



# **THE GLOBAL APPAREL, FOOTWEAR, & ACCESSORIES GLOSSARY OF TRACEABILITY TERMS**

May 2026

**Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Industry**  
**Glossary of Traceability Terms**  
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**Introduction**

The purpose of the Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms is to establish a common reference point for terminology used across the apparel, footwear, and accessories industry. As supply chain transparency and traceability become increasingly important for businesses, regulators, and stakeholders, consistent definitions are critical to ensuring clear communication and alignment. This glossary is intended to guide the industry by defining key traceability-related terms and addressing terminology that may appear in existing or emerging regulations, helping to promote clarity, consistency, and shared understanding across the global supply chain.

The Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms was created by the Traceability Working Group and the Solutions Providers Advisory Group, which are comprised of representatives of the entire supply chain – from materials providers to retailers, organizations involved in the industry and/or traceability, and traceability solutions providers to the industry. The Traceability Working Group consulted with dozens of organizations representing the global supply chain, as well as the traceability initiatives in the industry, in developing the Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms.

The Traceability Working Group and the Solutions Providers Advisory Group will regularly review the Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms to incorporate new or update traceability-related terms and incorporate terminology that may appear in new regulations. This review will culminate in a formal annual public review process that the Traceability Working Group will open in January of each year that will lead to the publication of an updated Glossary of Traceability Terms in April of each year. The updated Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms will include a “Change Record” that will list the terms that were updated, added, or deleted.

The Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms is publicly available and open source. We not only encourage the industry to adopt the Global Apparel, Footwear, & Accessories Glossary of Traceability Terms, but also encourage regulators to utilize the terms in the Glossary as they develop regulations governing the industry.

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## 1. Definitions of Tiers & Processes within Each Tier (Supply Chain Taxonomy)

- a. Defines the tiers of the supply chain, and the processes within each tier.
- b. Please refer to the [Apparel Alliance Supply Chain Taxonomy](#) for the standard definition of tiers of the supply chain and the processes and roles within each tier.

## 2. Guiding Terminology

- a. **Traceability:** The ability to collect, analyze, and verify the history, location, and processing steps of fibers and materials in a supply chain by means of recorded identification.
- b. **Transparency:** The sharing of relevant information regarding aspects of the supply chain. This includes disclosing details about suppliers, in some cases dating back all the way to the raw/virgin material, as well as sharing information on production processes, labor conditions, and environmental practices. This allows common understanding, accessibility, clarity, and comparison. Companies set levels of transparency based on both their comfort in sharing data publicly and on their ability to maintain traceability in their supply chains. Examples of company controls on transparency:
  - i. **Internal** – Data is only used inside the company, or inside the supply chain.
  - ii. **Regulator-Only** – Data is shared with customs or government agencies if requested/required.
  - iii. **Partner-Shared** – Selected information is passed on to certain business partners.
  - iv. **Public** – Information is disclosed on websites, product labels, or sustainability reports.
  - v. **Confidential** - Data that is considered commercially-sensitive. Increased transparency also increases the risk of leakage of commercially sensitive information. Companies set levels of confidentiality based on comfort and protection of confidential information.
- c. **Mapping:** Creating a detailed overview of the supply chain, which could be from the sourcing of raw materials to the delivery of finished goods, or any points in between, and identifying the locations, roles, and relationships of all parties involved.
- d. **Value Chain:** The full set of activities involved in creating value for a product, from raw material production to the final consumer. It includes all actors and processes that contribute to the product’s design, including materials (research and development), product development, production, distribution, and marketing, and focuses on how value is added at each stage of production and trade.
- e. **Supply Chain:** The sequence of organizations, facilities, and logistics processes involved in sourcing materials, manufacturing products, and delivering them to the market. It focuses primarily on the physical flow of goods, information, and resources from suppliers to manufacturers, to distributors, to brands and retailers, and, ultimately, to consumers.
- f. **Movement of goods:** The logistical activities associated with transporting raw materials, components, and finished products across the supply chain. This includes shipping, warehousing, and handling practices that ensure materials are available when needed and that products are delivered to the right places on time. Also known as **Transportation**.
- g. **Due Diligence:** The process by which a business identifies, assesses, prevents, mitigates, and accounts for actual or potential risks and adverse impacts in its operations and supply chains, which could relate to human rights, environmental, and forced labor issues, as well as financial and legal risks.
- h. **Movement of money:** The financial transactions that occur within the supply chain, encompassing payments for goods and services (e.g., for production, distribution, etc.). This includes processes like invoicing, payment processing, and financial reconciliation between parties. Also known as **Transaction**.
- i. **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** A policy approach that makes producers financially and/or operationally responsible for the collection, treatment, and end-of-life management of the products and packaging they place on the market.

