

# Responsibility at Essentiel Antwerp

A journey — not a destination.



Sustainability report 2023

**ESSENTIEL  
ANTWERP**



## Intro

**2023 was a challenging year where we continued mapping, tracing and intensifying our sustainability focus. We've been looking into optimizing our processes and refining our calculation methodology. It sheds light on the next necessary steps in our journey. While these efforts may not all yield immediate results, we're confident they set us on a path towards significant and tangible results in the future.**

## Focus

Designed in Antwerp, Essentiel Antwerp is an ode to play. Proportion, print and color are intrinsic to the brand's design. Its light-hearted approach and eclectic blend of rich textures and silhouettes is appealing to anyone that appreciates fashion with a distinctive twist.

While we may not be pioneers on all aspects of a fashion brand's sustainability journey, we recognize the impact we have within the industry and strive to set a positive example through our actions. Our ambitions are built on four strategic pillars:

— **Better products:** focusing on improving the quality and sustainability of our products. We are aware of the challenges we must overcome and set clear actions to reach our goal as we continuously improve our sourcing of materials.

— **Lowering our ecological footprint:** Implementing measures to reduce our environmental impact and carbon emissions. We know our numbers and are drawing up a plan to lower our emissions.

— **Contribute to a more responsible supply chain:** Our code of conduct is guiding us in all our operations worldwide, setting out the principles and standards to be followed by all suppliers, factories and subcontractors. Next to this, we continue to ask social audit reports, to guarantee the compliance in practice.

— **We believe in inclusivity, diversity and equality.** We raise our voice for the people and communities we care for, and we prioritize the well-being of our employees.

Since 2019, we have been guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs. This international framework sets out 17 goals for sustainable development by 2030, divided into the themes of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. These themes serve as the foundation of our sustainability strategy, guiding our actions and decisions.

— By prioritizing better products, we contribute to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

— Lowering our carbon footprint aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action).

— Our commitment to caring for people supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

— Lastly, speaking up and offering a perfect experience for customers with clear values aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and again SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

By integrating these SDGs into our strategy, we strive to make meaningful progress towards creating a more sustainable and equitable world. It goes without saying that we also hold all the other SDGs in high regard and strive to ensure that our actions do not generate any negative impact on them.



## 2023 trends & milestones

In today's ever-changing world, sustainability has become a key focus, especially in the fashion industry. As a Belgian fashion brand with activities across the world, we need to navigate the complexities of today's geopolitical and socio-economic landscape. This poses challenges in making sustainable choices.

Fluctuating trade policies, economic and political instability, and shifting consumer trends often complicate our sustainability efforts. Despite these hurdles, we're proud to have reached some important milestones in 2023:

— We have adopted a more professional approach to implementing sustainability throughout our design chain. After analyzing the various steps and identifying areas for more effective integration of sustainability, we have enhanced our processes to achieve tangible progress.

— We further expanded our resell platform RE—SSENTIEL, implementing a circular business model with sustainable values that we are committed to maintaining for the long term.

— We calculated and published our first carbon footprint in 2022. We learned from this and improved our data quality, bringing us to a second calculation in 2023. This has given us the necessary tools to define targets and actions.

— We further implemented our digital training app, improving our sales advisors' access to training and to our employee community.

— We introduced our first gender-fluid collections: a bold statement for what we stand for that amplifies our voice for equality.

All these milestones reflect the communal efforts of our teams, from designers and sales advisors to other department staff who translated information into clear communication for our customers as well as providing financial, product or HR data for calculations etc. As we navigate these changes and embrace sustainability, we are also very proud of our team's collective effort in consistently making small, positive changes every day.

2023 in facts and figures:  
our 2023 performance report

# Getting serious about the planet.

## Products with (less) impact

We design with quality and longevity in mind. We're on track for our goal to craft 50% of our products from more sustainable materials by 2025. We are now also moving beyond the experimental phase with circular business models. RE—SENTIEL, our resell model, is here to stay and we will continue to explore other circular business models such as rental services.

## The better alternative is the only option.

We operate in a sector where the materials we use have a major impact on the environment. The extraction and cultivation of raw materials is both water and energy intensive. Converting them into fibers and textiles to make our designs also requires a lot of energy and chemicals. That's why we make every effort to choose materials with a lower negative impact, as reflected in our Corporate Product Policy. This policy is helping us to move towards more sustainable design and fabrics. It also explains our criteria for considering a fabric 'sustainable' to our team and to suppliers. To guarantee compliance with our standards of fibers and textiles, we require the necessary supporting certificates from suppliers.

Our guiding principles:

- We promote maximal use of recycled materials for oil-based fabrics such as polyester and polyamide. We continue our research for innovative materials.
- We choose organically grown raw materials such as organic cotton, or materials that have a lower negative impact such as linen.
- We require all our suppliers to comply with the product requirements as described in our Corporate Product Policy (such as compliance with the REACH legislation). We also ask for proof of good practices on the basis of certificates.

Our ambition is for 50% of our materials to be more sustainable by 2025. For the year 2023, 29% of the volume of our ready-to-wear collection was made from recycled material or from organic origin. The most significant shift we achieved in 2023 was progressively replacing polyester with recycled polyester. Today, 58% of the polyester we use is of recycled origin. It became our most important raw material in 2023 and signifies an increase of 20% versus 2022.

Say it with numbers:

