

CITIZEN INSIGHTS

CLOTHING BEHAVIOURS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

A survey to understand citizen clothing behaviours during lockdown and the impact on textile operators



About WRAP

WRAP is not-for-profit, working with governments, businesses and citizens to create a world in which we use resources sustainably. Our experts generate the evidence-based solutions we need to protect the environment, build stronger economies and support more sustainable societies. Our impact spans the entire life-cycle of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the products we buy, from production to consumption and beyond.

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Front cover photography: Image of clothes being donated

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and method

During the Covid-19 lockdown textile operators have stopped collecting used clothes, while time may have been spent on spring cleaning and wardrobe clear outs. WRAP undertook consumer research with the aim of (a) providing textile recyclers and charity organisations with rapid information to prepare to come out of lockdown; and (b) informing SCAP signatories about what their customers want coming out of C-19 lockdown and what behaviours they should be prepared for. It is hoped the insights gained will support messaging that will encourage citizens to donate clothing and above all, keep it out of the bin.

The research was undertaken with 2,422 UK adults aged 18+, from 22-24 May 2020. The profile of the survey sample reflects the known profile of the UK population (according to age, gender, region, work status and social economic status).

The survey involves a large and robust sample of UK citizens. Nonetheless, because a sample of households has completed the survey (rather than a census), the results are subject to statistical margins of error¹. For the 2020 results as a whole, the maximum margin of error in the results is $\pm 2.6\%$ (i.e. if the survey gives a result of 50% then the real result, if all households in the country were interviewed, would be somewhere in the range 47.4% - 52.6%). Comparisons are also made to previous years using statistical tests to determine if differences are statistically significant or not. These tests have been undertaken to the 99% confidence level (i.e. 99 times out of 100 the observed difference will be real vs. 1 time out of 100 it will have happened by chance).

1.2 Key findings

Clear out behaviours during lockdown

- Around two in five (41%) UK citizens have disposed of textiles during the Covid-19 lockdown – most commonly items of clothing (cited by 37%), followed by shoes/footwear (19%), bedding (12%), bags/handbags (10%), clothing accessories (10%) and household textiles (10%).
- Key groups who are more likely to have had a clear out include those with children at home (53% say they have cleared out textiles during the lockdown vs. 37% with no children at home), 18-34s (50% vs. 33% of those aged 55+) and women (50% vs. 32% of men).

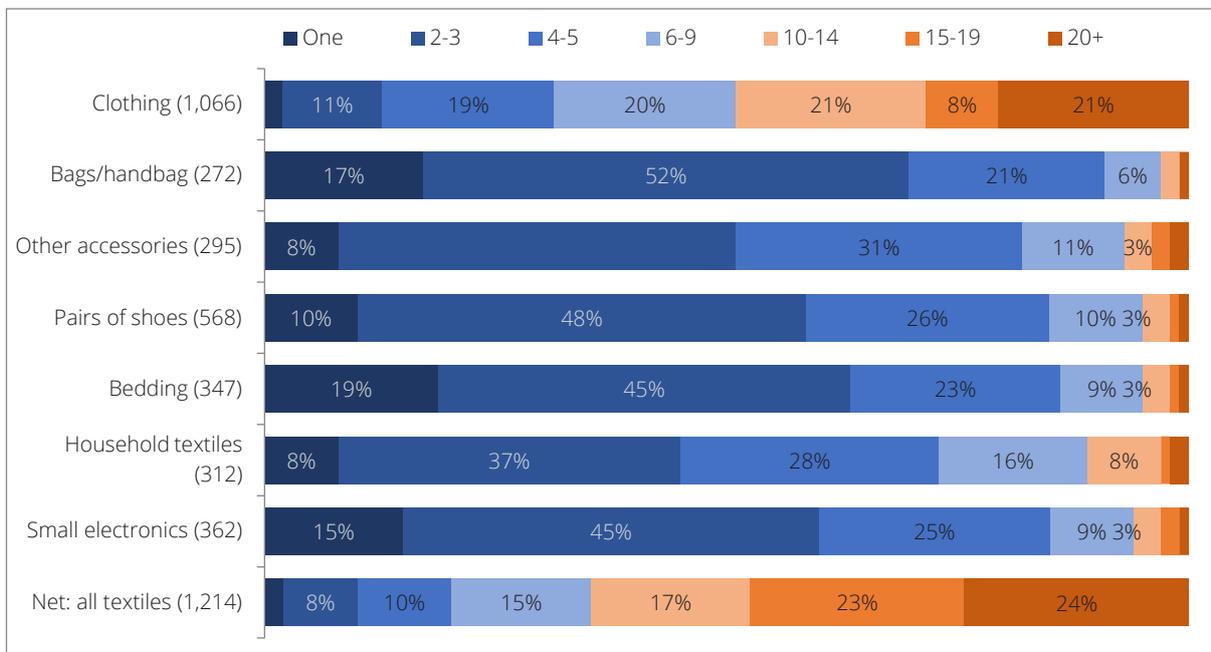
¹ Statistical tests are only valid when the survey method has used random probability sampling. While the market research industry routinely applies the same logic to non-probability samples, this must be done with appropriate caveats. For example, if the data reported throughout this report was generated from a random probability sample then the confidence intervals discussed in the report would apply.

