

IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES TO INCREASE THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE FOOTWEAR SECTOR

SOCIAL DIALOGUE PROJECT ref. VS/2019/0037

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Spin360 supports companies, industrial associations, social partners and institutions in taking advantage of the opportunities for a development model based on prompt and ongoing anticipation of changes. The pillars on which the growth models we propose are based are: Sustainability, Progress, Innovation and Network, with a broad 360-degree approach.

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Executive Summary

The present report highlights the main outcomes of the EU Social Dialogue project “**Implementing Best Practices to Increase the Attractiveness of the Footwear Sector**” (Project ref. VS/2019/0037), coordinated by the *European Footwear Confederation (CEC)*, *industriAll European Trade Union* and *Assocalzaturifici* the Italian Footwear Association, in cooperation with the national footwear associations from Poland, Portugal and Spain, and the consultancy company *Spin360* as technical partner.

The project (whose official website is available at www.inmyshoesproject.eu) envisaged the implementation of **four best practices** emerging from the results of a previous EU Social Dialogue project (VS/2017/0006) aimed at building up the capacities of national stakeholders in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain in attracting young workers to the footwear sector, and at communicating the values and innovative character of the EU footwear industry.

Best practice 1 “Technological visits to footwear companies” addressed the technological gap between education and training providers and the skills needs of footwear companies through the organization of technological visits in the companies. The visits (both onsite and online in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain in accordance with the COVID-19 mobility restrictions) represented an occasion to show the current sectoral technological innovations to education providers, in order for them to innovate/update their curricula and training programme, and better prepare students to the workplace, with the ultimate goal of building a future competent workforce.

Best practice 2 “Mentoring” aimed at building and consolidating a key role inside the companies: the mentor, a person with solid experience able to support and develop the skills of a newly recruited young people and support him/her in the rapid integration inside the company. The outcome is a dedicated e-learning course to strengthen the soft skills of experienced people inside footwear companies willing to become mentors.

Best Practice 3 “Apprenticeship” aimed at providing an updated status of the apprenticeship system in the four EU countries. The results of this analysis enabled the creation of five specific recommendations (coupled with example of already existing associated best practices) to promote a structured and innovative apprenticeship programme that will enhance and increase employment of young workers.

Best practice 4 “Integrated sectoral communication” was dedicated to the continuation of the communication and promotional campaign launched in 2017 to attract young workers to the industry, which included the second edition of the EU footwear contest “Shake the Future of the Footwear Sector-The Talent Shoes” targeted to people between 16-25 years old.

The main results and outcomes of the project activities were presented during the project **Final Conference**¹. The event gathered 70+ stakeholders and represented an opportunity not only to discuss project outcomes,

¹ The event was held online on July 14th, 2021

but also to set the ground for new strategies a way forward for their broader implementation in the footwear sector.

1. Introduction and project objectives

The European footwear industry boasts a long tradition and cultural heritage in the production of footwear. In 2018, the sector (if we consider EU28) was represented by 19.856 companies and 260.309 direct employees, and generated a turnover of EUR 27.548 billion. Two thirds of total EU footwear production is concentrated in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and among the top 15 exporters, 9 of them are European. The creativity in the design and the high-quality of footwear products are well-known both by European and global consumers, and this has also been made possible thanks to the added value provided by its skilled workforce.

These positive trends, the industry is and must face a stage of considerable restructuring. During the last 5-6 years previous to the start of the pandemic in early 2020, the number of companies and employment in Europe were quite stable. However, one of the main company challenges was, and still is, the shortage of workers in production and technical positions, with the difficulty to recruit new generations to join the industry in order to guarantee its sustainability and competitive growth. A concerted effort from the industry but also the education providers is therefore needed in implementing strategies to attract, hire and retain young people to the industry.

It is for the above reasons that a new action has been steered at European level through the EU Social Dialogue project “**Implementing Best Practices to Increase the Attractiveness of the Footwear Sector**” (Project ref. VS/2019/0037). The present report describes the main outcomes of this project, which was coordinated by the *European Footwear Confederation (CEC)*, *industriAll European Trade Union* and *Assocalzaturifici* the Italian Footwear Association, in cooperation the national associations from Poland Portugal and Spain, and the consultancy company *Spin360* as technical partner.

This project (run from 2019 to 2021) follows the conclusions and represents the natural continuation of two previous EU Social Dialogue Projects:

- An initial SD project (VS/2013/0385), whose aim was to provide an updated picture of the European footwear sector to be used for the definition of future priorities of action under the European Social Dialogue itself.
- A second SD project (VS/2017/0006), aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the sector towards young people and identify mid-term strategies for training and hiring young workers in order to provide them with the necessary opportunities to obtain quality jobs in the industry. This project identified the main common problems and proposed which potential solutions and best practices could be pursued at European level.

The current project counts therefore on evidence-based data from previous analysis, discussions and research carried out under the previous projects. For example, according to a survey circulated in 2017 among 116 footwear stakeholders, the main problems in recruiting young people are the lack of availability and quality of sectoral VET programmes (96% of replies), followed by the scarce attractiveness of the sector towards young people and easiness of transition between education and work (92%). Respondents to the

same survey indicated that the main problems in retaining young people are lack of career prospects (83% of replies) followed by unclear skills developments and lifelong learning programmes (79% of replies). Also, digitalisation & technological developments, as well as communication campaigns, are two key areas on which the sector should invest more.