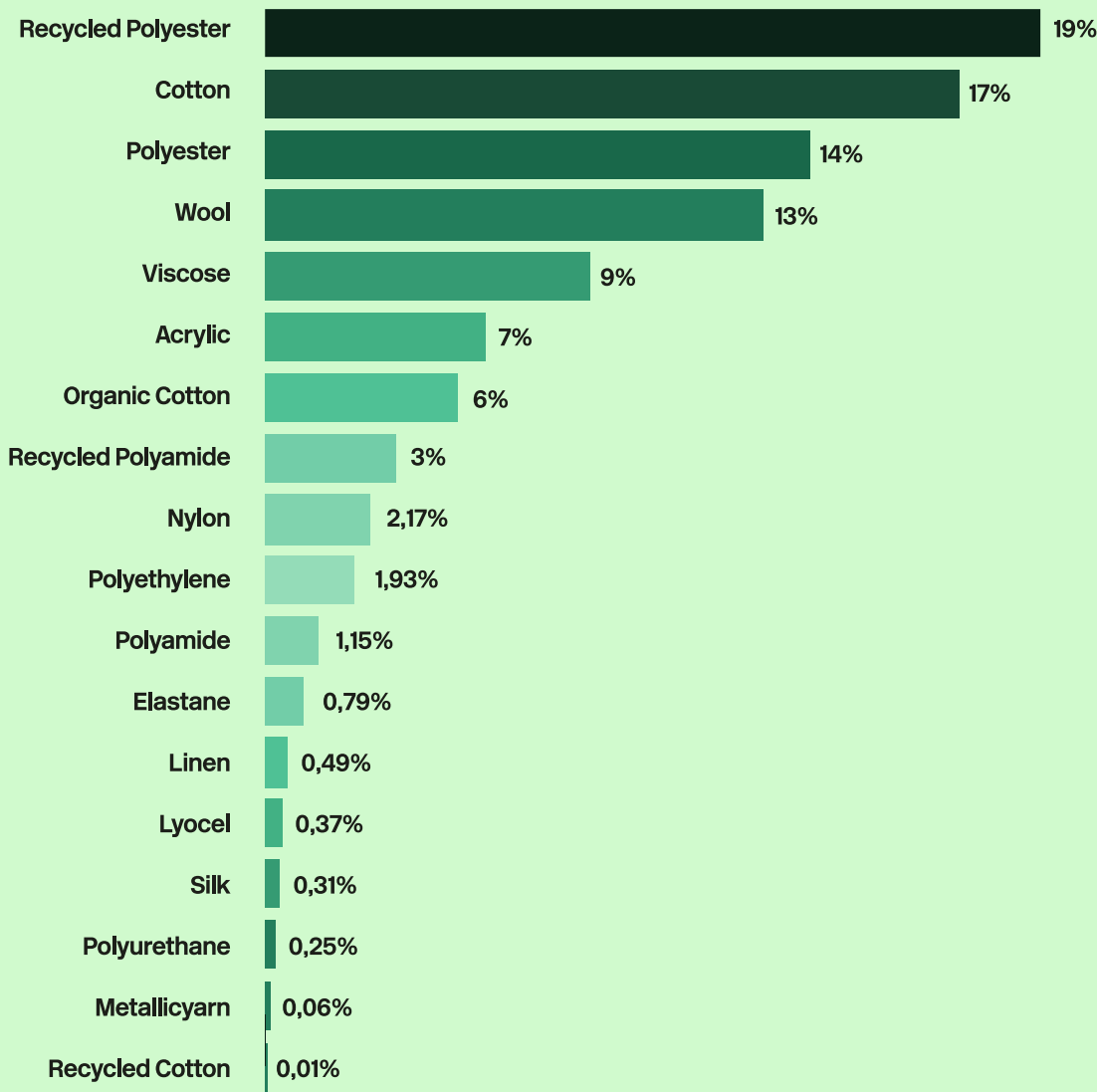
- 58% of the polyester garments are from recycled content
- 22% of all garments are from recycled content
- 26% of the cotton we use is certified organic cotton
- 14% of our viscose and lyocell are produced in a closed loop process
- 52% of our garments are made from natural fibers

In the past years we have gradually replaced our regular materials with sustainable alternatives. This remains challenging as we are sometimes still faced with large minimum quantities, or substantial surcharges, but we are noticing a shift in supplier behavior as more and more sustainable options become available. To generate the necessary shift to achieve our goal, our design department has reorganized the design, prototyping and communication cycle with our suppliers.

We have adopted a more professional approach to implement sustainability in the design chain. We're moving beyond initial naivety and are gaining a clearer understanding of the context. Whilst we still need to await the tangible results hereof, our analysis of the design chain has identified areas where we can integrate sustainability more effectively.

Moving forward, after the prototyping phase, we will engage with suppliers to prioritize sustainable options from the outset. With this new approach, we are hopeful that - without too many economic setbacks - we can achieve our goal.





Our materials in 2023 (by clothing weight)

## Never stop learning

We use the principles of circular design, such as working with mono-material as much as possible, throughout our design process. We conduct research into new fabrics and materials, visit fabric fairs, ask our suppliers about their latest innovations and get to work in design and experimentation ourselves.

To extend the knowledge of our design and product development team, we recently provided in-depth training on materials and sustainability for our designers. As the market for new and innovative materials continuously evolves, we want to keep our team updated and are planning to conduct individual workshops for designers, guiding them personally on integrating sustainability in their specific design focus. These workshops will focus on various aspects such as weaving, engaging with suppliers, knitwear, and accessories.



## RE—SSENTIEL is a business model to stay

As we leave the pilot phase behind us, our resell platform is here to stay. RE—SSENTIEL is a business model with the sustainable values we believe in. We were the first Belgian brand to launch a digital platform for reselling pre-loved items, back in 2022.

Customers can return pre-loved items which they no longer wear. We take back these items and after quality control we publish them on our digital platform in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Germany. The success of the launch was just a starting point for RE—SSENTIEL, which has since become a fully-fledged business unit within our organization.

### Say it with numbers:

- 692 238 visits in 2023
- 25 collections online
- 23 most wanted items published
- 82% of items published are new or in excellent condition
- 4 968 hours spent handling second-hand clothes
- 2 280 ESSENTIEL ANTWERP lovers joined us in making an impact by selling their loved item(s)
- 7 978 items found a new owner
- 55% sell-through
- 2% of items sent back were no longer suited for sale and were granted to goodwill organizations Emmaüs and 'La Fondation des Femmes'

## Rethinking the rental business model

For the past four seasons we have been offering a party rental service to our customers in four of our European stores, handling all processes internally. Although we made all efforts to make this model work we had to admit that the model was not viable in a monobrand context. For a circular business model to be sustainable, it must be contributing and scalable. After testing for a considerable period it became clear this would not be the case with the in-house rental model.

However, we do not intend to let the principle go. The whole idea behind piloting circular solutions is to learn, improve and dare to rethink them if necessary. Although we were managing our European rental service ourselves over the past years, we already successfully work with rental platforms in the US, such as Rent the Runway. As of 2024 we will be partnering up with other specialized rental businesses which already run a successful model with a strong customer base. A first partner has been selected in France and we'll implement this model in other European countries too.

### What we learned:

- Rental service is a nice-to-have in store as it inspires customers with circular fashion approaches.
- Customers are more and more open to the idea but often intend to rent clothing for a longer period of time, instead of just renting it for a short period such as a special occasion.
- Customers are more inclined to rent clothing at specialized stores.
- We want to rethink the model but hold onto the core idea by partnering with specialized local rental services who match well with our brand signature.