Citizens Insights: Clothing behaviours during lockdown

- The survey sample (2,422 UK adults) has cleared out 16,131 textiles items (Figure 1). 9,947 of these are clothing. Shoes, household textiles and bedlinen were also often included, totalling another 4,283 items. If scaled up for the total number of UK households (27,600,000) the total number of textiles items is equivalent to 184 million items (Figure 1). The majority of these are clothing items (113 million), followed by shoes/footwear (22 million pairs).

Figure 1: Number of items cleared out

Q: Approximately how many items of each of these have you cleared out? Your best estimate is fine.



	Clothing	Bags/handbags	Other accessories	Pairs of shoes	Bedding	Household textiles	Small electrical	All textiles
Average	11.4	3.5	4.6	4.1	3.6	5.0	4.0	16.2
Total number	9947	779	1122	1931	1063	1289	1251	16131

Base: UK adults aged 18+ who have cleared out each item during the Covid-19 lockdown (bases in brackets)

- The survey estimates that over half of the items – 57% – remain at home pending disposal after the lockdown ends, whereas 43% have already been disposed of. Of the different textile categories, bags/handbags and clothing are more likely to still be at home pending disposal (60% and 59%, respectively).
- In total UK citizens are set to dispose of 67 million items of clothing as UK comes out of lockdown.
- Among those with items still to dispose of, almost half (49%) intend to dispose of one or more in a charity shop, followed by a charity bag collection (17%) and the general rubbish (14%).

Among those who have already disposed of their items, over one in three (36%) used the general rubbish for one or more of their items – the most frequently cited disposal route.

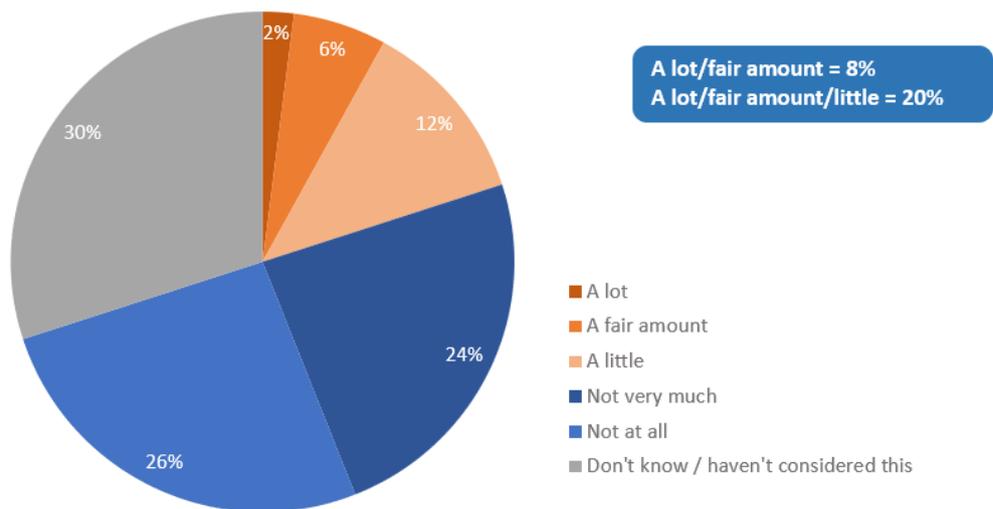
1.3 Wider outlooks towards clothing

- One in five (20%) UK citizens say the Covid-19 lockdown has made them think differently about clothing - either in terms of purchase and/or disposal (Figure 2).
- Groups who are more likely to have reflected upon clothing during the lockdown include women (25% vs. 14% of men), 18-24s (29% vs 17% of those aged 55+).
- Among those thinking differently about clothing, the top three reflections/changes in mindset are: realising they had too many clothes/didn't need as many (cited by 29% of those who say they are thinking differently about clothing), wanting to donate/donate more to charity (18%) and wanting to buy in a more sustainable/environmentally-friendly way (15%).

