



**BAPTIST  
WORLD AID  
AUSTRALIA**

Be love. End poverty.

# THE | COVID FASHION GUIDE

A handy tool for helping you become  
an ethical fashion consumer

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*Cover image: "COVID-19 emergency response activities, Mohammadpur, Dhaka" by UN Women Asia and the Pacific, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 / Flipped horizontally*



### Dive in

Keep an eye out for this symbol as you read through the Guide. It invites you to go deeper into a given topic with resources we've put together for you – all on one handy webpage! Find the online companion page to the Guide using the QR code or URL below.



**baptistworldaid.org.au/companion**

## Dear Conscious Consumer,

What a year 2020 has been! So much has changed, but some important things remain the same...

Workers deserve to live and work with dignity. In order to thrive and lead healthy lives, they – and we – need a flourishing environment.

It's time to discover how powerful you really are! Every time you walk into a store (or click onto an online shop!) YOU have the power to pass on opportunity and dignity to workers, and sustainability to our planet.

This special edition of the Guide is all about empowering you to be a more thoughtful and ethical fashion consumer. You'll find stories, tips and ideas to help you take your next steps on this journey... even through this COVID season.

Remember, our small steps work together to build a much larger movement of change. Read on! Take your next small step, today!

**The Ethical Fashion Team**



*“Girls Learning to Weave at a School in a Community Centre in Karachi” by United Nations  
Photo, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0*

## Meet Rani

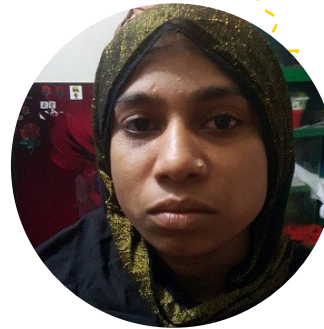
### Your shopping decisions matter because of people like Rani\*.

Rani is a 27-year-old garment factory worker from Bangladesh. We talked to her recently about the impact of COVID on working conditions in her factory.

Since the pandemic started, Rani has been required to work extra hours to clean the entire factory floor at the end of every day.

But despite now working 14-hour days, Rani isn't paid extra for overtime. And although the workers try to maintain physical distancing and good hygiene, Rani says the risk is still high. “After working all day long, you are exhausted and you just can't think of anything extra,” she explains.

There is also panic in Rani's community about the virus. Some people are afraid to go to work for fear of



infection, but they need money and food. Rani is worried about her mother, who she cannot visit for fear of spreading the virus to her village. Instead, Rani stays in the city where she lives with her sister and her sister's two children. “We struggle to pay rent and payments for the fridge and furniture on our reduced income,” Rani says. “The landlord often comes to ask for the rent, but we have no means to pay it.”

**The factory where Rani works used to make about two million taka per day, but since COVID, it only makes several thousand taka. As a result, Rani's salary which was AUD\$120 per month, has dropped to AUD\$71.**

*\*Name changed for protection reasons.*

## Step 1: The first decision is all yours

### The process of developing more conscious shopping habits starts well before you set foot in a store or scroll through an online shop!

Your first step is a decision to start making some little changes to be more connected to the impact of the clothes you buy. Your efforts may not be perfect at first – and that’s okay! Your small steps will slowly take you forward!



Next time you’re about to make a purchase, **stop** and **think**. Ask yourself:

#### What is my reason for buying?

- | Is the item a necessity – something you absolutely need? How often are you likely to wear it? Is it likely to still be in style next year, or the year after?
- 1.

#### What is the human impact of my purchase?

- | A garment is touched by almost 100 pairs of hands before it arrives in a store or on your doorstep. How many are garment workers like Rani and what could that mean? Keep reading to learn more!
- 2.

#### What is the environmental impact of my purchase?

- | A piece of clothing only spends a small part of its life in your wardrobe.
- 3.
- What was its impact before it came to you and what you will do once it’s worn out from use?

## Step 2: Make an informed choice!

So, you've thought it through and made a conscious decision to buy? Now you need to choose a brand to buy from. The good news? We've done the hard work for you!