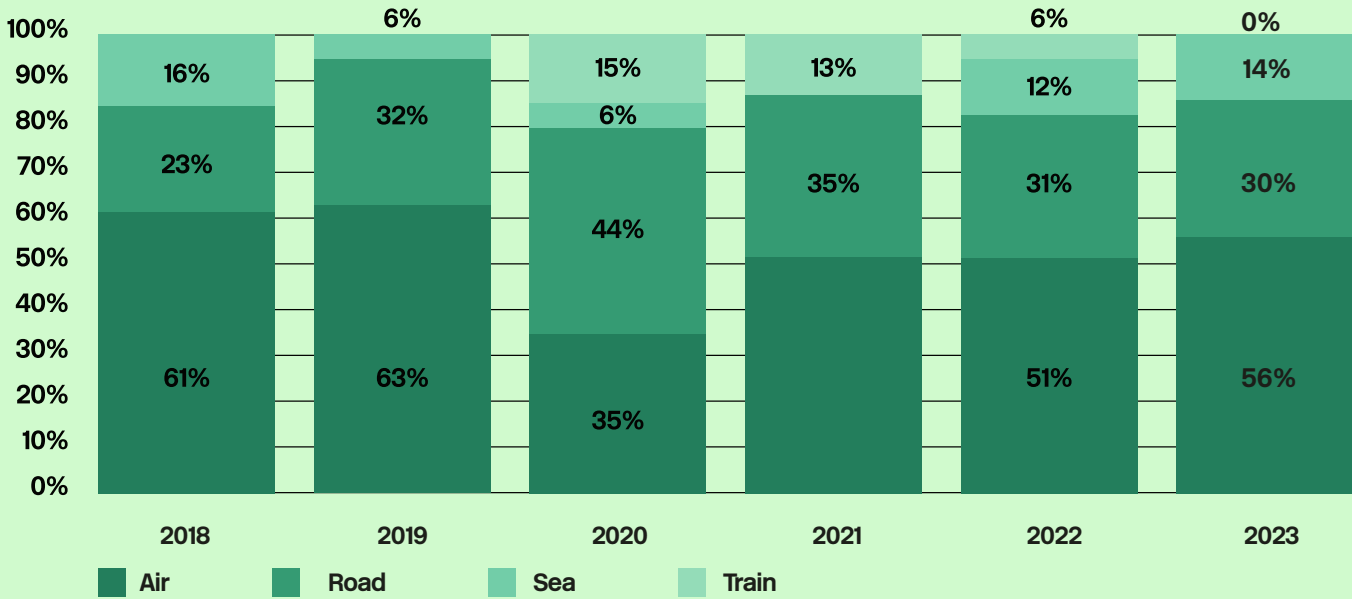
# Reduce our carbon footprint.

In 2022 we recorded our first carbon footprint. This exercise helped us to learn which were our main impacts and gave us insights into how data helps us in setting priorities and targets. For 2023 we deepened this exercise with more precise data, giving us a more complete view of our carbon footprint. Our next step is to lower our emissions, primarily by focusing on our products and transport.

In our commitment to improving our environmental impact, we embarked on the crucial task of calculating our carbon footprint for the base year 2022. This comprehensive exercise involved analyzing our scope 1, scope 2, and scope 3 carbon emissions. Calculating our first carbon footprint was a valuable process, helping us to dig into our data and learn where we could improve our data quality and detail. In 2023, we conducted our second carbon footprint calculation, having implemented some data collection improvements over the course of the year. This enabled us to add other activities, such as end-of-life and product use, to our calculation, and adopt a volume-based approach for calculating all of our transport, departing from the spend-base method.

Scope 1	Scope 2	Scope 3
<p>Scope 1 emissions are direct GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions that occur from sources that are owned or controlled by Essentiel Antwerp:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Stationary combustion</li> <li>— Mobile combustion</li> </ul>	<p>Scope 2 emissions are indirect GHG emissions that occur from the generation of purchased electricity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Electricity</li> </ul>	<p>Scope 3 emissions include all other indirect GHG emissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Our products: ready to wear, accessories and shoes</li> <li>— Purchased goods and services (like packaging etc.)</li> <li>— Capital goods</li> <li>— Energy supply</li> <li>— Transport upstream</li> <li>— Business travel</li> <li>— Commuting</li> <li>— Waste</li> <li>— Transport downstream</li> <li>— Use of product</li> <li>— End of life</li> </ul>

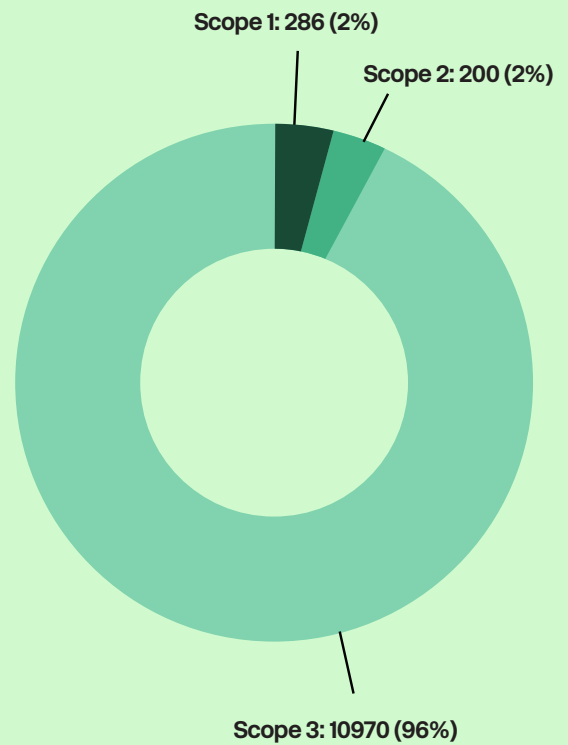
Volume of products per mode of transport between 2018 and 2023



Calculating our footprint serves as a vital exercise for our team, highlighting the significance of collaboration across departments. Analyzing our data unveils hidden opportunities for improvement and prompts us to rethink our current processes. In 2023, our total emissions amounted to 11456 tons of CO2 equivalents. Notably, in this calculation, scope 3 emissions comprised 96% of our footprint, a 3% increase compared to 2022. This trend aligns with wider sector trends.