As a result, the overall objective of the project subject to this report was to implement **four best practices** in recruitment and retaining young students in order to build capacities of national stakeholders and increase the attractiveness of the footwear sector in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain. The best practices were identified and selected under the diagnosis activities of the previous SD project (see section 1.3 for the full methodology which helped in designing them), demonstrating their effective contribution in attracting young employees and creating the conditions for them to obtain high-quality jobs. The best practices are linked to the following challenges:

1. **Technological innovation:** The results demonstrate that there is a technological gap between education and training providers and the actual skills' needs of footwear companies. In synthesis, the two worlds run at two different speeds, because technologies in the industry happen at a faster pace than the education curricula and programmes' adaptation. Companies need to quickly grasp such technological changes for which they need qualified workers. Both parties therefore need to react, while research and education centres can contribute to innovate/update training for companies.
2. **Transferring skills and problem solving:** On the onboarding phase in a company, new workers need practical knowledge in order to become acquainted and rapidly operational in their new occupation. It is widely acknowledged that their education is not sufficient to enter the labour market. They need as well to learn about the specificities of the company's culture and strategy, the product development processes, the use of specific machinery and the craftsmanship involved in their particular products. There is the need of a committed experienced person able to transfer such concepts to the newcomers.
3. **Structured apprenticeship programmes:** It has been widely recognised the relevance of the apprenticeship system in finding and retaining young people, as well as in providing them with the experience they need to understand what working in the industry means in practical terms. The most structured and known education system in Europe based on working experience is the German Dual Based System. A few countries have introduced practical experience during the studies through apprenticeship schemes, but the industry is still not supporting the implementation, and more apprenticeships opportunities are needed. Finally, in other European countries, there are less structured practices which should be addressed.
4. **Sectoral misperception:** There is a general lack of knowledge about what the industry consists of, its values, and what it can offer in terms of jobs and professional opportunities. Families tend to perceive it with negative connotations, and this old traditional image of occupations negatively affects the workforce turnover. An intensive, updated and smarter image of the EU footwear industry needs to be transmitted to the public, including families, children at school, etc.

The four above common issues have been translated into the four best practices (Figure 1), each of them thoroughly analysed in the subsequent dedicated sections:

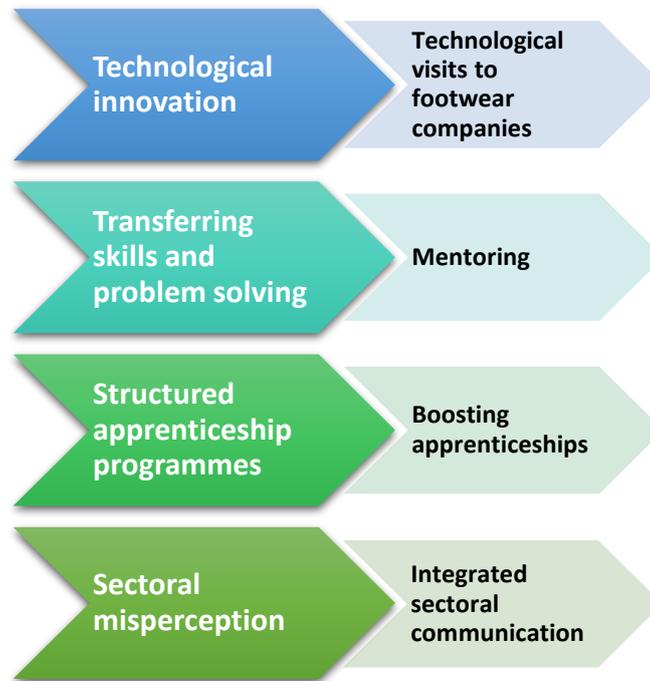


Figure 1: The four best practices

2. Methodology and COVID-19 implications

As previously mentioned, the project has foreseen the pilot implementation of the above four best practices in four designated countries (Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain). The countries were selected for their prominent role in the footwear industry and the declared social partners' interest in being engaged in the project.

Each best practice was selected thanks to a mixed-method approach combined with successful consultations and validation processes within the previous SD project (2017-2019), as described below:

- Firstly, an on-line survey was conducted targeting 116 stakeholders of six representative EU countries² in terms of the sector workforce to identify best practices that address main problems in the recruitment and employment of young people in the sector;
- Secondly, in-depth discussions were carried out with 11 key stakeholders in six EU Countries to validate results and enlighten national peculiarities;
- Then, a High-Level Workshop in Brussels with 25 European experts (social partners, VET providers and research centres) of the sector was held, where results were validated, and the best practices selected;
- Finally, meetings were organized at national level with national social partners and key stakeholders of the four countries.

The initially planned implementation of the four best practices has been inevitably impacted by the current COVID-19 pandemic. The project had indeed been conceived to be very operational in nature, with several activities to be performed onsite (many of them inside footwear companies) and with the direct involvement of engaged stakeholders (companies, research centres, VET providers, trade unions, associations and young students). Therefore, the project implementation had to be revised to comply with the pandemic restrictions, such as the temporary suspension/reduction of work by several companies, the schools' closure/distance learning didactic, and the general necessity of stakeholders to prioritise and concentrate all efforts on their core work in order to face the challenges posed by the pandemic (e.g., production losses, reduction of the workforce, decline in the demand etc).

