trends in the European apparel market](#) to learn about the growing environmental and sustainability concerns in the European apparel industry.

Non-legal requirements for base materials

The following standards and certifications are the most common in the European market for base materials:

- **BCI** (Better Cotton Initiative). A multi-stakeholder initiative with 1,200 members that helps to improve cotton growing conditions globally. Read more about it in the [CBI study on Sustainable cotton](#).
- **GRS** (Global Recycled Standard). Product standard that incorporates recycled material verification, including social and environmental responsibility criteria, as well as chemical management. Read more about it in the [CBI study on Recycled fashion](#).
- **RDS** (Responsible Down Standard) and **RWS** (Responsible Wool Standard). Third-party verified standards that guarantee animal welfare criteria have been met for animals that are kept for their down or wool, including respect for [the Five Freedoms](#).

Other possible requirements regarding base materials:

- Use of fabrics blended with eco-friendly fibres, such as hemp; regenerated fibres such as Tencel®, Modal® and Refibra™ (by yarn manufacturer [Lenzing](#)); or other sustainable fibres such as [Recover](#), [REPREVE](#) or [Infinited Fiber](#); or even with innovative bio-based polymer fibres such as PLA, milk, seaweed and soy.
- Saving water during production by dyeing fabrics with new techniques (using CO2 instead of water) such as [Dyecoo](#) or [Kitotex](#)®.
- Fabrics dyed with only natural ingredients such as [Rubia](#), [Fibre Bio](#) or [Greendyes](#) or dyestuffs made from recycled materials such as [Recycrom](#).

Non-legal requirements for textile processing and fabrics

The following standards and certifications may be requested to guarantee that textiles and fabrics have been produced with respect for the environment. Examples of European brands and retailers using these standards are: [Peek & Cloppenburg](#) (Oekotex), [Zalando](#) (EU Ecolabel), [C&A](#) (GOTS) and [G-Star](#) (Bluesign).

- Standard 100 by [Oekotex](#) – Label that ensures consumers that all materials used in a garment are tested for harmful substances.
- **EU Ecolabel** – Label that ensures consumers that textiles are made using less harmful substances, energy and water.
- **GOTS** (Global Organic Textile Standard) – This standard covers everything from the production to the distribution of textiles made from at least 70% organic natural fibres.
- **Bluesign** – The Bluesign System reduces impact on people and the environment in the entire textile supply chain, based on input stream management.

Tips:

Check the environmental impact of different textile and non-textile materials in The Sustainable Apparel Coalition's [Materials Sustainability Index](#).

Dutch apparel industry association Modint offers a comprehensive [guide for choosing sustainable alternatives](#) to commonly used base materials.

Non-legal requirements for garment manufacturing

Several standards and certifications in the textile industry aim to encourage fair treatment of workers in garment manufacturing. Here are some of the most requested standards by European buyers.

- **BSCI** (Business Social Compliance Initiative). For many European buyers, BSCI is the most popular and often only certification they will require. It is a supply chain management system that helps manufacturers drive

social compliance.

- Especially in the UK, the following social and environmental standards are popular: [WRAP](#) (Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production), [SEDEX](#) and [ETI](#) (Ethical Trade Initiative).
- Other popular standards that guarantee apparel are made with respect for workers' rights are [SA8000](#), [ISO 26000](#), [FWF](#) (Fair Wear Foundation) and [Fairtrade](#). A popular environmental management standard is [ISO 14001](#).

Tips:

For a complete list of certification schemes in the sector consult [the ITC Standards Map](#).

Check this freely accessible [CSR Risk Check tool](#) to discover the social and environmental risks associated with garment production in your country and ways to manage them.

Ask your buyer what standards they want you to comply with. Be aware that complying with a standard costs time and money, not only for the application and the audit, but also for its annual renewal. Because many standards have overlapping criteria, often a few simple interventions will make your factory compliant with more than one standard. Talk to your buyers about such adjustments to avoid having to process several different standards.

Familiarise yourself with the [Social & Labor Convergence Project](#). This is an industry initiative to avoid duplication of audits.

Note that much of the social and environmental impacts take place at your suppliers. Try to be as transparent as possible and help your buyers to trace the origins of products.

Assess your company's current performance by doing a self-assessment: [BSCI](#) for textile factories and LWG's '[Tannery of the Future: are you ready for an audit?](#)' for leather garment producers.