Figure 2: Effect of Covid-19 lockdown on attitudes about shopping for clothes

Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on attitudes to clothing

Q18. To what extent, if at all, has the Covid-19 lockdown had an impact on the way you think about clothing e.g. what you will look out for when buying clothes and, later on, how you will dispose of it?



Base: 2,061 UK citizens aged 18+, May 2020

- There has been a reduction in the proportion of UK citizens who say that 'I buy items that are fashionable, even if they're a bit uncomfortable or not quite me' (13% in May 2020, down from 23% in 2017).

Citizens Insights: Clothing behaviours during lockdown

- The proportion of UK citizens who report in the category that are values driven and go out of their way to avoid waste, who like shopping, and for whom clothing is important to their identity, increased from 31% in 2017 to 50% in 2020.

2.0 Clear our behaviour during lockdown

Asked whether they had a clear out during the Covid-19 lockdown, around two in five (41%) UK citizens have had a clear out of textiles items – most commonly items of clothing (cited by 37%), followed by shoes/footwear (19%), bedding (12%), bags/handbags (10%), clothing accessories (10%) and household textiles (10%).

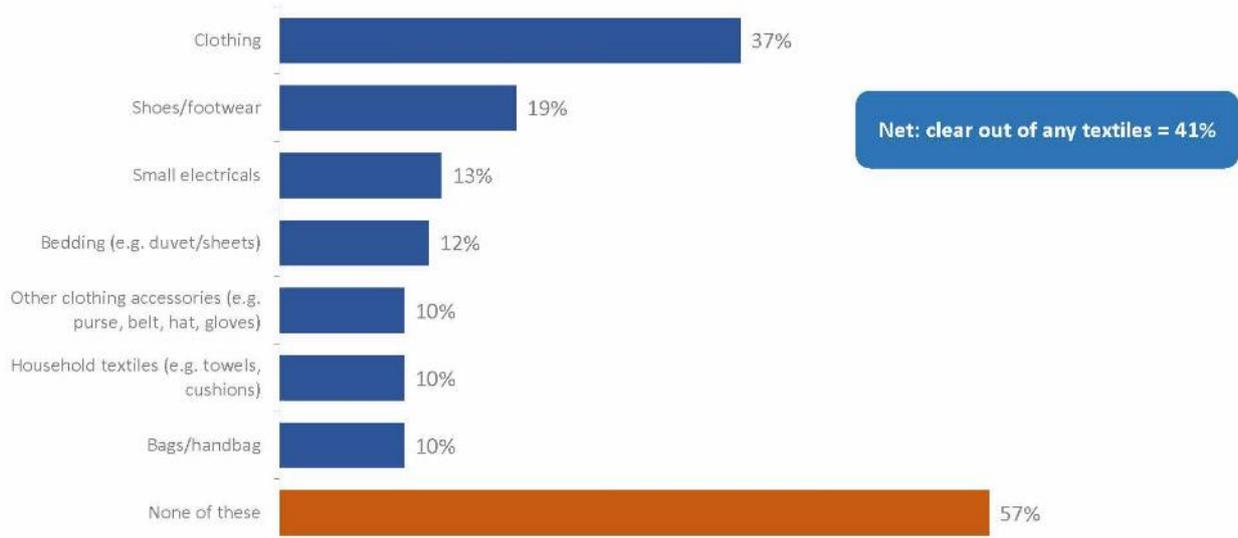
Scaled up to the UK as a whole, that means that people have cleared out 184 million textiles items during the lockdown.

People have cleared out on average, 11 items of clothing, or 16 items of textiles once you include other things like bags, pairs of shoes, and household textiles.

Figure 3: Clear out behaviour

Clear out behaviour

Q3. During the Covid-19 lockdown (i.e. from around the middle of March 2020), have you had a clear out/spring clean of any of the following items? Select all that apply

