

POSITION PAPER

Investment in Skills is a Key Priority for Economic Recovery, Sustainable and Digital Transformation in the European Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Sectors (TCLF)

31 August 2020 - The EU TCLF Industry Confederations and Skills4SmartTCLF Blueprint project consortium warmly welcome the new EU Skills Agenda and stand ready to engage in a Pact for Skills.

The partners of the Erasmus+ Blueprint project Skills4Smart TCLF Industries 2030, led by the representative organisations of the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear (TCLF) industries in Europe, welcome the new EU Skills Agenda published in July 2020.

The TCLF industries in the EU represent 2.1 million workers in over 200,000 companies, mostly SME's. They generate an annual turnover of € 195 billion and export income of € 95 billion. The sector is in the midst of the green and digital transformation, but it also faces challenges to renew an ageing workforce as over one third of workers is above the age of 50. Innovation, creativity and new business models, implemented by established companies as well as start-ups, can ensure the maintenance and creation of high-quality jobs and help attract young talent. Skills are at the core of the future of TCLF industries in the EU.

While the ultimate outcome is unknown, the COVID pandemic has created unprecedented economic challenges for the TCLF companies. Consumer-related parts of businesses, in particular, were heavily impacted by wide-spread retail closures, travel and tourism disruptions. If the situation fails to normalise quickly, hundreds of thousands of jobs could be at risk. The crisis has also sped up the digital transformation: it requires to accelerate skills development and regional value chains can become more resilient. It also presents opportunities for job creation and new business models. Learning and training provisions though should be accessible and rapidly put in place in the different industry clusters across Europe. Moreover, under the EU recovery package in response to the COVID crisis, the sector was identified as one of the 14 strategic industry eco-systems for priority policy action. A dedicated sectoral strategy is under preparation for 2021 as part of the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.

Since 2018, the TCLF industries have jointly implemented the project "Skills4Smart TCLF Industries 2030" (S4TCLF), as one of the first-wave Blueprints for Sectoral Skills Strategies. The project is based on the successful collaboration established with the trade unions IndustriALL Europe under the first EU Sector Skills Council in 2012.

The representative sectoral organisations EURATEX, CEC and COTANCE together with their national member associations and all partners of S4TCLF Blueprint project, **stand ready to engage in a Pact for Skills** for the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear sectors.

Key priorities for the TCLF Pact for Skills should be:

- Support to companies, especially SMEs in their efforts to upskill and reskill their workforce especially in areas such as sustainability, digitalisation and new business models;

- Modernisation of the sectoral education and training system including VET and Higher Education;
- On-the-job learning and generational skills transfer through apprenticeship and mentorship programmes;
- VET Excellence and reduced skills mismatches based on strong VET-industry collaboration;
- EU-wide mobility of learners and trainers through partnerships and exchange programmes.

Alberto Paccanelli, President of EURATEX – the Confederation of the European Apparel and Textile Industry, states: *“Our highly qualified employees, whether designers, engineers or skilled machine operators are at the basis of the value creation in our industry. They are the reason that EU Textile and Fashion industries are world-leading ones. Our companies heavily invest in the attraction, development and retention of this human and intellectual capital. But these are times of unprecedented economic disruption and at the same time of green and digital transformation: our companies, especially SMEs, need support to maintain jobs and create new ones. An EU Pact for Skills for the TCLF industries would be the right signal that EU policy stands ready to work with the sector to make the smart investments needed and keep the EU Textile and Fashion industries in the global pole position for many years into the future.”*

Luis Onofre, President of the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) adds that *“Through the Sectoral Skills Council and the Blueprint project, our sectors have shown the positive outcomes of working together in skills policy and implementation with all categories of stakeholders at regional, national and EU level across Europe. The launch of a Pact for Skills would be the logic extension of these efforts.”*

Andreas Kindermann, President of COTANCE summarises: *“Sustainable materials and processes and highly digitalised businesses are the future of the TCLF industries. Our companies, education and training providers need to transfer the right green and digital skills to our existing and future employees. We appeal to European, national and regional policy makers to facilitate this skills transition with smart policies and support programmes.”*

The current activities of the S4TCLF Blueprint project are already putting in place the first building blocks for a future Pact for Skills, namely the development of modernised curricula based on an in-depth industry survey, the development of a first Sectoral Skills Strategy for the European TCLF sectors and the development of an EU-wide VET network including regional and national policy stakeholders .

These should be complemented with more focussed actions on:

- Apprenticeship programme implementation across Europe;
- Generational knowledge transfer, such as coaching and mentorship schemes enabling experienced/retiring employees to pass on their technical expertise and best business practices to the next generation;
- Development of Centres of Vocational Excellence;
- Mobility and digital collaboration programmes between VET, Higher Education and industry including start-ups;
- Sectoral approaches to skills intelligence development
- Promotional programmes on the attractiveness of careers in the TCLF industries.

The EU TCLF industries fully support the objectives of the new EU Skills Agenda. The final interinstitutional MFF negotiations should lead to the strengthening of EU Programmes supporting the implementation of the EU Skills Agenda and the green and digital transitions, most notably the ERASMUS programme.

Sector Skills Alliances for implementing a new strategic approach to sectoral cooperation on skills ("Blueprint")

Agreement n. 2017- 3536/001-001
(Project number - 591986-EPP-1-2017-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B)

Project duration:
01st January 2018 –31st December 2021

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

PROJECT COORDINATOR:



Project contact person:
Iratxe Garcia-Bayona
iratxe.garcia@euratex.eu

PROJECT PARTNERS:



@Skills4SmartTCLF



S4TCLFBLUEPRINT.EU



@Skills4TCLF