- j. **Chain of Custody:** A system used to document, control, and verify the flow of materials or products through all stages of production, processing, and distribution, from source to final product. It preserves key attributes of the input—such as origin, composition, or certification status—through defined tracking and verification mechanisms. Chain of custody systems support the substantiation of product claims (e.g., organic, recycled) by linking inputs to outputs across the supply chain. Many voluntary standards operate as chain of custody systems, establishing rules for how materials are tracked, handled, and claimed. Also known as **CoC**.
  - i. **Mass Balance:** A CoC model in which certified input materials are mixed according to defined criteria with non-certified materials, and where there is no guarantee of physical presence of specified characteristics in a specific good.
  - ii. **Identity Preservation (IP):** A CoC model in which materials from a single, identifiable source are kept separate from all other materials throughout the supply chain, ensuring full traceability to origin without any mixing.
  - iii. **Segregation:** A CoC model in which certified materials are kept physically separate from non-certified materials throughout the supply chain, while allowing mixing of materials with the same certification status.

### 3. Roles

- a. **Buyer/Brand/Retailer:** A company that purchases materials, garments, or footwear from suppliers, either directly or indirectly, with potential but not definite inclusion of those materials in final products.
- b. **Vendor/Supplier:** Includes any person or entity who receives a purchase order from a buyer to engage in the production or provision of materials, components, products, or services that a buyer acquires, authorizes, or licenses. The term may be used in conjunction with a sub-definition that distinguishes between a buyer's direct supplier and an upstream (indirect) supplier.
  - i. **Direct Upstream Supplier:** A supplier of materials or a subcontractor that has direct financial and logistical transactions with the buyer/facility. Also known as **Direct Supplier**.
  - ii. **Indirect Upstream Supplier:** A supplier of materials or services to the Tier 1 vendor. It does not have any financial, legal, and logistical relationship with the brand. Also known as **Indirect Supplier**.
  - iii. **Nominated Supplier:** An upstream supplier of materials or components that a buyer requires the vendor or manufacturer to use. Examples include a textile manufacturer (usually at Tier 2) that a finished goods vendor needs to use, or a yarn manufacturer (usually at Tier 3) that a textile supplier needs to use. The Nominated Supplier could be a Direct or Indirect Upstream Supplier to the brand.
- c. **Facility/Factory:** The physical entity/location that manufactures or produces apparel, footwear, material, components, leather, textiles, service, and/or accessories.
- d. **Subcontractor:** A legal entity, such as a factory or facility, hired by a prime factory/facility/vendor to perform specific sub-manufacturing processes and/or services for another company, such as cutting, sewing, laundering, finishing, or embroidery.
- e. **Manufacturer:** An entity or company that produces goods by transforming raw materials into components, or components into finished products, through industrial processes, often in factories or specialized facilities.
- f. **Licensee:** A company that is licensing the intellectual property (e.g., brand name, characters, designs, trademark, etc.) of another brand for the purpose of putting this marketing on a finished good. In this case, the licensee brand does not assume ownership over the licensed intellectual property but is responsible for the design, production, and distribution of the product either to a brand or consumer.
- g. **Agents:** Intermediaries who connect buyers and sellers, facilitating transactions without taking ownership of the goods. They negotiate deals, contract with producers, and coordinate logistics across the supply chain. Also known as **Brokers (but not Customs Brokers)**.

