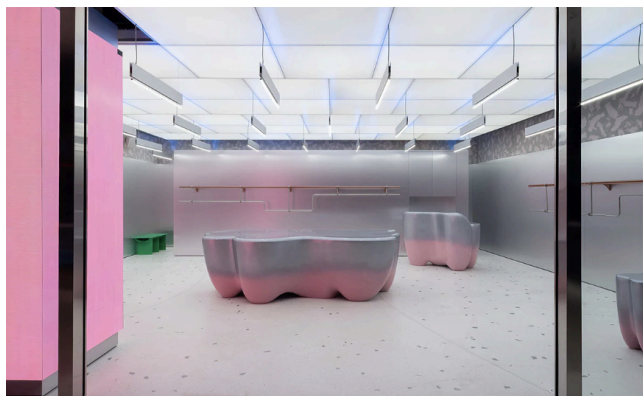


## THE POISON THAT WE WEAR

Jeans started as miner's clothing and became a major fashion item on the shelves and the highlight of magazine covers, jeans are a part of our everyday life (Britannica). As the young generation, we are forced to look beyond and think about how thousands of jeans are produced and their impact on the environment. Because beyond the closed curtains of the glamorous fashion world of denim, there is a polluted planet, the tears of the child workers, the release of 5 ounces of chemicals, and the usage of 18 gallons of water PER JEAN (Thomas)!

Child labor is a harsh reality in the fashion industry and cotton production, it has reached obscene levels. (Child Labour In Fashion). These works are nothing like a part-time job, it is straightforward modern-day slavery. Sadly, the problem isn't only about labor. In South Sudan, managers of a cotton factory altered the menstrual cycle of their female workers including teenage girls by giving them hormones to prevent any unproductivity that can result because of their periods (Hymann). What is so unfortunate is that the workers lack the financial strength to meet their vital needs let alone afford the jeans they are producing (Mud Jeans). These insensible actions play a barrier against the SDGs, specifically No Poverty, Decent Work, and Economic Growth, Good Health, and Well-Being goals, which are actions aimed for a better future. However, there are ways to prevent these obstacles through initiatives that create an ideal standard for manufactured raw materials in alignment with the SDGs like the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). Standards like these push the jean manufacturers into inhabiting more humane and sustainable production practices. One of the founding members of the sustainably cautious Turkey-based brand Reflect Studio which is also certified by the BCI, Eray Erdoğan, stated that such verifications create trust among customers about the reliability of the sources of the raw materials which helps create a wider demand for sustainable fashion in the industry (Erdoğan).

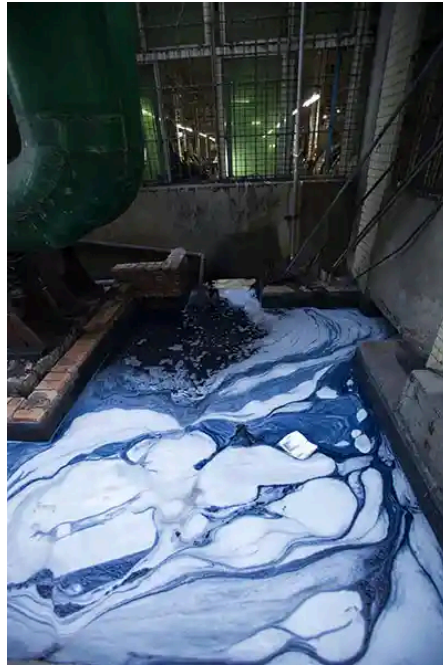


*Figure 1: The Store of Reflect Studios in Akasya Istanbul (“Mağazalar – Reflect Studio.”)*



*Figure 2: Child working in the dyeing process of denim photographed by Mohammad Ponir Hossain (Peoples)*

From the production of its raw material, cotton, which consumes 222 billion m<sup>3</sup>/y of water to its dyeing process that uses 125 liters of water per kilogram cotton fiber, multiple steps of manufacturing denim include extreme levels of water usage (Fluence News Team). However, the high usage of water doesn't equal an increase in the world's water supply which is a huge part of humanity and a source of life (EPA). We use water in our daily lives which is about 50-100 liters a day for one person (Singh). It also jeopardizes the environment and the aquatic resources creating a setback in reaching the SDG "Life below water" since this goal aims to create a clean habitat for marine life (Poratelli). Ironically, as the generation who will be affected most by the huge water crisis said to be set in the year 2030, we are the biggest supporter of the jean industry by being the major marketing target making us a part of the issue (Hemingway Jaynes). So much so that according to the survey conducted in Gymnasium Murska Sobota School analyzes jean consumption among teenage students %27 of them owned 10-15 pairs of jeans.



*Figure 3: Wastewater discharged from a denim washing factory in Xintang photographed by Lu Guang/Greenpeace (“The Price of Success”)*

Among the various fabric types used in fashion denim repetitively stands out as the most harmful one since it is a plant-based product (Sipiritoftextile). During the farming of raw material of denim, an outrageous amount of fertilizers and pesticides are used (Okafor et al.). There is an estimated value of 8 million tonnes of synthetic fertilizers and 200,000 tonnes of pesticides globally used every year in cotton farming. These agricultural activities cause harm to the environment because the pesticide remains in the soil for a few more decades (Okafor; PreventionWeb). Furthermore, when soil and groundwater are mixed with chemicals, the crops and drinking water that humans and animals consume get contaminated, can result in health problems (PreventionWeb). This contradicts the “Clean Water and Sanitation” SDG. To combat this issue companies like Reflect Studio adopt the usage of recycled fabrics including dead stock and second-quality products preventing waste problems along the way as well. Erdoğan stated that “Annually %1 of all used clothes is recycled and the rest ends up as litter” (Erdoğan). Reflect Studio’s approach to this issue is collecting litter from other fashion companies and reusing the waste products instead of trying to consume organic ones.

Among many aspects; jeans have a major role in increasing our carbon footprint considering the fact that a pair of jeans emits 33 to 80 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> (COMMONS). CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming have a major impact on the ecosystems. “Responsible Consumption and Production”, “Affordable and Clean Energy” and “Climate Action” SDGs should be considered by producers and consumers to prevent negative outcomes. Individuals can change their purchasing habits to prefer second-hand stores, and use products for extensive periods. %7 of our friends in Gymnasium Murska Sobota School

thrift their jeans, and 38% of them wear their jeans clothes for 3 to 4 years. We should take their practices as an example to be a part of a sustainable world. Moreover, companies can create platforms that would encourage such actions as the Reflect Studio's #NextSustainability approach that sees "see sustainability in a fashion not just as a goal, but as a journey that everyone can participate in." (Erdoğan). Additionally, in Erdoğan's words, companies should "seek out innovative ways to increase circularity and sustainability" through approaches that would decrease textile waste like their "Upgrade Space" which "functions as a playground that allows you to repair and customize products where second quality products are turned into new products" (Erdoğan).

Humanity should consider everyone's benefits including the environment. At the end of the day, the problem is tied to our actions. As individual consumers, we must limit our usage as much as possible, make campaigns, and try to settle with governments. However, as the youth, it's our turn to protect our homes by working together to initiate actions FOR OUR PLANET!

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