Covid-19 protection on the work floor

EU buyers will expect you to follow local rules and regulations concerning worker safety and COVID-19 protection. There are different ways to create a safe working environment:

- Nominate an internal health and safety officer who will regularly inform your workers of protection measures and guide them in the adoption of those measures.
- Use signs, posters and other communication materials to inform all people involved in the process.
- All workers should have access to clean facilities. Sanitising products should be widely available.
- All people in the factory should be obliged to wear PPE such as facemasks.
- Measure the body temperature of all people entering and leaving the factory.
- In case of sickness, people should not be allowed to enter the factory and should stay at home to prevent infection.
- The factory and equipment should be sanitised during lunch and at the end of each shift.

Packaging requirements

In most cases, your buyer will give you instructions on how to package the order, in a manual (see below). If you agree that your buyer will clear customs in the country of import, it is their responsibility to make sure the instructions comply with EU import procedures.

Payment terms

For a first-time order, European buyers may agree with a down payment (e.g. 30%). They will pay the rest (70%) after the order is completed. The safest payment method for you as a manufacturer is the LC ([Letter of Credit](#)). An LC obligates a buyer's bank to pay the supplier when the conditions that both parties have agreed are met.

However, many buyers no longer favour LC payments because these block their cash flow. Be aware that LCs do not offer financial protection against cancelled orders or bankruptcies.

For any further orders, most European buyers will ask for a TT (Telegraphic Transfer) after 30, 60, 90 or sometimes even 120 days. This means you as a manufacturer will finish the production and hand over the shipment to the buyer, including the original documents, before payment is due. The payment will be made after the number of days that you have agreed with the buyer. This is a risky payment agreement because you take full financial risk.

The buyer manual

When you do business with a European buyer for the first time, they will typically give you a contract and/or a manual to sign. By signing the contract, you confirm that you will comply with all the listed requirements. This means you will be held accountable in case of a problem after the delivery of an order. Complying with REACH can be especially challenging. Most European buyers will not ask for expensive testing for small orders, but if illegal chemicals are discovered after delivery, you will bear all expenses involved.

Acceptable quality limit

To guarantee product quality, your buyer may set an [AQL](#) (acceptable quality limit) for you. This refers to the quality level that is the worst tolerable. For instance, AQL 2.5 means that your buyer will reject a batch if more than 2.5% of the whole order quantity over several production runs is defective.

Customers also set the product quality standard defining the level of physical standards, such as:

- pilling
- colour fastness
- tear force
- shrinkage

Tip:

Set up a small lab to test all products on physical standards.

2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

In addition to mandatory (legal) requirements, there are many services that buyers implicitly expect or at least highly appreciate if you want to do business with them.

Product design and development

Most buyers have their own design team and don't solely rely on the collections that factories present to them. Still, having your own ideas on product design and development will be highly appreciated. Buyers are always looking for special designs, materials or production methods that may help them stand out in the market.

For instance, consider using: on-trend (sustainable) materials; special finishes such as coatings and prints; stretch fabrics for extra comfort; special property fabrics (for instance, with soil-resistant, breathing, waterproof, anti-bacterial or UV-protective properties); quick-drying, easy iron and crease-resistant fabrics; stay dark fabrics (colour fastness); and garment dyeing during production to increase flexibility.

Tips:

Do not underestimate how difficult it is to understand trends in the European market and translate them to successful apparel items.

Because of COVID-19, many trade fairs have set up 'virtual' shows, online matchmaking events and webinars. Try to attend them online. If the situation allows it, visit physical fashion fairs. This way, you get an idea of the latest fashion trends. Roughly speaking, trends you see in women's wear today will appear in men's wear one or two years later.

Check [Fibre2Fashion's online fashion trends page](#) and sign up for trend forecaster [WGSN's newsletter](#) or fashion consultancy [Edited's Insider Briefing](#) for the latest news on market trends in fashion.

Other online fashion platforms widely followed by European buyers are [FashionUnited](#), [Just-Style](#), [The Business of Fashion](#) and [Leatherbiz](#) (for leather products).

Check the websites of [Fashion for Good](#) and [Springwise](#) (type in 'apparel', 'fashion' or 'leather' in the search bar) for the latest innovations in apparel design and production. Check [Material District](#) for the latest innovations in materials.

Hire a designer to help you with your fabric selection and design input. Post your job offer on [The Business of Fashion](#), [FashionUnited](#) or [HTNK](#). For freelance designers, try [Upwork](#) or [Fiverr](#).