- h. **Country of Origin (COO):** The country where a product, or its materials, are primarily manufactured, processed, assembled, produced, grown, or harvested. Country of origin could have different definitions established by regulation, which could determine tariff-levels, labeling requirements, regulatory compliance, or consumer perception. Examples:
  - i. Non-preferential COO (often substantial transformation tests; can differ from assembly)
  - ii. Preferential COO (free trade agreement (FTA) rules of origin; may be regional value content (RVC), tariff shift, value requirement, yarn-forward, etc.)
- i. **Customs Brokers:** Individuals or firms, licensed by the governing customs authority, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the United States, to act as an intermediary for importers and exporters in handling the sequence of customs formalities involved in the customs clearance and exporting/exportation or importing/importation of goods. A customs broker helps to adhere to requirements for imports or exports, obtains necessary clearances, and submits paperwork and payments to governing customs authorities on a company's behalf. Also known as **Customs Representative**.
- j. **Traders:** Entities that buy and sell goods. They handle sourcing, importing, exporting, and/or distribution within various markets. Also known as **Trading Companies** and **Middlemen**.
- k. **Multi-sourced:** Refers to obtaining materials or products from multiple suppliers, reducing reliance on a single source, and increasing supply chain resilience. Also known as **Dual-sourced** and **Counter-sourced**.
- l. **Vertical Integration:** A business model where a company controls two or more stages of the supply chain, which may range from raw material sourcing to final product distribution. Vertical integration can be at the facility level, where multiple levels of processing can occur in the same location, or at the supplier level, where multiple levels of processing are owned by the same supplier but the facilities could be in the same or different physical locations. Also known as **Vertically Integrated**.
- m. **Factory-Sourced:** Buyer requires the finished good supplier/vendor to source its own materials, usually based on specifications provided by the buyer.
- n. **Slaughterhouse/Slaughter plant:** A formal facility designed and built for slaughter, where animals, such as cattle, sheep, or pigs, are slaughtered to harvest meat for human consumption. The slaughtering creates co-products, including hides, which are later processed into material (i.e. leather) for use.
- o. **Raw material producer:** The person or entity growing, extracting, or fishing a product from the land (farm, ranch, forest, mine, etc.) or ocean that produces the raw material. Also known as the **Extraction Point**.

#### 4. Materials and Related Components

- a. **Cotton:** A natural fiber cultivated from cotton plants, processed into yarn and fabric for textiles, or used for medical supplies (e.g., gauze or cotton balls), stuffing, paper, etc.
- b. **Cotton Bale:** After the seeds are removed (ginning), a large volume of cotton lint is pressed under great pressure into a Cotton Bale and held together with straps for easier transportation. Cotton bales can vary in weight from 165 – 227 kgs or 364 –500 lbs.
- c. **Cotton Noil:** The short cotton fibers removed during the combing process when producing higher-quality combed cotton yarns (they have not been deconstructed or recycled). Cotton noil is used with open-end spinning to make yarns suitable for denim, towels, and lower-end fabrics.
- d. **Wool:** Fiber sheared from an animal (i.e. sheep, alpacas, angora rabbits, etc.) often used for yarn, fabric, or felt after cleaning and spinning or pressing.
- e. **Leather:** A hide or skin with its original fibrous structure more or less intact and tanned to prevent rot, either with or without hair or wool attached, inclusive of hides or skin split into layers or segmented either before or after tanning, with any surface coating or surface layer no thicker than 0.15 mm.
- f. **Raw Hide:** Untreated animal skin, typically from cattle. May be salted or dried to prevent decay but remains in its natural state until further processed into materials derived from hides. Note that hides are a by-product from animals that have been raised and slaughtered for their meat.