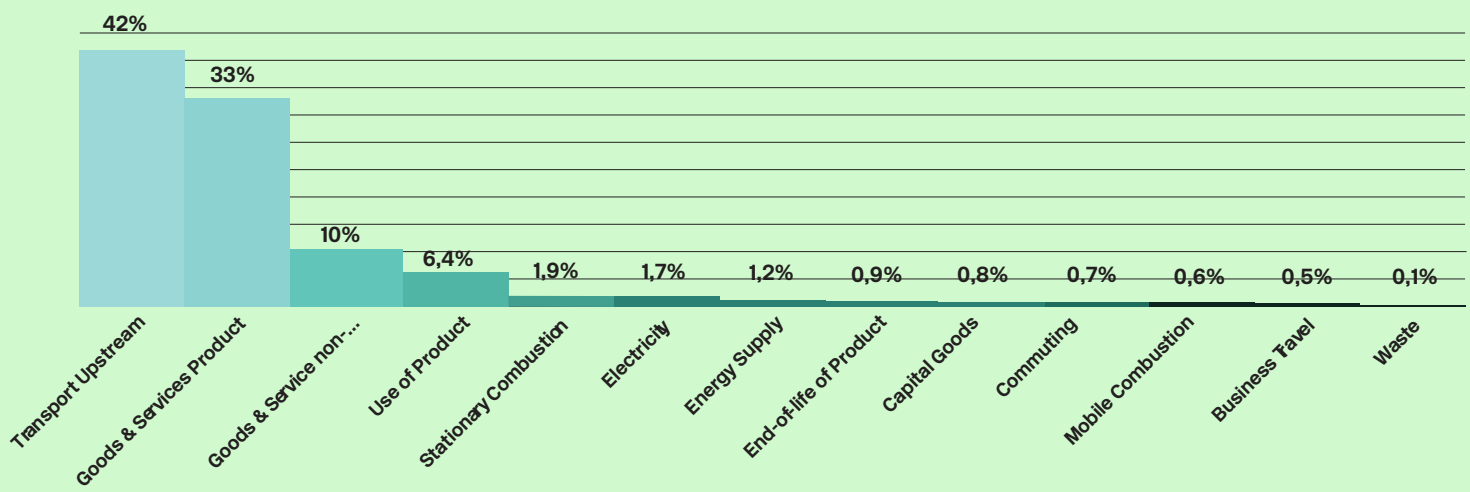
As a result of transitioning from spend-based\* to activity-based calculations for all our transports, both inbound and outbound, transportation now accounts for up to 42% of our total emissions. This marks a 12% increase compared to our 2022 report. The most significant impact in inbound transport stems from this shift in calculation methodology, particularly evident in the use of air transport for both inbound and outbound deliveries. Addressing this issue will be our top priority in the upcoming years.

Despite facing numerous challenges such as the Covid pandemic, the container crisis, and uncertainties specifically surrounding train transports due to geopolitical events like the Ukrainian war, we held on to our commitment to reducing air transports. Despite our commitment, these challenges have led again to an increased air transport level. Nevertheless, it's important to note our air transport is still below the levels recorded in the years prior to 2020. However, we did continue to focus on boat transport as an alternative to air or train transport. While many of these circumstances are beyond our full control, we remain dedicated to leveraging the opportunities we do have in our hands. One such initiative is our direct transports from the Far East to our customers in South Korea and the US, bypassing transit through Belgium. This approach has proven effective in mitigating our environmental impact.



This report covers the footprint of the entire Essentiel Antwerp organization. It has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol reporting standards (Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard, 2004; Corporate Value Chain Accounting and Reporting Standard, 2011). Endeavors were made to use primary data wherever possible but especially surrounding all major emissions sources. Where primary data was not available, a consistent and conservative approach to calculation was applied. For the 2023 calculation, more specific data has been used to calculate the emissions for purchased goods and services and transports. Due to these improvements, like-for-like comparisons are not possible for some of the activities within the footprint. The report excludes specific targets as well as reports on greenhouse gas removals. The reporting period covered is 01/01/2023 to 31/12/2023. The next iteration of this footprint is expected to be of the same length, starting from the first day following this reporting period. Any deviation from this will be mentioned in communication at the time of publication.

\*Regarding spend-based versus activity-based calculations: the spend-based method of carbon accounting takes the financial value of a purchased good or service and translates it into emissions with a corresponding spend-based emission factor. Using the activity-based method we base the calculation of our emissions on raw data for different activities such as energy consumption, our products, packaging, transports, waste etc.