We have been researching ethical fashion for eight years. This year, we asked brands about their response to the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable workers. Things like tracing supply chains, paying a living wage, and tackling child and forced labour cannot stop during a crisis, so we've sought to understand:



What are brands doing to ensure workers continue to be paid fairly?



Do brands have systems to understand the greatest risks for workers and are they taking steps to protect them?

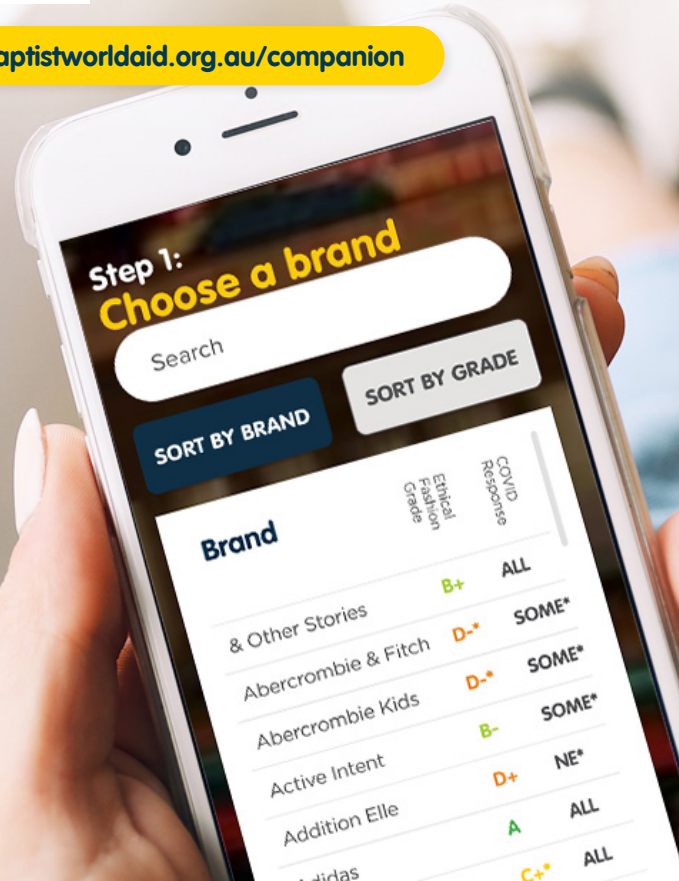


Through the pandemic, are brands still hearing from workers and auditing factories?



Find the details behind each brand's COVID Fashion Commitment rating... as well as the most recent Ethical Fashion grades here:

[baptistworldaid.org.au/companion](https://baptistworldaid.org.au/companion)



### Step 3: Do some simple research

#### Interested in buying from a brand that's not included in the Ethical Fashion Report or just want to learn more?

Ask these questions to figure out how serious a brand is about its ethical responsibility to workers and the planet.



*“Ando International garment factory (Better Work Vietnam)” by ILO Asia-Pacific, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0*



### 1. Where is this product made?

Knowing where a product is manufactured provides clues as to whether a brand has a close relationship with the suppliers who manufacture its clothes and knows how workers are treated in its supply chain.

For smaller brands, ask in store if they know the factories where their garments are made. For big brands, your best bet is to look on their website for a supplier list. While this list can't fully capture a brand's practices, it will tell you that it knows its suppliers and is being transparent about its supply chain.

If you can only find the country of manufacture (which all clothing tags should include by law), this can still offer some insight. While countries are not inherently “good” or “bad”, each comes with a range of common risks including forced labour, child labour, or union busting. Find out what it means when an item of clothing was made by a worker in Bangladesh, China, or India (amongst others) on [the Guide companion webpage](#).

### Step 3: Do some simple research



## 2. What is it made from?

The material a product is made from can help you understand its environmental impact before you even purchased it, while also hinting at the impact it may have during its life in your wardrobe.

Different fibres have varying environmental impacts. For garments made from natural fibres (e.g. cotton or wool), organic or other responsible certifications are a better option than their conventional counterparts.