- g. **Down:** The fine plumage on a waterfowl that sits under the outer feathers. Commonly used as an insulating material in jackets and bedding.
- h. **Natural Rubber:** Rubber that is harvested from rubber trees, processed into latex and vulcanized for products like footwear soles.
- i. **Synthetic Rubber:** Primarily made from petroleum-based byproducts, specifically monomers derived from cracked hydrocarbons like petroleum and natural gas.
- j. **Raw Materials/Virgin Materials:** Materials that have not yet been used, processed, or reclaimed. These include both finite materials (e.g. iron ore mined from the ground, polyester fibers produced from oil by-products) and renewable resources (e.g. newly produced cotton). Also known as **Virgin Resources**.
- k. **Raw Resources/Virgin Resources:** A natural resource occurring in nature that has not been subjected to any human-related processing or modification. These include both renewable resources and non-renewable resources.
- l. **Virgin Synthetics (Polyester, Nylon, Polyamide, Synthetic Rubber):** Synthetics based on non-renewable fossil fuels extracted from the earth and synthesized into petrochemical feedstocks.
- m. **Virgin Natural Fibers:** Fibers obtained directly from natural sources, such as plants or animals, and have not been previously processed or recycled.
- n. **Virgin Cotton:** Cotton that is harvested and used for the first time, without any prior transformational processing (such as spinning, weaving, or knitting) or recycling.
- o. **Pre-Consumer:** Materials or waste generated during the manufacturing process before a product reaches the consumer, such as fabric or leather offcuts, yarn waste, or defective goods that are reused, recycled, or discarded. Also known as **post-industrial**.
- p. **Post-Consumer:** Materials or products that have been used and discarded by consumers, such as worn garments, footwear, or accessories collected for reuse, resale, repair, or recycling.
- q. **Recycled Material:** Material that has been reprocessed from recovered (reclaimed) material by means of a manufacturing process and made into a final product or into a component for incorporation into a product. Recycled material could be from pre-consumer material or post-consumer material.
- r. **Recycled Synthetics:** Synthetics created by reprocessing plastic waste into usable materials, typically by shredding it, melting it down, and extruding it into new filaments.
- s. **Recycled Natural Fibers:** Natural fibers from raw materials such as cotton, wool, linen, leather, natural rubber, and hemp, which are reprocessed from waste into new fibers. The processing involves collecting, cleaning, and shredding the fibers for reuse.
- t. **Recycled Cotton:** Cotton specifically made from cotton waste that originates from pre-consumer sources (such as fabric or yarn scraps from manufacturing) and/or post-consumer sources (like discarded clothing and textiles). Mechanical and/or chemical processing creates recycled fibers that are further transformed into downstream materials such as yarn and textiles.
- u. **Recycled Leather:** Leather made from waste leather, whether as a by-product from the leather tanning industry, off-cuts from fashion production, or post-consumer waste.
- v. **Recycled Rubber:** Rubber that has been reclaimed from scrap materials, such as used tires or post-consumer waste. Could be made from both natural and synthetic rubber.
- w. **Polyvinyl Chloride:** A synthetic plastic polymer used in various products, including synthetic leather, footwear, and accessories. Commonly used as a leather alternative. Also known as **PVC**.
- x. **Polyurethane:** A versatile polymer used widely as a leather substitute in products like shoes, bags, and upholstery. Commonly applied in coatings, foams, and synthetic fabrics across the apparel, footwear, and accessories industries. Also known as **PU**.
- y. **Biosynthetics/Biobased Synthetics:** Synthetic materials that are wholly or partially derived from biobased resources (i.e. biomaterials). Biosynthetics can be made from a variety of biomass feedstocks. The main feedstocks currently used for biosynthetics are high sugar or starch-containing agricultural crops such as corn, sugar beet, sugarcane, and — to a minor extent — also wheat and cassava, as well as oil crops such as castor.

- z. **Man-Made Cellulosic Fiber:** Fibers derived from forestry or other plants and increasingly from salvaged cellulose ‘waste’. Man-made cellulose fibers can include viscose, modal, lyocell, and acetate. **Also known as MMCF.**
- aa. **Trims:** Components and accessories added to a product during manufacturing, including both functional elements (such as zippers, buttons, snaps, hooks and, buckles) and decorative or branding elements (such as labels, tapes, piping, webbing, and embellishments). **Also known as trim or webbing.**
- bb. **Conflict minerals:** Natural resources—primarily tantalum, tin, tungsten, and gold (3TG)—extracted in conflict afflicted and high-risk area (CAHRA) zones, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- cc. **Mined Materials:** Natural resources extracted from the earth through mining processes, often including metals, minerals, and other raw substances used in product manufacturing. Examples include:
  - i. **Metals:** Materials like aluminum, tin, copper, nickel, and zinc are often mined and used in components such as zippers, buttons, buckles, and eyelets for clothes, shoes, bags, and accessories.
  - ii. **Precious Metals and Gemstones:** Gold, silver, and gemstones may be used for decorative elements in high-end apparel, accessories, or jewelry associated with fashion items.
  - iii. **Minerals:** Silica, talc, and other minerals may be incorporated into specific finishes or treatments for textiles and leathers.