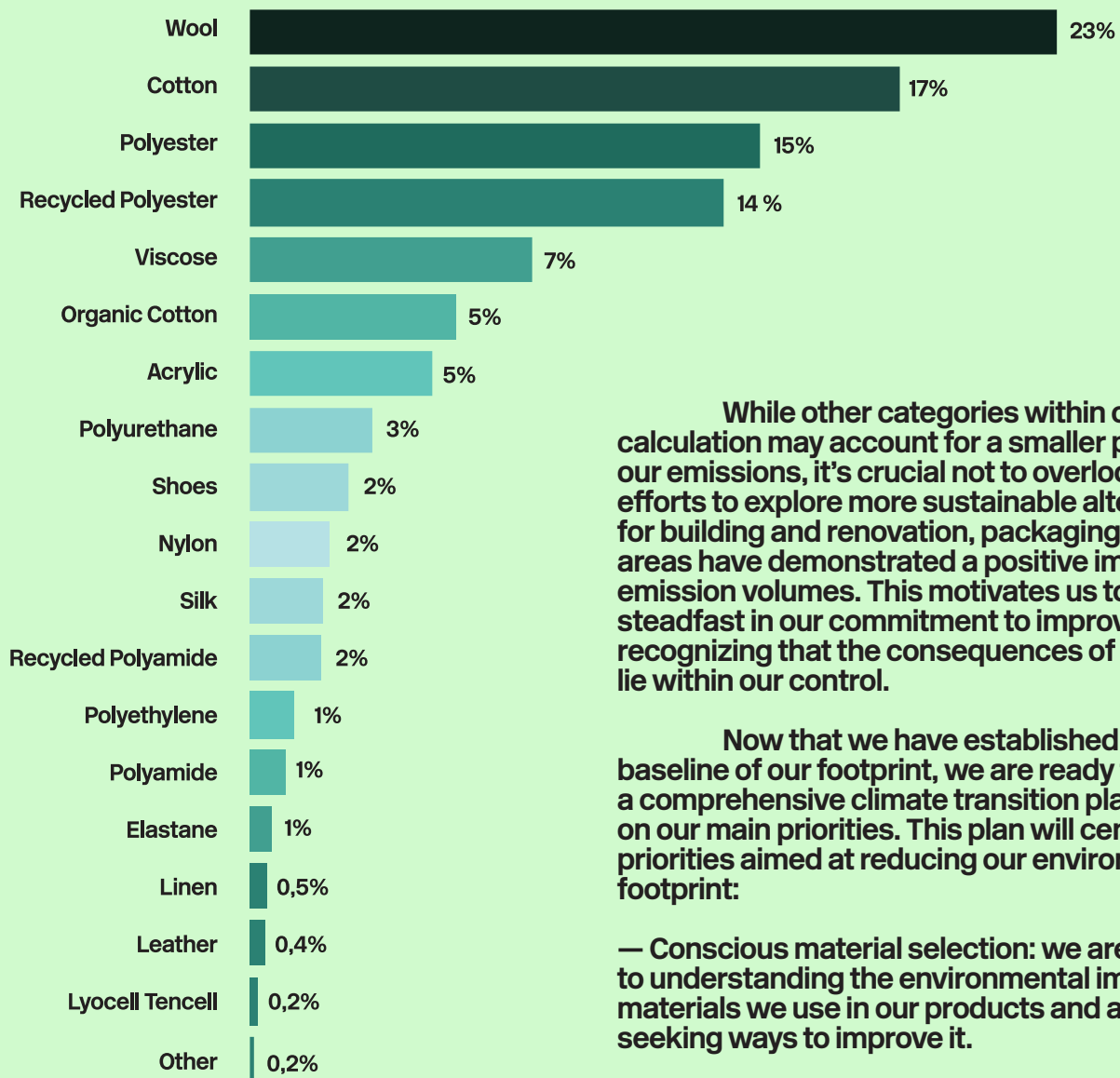


In the dynamic landscape of the fashion industry, the careful follow-up of our design and ordering calendar stands as a cornerstone of our strategy. This process demands close coordination among our multifaceted teams and valued suppliers, emphasizing its pivotal role in our operations. Particularly within the ever-evolving fashion sector, where timing is paramount, we recognize the invaluable partnerships we have with our suppliers, many of whom rely on longstanding collaborations with us. In our outbound transports, we are actively implementing measures to minimize negative effects:

- Providing sales advisors with the option to send non-available stock items directly from the warehouse to the customer's home, reducing unnecessary transportation or relocation.
- Analyzing and optimizing outbound distribution processes to enhance efficiency, particularly for wholesale packages.
- Further improving our online store, aiming to reduce web returns through improved product information and fitting advice on product labels.

Despite transportation being our primary concern, we also acknowledge the significant contribution of our collections to our emissions. Our garments (including clothing, accessories, and shoes) constitute the second largest contributor, responsible for up to 33% of our emissions, followed by our non-products (for example, marketing materials and shop equipment) and services (such as IT consulting).

When it comes to our products, we have pinpointed wool, cotton, and polyester as the materials with the most significant impact. These materials also happen to be the most frequently used in our production process. However, recycled polyester, despite constituting 19% of our total weight of produced materials for clothing, accounts for 14% of our product emissions. A similar trend is also observed with other materials, where the more sustainable variant generates relatively fewer emissions compared to the virgin material.



While other categories within our calculation may account for a smaller portion of our emissions, it's crucial not to overlook them. Our efforts to explore more sustainable alternatives for building and renovation, packaging, and other areas have demonstrated a positive impact on our emission volumes. This motivates us to remain steadfast in our commitment to improvement, recognizing that the consequences of our choices lie within our control.

Now that we have established a clear baseline of our footprint, we are ready to develop a comprehensive climate transition plan, focusing on our main priorities. This plan will center on key priorities aimed at reducing our environmental footprint:

- **Conscious material selection:** we are committed to understanding the environmental impact of the materials we use in our products and are actively seeking ways to improve it.

- **Optimizing inbound and outbound distribution:** we are streamlining our design calendar and further optimizing our inbound distribution flow to reduce reliance on air transport, thereby lowering emissions associated with our logistics operations. We will research possibilities to improve the impact of our outbound distribution in collaboration with our logistics partners.

- **Increasing awareness:** through collaborative efforts within our team, we will explore ways to further integrate sustainability into our daily operations, encompassing everything from travel practices to energy consumption in our stores, our store design, and waste management. For example, our 2022 initiative to improve our energy consumption in stores resulted into an internal awareness momentum among our retail sales team.

- **Innovation and alternative business models:** we will continue to explore innovative approaches and alternative business models aimed at extending the lifecycle of our garments among our customers, thereby promoting sustainability throughout our value chain.

## Packaging and merchandise

For several years now, we've been consistently making more sustainable choices for purchases such as packaging materials for our e-shop and stores. Following the principles of the waste hierarchy (Lansink's ladder), we aim to rethink our practices. An example of this is discontinuing the printing of brochures. Additionally, we prioritize sustainable design for our packaging, focusing on simple but refined design. We now use recycled cardboard or paper for our store bags and e-shop shipments, and ensure printing is done with soy ink.

Our procurement principles:

- All FSC-certified paper and cardboard
- Recycled is the first choice
- Soy ink for printing
- Elimination of laminated paper products
- Paper bags
- Look for new materials – local is our preference







## Shop design and refurbishment of shops

We love to create inspirational shop windows and align our shop design with the Essentiel Antwerp vision. We look for high-quality materials for shop furniture, with a focus on long-lasting design. In our visual merchandising operations, we value sustainable materials and avoid the use of plastics and non-reusable materials. Circular design always wins.

In setting up our shop windows, our motto is that it's the clothes that tell the story. All the extra visuals and materials are selected in light of this principle. Whenever we open a new shop, or another shop moves at the end of a leasing contract, we check which materials we can reuse or refurbish to fit within the new design idea for that shop. In 2023 we fully refurbished our stores in Uccle, Liège and Namur, according to our circular principles.

A more responsible supply chain

# Caring for who we work with.

There's no denying that the fashion industry has become one of the most polluting sectors in the world, with more and more stories of unacceptable working conditions in clothing factories emerging as well. Here at Essentiel Antwerp we realize that, as an international fashion brand, we must take responsibility for our own business practices in this regard, and customers rightly ask us questions about this.