With each country being hit differently, the implementation of each best practice had to be adapted to the national context: national social partners were actively involved in capacity building activities and were asked to collaborate and support the overall project implementation at national level. The detailed description of the rollout of the best practices for each country is provided in section 3.

² Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Romania and Hungary

3. Best practices implementation: results

3.1 Best practice 1: Technological visits to footwear companies

The footwear sector is an industry daily impacted by the opportunities that offer the new technologies and digitalisation. The skills required to handle and benefit from these innovations must be rapidly reflected into the education and training curricula, in order to build a future skilled workforce able to deal in the most efficient way with such changes and innovations.

The main goal of this best practice was thus to favour a continuous updating process between VET providers/research and training centres and footwear companies, in order to:

- Update and orientate the education and training offer with the technological skills requested from the industry in line with technological innovations and digitalisation;
- Bridge the technological gap between companies' needs and the education and training systems;
- Speed-up the innovation process in the industry.

The work that led to the core of this best practice (namely, the technological visits themselves), consisted of the following activities (as described in Figure 2):



Figure 2: Best practice 1 overview

Framing the state of the art (step 1) was aimed at the definition of the key technological drivers and technological innovations in the footwear industry in the different production steps. This task was performed through a questionnaire submitted to footwear companies in the four countries in 2020.

During the second step, the key stakeholders to be engaged for the technological visits at national level were identified, as well as the main technologies to be addressed. Stakeholders mainly included companies and education and training providers.

The third step was the core of this activity: companies in the four partner countries opened their doors and organised onsite or online visits³ to education and training teachers in order to show them their current technologies and upcoming innovations, including new equipment and machinery. During this activity, the involvement of the target group, the VET providers, was key in order to increase their awareness of the industry's technological needs and further increase the quality of education and training on technological skills.

The final activity consisted in data elaboration, assessment and reporting on the activities in the four countries, whose results are explained in the following paragraph.

3.1.1 Outcomes from Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain

During the implementation of the project, different companies from each of the four countries performed the technological visits through different modalities due to the pandemic mobility restrictions.

In **Italy**, three online seminars were held in April 2021, each gathering more than 50 participants together. The main stakeholders involved were teachers at high school level coming from fashion schools in the North and Centre of Italy. The seminars addressed three crucial topics for footwear companies:

- How digital technologies are transforming factories;
- Different approaches and trends in the digitalization of the footwear product, related materials and components;
- Traceability & transparency: towards a digital ID of the product.

What emerged as crucial from the seminars was the need for education and training providers to be involved more actively and in advance in such technical discussions: many of them were indeed not fully aware of the main trends and digital innovations of the footwear products, and therefore unable to transfer such knowledge to their students.

In **Poland**, two companies were involved and conducted two online visits with teachers at higher education level (university) in June 2021. The following companies' technologies were presented (through virtual tour videos) and discussed:

- Advanced direct injection molding;
- Automatic cutting;
- CAD/CAM shoe design;
- Semi- automatic stitching.

The discussions in Poland revealed the opportunities as well as the challenges both of companies as such but also of a successful dialogue between education/training and the industry. Major points addressed included:

³ Due to COVID-19, the initial concept of the visits (to be held onsite) had to be revisited. Therefore, online visits were conducted, where representatives from the selected companies virtually met teachers and explained them the main technologies and the needs of the company through videos, materials and tools.

- For companies, the difficulty of replacing older people with new workers and technicians was underlined. Young people saw this job as unattractive compared to other vacancies available. The average age of footwear companies' employees was rising, putting the continuation of production at risk;
- On the other hand, the occupations and type of activities they implied, was not at all outdated and required a large variety of skills to manage the software connected to modern equipment;
- The university regretted that this type of initiative should have taken place at least 10 years earlier because in the meantime, the faculties specifically dedicated to shoe technology had been closed. There were still people who had the specific knowledge, but the university no longer had the necessary technical equipment to carry out a full course at university level;
- What could be possible instead would be the theoretical courses dedicated to the technical staff of the companies then continued within the companies on specific machinery. This is why the initiative on the part of the footwear companies is to organise courses for at least 15 people at a time with a certain continuity.
- To achieve this objective, the involvement of the Polish Footwear and Leather Association would be indispensable to bring together several companies, which otherwise will find difficult to communicate and collaborate on their own, because they considered themselves competitors.

In **Portugal** and in April 2021, three footwear companies were involved and managed to hold onsite visits to VET providers showing them the current equipment, machines and production processes. The main technologies addressed were:

- 3D printing
- Automatic cutting system machines
- Automatic logistic conveyor in stitching room
- Automatic stitching machines
- CAD/CAM system for product development and engineering
- Direct Injection Process
- ERP for supply chain management and production control
- Laser printing system for personalization of leather and soles
- Plotter for digital printing
- Roughing Robot

When it comes to the core of the consultations, both parties (industry and VET providers) confirmed their positive feedback of the visits. There was indeed a good engagement from the companies, specifically from the entrepreneurs, who personally guided the visits but also from the teachers, who stressed the fact that the possibility to get acquainted with new technologies does not currently exist in the VET centres. But more importantly, this was an occasion for VET providers to adjust and re-shape their curricula, and they committed to do so already for the next academic year.