## 5. Traceability Components and Documents

- a. **Commercial Document:** Documents that describe the goods, parties, and terms of a transaction and serve as the primary record of what was agreed between buyer and seller.
  - i. **Purchase Order:** A document issued by a buyer to a seller that specifies the goods or services to be purchased, including quantities, prices, delivery terms, and payment conditions, and serves as a formal commitment to buy under agreed terms. **Also known as PO.**
  - ii. **Invoice:** A bill or written request for payment issued by a seller to a buyer for goods delivered or services rendered. It typically includes details such as buyer and seller information, date, invoice number, description of goods or services, quantities, unit prices, and payment terms, and serves as a formal record of the transaction.
  - iii. **Customs invoice:** A document required by customs authorities for international shipments that provides detailed information about the goods, including the seller and buyer (exporter and importer), description, value, quantity, and other data necessary to assess duties, taxes, and regulatory compliance. It typically contains the same core information as a commercial invoice, with additional details required for customs clearance.
- b. **Financial and Transactional Documents:** A document that creates, facilitates, or evidences payment obligations and payment flows between parties. (adapted from ICC UCP 600 and URC 522). Examples include:
  - i. **Payment Record / Proof of Payment:** A document or electronic record that evidences that a payment has been completed from a buyer to a seller in connection with a transaction. It typically includes details such as the buyer and seller, amount, date, payment method, and transaction or reference number, and serves as confirmation that funds were transferred.
  - ii. **Remittance Advice:** A document or electronic communication sent by a buyer to a seller that provides details of a payment and specifies the invoice(s) or obligations to which the payment applies, enabling the seller to reconcile the payment with outstanding balances.
  - iii. **Sales Contract / Sales Agreement:** A legally binding agreement between a buyer and a seller that defines the terms and conditions of a transaction, including the goods or services to be provided, pricing, quantities, delivery terms, payment conditions, and the rights and obligations of each party. It serves as the governing document for the transaction and forms the basis for related commercial, transport, and payment documents.

- iv. **Receipt:** A document issued by a seller or service provider acknowledging that payment has been received from a buyer for goods or services, typically including details such as the amount paid, date of payment, method of payment, and description of the transaction.
- v. **Letter of Credit:** A financial document issued by a bank that guarantees a buyer's payment to a seller will be received on time and for the correct amount. If the buyer cannot pay, the bank is legally required to cover the remaining purchase amount.
- c. **Transportation Documents:** Documents that evidence the shipment and movement of goods along the supply chain and define the terms under which they are transported.
  - i. **Proof of Delivery:** A document or electronic record confirming that goods have been delivered to the designated recipient at the agreed location and time, typically including recipient acknowledgment (e.g., signature or electronic confirmation). It serves as evidence that delivery has been completed and may be used for tracking and dispute resolution. Also known as **POD**.
  - ii. **Bills of Lading:** A legally binding document issued by a carrier acknowledging receipt of goods for shipment. It serves as evidence of receipt, a contract of carriage, and, when negotiable, a document of title. It typically includes details such as the type, quantity, and destination of the goods. Each shipment is covered by its own bill of lading. Also known as **BOL**.
  - iii. **Delivery Order:** A document issued by a carrier or authorized party instructing the release of goods to a designated recipient at the destination. It specifies where and to whom the shipment is to be delivered and may include relevant shipment details and delivery terms. A delivery order authorizes release of goods but does not constitute proof of delivery. *See Proof of Delivery.*
  - iv. **Shipping Manifests:** A document listing all cargo carried on a vessel or transport vehicle, including details such as item descriptions, quantities, weights, consignors, consignees, and destinations. It is used by carriers and authorities for logistics management, tracking, and regulatory purposes.
  - v. **Packing List:** A document accompanying a shipment that itemizes its contents, including descriptions, quantities, weights, and packaging details. It is used by shippers, carriers, and recipients to support handling, verification, and customs inspection, but does not serve as a transport or financial document.
  - vi. **Certificates:** Documents issued by an authorized body that attest to the origin, characteristics, or compliance of materials or products with specified standards, regulations, or requirements.
  - vii. **Certificates of Origin:** Documents that certify the country of origin where a product was manufactured or substantially transformed. They are used for customs clearance to determine applicable duties, support compliance with trade agreements, and verify that goods meet origin requirements.
  - viii. **Certificates of Scope:** Documents issued by a certification body confirming that an organization complies with the requirements of a specified standard within a defined scope (e.g., products, processes, or facilities). They authorize the organization to produce and sell materials as certified under that standard. Also known as **Scope Certificates (SC)**.
  - ix. **Transaction Certificates:** Documents issued by a certification body that verify that specific materials or products being sold or transferred between organizations conform to a given standard and may be treated as certified by the receiving party. Also known as **TC**.
  - x. **Certificates of Compliance/Conformity:** Documents issued by an authorized body (e.g., certification body, laboratory, or regulator) that attest that a product, material, process, or facility meets specified standards, regulations, or requirements.
- d. **Enterprise Resource Planning:** A software system that integrates and manages core business processes and data across an organization, including procurement, production, inventory, sales, and finance. In traceability, it serves as a central system of record that links key transactional data—such as purchase orders, invoices, bills of materials, and inventory movements—supporting end-to-end visibility and consistency across the supply chain. Also known as **ERP**.
- e. **Bill of Materials (BOM):** A structured list of all materials, components, assemblies, and parts required to manufacture a product, including the quantities or volumes of each. It serves as a specification of product composition.

