





Brussels, 7 July, 2025

#### **JOINT WRITTEN CONTRIBUTION**

ON

# Quality Jobs for the Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear (TCLF) Industries

- Following the <u>Joint Statement on TCLF Social Partners' Priorities for the Next European</u>
  <u>Mandate (2024–2029)</u>, as of June 4, 2024,
- building on the principles of the **Antwerp Declaration for a European Industrial Deal** to which the EU TCLF Social Partners CEC, COTANCE, EURATEX are all signatories,
- reaffirming the commitments outlined in the Erasmus+ Blueprint <u>METASKILLS4TCLF</u> <u>Manifesto</u>, particularly the importance of fostering an inclusive and future-proof workforce that reflects the diversity and strengths of the European Union,
- in full alignment with the EU TCLF Pact for Skills,
- having consulted its members & partners across the European Union.

the EU TCLF Social Partners — <u>CEC</u>, <u>COTANCE</u> and <u>EURATEX</u> — are submitting this written contribution to European Commission Vice-President **Ms Roxana Minzatu** to support the development of the **EU Quality Jobs Roadmap & enhance it with the perspective & insights** of the European Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear (TCLF) sectors, which collectively provide **over 1.5** million jobs in the EU and contribute over €200 billion to the European economy.

Quality Jobs for TCLF: Powered by Policy, Supported by Investment, Trusted by People.

## **Quality Jobs Powered by Policy**

The TCLF sectors, represented by more than 95% of SMEs, are under pressure to meet the green and digital twin transitions while competing on a fierce global market and facing a decreasing consumption. They are also at a skills crossroads: the digital transformation and green transition are reshaping the competencies needed in these sectors, which makes it vital to upskill the current workforce and attract new talent into TCLF industries.

As part of this transformation, operators are navigating a growing volume of regulatory requirements that aim to improve sustainability, transparency and product stewardship across the value chain. While these objectives are widely supported, companies (particularly SMEs) need adequate time, guidance and financial support to implement the changes effectively. At the same time, the TCLF sectors face increasing global competition, including from countries where producers benefit from targeted industrial support or lower regulatory obligations.







These combined pressures are contributing to uncertainty and, in some cases, forcing European companies to consider relocating or reducing operations. The EU's 2025 Competitiveness Compass recognises these risks and pledges to reduce administrative burdens by 25%, positioning initiatives such as the Clean Industrial Deal as engines of innovation and industrial renewal. Ensuring that the green transition is accompanied by realistic timelines and a level playing field at global level is essential to retain quality jobs and manufacturing capacity in Europe.

An EU Quality Jobs Roadmap will only be meaningful if there are jobs left in Europe and this calls for creating a business-friendly environment in the EU that supports competitiveness, safeguards existing jobs, and enables sustainable growth in Europe. This requires a coherent policy framework that reduces regulatory uncertainty, limits unnecessary administrative burdens, and channels investment into strategic infrastructure and innovation. Such an environment is essential for companies to remain competitive, drive productivity, and generate high-quality employment opportunities.

Europe's TCLF industries already offer quality jobs—collective bargaining, frontrunning health and safety standards, inclusive workplaces, and strong commitments to lifelong learning. And while there's always room for improvement, the level of excellence achieved is already high<sup>12</sup>.

What the TCLF sectors need now is **recognition and support from EU and national authorities**. The Quality Jobs Roadmap should avoid imposing a rigid or uniform definition of job quality. Rather than introducing new labels or standards, the focus should be on creating the conditions that enable improvements in working conditions across all sectors. This means supporting innovation, investing in skills, and fostering effective social dialogue, while respecting the autonomy of social partners and the diversity of national labour market systems.

The EU Quality Jobs Roadmap should acknowledge the high standards already achieved by European TCLF industries.

These standards must now be actively **promoted and adopted globally**, as the TCLF sectors are judged not only on individual efforts but on the **collective progress of the industry worldwide**. Unfortunately, many of the concerning images circulating on social media often originate from **developing countries** and do **not reflect the practices of European SMEs**, which nonetheless suffer reputational damage as a result.

Ensuring that **Europe's high standards are recognised and upheld globally** is essential, not only to protect the reputation of our industries, but also to promote fair and responsible practices worldwide.