Lastly, the technological visits in **Spain** were held in two companies in March And April 2021, one online and the other onsite, with the involvement of two VET providers. The main technologies addressed were:

- 3D design and 3D printing
- Business intelligence
- Computer design
- Dashboard (*cuadros de mando*)
- Digital cut
- ERP for production
- Laser cutting
- Management and programming of state-of-the-art machinery (ex: automatic sanding)
- Operations management through technology and forecasting tools.
- Production organization system

In Spain, like in the other countries, the possibility of VET providers to get acquainted with the distinctive capacities and added value of the two companies was perceived as highly beneficial in terms of better understanding the point of view of the production but also of the company's organisation as a whole. The direct involvement of the CEO, managers and workers allowed teachers discover and understand the technologies, machines and equipment that they did not have in their classes, and therefore to ultimately show and teach how these technologies work to students.

The technological visits have certainly strengthened the relations between national and industry VET providers in relation to the technological industry needs, thus increasing the knowledge of VET teachers on technological process and skills needs. It is envisaged that such meetings will be the firsts of a series of structured and regular dialogues between education and training providers and companies, in order to enable a better alignment between the skills industry demand and the footwear education offer in these countries. It is fundamental that the education and training world has access to the new technologies in place in order to better understand what is needed in terms of skills, and thus build more tailored curricula for students entering the sector. This will lead to a future workforce already competent on existing and emerging technologies.

3.2 Best practice 2: Mentoring

This best practice addressed the initial working period of a young person inside a company, and in particular the need for the new employee to be equipped with the practical knowledge that is needed in order to be effective and rapidly operational in their new occupation within a company. This refers not only to technical knowledge and capacities, but also to the integration into the working environment, the company's culture and strategy and the possibility to be guided during the onboarding process.

Therefore, the main goal of this best practice was to identify and build a specific profile able to take up this role, namely, the **Mentor in the workplace**. The mentor is a person who, by leveraging on his/her experience and greater knowledge of the company's dynamics, supports the development of skills, abilities and knowledge of less experienced colleagues, and more specifically a young worker. The previous SD project demonstrated that there is general consensus among sectoral stakeholders at European level that mentoring,

when effectively implemented in the workplace, has multiple positive effects and benefits towards all stakeholders involved (employers, mentors and workers), and favours employability, career development as well as it can capitalise on older workers' knowledge and keep them motivated.

The work that led to the core of this best practice (namely, the creation of an e-learning course for mentors), consisted of the following activities:



Figure 3: Best practice 2 overview

In order to define and validate a mentor profile applicable to the industry needs, a questionnaire was created and circulated among national stakeholders. Participants were asked which of the three key roles should a mentor play in their company:

- The role of **instructor**: it requires an extensive working experience and knowledge of the workplace. His job is to successfully transfer knowledge to young workers. It applies to teaching hands-on skills.
- The role of a **supporting coach**, based on practical experience, day-to-day moral support and trust. He/she does not need to be the expert of the job able to fix all problems and having all the answers but he/she supports the process of learning by being a trusted person of reference in the company, to which the young worker can refer to receive advice and moral support.
- The role of a career **development coach**, in the sense of a model of 'coach as facilitator' who guides young workers in the identification of their specific skills and abilities, so as to optimise their choices of career development.



Figure 4: mentor main competences in percentage

Figure 4 represents the main results of the questionnaire in terms of which role shall a mentor play, and reveals that a mentor shall have:

- To a great extent, solid technical knowledge to teach hands-on skills to young workers, by leveraging on his/her extensive working experience and knowledge of the workplace;
- Partly, the mentor should also be a trusted person of reference in the company to give support in the process of learning;
- To a lesser extent, the mentor should support young workers in their career development path acting as a coach, guiding in the identification of their specific skills and abilities.

In addition, respondents were asked for each of the above roles which were their perceived most required skills, knowledge and attitudes. The results are shown in Table 1.

	INSTRUCTOR	SUPPORTING COACH	DEVELOPMENT COACH
KNOWLEDGE			
Knows his own role, tasks and responsibilities	X	X	X
Has the technical professional knowledge specific for the tasks to teach	X	X	X
Knows the work area of the newcomer	X	X	X
SKILLS			
Teach/transfer knowledge and skills	X		
Share knowledge and expertise	X		
Able to give clear instructions	X		
Negotiation, persuasion and influencing skills		X	
Team leader with high performance, known throughout the organisation		X	
Team working			X
Verbal communication skills			X
Listening skills			X
Attitudes			
Honest	X	X	X
Reliable	X	X	X
Be patient with people with less experience	X	X	X
Willing to share experiences		X	
Willing to spend the necessary time to transfer skills and knowledge			X

Table 1: Knowledge, skills and attitudes for the mentor

The results of the questionnaire were then aggregated and analysed, and ultimately enabled the creation of a dedicated and specific e-learning course for experienced employees within the workplace willing to take up this role of mentor ⁴.

⁴ The initial foreseen core activity of this best practice was the definition of a pilot mentoring scheme and mentor certification scheme to be implemented in two companies for each country, with the active participation of the VET students and VET providers. After the restrictions posed by the pandemic which made this specific task not implementable, project partners agreed on the creation of such e-learning course.