- f. **Interoperability:** The ability of systems and organizations to exchange, interpret, and use data through standardized formats, protocols, and common data models, enabling consistent and reliable communication across platforms and parties.
- g. **Lots and Batches Tracking:** A method that assigns unique identifiers to defined quantities of materials or products produced under the same conditions, enabling their tracking through production and supply chain processes. It allows specific inputs to be linked to corresponding outputs within discrete production runs.
- h. **Traceability Platforms:** Digital platforms that collect, manage, and connect supply chain data and documentation, enabling organizations to track materials, products, and related information across multiple tiers of the supply chain and support traceability and verification of claims.
- i. **Forensic Tracing:** A scientific method used to verify the origin, composition, or characteristics of materials in a supply chain by analyzing inherent physical or chemical signatures (e.g., DNA, isotopes, or fiber properties). It provides independent verification of material provenance and supports the validation of traceability claims.
  - i. **Isotopic Testing:** Analyzes the molecular composition of fibers, materials, and/or garments through Mass Spectrometry analysis of isotopic ratios, compared to a reference database.
  - ii. **DNA Testing:** Analyzes the biochemical composition of fibers, materials, and/or garments through micro-particle analysis of DNA structures.
  - iii. **Additive Tracers:** Applying a tracer substance, taggant, or tagging agent to fibers, materials, and/or garments at a specific point in the production process, and then detect that same unique substance later down the supply chain to validate origin.
- j. **Traceability Assessments:** Programs, organizations, or services that evaluate and verify the traceability or chain of custody of materials, products, or supply chains against defined standards, requirements, or methodologies.

## 6. Other Processes

- a. **Chemical Recycling:** Manufacturing processes that convert waste materials into feedstock by altering their chemical structure, enabling the production of new polymers, monomers, intermediates, or other materials. These processes may include, but are not limited to, pyrolysis, gasification, depolymerization, solvolysis, catalysis, reforming, purification, hydrogenation, dissolution, dehydrochlorination, and other similar or emerging technologies. Also known as **Advanced Recycling**.
- b. **Mechanical Recycling:** Recycling processes that use physical methods to recover and reprocess materials without altering their chemical structure. These processes may include compounding, drying, grinding, re-granulating, separating, shredding, and washing. Materials obtained through mechanical recycling may be used directly in the production of leather, rubber, textiles, or fibers, or as pre-processed inputs for thermal or chemical recycling.