This has been the shared mission of the **European Sectoral Social Dialogue**. Since **1999 for the leather industry**, and similarly long-standing for **textiles**, **clothing**, **and footwear**, we have worked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.euroleather.com/news/european-social-environmental-report

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>https://www.euroleather.com/doc/GDL%20Study%20on%20Injuries%20and%20Accidents%20at%20the%20workplace%202023.pdf







collectively—employers and trade unions—with the strong support of the **European Commission (DG EMPL)** to advance social dialogue as a cornerstone of sustainable industry development.

Through **numerous joint initiatives**, we have demonstrated the value of cooperation in improving working conditions, skills, and social protection. These efforts not only strengthen our own sectors, but also **serve as a model for global best practices**, inspiring a broader shift toward responsible and ethical industry standards.

We therefore collectively call for the EU Quality Jobs Roadmap to prioritise and strongly support Social Dialogue—both within Europe and globally. This means, on one hand, ensuring that social partners are involved early and meaningfully in shaping employment-relevant initiatives. On the other hand, it also requires the EU to champion Social Dialogue on the global stage, including at the ILO, IndustriALL Global Union, and United Nations level.

Quality Jobs Powered by Policy is about more than just regulation—it's about protecting European industries, securing existing jobs, and promoting fair global standards. It means ensuring that social dialogue and long-term industrial strength remain at the heart of EU policy.

## Quality Jobs Supported by Investment

The green and digital transitions demand significant industrial investment across Europe. Financial support must not only drive innovation but also ensure the development of education/training for the corresponding quality jobs. To achieve this, EU funds must be aligned with social goals—with access conditioned on promoting social cohesion, decent work, and strong engagement with social partners.

EU and national funding should support technological innovation while equally investing in training systems that help workers adapt to evolving requirements. This includes practical measures such as funding regional training centres, strengthening digital and green skills development in SMEs, and enabling partnerships between companies and VET providers to offer apprenticeships tailored to circular and sustainable production models.

Clear, reliable access to funding is essential to make EU policies more stable, predictable, and effective. Yet too often, promising initiatives lose momentum after just one political cycle. If we want real results, especially in skills and education, we can't afford to treat these projects as short-term experiments. The EU must back these efforts consistently—these commitments must be sustained across successive programming periods. The EU must ensure continuity of support and long-term engagement. For example, the Pact for Skills provides a valuable framework for sectoral cooperation, already mobilised by the TCLF ecosystem. Its success, however, depends on consistent backing and integration into national and regional strategies over time, including stable support for training providers and SME involvement.

We hope that the EU Quality Jobs Roadmap will be built keeping that in mind.







#### More Sector-Specific, Accessible Funding - Including for People

The availability and accessibility of European and national funding must be significantly improved, particularly for the TCLF industries. These sectors—often represented by family-businesses—would need dedicated funding not only to drive innovation and competitiveness, but also to support the development of competences to cope with technological progress.

# Call for the EU Quality Jobs Roadmap to Include Dedicated Funding Streams for the TCLF Sectors that:

- Create dedicated funding streams addressed to young jobseekers, school leavers, migrant
  workers or international students tailored to the specific skills needs of the TCLF sectors (e.g.,
  leather, footwear, textiles, clothing), including support for apprenticeships, lifelong learning,
  and regional training hubs.
- Ensure easier, more stable access to EU funding for SMEs in the TCLF industries—through simplified application procedures, longer funding cycles, and sector-specific support mechanisms.
- Allocate funding to **help SMEs implement EU regulations** (environmental, labour, product safety, etc.)—to facilitate companies to train their employees to higher industry standards.
- Create a funding stream for awareness and promotional campaigns that boost demand for sustainable products made in Europe (e.g., leather, clothing, shoes), linking this directly to job creation.
- Introduce financial incentives for **internal career mobility**, **upskilling schemes**, **and mentoring systems** to retain experienced workers and attract new generations.

Develop and fund micro-credentials tailored to TCLF-specific job roles such as 3D knitting operators, textile recycling coordinators, traceability managers and digital fashion designers. These credentials should be short, modular and stackable. They should allow learners to combine training flexibly while remaining in employment, and help employers build talent pipelines aligned with their innovation needs

In short, investment in technology must be matched by dedicated support for people, skills, and social fairness. Only by combining innovation funding with sector-specific resources for training, compliance, and SME support can the EU ensure that its transitions are not only sustainable, but also socially just—and that quality jobs continue to thrive in Europe's TCLF industries.