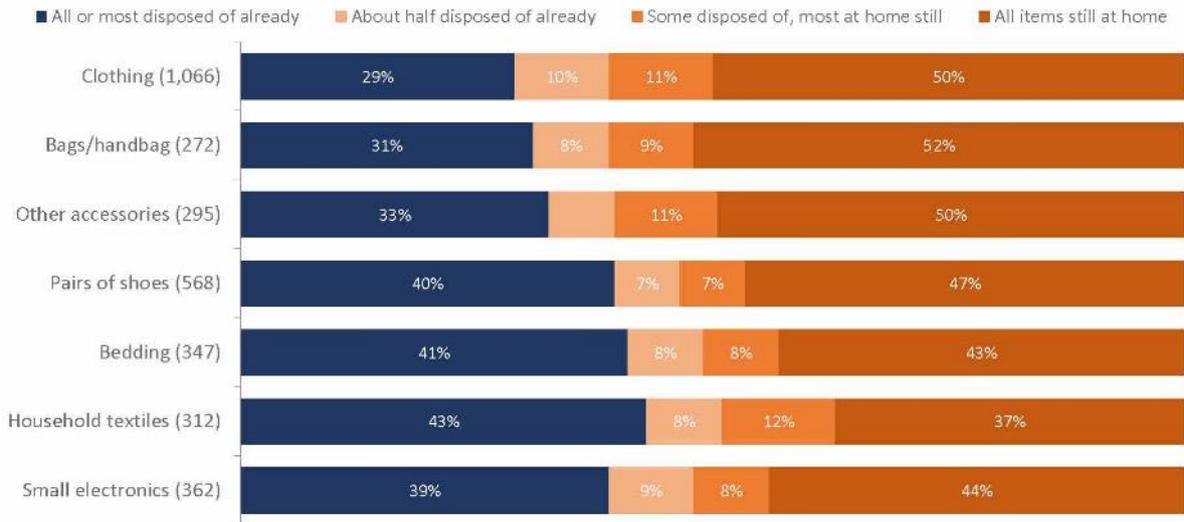


Base: 2,061 UK adults aged 18

Figure 4: Items that have been disposed of already compared to items still at home, ready to go out

Have the items been disposed of yet?

Q5. Thinking about whether these items that you have cleared out have already been disposed of or are still in the home ready to go out, which of the following best applies.



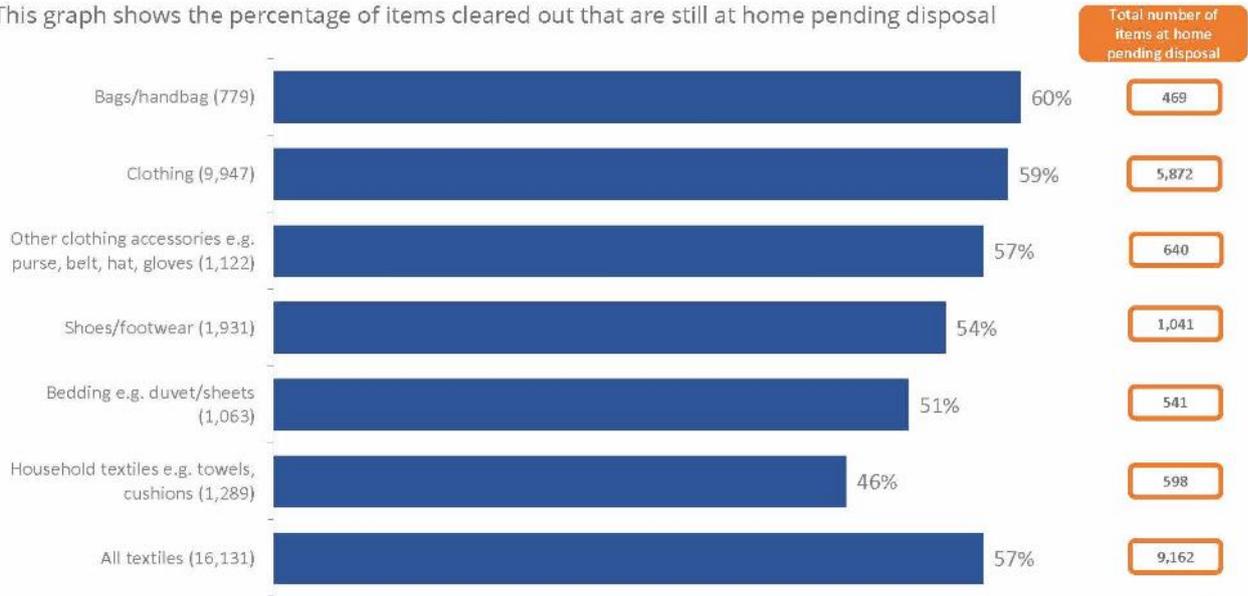
Base: UK adults aged 18+ who have cleared out each item during the Covid-19 lockdown (bases in brackets)

People were holding on to the majority of the clothing they were getting rid of and are looking to find somewhere for it to go as lockdown ends. The most favoured route for getting rid of clothes is donating them to charity.