Garment care preferences

When selecting base materials, keep in mind that most consumers in Europe prefer easy to care for, machine-washable garments. Try to avoid dry-clean-only products, unless you have a specific agreement about this with your buyer.

Communication

Smooth communication is an implicit requirement that all buyers have. Be prepared to follow these basic rules if you want to successfully do business with European buyers:

- Always reply to every email within 24 hours. Even if it is just to confirm that you have received the email and to say that you will provide a proper reply later.
- If you encounter a problem with a production order, immediately notify the customer and try to offer a solution.
- Create a T&A (time and arrival) of every order and share it with your buyer. This file will help you to manage expectations, monitor progress and is the best guarantee of on-time delivery.
- Create a communication file of every order so you build up a case history. This file is your backup in case of a complaint.
- Tools like 3D prototyping, such as [CLO3d](#), can help you speed up the approval process.

Speed to market

Fashion companies like [Zara](#) have proven that having the right product at the right time is at least as important as being the cheapest. Sales in Europe were already under increased pressure, even before COVID-19. Now buyers will try even harder to minimise stock and order as late as possible. Manufacturing and delivering fast is an important implicit requirement, just like flexibility in order quantities (see below).

Within the next three years, you should expect stricter requirements on delivery times, since European brands and retailers are struggling to attract and hold the attention of consumers. Instead of four or even 12 collections a year, ever more retailers are releasing as many as one micro collection per week, year-round. Ultrafast fashion online retailers increasingly try to mimic trends that can pop up any moment during the fashion season.

There are different ways to optimise manufacturing:

- Keep stock materials to increase flexibility. Source from fabric suppliers that work with stock yarns and that can help you reduce manufacturing time.
- Confirm lab dips (a small swatch of fabric to define colour and its recipe before it goes for bulk dyeing), trims and style before the final order is placed.
- Ask your buyers for a seasonal sales forecast and regular sales updates, to help plan your production capacity.
- Read the [CBI report on trends in the European apparel market](#) to learn about the growing fast-fashion industry in Europe.

Flexibility

Many factories focus only on getting convenient orders: simple styles, large quantities and long delivery times. However, if you want to start a business relationship with a European buyer, be prepared to accept complicated orders first. Buyers will want to test your factory before giving you big, easy orders. Make sure at the start that a buyer will not continue to place only difficult orders with you and convenient orders elsewhere.

Expect a European buyer to require (for their first order):

- high-quality material and impeccable workmanship;
- order quantities below your normal minimum order quantity (MOQ);
- a price level that is lower than you normally would accept for small quantity orders.

Factories in different GSP countries

When all other selling points are equal, European buyers will prefer manufacturers that operate in countries under the EU's [Generalised Scheme of Preferences](#) (GSP). The scheme removes import duties from apparel exported to the EU from 72 countries worldwide, giving buyers a substantial financial advantage.

Tips:

Check if your country is one of the [72 countries that falls under the GSP](#) by selecting a country in the box to find the related scheme.

If you are supplying from a country on the GSP list, promote yourself as such.

If you are not supplying from a country on the GSP list, consider setting up a partnership with a factory from a country that is on the list.

Examples of successful exporters to the EU

The following garment manufacturers are good examples of companies that have successfully put the additional requirements mentioned above into practice.

- [Denim Expert Limited](#) from Bangladesh is a factory that has successfully developed into a design and innovation driven manufacturing organisation, supplying garments to buyers in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Turkey.
- [Shirt By Shirt](#) from Turkey is a design and innovation driven organisation that offers buyers the flexibility of manufacturing in a variety of countries like Turkey, Vietnam and Bangladesh.
- [Crystal Group](#) from China is a CSR-driven apparel maker that offers buyers the flexibility of manufacturing volume orders in different GSP countries within their own factories.

3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

Niche markets are markets that have a specific target group with special requirements, such as low order quantities, specific dying processes, tech add-ons and special fabrics. Because of this, most mainstream providers don't service this group. However, as sales in the mainstream fashion market are continuously under pressure, ever more European buyers are targeting niche markets to achieve growth. So can you.

