SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT FACTSHEET – T-SHIRT



This factsheet provides practical guidance for humanitarian procurement and programme teams to source T-shirts more sustainably and from local production. It highlights key considerations throughout the product lifecycle:



1. Before buying

Sustainable procurement starts with a clear assessment of needs. The following questions can guide procurement policies and decisions.

Do we need to buy new T-shirts?	Do we buy the right quantities?	Can we buy sustainable?
• Is repair technically feasible and cost-effective? • All textiles can be repaired in theory, particularly those made from natural fibres. Using local repair services supports the local economy and can be a cost-effective solution.	**For internal NGO use:** • How many T-shirts do we need, and what are donor requirements? • Can T-shirts already in stock be equipped with a changeable, reusable logo instead of a printed one? • Can we buy second-hand or deadstock items? **For beneficiaries:** Can we buy second-hand or deadstock items?	• Can we favour natural or recycled fibres over virgin synthetic fibres? • Are the fibres responsibly sourced and traceable? • Does the supplier reduce environmental impacts through energy efficiency, low-carbon energy use, or wastewater treatment? • Can we reduce or eliminate unnecessary packaging?

2. Choosing the right T-shirt

These tables help integrate sustainability into T-shirt procurement. **Table 1** includes ready-to-use technical specifications for BOQs, and **Table 2** provides supplier evaluation criteria for procurement assessment. The "Impact" column reflects each criterion's importance to the environmental footprint (climate, water, waste).

Table 1. Criteria for sustainable T-shirt procurement

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Second-hand or deadstock T-shirts		
Quality of the fabric	High	The T-shirt must be in good condition: no odour, stains, or holes. No re-dyeing before distribution as this would offset much of the environmental benefits of reuse and may introduce chemical residues.
Material	Medium	Favour natural or natural-blend fibres (cotton) where possible, easier to recycle at end of life than fully synthetic fabrics.
Traceability	Low	Where possible, ask for traceability of deadstock T-shirts back to their original production batch.
New T-Shirt		
Tailoring and quality of the stitching	High	Reinforced strip on the back of the collar (highest-friction area) and even, non-fraying edge-stitching.
Fabric - grammage	High	Above 150 g/m^2: a thicker fabric lasts longer.
Certified fabric	Medium	GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard), GRS (Global Recycled Standard), Fair Trade, ROC (Regenerative Organic Certified), or Fair Wear Foundation certification. Environmental certifications: GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard), GRS (Global Recycled Standard), , ROC (Regenerative Organic Certified), or Social certifications: Fair Trade, Fair Wear Foundation certification
Material	Medium	Organic natural fibre (100% organic cotton; 100% linen where relevant for the market).
Logo	Low	**Detachable Velcro panel** for NGO/donor logos (left chest, back, right forearm: size to be determined). Where embroidery isn't possible, use digital or screen printing instead.
Local manufacturing	Low	Locally produced fibres and/or locally woven and tailored.

Table 2. Supplier criteria

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Water consumption	Medium	Monitor water use and have measures in place to reduce consumption and treat wastewater.
Packaging	Medium	Primary packaging: paper wrap / secondary packaging: cardboard. No chemical product for anti-mite / anti parasite in the cardboard.
Energy used in manufacturing	Low	Use of low-carbon energy. Ask for the share of electricity from renewable sources and the use of diesel generators in the manufacturing process.
Social impact		The supplier shall demonstrate appropriate health & safety measures, local employment, and fair wage practices.

3. During use

Tips and hints to increase the life expectancy of the T-shirt:

- No harsh chemicals, such as bleach, when washing.
- Let T-shirts air-dry rather than tumble-drying them.
- Wash at 30°C.

4. End of life

A damaged T-shirt could be:

- **Repaired** (especially natural fabrics).
- **Recycled or upcycled**: A local company or association can turn damaged T-shirts into new clothing, or new objects (T-shirts might be used as stuffing), or rags. Natural fibres (cotton and linen) are easier to recycle.
- **Disposed in a proper way:** Textiles (even natural fibres) shall not be destroyed by open burning or street dumping. If recycling opportunities are not available, ensure proper disposal.

5. Alternatives: cost and environmental analysis

Table 3. All contexts: environmental benefits of recommended alternatives

Availability of these alternatives must be verified with local suppliers. The reductions in climate change impact were calculated by comparing standard synthetic imported T-shirts produced in Türkiye with alternatives from local producers in Lebanon.

Alternatives	Reduction in climate impact	Key environmental benefits
Deadstock	-34%	No new production, reducing waste and its associated impact.
Second-hand	-24%	No new production, avoiding the associated environmental impact.
Organic natural fibres	+54%	Whilst organic natural fibres come with a higher climate impact, the human-health impacts and its associated pollution risks (microplastics, petroleum-based processing) are lower.

Table 4. Lebanon: cost and environmental analysis of available alternatives

Compared with a standard imported T-shirt, **upcycled deadstock T-shirts cost 33% less and have a 34% lower climate impact. Second-hand T-shirts cost 80% less and have a 24% lower climate impact.**

Conventional technical specifications	Sustainable technical specification
New T-shirt – 90% cotton, 10% elastane	• Upcycled T-shirts made from deadstock (uniform look and colour per batch, logo can be added) – for NGO staff. • Second-hand T-shirts (variable sizes, looks, and materials) – for beneficiaries.

6. References and resources

This factsheet is based on a project's market assessment in Lebanon, drawing on supplier questionnaire responses, technical observations from site visits, and available guidance on sustainable products and services relevant to the Lebanese context in 2026. For more information, as well as the methodology used for price comparison, total cost of ownership, and the simplified LCA, please refer to the following document: *Appendix 1 - Price comparison & environmental analysis methodologies.*