Figure 5: Estimating the number of items pending disposal

Estimating the amount of items pending disposal

This graph shows the percentage of items cleared out that are still at home pending disposal



Base: Number of items in each textiles category cleared out each item during the Covid-19 lockdown (bases in brackets)

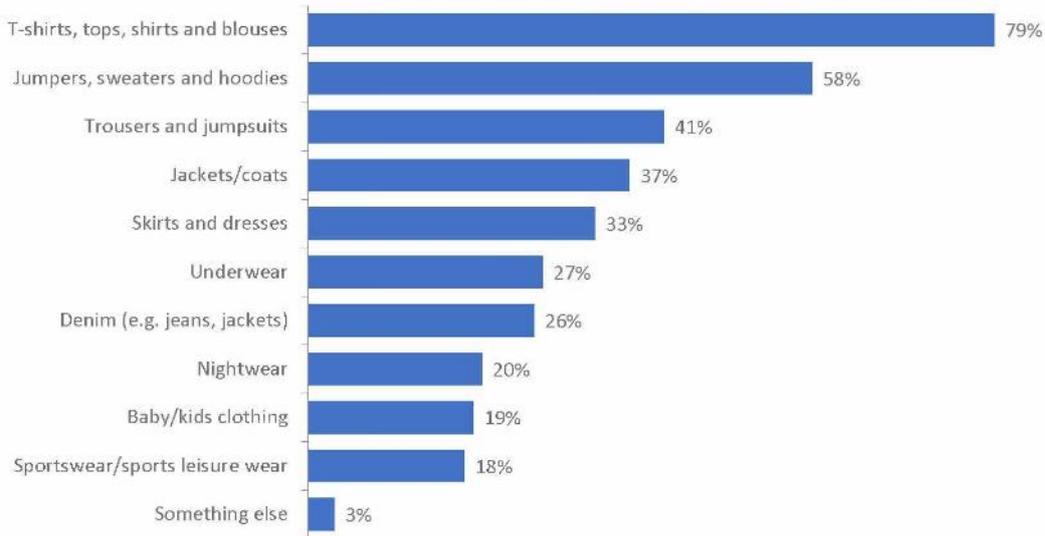
The majority, around 59% of clothing items that have been “cleared out”, were still in the home, waiting to be donated.

Most of the clothes that people have been clearing out are outer wear such as tops, jumpers, trousers, and skirts. And the most likely reason, is that they don't fit any more.

Figure 6: Types of clothing getting cleared out

Clothing items disposed of

Q7. You said that you have had a clear out of clothing items. Which of the following specific types of clothing did you clear out? Select all that apply

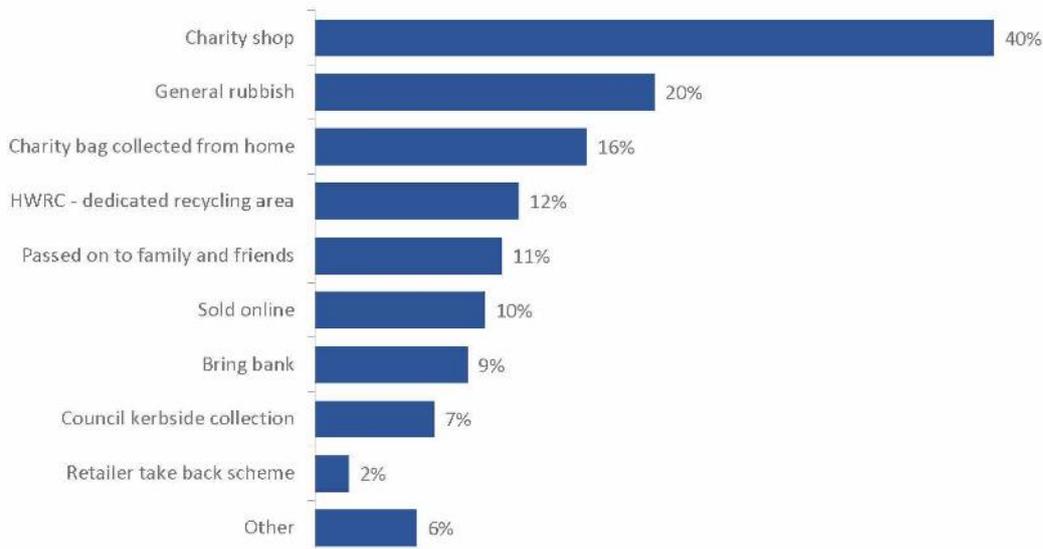


Base: 1,066 UK adults aged 18+ who have had a clear out of clothing items during the lockdown

Figure 7: Disposal routes for clothing items getting cleared out

Disposal routes – all clothing

Q8. And what did you do/will you do with each of these items that you have cleared out?