The course was designed to strengthen particularly the soft skills that are needed to become an effective mentor⁵. In line with the perceived most required skills by respondents, the course was built around the following modules and lessons, as shown in Table 2:

MODULE	LESSON
1 INTRODUCTION TO MENTORING	1.1 What is mentoring?
	1.2 Mentor and Mentee: opportunities and challenges
2 TEACHING/INSTRUCTING SKILLS	2.1 Sharing knowledge and expertise
	2.2 Intergenerational mentoring: giving advice
	2.3 Emotional awareness
3 COMMUNICATION SKILLS	3.1: What makes a communication effective?
	3.2: Communication skills – Speaking
	3.3: Communication skills – Listening
	3.4: Communication skills – Asking questions and providing feedback
4 TEAM LEADING	4.1 Team working and trust
	4.2 Intrinsic motivation
5 NEGOTIATION	5.1 Basics of effective negotiation
	5.2 Negotiation styles
	5.3 Negotiation strategies

Table 2: Mentor e-learning course

The course has been validated by the four national footwear associations, and an active dissemination campaign has been launched. The course will remain open also after the end of the project in order to allow people to take it at any time. It is envisaged for the mentoring scheme to be a practice that favours not only a smoother integration of the young person into the working environment, but also the identification of a strategic approach that enhances intergenerational exchange and recognition of competences both of trainees and experienced workers. The mentoring is a practice that, when effectively implemented, is

⁵ The course is free and available in EN, ES, IT, PL, and PT at the project website (www.inmyshoesproject.eu)

recognised to produce significant benefits to the sector employment and to the company's needs in terms of practical skills and training of new workers. Furthermore, it can also be a source of motivation for experienced workers (mentors) taking up the role.

3.3 Best practice 3: Apprenticeships

The previous SD project outcomes reveal that there is also general consensus among stakeholders that apprenticeship and dual-system programmes are the most effective means to involve and engage young workers in the sector. Apprenticeships programmes result to be the most important means for an easier transition between education and work.

The main goal of this best practice was to increase awareness and boost the apprenticeship scheme targeting footwear companies in the four countries, based on each national context and existing experiences. To do so, the best practice consisted of the following activities⁶ as summarized in Figure 5:



Figure 5: best practice 3 overview

As part of the first activity, the four national associations undertook a research on the current status of apprenticeships in the footwear sector in their country, which could allow for:

- A detailed analysis of the status of apprenticeships in the footwear sector, both from the perspective of companies and those of VET providers;
- An identification of opportunities and challenges;
- A comparison of the apprenticeship offer in the different countries, thus encouraging mutual learning and exchange of good practices;
- A definition of implementing actions to overcome the challenges and barriers for each stakeholder in order to strengthen and further promote apprenticeships in the footwear sector.

The outcomes of such research are presented in the following section.

⁶ Originally, this best practice also envisaged a definition of a pilot apprenticeship scheme to be implemented in three SMEs in each target country, with the active participation of the key stakeholders through on-site visits during the practical training of students in companies. Due to the pandemic imposing closure of companies and suspension of activities, this task was not implementable and online workshop has replaced it.

3.3.1 The apprenticeship system in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain

The **Italian system** broadly distinguishes three main types of apprenticeships:

- Apprenticeship for Vocational Qualification and Diploma, Upper Secondary Education Diploma and High Technical Specialisation Certificate (Type 1), for people from 15 to 18 years old;
- Professional apprenticeship (Type 2), for people from 18 to 29 years old;
- Higher Training/Education and Research apprenticeship (Type 3), for people from 18 to 29 years old.

The main reference figures for the apprenticeships in the Italian footwear, textile, clothing, leather systems are:

- Production operator;
- Product control operator;
- Production co-ordination employee;
- Operator of automated systems;
- Production planning employee;
- Quality control/laboratory employee;
- Project development employee - product/model maker;
- Product stylist/designer;
- Product promotion/customer service employee.

When focusing on the sectoral numbers, the observatory of INPS [National Social Security Institute] shows the following data on the use of apprenticeship contracts with respect to employees in 2019 for the total economy, for the manufacturing sector and for Division 15 “Production of leather goods” (which the Ateco⁷ 15.2 category - “Production of footwear” is part of):

- The apprenticeship contract is applied to 4.2% of all sectors’ workers and to 3.9% of all jobs in the industry sector;
- On a sectoral level, apprentices make up 5.8% of total workers in the Ateco 15 category.

It is evident that the apprenticeship contract is still scarcely known and used by Italian footwear companies, as shown by sample data from the Marche region (Table 3), one of the main footwear districts in Italy:

Year of employment	Total apprentices	Footwear apprentices	% of the total
2019	14495	408	2.81%
2020	10165	175	1.72%

Table 3: number of apprentices in the Marche region, Italy

⁷ The classification of economic activities ATECO is a type of classification adopted by the Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) for national statistical surveys of an economic nature.

The **Polish apprenticeship system** is labelled “Vocational Preparation of Young Workers” (upper secondary level) and the apprenticeship can take the form of:

- Alternance between schools and employer premises;
- Entirely at the employer premises (the apprentice does not attend school but may still obtain qualifications that result in a journey/man certificate);
- Alternance with vocational centres.

At post-secondary level, there are instead the following modalities:

- Practical vocational education for adults (from 6 to 12 months);
- Practical job training for adults (from 3 to 6 months).

