THE
ANTI-SLAVERY
COLLECTIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FAKE FASHION:

A HUMAN RIGHTS SCANDAL

STATS

New data commissioned by The Anti-Slavery Collective, 2025 (unless otherwise marked)

£274 BILLION

Value of internationally traded fake fashion, which represents 63% of all internationally traded counterfeit goods.

£9 BILLION

Total value of internationally traded counterfeited goods for the UK economy

£2.55 BILLION

Amount of annual tax revenue foregone by the UK Exchequer due to counterfeiting

1/3

More than a third of Gen Z respondents had deliberately purchased a fake designer item in the previous year *EUIPO

£2.7 BILLION - £3.6 BILLION

Upper and lower band estimates for total value of internationally traded counterfeit apparel goods in the UK economy

The UK Government could afford the following public service workers with tax revenue lost through counterfeiting

47,300 POLICE OFFICERS

51,400 NURSES

47,100 TEACHERS

$550 BILLION

Total value of internationally traded counterfeit goods in 2025. A 17.7% increase since 2021 when it was estimated to be $467 billion.

$346 BILLION

Specific estimate of the value of internationally traded counterfeited goods in the apparel sector

$1.899 TRILLION

Total global value of digital piracy including filesharing and streaming (using 2025 prices)

#1

Counterfeiting is the most profitable income stream for organised criminal groups. More than twice as lucrative as the second highest category, drug trafficking.
*Global Financial Integrity

$747 - $910 BILLION

Wider global economic and social costs of counterfeiting (using 2025 prices)

FOREWORD

Counterfeit fashion is booming — and with it, so is human exploitation. For too long, fake fashion has been trivialised as a harmless shortcut to a more desirable lifestyle. A bargain. A slice of luxury at a fraction of the price. But this report paints a much darker picture — one where fake fashion is embedded in a complex criminal underworld rife with abuse and exploitation.

Behind every fake handbag, pair of trainers, or football shirt lies a murky supply chain laced with exploitation, coercion, and in some cases forced labour. Fuelled by a convergence of intersecting social, economic, and technological dynamics, counterfeit trade has become a globalised industry. This lucrative trade is driven by organised crime groups who treat people as disposable business inputs, and who use profits to finance violent criminal activities.

Fake fashion has existed for millennia, but the scale of its production and distribution has expanded rapidly over the last five years. What was once a fringe activity is now firmly mainstream, ranging from luxury knockoffs to sportswear reps. What this report shows is that counterfeit fashion is far from a harmless side hustle; it is a gateway for criminal networks to move money, exploit workers, and erode our collective safety. The consequences are wide-ranging and significant — billions of lost tax revenue, huge costs to law enforcement, damaging health impacts, and environmental damage. However, the heaviest toll of these illicit operations is borne by the people — men, women and children — who have been deceived, coerced or forced to commit crimes, often at huge personal risks with little personal gain.

Counterfeiting supply chains prey upon the vulnerable and profit directly from labour exploitation. This paper uncovers the hidden risks and impacts of fake fashion and reveals its links with forced labour and organised crime. We hope our research and findings will help raise awareness of this underexplored and underreported human rights scandal.

Sarah Woodcock
CEO, The Anti-Slavery Collective

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Key Findings

Fake fashion harms people, economies and the planet

The manufacture and sale of fake fashion is responsible for many deeply damaging harms. These include: a significant loss of taxation; damage to legitimate businesses; harmful environmental manufacturing processes; dangerous health and safety impacts, and increased crime.[1] This report also reveals the underreported connections between counterfeiting and forced labour.[2]

Profits from fake fashion fund darker and more violent criminality

Counterfeit goods[3] are an extremely lucrative and low risk economic activity for criminal actors.[4] There is growing evidence that counterfeiting profits are funding other forms of violent criminality, such as money laundering and drug, gun, and human trafficking.

Gathering data on counterfeiting and forced labour is a major challenge

Forced labour is a crime that thrives on the vulnerability and isolation of victims who can be too fearful, too desperate, or simply unaware of their rights to seek help. Counterfeit production and distribution are deliberately concealed, with goods crossing borders through informal networks and with criminals often operating in regions with weak regulation or corruption. The same secrecy that protects these operations also hides exploitative labour practices such as forced or child labour; this makes quantifiable data very challenging to trace.

Data sharing deficits hinder evidence-based policymaking

There are significant gaps and inconsistencies in data sharing between public and private actors on the extent and nature of counterfeiting. This hinders government bodies, law enforcement agencies, and intellectual property specialists in identifying and targeting criminal operations and exploitation. Brands that possess vital data and supply chain monitoring capacity represent an underutilised source of insight.