When entering the following high-opportunity niche markets, expect very specific buyer requirements:

- Apparel made from recycled materials. Yarns and fabrics made from recycled cuttings and post-consumer waste are becoming increasingly popular — and not just with brands and retailers that promote themselves as sustainable. The most asked-for standards here are the [Textile Exchange's Recycled Claim Standard and Global Recycled Standard](#). Read the [CBI study on Recycled Fashion](#).
- Vegan apparel. In the wake of a rising demand for vegan food in Europe, apparel made without using materials from animal origin is a small but fast-growing niche. If you use plant-based or synthetic alternatives to materials such as leather or wool, you can apply for the PETA-Approved Vegan certification. The PETA website offers [a database with more than 1,000 PETA-Approved Vegan brands](#). Read the [CBI report on sustainable apparel](#) for information on this niche.
- Children's wear. Use of organic cotton is especially popular in baby and children's wear, as many parents are willing to pay extra for materials that are grown without the use of chemicals. [GOTS](#) is a popular standard for children's wear. Remember that children's wear also needs to comply with EU Regulation regarding the safe attachment of drawstrings and accessories (see mandatory requirements above). Read the [CBI report on Children's wear](#).
- Pet clothing. The manufacturing of pet clothing requires no compliance with specific regulation. Only the sizing of pet clothing is complicated. Buyers will require you to produce size-adjustable styles.
- Work wear. This is a niche with several sub-niches, including apparel that protects against rain and foul weather, against liquid chemicals, against fire and flames, against the thermal hazards of an electric arc and high-visibility apparel. Check the [EU Regulation on PPE](#) and its [many different related norms and standards](#). Read the [CBI report on workwear](#).
- Corporate wear. Many large organisations like banks and hotels tender their corporate ware. These are usually three-year contracts in which a supplier needs to guarantee the quality and colour consistency of deliveries. Expect no specific legal requirements but high demands regarding stock keeping, flexibility, printing, colour fastness and fabric quality.
- High-performance wear. Companies developing high-performance wear try to create individual USPs on their garments and collection that will help athletes with their performance. Expect no specific legal requirements, but high demands regarding breathability, durability (abrasion, adhesion, colour fastness) and water resistance. Read the [CBI report on sportswear](#) for more information on this niche.
- Adaptive apparel. The cohort of elderly people in Europe is growing and so is this niche. People with certain disabilities or medical conditions often cannot wear regular clothing. Adaptive apparel is constructed in a way that the target group can dress and undress without or with only minimum help. This apparel can also have technical, supportive, moisture control or anti-bacterial functions. Expect no specific legal requirements, but high demands regarding technical textiles, sizing and shape. Read the [CBI report on Adaptive apparel](#).
- Swimwear. UV-protective swimwear is growing in popularity in Europe as consumers become more aware of the risk of sunburn. UV-protective clothing is considered as Category 1 PPE under the scope of the [EU Regulation on personal protective equipment](#). Read the [CBI report on Swimwear](#).
- Leather fashion. To avoid the risk of Chromium VI in leather apparel and accessories, ever more buyers are requiring chrome-free leather tanning. This can be either [vegetable tanned or wet-white tanned leather](#). The most popular certification for leather is [Leather Working Group](#). The Textile Exchange has also started developing [a new international standard for fair and sustainable leather](#), but it has not published it yet. Read the [CBI study on leather fashion accessories](#).
- Modest wear. Many people with an Islamic background prefer 'modest' styles. In Europe, this target group is underserved but growing. Source for materials that obscure the female silhouette, so no fabrics that are too stretchy or too thin. For specific requirements, read the [CBI study on Islamic wear](#) or this [article by fashion](#)

[consultancy Edited about the rise of modest fashion](#).

- Special sizes. Following the 'body acceptance' trend, ever more European fashion brands have started to include silhouettes in their size range for specific body types, such as plus size, petit, tall and maternity fashion. Check this article by fashion consultancy Edited about [the growing market and requirements for special sizes](#).
- Zero-emission apparel. In 2019, [a big group of buyers pledged to give special attention to cutting carbon emissions](#). Kering Group and Gap want to use 100% renewable energy by 2030. H&M even wants to become carbon positive by 2040, so investing in renewable energy can give you a competitive edge.

Examples

- [Hip Doggie](#) is a good example of a successful pet apparel company.
- [MUD Jeans](#) is famous for leasing out jeans, collecting them back and recycling them into new pairs.
- [Veja](#) is a successful shoe brand that uses vegan and recycled materials for its sneakers.
- [C&A](#) is a big European value retailer using only chrome-free tanned leather in its collections of shoes and garments.

Further Reading

The [CBI report '10 Tips for Finding European Buyers'](#) can help you with finding interesting prospects and how to approach them.


The [CBI study '10 Tips for Doing Business with European Buyers'](#) provides tips on how to successfully approach a potential buyer and develop a long-lasting business relationship with them.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [FT Journalistiek](#).

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