With reference to specific financial incentives, employers can be reimbursed for the apprentices’ wage and social security insurance costs from the Labour Fund (Fundusz Pracy), which is part of the State budget. The Labour Fund provides incentives for employers involved in apprenticeships in two ways:

- Remuneration apprentice’s salary (70-90 Euro/month) in the minimum form up to 5-7% of average salary;
- Subsidy for employers who had successfully trained or led a juvenile to the acquisition of qualifications after the apprenticeship (one-time “reward” 2,000-2,500 Euro per apprentice) – but only in certain professions which list is announced by the Institute of Educational Research and published by the Minister of Education.

There were no further insights and data on the apprenticeship system in Poland specifically related to the footwear sector. It was evidenced through research at national level that apprenticeships in Poland had not gained popularity despite some actions mostly focused on technical schools (where apprenticeship is not offered) undertaken by the Ministry of Education and the Polish Craft Association. Few data was available regarding companies and education and training providers implementing apprenticeship schemes, and the education programme seemed not to be updated to the newest technological requirements.

In the **Portuguese system**, the main qualifications that included an apprenticeship scheme in the footwear industry were:

- Footwear manufacturing technician;
- Technician of footwear and leather goods production management;
- Technician of footwear and leather goods machines maintenance;
- Footwear patter making technician;
- Footwear and leather goods’ quality technician.

The “footwear manufacturing technician”, “footwear patter making technician” and “footwear and leather goods’ quality technician” are considered the most relevant qualifications including an apprenticeship scheme.

In addition, research also listed the main associated job roles including an apprenticeship, which are:

- Footwear pattern-maker;
- Manual footwear producer technician;
- Footwear and Leather Goods' Quality Technician;
- Maintenance technician;
- Production manager of footwear and leather goods companies.

Although in Portugal there are VET programmes in the education system and in the employment system, they have a reduced component of in-company training. There is indeed currently a lack of trainers/tutors in technical areas, and VET courses within apprenticeships schemes are not enough customised to the needs of each company. It is therefore encouraged a more leading process from companies.

Finally, in the **Spanish system**, the general apprenticeship modalities in companies are both the so-called "internships agreements" and "contracts for training and learning". Apprenticeships in footwear exist for the three vocational training courses of the educational Spanish system (the basic VET cycle, the medium VET cycle and the higher VET cycle), and the main vocational training titles specifically related to footwear are:

- For the basic VET cycle: "repair of textile and leather articles";
- For the medium VET cycle: "technician in footwear and fashion accessories";
- For the higher VET cycle: "technician in design and production of footwear and accessories".

In addition, for the medium and higher VET cycles, there is a list of the main associated job roles including an apprenticeship:

- Medium VET cycle:
 - Leather cutter (cortador);
 - Cutter of pieces for equipment and assembly of footwear (cortador);
 - Leather goods and glove cutter (cortador);
 - Shoe parts cutting machine operator (operador);
 - Cutter by hand and by machine (cortador);
 - Machine operator (operador);
 - Industrial sewing machine operator (operador);
 - Machine shoe fitter (montador);
 - Hand shoe fitter (montador);
 - Custom-made shoemaker;
 - Orthopaedic shoemaker;
 - Warehouse keeper.
- Higher VET cycle:
 - Pattern maker of leather goods;
 - Modelmaker-patternmaker, shoe-fitter (Modelista-patronista);
 - Modelmaker-patternmaker of leather goods (Modelista-patronista);
 - Footwear Product Development Technician;
 - Technician in development of leather goods;

- Shoe manufacturing technician;
- Technician in the manufacture of leather goods;
- Quality control technician in the footwear and leather goods industries;
- Organization Technician;
- Technical office manager;
- Manufacturing manager;
- Quality supervisor;
- Production controller;
- Quality manager;
- Head of section;
- Team leader.

Currently in Spain, there is no public information available on the number of students enrolled in apprenticeship programmes in footwear companies. Thanks to the information available from VET providers and companies, we know that the participation in these programmes has drastically dropped due to the pandemic restrictions. The sector is already showing recovery figures and as soon as the sanitary situation allows it, these programmes will be relaunched.

3.3.2 Recommendations to boost the apprenticeship system

The subsequent activity of this best practice was to present the results of each country analysis. This was done through a dedicated workshop gathering sectoral stakeholders (companies, VET providers, training and research centres, trade unions, national associations as well as public authorities) to favour exchange of knowledge, ideas and best practices ⁸.

During the workshop, six main recommendations emerging from the identified gaps of the four countries' analysis were presented and validated. For each recommendation, a list of associated best practices already implemented across the EU was presented to allow participants to get inspired and learn from success stories:

⁸ The online workshop was held on June 14th, 2021 and gathered around 50 stakeholders from the four participating countries.