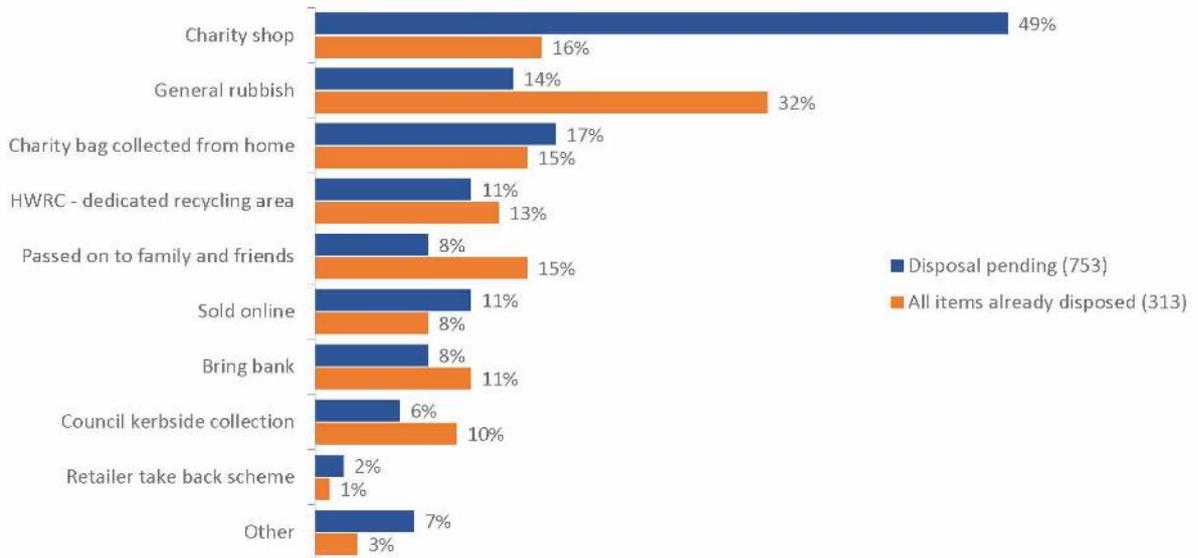


Base: 1,066 UK adults aged 18+ who have had a clear out of clothing items during the lockdown

Figure 8: Disposal routes for items that have already been disposed and pending disposal

Disposal routes – have disposed vs. will dispose

Q8. And what did you do/will you do with each of these items that you have cleared out?

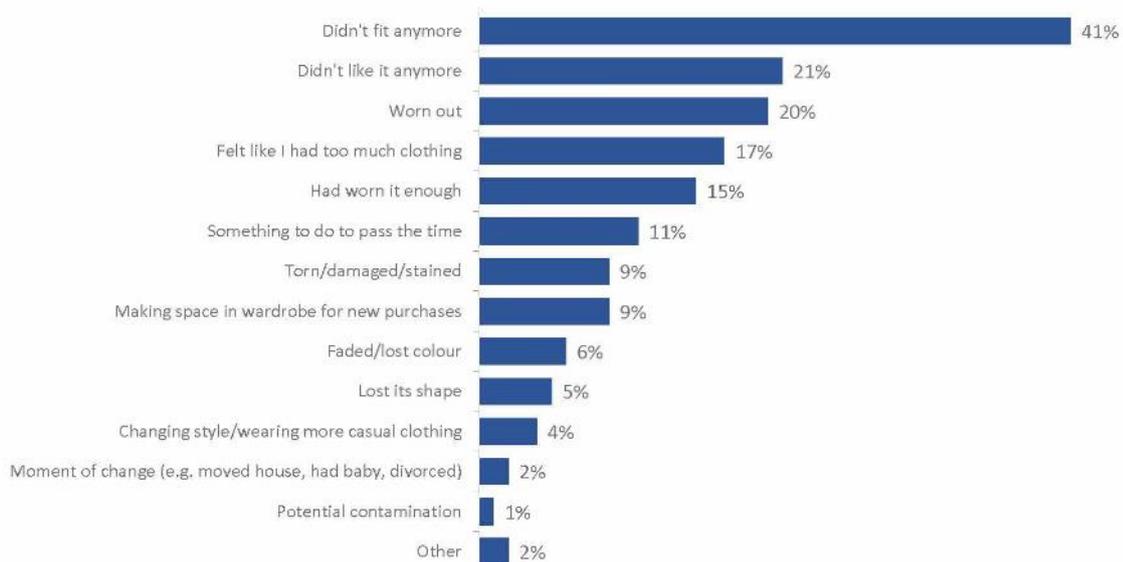


Base: 1,066 UK adults aged 18+ who have had a clear out of clothing items during the lockdown

Figure 9: Reasons for disposing of clothing items

Disposal routes – all clothing

Q9. Why did you dispose of these items?



