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**European Confederation of the Footwear Industry**

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**ERASMUS+ DIGITALFABLAB: ON-THE-JOB TRAINING USING AUGMENTED REALITY**

*On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2021, the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and partners from Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Spain, and Romania met remotely to kick off the new **Erasmus+ project digitalFABLAB**. New, innovative Vocational Education and Training (VET) practices and digital learning and teaching technologies must be taken up to reduce the skills gap between the education and the workplace, attract new professionals, and adapt to a highly digitalized post-COVID-19 world. The project will build on partners' expertise in research, education, and digital tools elaboration to develop a digital Fablab using Augmented Reality, an associated international training course for students, and a methodology brief for teachers on how to incorporate the new platform into their training programmes.*

**The added value of learning-by-doing**

FabLabs are shared workshops where students can access equipment and technologies to design and create footwear products, components, or accessories. They build on the learning-by-doing methodology that relies on simulations and experiential learning, allowing students to apply knowledge learned in classrooms to real-world situations. The digitalFABLAB project will draw upon the new opportunities offered by Augmented Reality to propose a fully digital, immersive, accessible-from-anywhere, and appealing footwear FabLab that will offer an incomparable learning-by-doing experience to a wide audience. Students will learn how to solve problems in context, test their own knowledge, and apply it to practical problems. Because it is digital, the FabLab will also enhance students' technological understanding and improve their digital literacy. In addition, the digital FabLab will offer engaging, attractive and up-to-date learning methods that today's students are fond of, reach new potential footwear professionals by broadening the geographical scope of footwear VET, and allow footwear VET to keep up with the new reality induced by COVID-19.

**Ensuring technology adoption across Europe**

Along with the digital Fablab, project partners will elaborate a joint international course, certified at national level and recognised at EU level, for the development of practical skills for footwear students and other people interested in joining the sector. Because integrating new tools in education programmes efficiently needs practice, project partners will also develop a common methodology for Augmented Reality geared toward footwear VET teachers. It will ensure that teachers can learn how to master the programme and fully incorporate the digital FabLab into their regular curricula in a compelling way for their students. Learning-by-doing is essential to acquire the right skills to produce quality footwear. By simulating real-world experiences with latest digital technologies, the project's digital FabLab will offer a stimulating experience to students. In addition to its appeal, the digital FabLab – and the associated courses – will be accessible from anywhere in Europe, making it possible to reach new potential footwear professionals. Because Augmented Reality is still a fairly new technology, the project will also guide teachers to guarantee its good adoption and ensure that the tool is blended into learning programmes and used to its full capacity.

The project, led by the Footwear Technology Centre of Portugal (CTCP) will also count with the expertise of Politecnico Calzaturiero (Italy), the Institute of the Leather Industry (Poland), the Footwear Technology Centre of La Rioja (CTCR – Spain), the Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iasi (Romania), the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and the technology provider Hearthands Solutions from Cyprus. More information soon at [www.digitalfablab.eu](http://www.digitalfablab.eu)