Counterfeiting operations apply different norms, patterns and business models

The risk of modern slavery and other forms of labour exploitation exists in all business supply chains. In legitimate manufacturing businesses, labour exploitation risk is highest at the production and manufacturing stages. Although there are some examples of labour exploitation in the distribution and sale of legally compliant goods, the exposure to labour abuse at these stages is significantly lower than it is in counterfeiting supply chains. The Anti-Slavery Collective has collected case studies that suggest labour exploitation exists from end to end in counterfeit supply chains, including at the assembly and sale stages.

Counterfeiters evade detection by exploiting international legal loopholes

The fragmented international legal landscape around counterfeiting allows criminal actors to exploit loopholes and evade detection. Counterfeit production is increasingly localised, particularly in free trade zones, where counterfeiters deceive enforcement by shipping unbranded disassembled materials separately.[5] Law enforcement agencies are struggling to keep pace with evolving covert production and distribution methods.

The eCommerce landscape presents new challenges

eCommerce has boomed since the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated the rise of online shopping.[6] It is forecast that, by 2026, 39% of global retail purchases will be made online.[7] The eCommerce marketplace is driven by social media platforms, and global brands are omnipresent. This has fuelled an exponential growth in counterfeiting as criminal groups are increasingly able to target a global consumer base.

Social media platforms and influencers are driving fake fashion sales

The influence of social media on consumer purchasing is clear; it's forecast that by 2030, 42% of all purchase intent will come from social media eCommerce platforms.[8] There is growing evidence that influencers are promoting and selling counterfeit fashion items on social media platforms with ease and relative impunity. These platforms are now a vast, lucrative marketplace for counterfeit fashion products.

A profound attitudinal shift has occurred

Whereas owning counterfeit goods was once stigmatised, attitudes amongst younger demographics have changed dramatically. Buying, wearing, and owning counterfeit goods has become entirely normalised. In particular, Gen Z consumers perceive fake goods as being harmless, a savvy economic choice , or even as a defiant stance against corporate profits.

The counterfeiting of apparel goods has reached epidemic proportions

New data commissioned by The Anti-Slavery Collective estimates the total value of internationally traded counterfeit goods in 2025 is $550 billion[9], with fake fashion constituting a majority share (63%) of this trade.

Recommendations

1. An international, multi-stakeholder approach is required

The responsibility for tackling counterfeiting falls across international jurisdictions, public and private sector actors, and government departments. Sustainability, human rights abuses, and poly-criminality cannot be understood in isolation; multi-stakeholder cooperation needs to be prioritised and a big picture leadership approach applied to facilitate greater cooperation and joined up action.

2. Data sharing is an urgent priority

Restricted access to data and intelligence limits our understanding of the true scale and nature of the fake fashion market and its intersection with labour exploitation. Governments, law enforcement agencies, intellectual property (IP) experts, and trading standards groups urgently require more data to target their investigations. A culture of transparency and collaboration around data sharing between the public and private sectors is required.

3. Law enforcement officers and private investigators need targeted training

IP crime investigators in law enforcement agencies and private investigators hired by brands often do not have comprehensive training on recognising the signs of labour exploitation. Targeted training is required which would also contribute to a culture of data and intelligence sharing.

4. Counterfeiting must be treated as a serious crime

Enforcement policies and tactics need to take counterfeiting as seriously as other forms of organised crime, rather than viewing it as a secondary IP concern. This would promote stronger interagency cooperation, harmonised international standards, and more consistent penalties across jurisdictions. It would also enable law enforcement and regulatory bodies to better target the organised networks linked to labour exploitation.

5. Gen Z targeted awareness-raising campaigns should be prioritised

Awareness-raising campaigns should target Gen Z consumers in response to their demand for fake fashion and the marked attitudinal shifts towards counterfeiting amongst this cohort. These campaigns should leverage existing consumer insight research and apply a behavioural change approach.

6. More comparative legal analysis is required

There are some countries where legislation exists to criminalise the purchase of illicit and counterfeit goods. These include France and Italy, where the luxury fashion markets are economically significant. Historically, there has been little appetite for a change in the law in the UK. This is largely due to significant challenges in enforcement and judicial capacity. There is also a persistent belief that IP protection primarily serves the interests of brands rather than being integral to tackling criminality. More comparative legal analysis is needed on the effectiveness of different legal approaches to assess the potential for deterring consumers from buying counterfeit goods that contribute to exploitative labour practices.

7. The new eCommerce landscape needs to be better understood

Partnerships with eCommerce and social media platforms should be prioritised to better understand the challenges in verifying sellers, identifying fakes, protecting IP, and prosecuting criminals.

8. AI technology should be increasingly leveraged

AI-powered technology is already being used to spot fakes by comparing millions of images of real and counterfeit products. AI technology could be leveraged more widely by private and public sector organisations to target and disrupt counterfeiting.

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