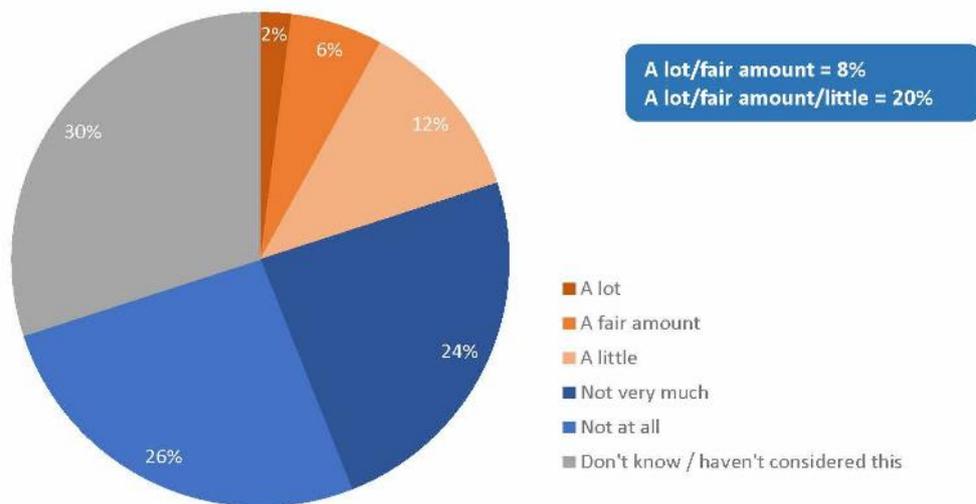
Base: 1,066 UK adults aged 18+ who have had a clear out of clothing items during the lockdown

3.0 Clothing attitudes and identities

Figure 10: Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on attitudes about clothing

Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on attitudes to clothing

Q18. To what extent, if at all, has the Covid-19 lockdown had an impact on the way you think about clothing e.g. what you will look out for when buying clothes and, later on, how you will dispose of it?

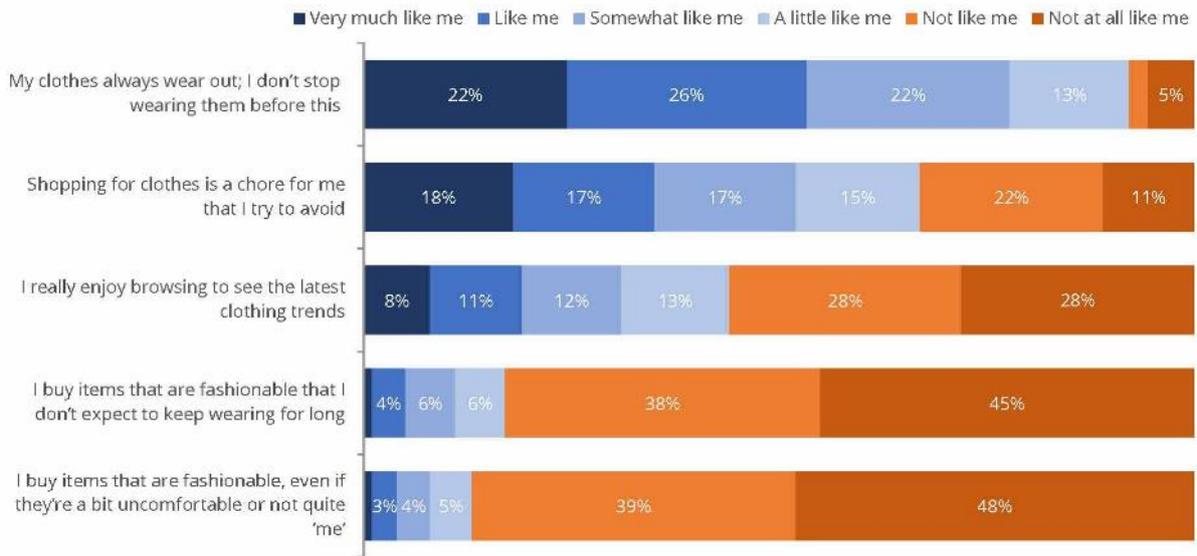


Base: 2,061 UK adults aged 18

Figure 11: Clothing identities

Clothing identities

Q1. How much is the description below like you?