## Quality Jobs Trusted by People

People are at the Heart of Our Industries

We may have all the technologies and financial resources in the world, but it is people who bring our industries to life. They are the ones who craft leather, weave textiles, sew and design clothing and footwear.







In spite of AI, 3D printing, and the exciting advances in robotics, without skilled and passionate workers—and their professional, artistic touch—the uniqueness and identity of textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear made in Europe would be lost.

Quality jobs that do not resonate with generations by offering intrinsic value, flexible work structures, civic pride, and a fair, non-exploitative work environment, will fail to attract people. They must also provide real opportunities for personal growth and development through re-skilling, up-skilling, training, and apprenticeships—while placing equal importance on mental health and well-being.

The TCLF sectors clearly align with this description and expect the EU Quality Jobs Roadmap to serve as a practical tool to turn it into reality—through the right mix of policies, funding, and training opportunities. Social partners can play a central role in shaping and delivering these measures to ensure quality jobs are sustained and strengthened across the sectors. Notably, the European Commission's new "Union of Skills" strategy underlines the need to deliver higher levels of skills, promote lifelong learning, and help businesses recruit talent across the EU. Reinforcing initiatives like the Pact for Skills and launching sector-specific skills academies are concrete ways to achieve these goals in practice, and the Quality Jobs Roadmap should leverage these tools for TCLF.

However, these efforts must be backed by sustained, targeted support for SMEs, which form the backbone of the TCLF sectors. Facing structural challenges such as fragmentation, critical skill gaps in areas like ICT and green technologies, an ageing workforce, and difficulty attracting young talent, these industries need long-term EU commitment through funding, skills development, and policy coherence to ensure that quality jobs do not just survive—but grow and evolve in the face of transition.

#### Quality jobs also mean access to higher education tailored to the specific needs of each sector.

While short- and medium-term training and reskilling are essential, long-term sustainability in the TCLF industries depends on securing a continuous supply of well-educated professionals with a deep, foundational understanding of the sectors—knowledge that can only be built through dedicated higher education.

Unfortunately, the current reality for the leather industry is alarming: across the entire EU, only two higher education institutions offer a Bachelor & Master degrees in Leather Technology & Engineering (University of Lleida, Igualada, Spain & ITECH, Lyon, France), and there are no EU level Master's-level programmes available to continue this academic and professional path.

Submitted to Erasmus Mundus, for the third time, the **LEATECH Joint Master's in Innovative Leather Technology** galvanises the hope of Europe's leather producers. The unwavering support from the European Union—both in terms of funding and recognition — is essential for saving the European know-how in tanning from vanishing.







Programmes like LEATECH are key to keep the sectoral knowledge in Europe, promote EU regulatory principles and values worldwide and reduce the gap in quality jobs between the EU and third countries. Without a strong academic foundation, we risk losing the scientific leadership that makes European products stand out from the crowd and quality jobs globally competitive. This is not just about education—it's about the survival and competitiveness of key European industries. We expect the **EU Quality Jobs Roadmap** to recognise this.

In the textile and clothing sectors, efforts are also needed to strengthen advanced skills development. Some countries have established specialised technical institutes (for example, Italy's "ITS" academy for fashion) to train young people in high-demand areas outside the traditional university path. However, enrollment in dedicated textile, clothing, or footwear programmes remains low compared to industry needs. The Commission's upcoming EU VET strategy aims to make vocational education more attractive and innovative, which can support modernising such programmes for TCLF. Expanding such higher education and training opportunities across Europe is crucial to produce the next generation of experts in sustainable textiles, innovative clothing and footwear design, and advanced

leather processing. These are all key occupational profiles for the future of quality jobs in the TCLF sectors.

## Conclusion: a shared commitment to quality jobs in TCLF

The TCLF industries stand ready to actively contribute to the **EU Quality Jobs Roadmap** and all upcoming EU-driven initiatives and policies, aiming to develop and deliver strong, industry-oriented agreements that secure and strengthen quality jobs across the TCLF sectors in Europe.