Our company aims to be completely accountable for the social and environmental conditions under which our products are manufactured — accountable to garment workers, to the companies we do business with, to customers, and ultimately to all those impacted by our choices in our shared world.

## Our code of conduct

In light of this, we have a Code of Conduct, which guides all our operations worldwide. We aim to work with suppliers that are as committed as we are to operating in a responsible and ethical manner, by respecting social, environmental and economic standards and upholding them in their business practices. Our Code of Conduct sets out the principles and standards to be followed by all suppliers, factories and subcontractors. It mainly covers labor practices, based on the Fundamental International Labor Organization Conventions, as well as environmental commitments. The Code of Conduct is signed by the suppliers and/or subcontractors and returned to Essentiel Antwerp.

In 2024 we will be working on an extension of this code with the development of the Essentiel Antwerp Due Diligence Policy, expanding on several principles:

— Ensure ethical practices throughout the supply chain by asking suppliers for compliance with fair labor standards, including safe working conditions, fair wages, and no child labor, using our Code of Conduct.

— Collaborate with suppliers to address social and environmental challenges, fostering innovation and shared value creation. Here we will mainly focus on fabric selection in the light of environmental impact.

— Enhance transparency and traceability in sourcing practices, providing consumers with information about the origin of materials and production processes, and enabling accountability throughout the supply chain. This also helps us prepare for the upcoming European legislation around product passports for textiles.

— Manage risks associated with unsustainable practices, such as reputational damage and supply chain disruptions, by implementing robust monitoring and compliance mechanisms. For this we need to collaborate and take responsibility ourselves as well.

— Continuously improve procurement practices through regular assessments of suppliers' social and environmental performance, stakeholder engagement, and feedback mechanisms for continuous learning and improvement.



## Audit and risk analysis

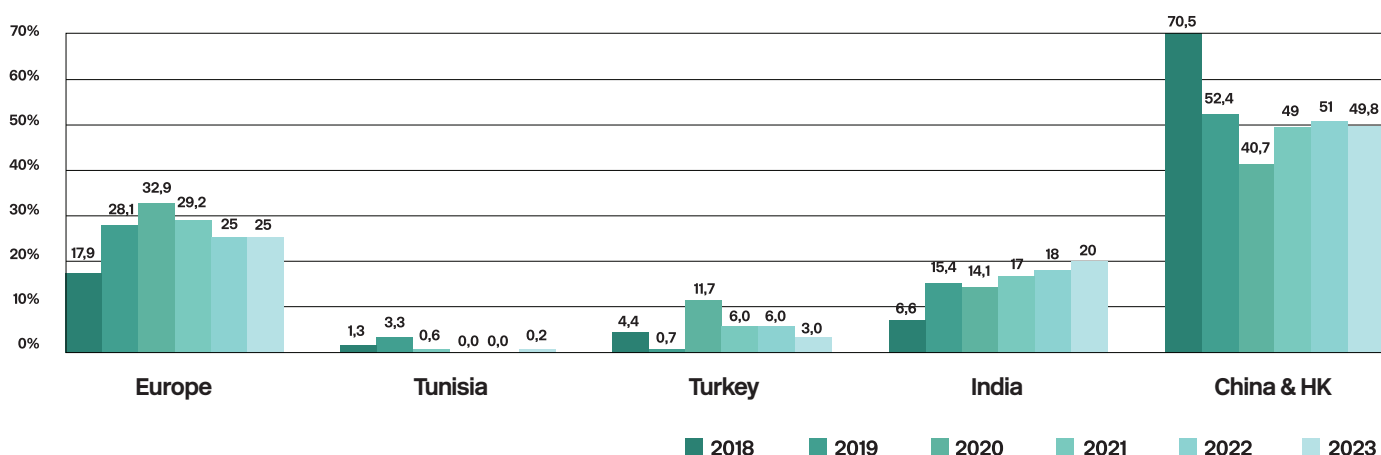
The signing of our Code of Conduct by our suppliers represents a strong commitment, however, this does not guarantee compliance in practice. For this reason, we also ask our suppliers for social audit reports, in which their working conditions are evaluated by an independent third party. We have received recent audit reports (no older than three years) from many of our suppliers. These are mostly BSCI or SEDEX/SMETA audits. This means that more than 50% of our production is covered by social audits. Additionally, 25% of our collections are produced in Europe, where fair working conditions are guaranteed under the applicable European regulations.

We strive to constantly increase this percentage. We analyze the audit reports that we receive, and based on these findings, we have developed a risk analysis at supplier level. We stay alert as we are aware that systematic overwork and a lack of social dialogue are structural challenges in foreign manufacturing countries. We are committed to further dialogue with our suppliers on these issues, to gain a better understanding of the root causes of this and how we, as Essentiel Antwerp, can play a meaningful role.

## Transparency

The call for more transparency in the clothing industry is getting louder. NGOs and customers not only want to know where garments are produced, but also whether the working conditions of garment workers are acceptable. It is not always easy to have complete insight into the production of clothing, as the chain from the cotton field to your wardrobe is often long and complex. But at Essentiel Antwerp, we maintain good relationships with our suppliers in an atmosphere of trust. Just as in 2022, around 70% of our garments were produced in China or India in 2023 (by number of pieces).

Each supplier has its own unique capabilities and expertise in the product type they produce. To promote transparency, as of 2021 we have been working with a specific questionnaire for our suppliers. We ask them about the number of employees in their factory, the proportion of men and women, and we ask them to identify their subcontractors and suppliers of fabrics, yarns and lining, with names, address and contact details. Furthermore, we request them to provide social and environmental audit reports in their possession.





# Caring for our team.

**What connects us at Essentiel Antwerp is our absolute passion for what we do. Our people are open-minded, and we value the international and diverse backgrounds of our team as this is the perfect recipe for creativity and positive vibes. Our playful spirit and joie-de-vivre helps opportunities come to us organically. Our top priorities revolve around fostering wellbeing and facilitating personal growth for our teams. We strive to create an environment where individuals thrive and develop both personally and professionally.**



## A diverse team with international appeal

Our team is made up of employees with 17 different nationalities. Of course, diversity is not only reflected in nationality, but also the cultures and backgrounds of all our people, who create our identity and the Essentiel Antwerp spirit.

We are also proud of the strong loyalty of our team and our below-average turnover rate. An important strategy for building this loyalty is the respectful management of our teams and that is why we avoid working with temporary contracts, offering up to 94% of our employees a permanent contract. A good work-life balance is important, and with up to 50% part-time contracts we create an open dialogue with our employees to understand their needs. This is something we value highly. Some of our employees have been with us since the early days of Essentiel Antwerp.