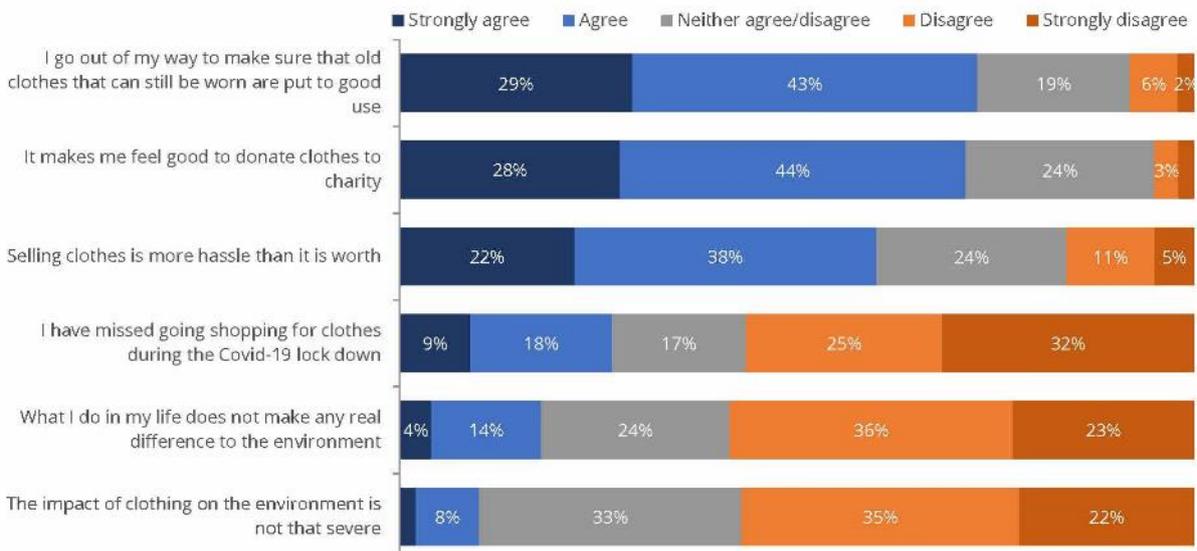


Base: 2,061 UK adults aged 18

Figure 12: Clothing identities and attitude towards the environment and sustainability

Attitudes to clothing

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 2,061 UK adults aged 18

Two-thirds of people actively go out of their way to ensure their unwanted clothes go to good use. Most people also feel good about donating clothes to charity.

Figure 13: Changes in clothing identities and attitudes over time

Clothing identities and attitudes – over time

% of UK consumers who say the statement is 'like them' to any extent	July 2017 (2,553)	April 2019 (2,079)	Dec 2019 (2,070)	May 2020 (2,061)
My clothes always wear out; I don't stop wearing them before this	86%	85%		84%
I buy items that are fashionable, even if they're a bit uncomfortable or not quite 'me'	23%	14%		13% ²⁰¹⁷

% of UK consumers who 'agree' with each statement	July 2017 (2,553)	April 2019 (2,079)	Dec 2019 (2,070)	May 2020 (2,061)
The impact of clothing on the environment is not that severe	18%	14%	15%	11% ^{All}
I go out of my way to make sure that old clothes that can still be worn are put to good use	74%	74%	70%	72%
What I do in my life does not make any real difference to the environment		25%		18% ²⁰¹⁹
Selling clothes is more hassle than it's worth		63%	66%	60%
It makes me feel good to donate clothes to charity		75%	73%	71%

Base: UK adults aged 18

Overall, the research found a trend towards greater environmental awareness. People wanting to reduce waste and really try to do the right thing, has continued despite the Covid crisis. We found that 50% of UK citizens are willing to go out of their way to avoid generating clothing waste, as well as being keen to identify as presentable and smart in appearance, they are concerned about the impact clothing has on the environment. This group of UK citizens has grown in size, up from 31% in 2017.

WRAP's vision is a world in which resources are used sustainably.

Our mission is to accelerate the move to a sustainable resource-efficient economy through re-inventing how we design, produce and sell products; re-thinking how we use and consume products; and re-defining what is possible through re-use and recycling.

Find out more at www.wrap.org.uk

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