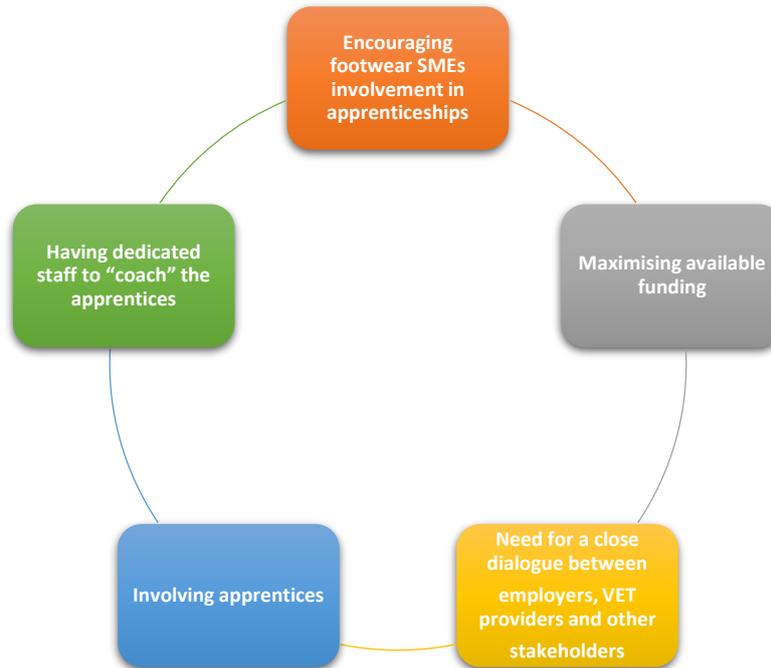


Figure 6: Recommendations to promote apprenticeship system in the four participating countries

“Encouraging footwear SMEs involvement in apprenticeships”: SMEs often face challenges in implementing apprenticeships. Here, a number of suggestions were proposed, such as:

- Role of intermediary bodies, (chambers of commerce and footwear associations) to develop SME support structures;
- Partnerships with large enterprises to assist SMEs in increasing the supply of apprenticeships;
- Cooperation between EU umbrella organisations and their national members or affiliates for developing and setting up support for SMEs;
- Promoting teaching and training;
- Enhancing support through mentors, tutors and coaches.

“Maximising available funding”: This includes not only tackling funding barriers but also to be aware of what funding is available and accessible. To do this, it is necessary to:

- Involve both employers and public authorities sufficiently in the funding of apprenticeship schemes;
- Have constant access to information on different apprenticeship financing schemes;
- Draw from examples of innovative ways employers can utilise the funding that is available in the four countries;
- Ensure adequate remuneration and social protection of apprentices.

“Involving apprentices”: young people have to know what apprenticeship is about. To involve them in being part of an apprenticeship, it is crucial that both footwear companies and training providers highlight the benefits of such scheme, and leverage on the opportunities, knowledge and skills young people can acquire. Main actions can include:

- Communication and promotional campaigns/fairs;
- Promoting strong job values and an inspirational company culture;
- Competitive employment, compensation and benefits;
- Diverse learning offer and modern learning methods;
- Focus on sustainability.

“Having dedicated staff to “coach” the apprentices”: it was confirmed the importance of good quality training, thanks to in-company mentors trained for this purpose. Experienced employees with wide hands-on technical experience are particularly welcome. These figures supervise and assess the apprentice’s learning activities and provide a link to the apprentice’s training institution.

It is envisaged that the analysis of the apprenticeship system in the four countries, combined with the above recommendations and examples of best practices presented during the workshop can provide an effective starting point to promote a structured and innovative apprenticeship programme that will enhance and increase employment of young workers.

“Need for a close dialogue between employers, providers and other stakeholders”: It may be difficult to have all partners involved in the apprenticeship development process, due to different points of view or competing aims, different language, lack of resources or even timing restrictions. However, the involvement of employers, trade unions, training providers, career advisors, and public authorities is crucial in order to set up:

- Standards relating to learning processes for the apprentice;
- Remuneration of apprentices;
- Curriculum development;
- Quality assurance;
- Funding.

EU umbrella organisations of the textile, clothing footwear and leather sectors are also currently working to ensure the increase of apprenticeships schemes in their sectors through an EU TCLF Pact for Skills.

3.4 Best practice 4: Integrated sectoral communication

The last best practice consisted in a continuous work on communication and dissemination activities at sectoral level. To this end, a series of parallel activities were carried out.

First, a dedicated **project website** was launched, together with Facebook and Instagram accounts⁹. The website is available in six languages (EN/ES/PT/HU/RO/PL/IT) and combines the activities and outcomes of the current project and the results of the previous SD project.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/inmyshoesproject/>, <https://www.instagram.com/inmyshoesproject/>

The core of this best practice was represented by the organisation of the second edition¹⁰ of the **EU footwear contest "Shake the Future of the Footwear Sector-The Talent Shoes"**. The contest targeted students across Europe who followed footwear studies or design aged from 16 to 25 years old. Prior to the contest, groups of young students were invited to present their projects proposals in one of the following categories:

- Designing a shoe;
- Promoting the footwear sector to young people: a new image campaign for the sector.

The contest was followed by an awarding ceremony and prizes for the three winning teams, which included the production of the shoes they designed and access to courses related to fashion and footwear. Examples of the produced shoes designed from the winning teams are shown in Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9.



Figure 7: "Orango" project (Arsutoria School, Italy)



Figure 9: "Seeds" project (Askardamykti School, Greece)



Figure 8: "Naturcultural" project (Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonia)

Through this best practice, it was possible not only to disseminate project activities and results to a wider public, but also to increase awareness among young people and attract them by showing the possibilities of the sector offers.

¹⁰ The first edition was held on site in June 2018 in Milan, and the second was held online/onsite in September 2020 in MICAM.