In 2023, we experienced significant growth. We onboarded 43 new employees and launched new stores, with the opening of our New York flagship store marking a major milestone. With our new store openings and the accompanying HR challenges, we place great emphasis on immersing new employees in the world of Essentiel Antwerp. This includes practical training, as well as understanding our culture and typical Essentiel Antwerp style. Most of these onboarding activities are realized through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. To ensure a smooth onboarding, our Belgian sales teams traveled to the US to work together with the new team, and the New York shop manager was invited to Antwerp to meet our founders and experience the spirit of Essentiel Antwerp firsthand.

To promote the wellbeing of our employees and seamlessly integrate wellbeing into our approach, we appointed within our HR team a dedicated wellbeing coordinator. This role ensures that our team members receive comprehensive support and resources tailored to their needs.

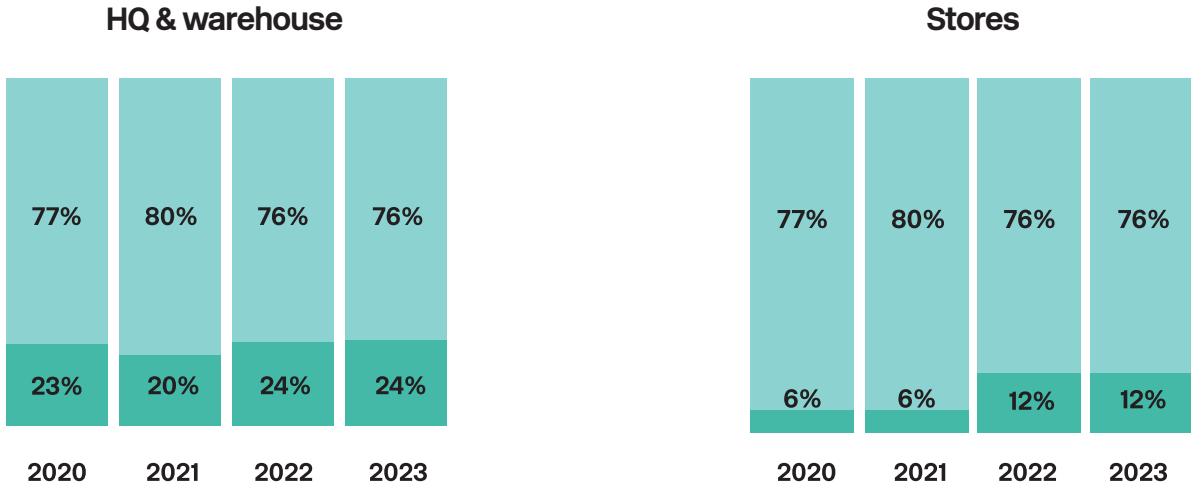
When hiring new team members, we look for applicants who connect with our values. Although we use a formal recruitment process, the diverse and international composition of our team has grown in a very organic and genuine way. We have a considerable number of team members who have come to us spontaneously, whether via an internship, or just by happening upon us at the right moment in time. While the right skills and competencies are important, candidates must also connect with our positive spirit and love for our product and customers.

All employees deserve the same respect and opportunities and it's our duty to support our team in their career development. This also entails open-mindedness and a commitment to equal opportunities in terms of age, gender, personal expression and background. It's not unusual for our employees to move across departments, functions and locations as their skills and ambitions grow and develop.



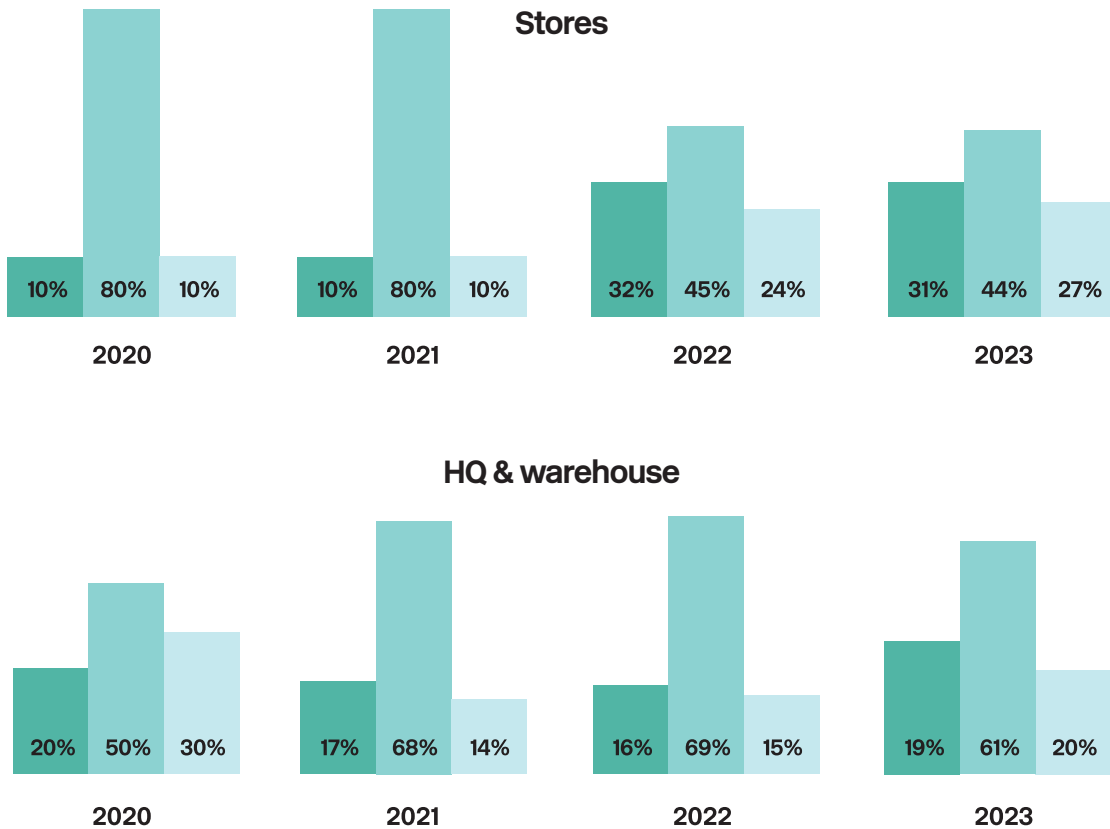
## Gender (FTE)

M F X



## Age (FTE)

<30 30-50 >50



11:10

4G

Learn different.



