



**Confédération Européenne de l'Industrie de la Chaussure**  
**European Confederation of the Footwear Industry**

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**Joining forces to tackle TCLF skills challenges for more competitive companies**

*On the 17th of March 2021, the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) participated in a High-level Roundtable with European Commissioners Nicolas Schmit and Thierry Breton and other Textile, Clothing and Leather stakeholders, to discuss the industries' perspective and best skills strategy to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and increase growth. CEC President Luis Onofre reiterated the economic value and potential of the footwear sector for many European regions and the utmost necessity of investing in workers' skills development to safeguard the industry's competitiveness.*

**Skills are crucial for the industries' future, say EU TCLF companies**

The EU Footwear industry, as well as Textile, Clothing and Leather industries, have built their global reputation on their ability to mix tradition with innovation in high added-value distinctive products. But both the heritage and the capacity to innovate are currently at risk and hampered by skills-related challenges. On the one hand, the workforce is ageing and companies could lose precious know-how. Young people are deserting the sectors because of long-lasting misconceptions and prejudices. On the other hand, digitalisation and new technologies are rapidly changing manufacturing processes and business models. Making EU footwear products more sustainable and performant requires TCLF workers' skills to be regularly updated. A recent survey of TCLF companies conducted by CEC, EURATEX and COTANCE further highlighted the crucial importance of skills for EU TCLF companies: close to 85% of respondents recognize that skills will be important or very important in the next five years. However, TCLF companies do not always have the resources and time to allocate to workers' training, in particular during this pandemic-induced crisis.

**Joining forces to upskill and reskill the EU workforce**

As a response, the European Commission launched the Pact for Skills initiative in September 2020, which aims to support a fair and resilient economic recovery from COVID-19 and deliver on the ambitions of the green and digital transition of different industries. Four main principles are at the core of the Pact for Skills: (1) Promoting a culture of lifelong learning for all, (2) Building strong partnerships, (3) Monitoring skills supply/demand and anticipating skills needs, and (4) Working against discrimination and for gender equality and equal opportunities. With the support of the Commission, these core principles are to be implemented through concrete upskilling and reskilling strategies by public and private organisations' joint efforts, and driven above all by social partners.

**Avenues for action under a Pact for Skills**

Under a future TCLF Pact for Skills, CEC President Luis Onofre proposed three main avenues for action: (1) strengthen the cooperation between the world of work and the work of education to bridge the gap between skills' supply and demand, (2) Prompt European regional/ national governments to financially support TCLF companies in their up- and reskilling activities and modernise Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, both in terms of facilities and equipment, and make their regulatory framework more agile and responsive to companies' needs, and (3) Deploy efforts to increase the attractiveness of the TCLF industries by showcasing the many career paths and opportunities it offers young people and others interested in a career change.

Overcoming skills challenges is make-or-break for the competitiveness of the European TCLF companies. COVID-19 has induced economic hardships, and uncertainties have underlined the



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companies' need to strengthen resilience with a skilled workforce, an essential aspect for the sector's growth. CEC and its partners are joining efforts under the TCLF Pact for Skills to respond to these challenges – as is already the case in ambitious initiatives such as the Erasmus+ Skills4Smart TCLF Industries 2030 Blueprint – in collaboration with companies, trade unions, education and research centres, and public regional and national EU27 authorities.