Where you can't pick a natural fibre, look for recycled synthetic options

or responsibly certified regenerated cellulose fibres, like Tencel.

These choices are all about how the fibre was grown or produced. Chemical use, water consumption, and land degradation all impact vulnerable communities and are big issues globally.

To learn more about different fibres and how to reduce your own impact, check [the Guide companion webpage](#).

Check your inside seams for a fibre content tag. If you're shopping online, look for a **Product Details** or **Material** section.



### Step 3: Do some simple research



#### 3. Are there certifications on the labels?

Certifications indicate that a brand has invested in improving labour rights or environmental standards in its supply chain. Look out for:

**Environmental Sustainability**

**Labour Rights**

**Labour Rights & Environmental Sustainability**

#### Did you know?



Each certification comes with its own set of practices and criteria and varying impacts for workers and the environment.



OEKO-TEX®  
INSPIRING CONFIDENCE



ethical clothing  
AUSTRALIA



BCI Better Cotton Initiative  
BetterCotton.org



#### 4. Dig deeper

Increasingly, brands are publishing information about their labour rights and environmental sustainability work. Search a brand's website for:

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- A living wage commitment
- Modern Slavery Statement
- Annual/Sustainability Report

#### Living vs. minimum wage: what's the difference?

**Living wage** meets basic needs and provides some discretionary income.

**Minimum wage** is legally mandated, typically less than a living wage.

Preference brands with a **living wage** commitment!

**Can't find anything on a brand's website?** Try looking up its parent company.





## Step 4: Treat your clothes kindly

### The most sustainable wardrobe is the one you already have!

You control the environmental impact of your garment care and are responsible for determining what happens to your clothes once they're no longer needed. Take care to:



**Repair your clothes when damaged.**



**Launder consciously** – think about how often you wash your clothes, the impact of the fibre type, and follow care instructions.



**Dispose of clothing by donating responsibly, repurposing, or turning them into something new.**

Some items can be recycled into new fibres. Garments made from a single fibre like 100% cotton can be broken down and processed into new fabric, but blended fibres like poly-cotton are much more difficult to recycle. Next time you cull your wardrobe, check the fibre label and consider a textile recycling service!

### Did you know?

Microfibres are a major source of plastic pollution.

Each year, it's estimated that the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles is released from synthetic fabrics during washing. Reduce your impact with a microfibre filter washing bag!



## Step 5: Be part of an ethical community

**What's next? Make an even deeper commitment to labour rights and environmental sustainability.**

1. -----

**Start a conversation with your friends and family.**

By encouraging others to consume consciously, you're helping to catalyse positive change. Brands are motivated to do better when consumers seek high standards of labour rights and environmental sustainability.

2. ----- 

**Tell your favourite brands: ethical fashion matters.**

Head to **the Guide companion page** for an email template. Let brands know you care about big issues like labour rights and sustainability.

3. -----

**Invest in change for garment workers.**

After making your own best effort to buy ethically, grow your impact by supporting the work of Baptist World Aid. From community development projects in major garment producing countries, to advocacy with fashion brands, and consumer education tools (like this one!) – help drive change in supply chains!

**DONATE NOW:**  
[www.baptistworldaid.org.au/advocacy-research](http://www.baptistworldaid.org.au/advocacy-research)

### Who is Baptist World Aid?

We're a Christian development agency with a vision to end poverty. We believe poverty is caused by a breakdown of relationships at every level – that's why we seek to fight poverty in many different ways. From the creation of this Guide to help you make more ethical choices, emergency relief when disaster strikes, or livelihood projects so families can grow their income, our work is all about helping YOU end poverty.



# Your checklist for more ethical shopping

## Before you go shopping... DECIDE!

- Decide to take the next step toward more ethical fashion buying

## At the shops... ACT!

- Check the Baptist World Aid ethical fashion grades
- Do some simple research of your own

## Be part of something bigger... INFLUENCE!

- Start a conversation with friends and family
- Tell a fashion brand that you care about workers and the environment
- Support work to improve the lives of garment workers through organisations like Baptist World Aid.



**Find out more!**