Get your update on store managers meeting with a coffee!

75 keer bekeken

0 40

ESSENTIEL  
ANTWERP

ESSENTIEL ANTWERP  
19 september 2024



Opening flagship store Den Haag

74 keer bekeken

12 48

ESSENTIEL  
ANTWERP

ESSENTIEL ANTWERP  
17 september 2024



## Training and community building

Learning and development are integral parts of the employee journey with us. Team members at HQ may request relevant external training within their field of expertise. Certain trainings are mandatory for warehouse employees for safety reasons, while we also offer a comprehensive tailored training program for our store staff. Trainings are offered both in person and via an app. Our dedicated training manager assesses training needs and prepares tailored programs. The further implementation of our learning and connection app is a main achievement in 2023, helping us to further spread our Essentiel Antwerp voice throughout our growing international employee base.

### In-person training

Our in-person training sessions are dynamic and interactive, focusing on essential processes such as customer inquiries, understanding the customer journey, and effective complaint handling. These sessions are designed to empower our shop managers and associates with the skills and knowledge they need to excel in their roles.

### App-based training

Through our custom-designed app, we've developed comprehensive training modules covering various aspects of our business, including welcome messages, system navigation, and commercial strategies. Additionally, the app serves as a hub for team updates, providing insights into team achievements, and sharing important announcements. The opportunities for our app are endless, it's even used to share local hotspots and must-visit locations. In 2023 we had a very successful take-up of our app, resulting in KPI's largely passing sector averages.

### Say it with numbers:

#### In-person training:

- 89 training hours given by external trainers to our personnel in Belgium, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and France
- 121 participants
- 2 full days of training for all shop managers

#### In-person training:

- 86% connected learners
- 121 minutes per learner
- 90% progression rate
- 12 courses online covering a range of topics from onboarding to sustainability information

# Inclusivity, diversity and equality.

## Speaking up and showing our true colors

With our open mindset, topics such as equality, inclusion and non-discrimination seem natural to Essentiel Antwerp. Nevertheless, we know that this is not self-evident for everyone. That is why we still regard inclusivity as a very important pillar in our policy.

This is because we believe we can use our brand and voice to promote our beliefs to our customers and our own organization. This is about creating vacancies without barriers for groups for which the threshold may already be high. It is about training our staff to approach and help customers without prejudice. It is about integrating relevant fitting information for our e-commerce customers so that they can have a fantastic customer experience, while respecting and helping all of them.

But equity and inclusion also means using our voice to speak out in favor of equality and non-discrimination, and clearly express this in the media and podcasts in which we participate. In 2023 we continued to do so through the collaborations we set up and the causes we supported (including LGBTQIA+ initiatives and women's rights).

In 2024 we will continue to build on these actions, aiming to have a further positive impact on societal challenges.

Our actions speak for us:



## Fluid

In 2023 we introduced our first fluid collection, offering a bold approach to self-expression, designed for everyone and defying gender restrictions.

Each piece is carefully crafted to empower individuals to embrace their true selves and express their individuality, however they choose.

## Breast cancer awareness month

Co-founder Inge Onsea curated two special edition items with local artists/designers of which 20% of proceeds went to the Think Pink fundraising campaign, supporting breast cancer research and care.

**Boobie ceramic by Eva van Eeghem:**  
Handmade ceramic piece serving as a multipurpose storage for small essentials as well as a decorative object.

**Turtleneck with breast artwork by Hadassah Emmerich:** The print is an interpretation of her painting "Oben Ohne", literally translated as 'topless'. It represents the celebration of breasts as a powerful weapon in the battle against regression, conservatism, and misogyny.





## International Women's Day 2023

In celebration of International Women's Day 2023, Essentiel Antwerp supported emerging female talents. We opened up our social media platforms to these women, featuring talents like Sol Pardo, Sophie Engelen, Zeena Shah, and Cedrique Loyson, who own small businesses.

Through our Instagram posts, we amplified their reach, showcasing their work and empowering their entrepreneurial endeavors.

## Pride

As part of our yearly support of Pride Antwerp, a tradition we're proud to continue, we've donated staff t-shirts to all Pride volunteers. Despite not having a collection this year, we remain committed to producing and donating these shirts to show our ongoing support.





## Sustainability information

We also strive to provide clear and detailed information about our products' sustainability credentials, including materials used. This empowers customers to make informed choices that align with their values.

In our daily communications, we integrate sustainability messaging in various ways. We regularly share updates on the performance of our resell platform RE—SENTIEL, highlighting the positive impact of extending the lifecycle of our products and reducing waste. Additionally, we publish an annual sustainability report to provide transparency and accountability regarding our sustainability efforts.

We also ensure that product descriptions and marketing materials highlight sustainable features such as organic cotton, recycled materials, and eco-friendly production techniques. By integrating sustainability messages into our communication channels, we aim to educate and inspire customers to make more sustainable

choices while enhancing their overall shopping experience, both in-store and online. Our shop assistants are trained about the materials we use and can give the necessary care advice to extend the life-span of our products.

To cover our full value chain, we also share our report with our suppliers, who feel positive about the steps that are being taken. The demand for sustainability information is continuously rising, both from our own B2B partners but also as a consequence of changing legislation. We are learning and preparing ourselves for more formal sustainability reporting in anticipation of the European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the consequences of the regulations about extended producers' responsibility and the digital product passport. Although we will not fall under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, we are still setting next steps for analyzing our supply chain and preparing the necessary processes for follow-up.

# Conclusion

**2023 marked a pivotal year in our journey, with an intensified focus on refining processes and calculation methodologies. We are confident that these efforts lay the groundwork for tangible progress, as we continue to prioritize innovative design, transportation improvements, and the expansion of circular business models to enhance resource efficiency.**

**As we continue to strengthen our long-standing relationships with trusted manufacturers, our due diligence efforts for new sourcing will be focused on aligning with the latest regulations. Throughout this journey, we remain guided by our family-oriented values, always keeping our community at the heart of our efforts.**

# About this report.

**Name and location of the organization:**

Essentiel Antwerp's registered head office is located at Arenbergstraat 21, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium

**Reporting scope:**

This report is the fourth sustainability report published by Essentiel Antwerp and covers the sustainability policy, achievements and ambitions of the company in the near and mid-term future.

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1 January 2023 — 31 December 2023

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