4. Conclusions and next steps

The present report summarises the different activities of the project “Implementing Best Practices to Increase the Attractiveness of the Footwear Sector”, which was the continuation of previous EU footwear SD projects from a more operational and practical perspective. The implementation of four best practices through a mixed-method approach has supported stakeholders at different levels to put theory into practice and implement strategies to attract and retain young workers to the footwear industry.

More specifically, the four best practices have contributed to:

1. **Strengthening the relations between education/training providers and companies** on the technological needs of the sector, increasing the knowledge of the sector on technological process and skills needs. Structured and future technological visits will enable the implementation of more effective skills needs anticipation processes and a better alignment between what is the demand of the industry and what is offered by the education and training side;
2. Building the figure of the **mentor in the workplace**, a role aimed at supporting, guiding and instructing newly recruited young people inside a company to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to be rapidly operational and fully integrated in the company; this role is also relevant when it comes to motivating experienced staff in taking up new roles and responsibilities;
3. Providing an updated status of the **apprenticeship system** in the four countries, as well as outlining key recommendations and best practices to promote a structured and innovative apprenticeship programme that enhances and increases employment of young workers;
4. Enhancing the visibility and promoting the footwear sector through continuous work on **communication and dissemination activities** at sectoral level.

It is encouraged that this project represents the starting point of more regular and effective actions in the four target countries, involving a closer dialogue among education and training providers, companies, unions and other relevant stakeholders. The aim is also that these actions are replicated and reach other EU countries. This will contribute in ensuring recruitment of new generations, securing their successful career development in the industry, and thus strengthening the European footwear sector.

Annex

Recent reforms of the apprenticeship system in England (UK) ¹¹

The Richard Review of apprenticeships in 2012¹² recommended a route and branch reform and refocus of the English apprenticeship system. The followed years of neglect (provision had become confusing for both employers and potential apprentices) and underfunding in Further Education (FE, the non-university further education system in the UK) lack of attention to the outcomes for learners, and the increasingly acute skills gaps across the economy. It was seismic financial, pedagogic and organisational change for both public and private VET providers and demanded far greater engagement from industries at every level of the process, from developing apprenticeship qualifications, to curricula design, shared delivery and paying new entrants. In England, every nationally accredited apprenticeship programme had to be replaced by new employer developed apprenticeship programmes. There are extensive rules and requirements around this process. Every apprenticeship must be focussed on an occupational role or closely related family of roles. They cannot be vague as in the past, they must be focussed on recognised industry roles in demand from employers. They can be anywhere between level 2 to level 7, although the government wishes to phase out level 2 apprenticeships in many sectors. The change was disruptive, and the process took five/ six years to settle in. Issues remain even now.

All UK employers with an annual salary bill of more than £3 million pay the Apprenticeship Levy at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's annual pay bill, less an offset of £15,000. This fund is used by the government to pay for all apprenticeship training, including for those who do not pay the levy. The government also has extra 'ringed fenced' apprenticeship funding.

There are four national bodies (with the exception of qualification agencies and awarding bodies) responsible for administering, approving funding, developing and quality assurance of delivery of apprenticeships. Each nation periodically offers incentives and payments for employers to take apprentices.

England – The Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education

An employer lead organisation set up by government, they maintain the occupational maps which underpin all technical education. They develop, approve, review and revise apprenticeship standards and technical qualifications with employers, including responsibility for T-Levels delivery in and for implementing an approval process for higher technical qualifications.

T-Levels (Technical Levels)¹³ are aligned with apprenticeship standard routes and will be delivered in schools (effectively pre- apprenticeship training) in England from 2022. Pilots are currently underway. There will be two-year courses with 20% work-based element. Government has started to map the T-level to

¹¹ This note is primarily written from an English perspective. England has the largest proportion of apprenticeships in delivery, and its apprenticeship ecosystem has undergone the most recent and significant change. The key for its success is employer lead, simplification of offer, and quality of delivery are replicated in the nations. Skills is a devolved issue so administration, accreditation and funding of apprenticeships differs in the nations.

¹² Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

¹³ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/t-levels/>

apprenticeship progression pathways although Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear (TCLF) are not yet included (TCLF 'make and design' will fall under the Craft and Creative' sector).

For the rest of the UK, BTECs¹⁴ (available across the UK), NVQs (available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and other vocational courses like Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) will continue to apply.

There are currently 427 apprenticeship standards in England¹⁵. Not all parts of the country have access to all apprenticeship standards. There is niche provision in every sector. In 2019/20, there were 719,000 people participating in an apprenticeship in England including 322,500 apprenticeships starting that year.

Scotland - Skills Development Scotland ¹⁶

SDS administers Scottish Apprenticeships on behalf of Scottish Government, which incorporates Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) pre-apprenticeship technical education in schools with work experience embedded in the programme, Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) work-based learning, and Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) apprenticeship with degree embedded. Last June SDS reported 30,000 recruits in apprenticeships for the 19/20 year¹⁷.

Wales

From 1 May 2020, the Welsh Government is the issuing authority in relation to apprenticeships. The qualification element is overseen by Qualifications Wales. Apprenticeship frameworks are available in 23 sectors, many of which have pathways within them¹⁸. Employers pay the apprentice and must contract them for at least 16 hours a week and pay at least the same rate as in England. In December 2020, the Welsh government reported the recruitment of 100,000 apprentices over the last five years¹⁹.

Northern Ireland

There are around 150 Apprenticeship frameworks and over 45 HLA frameworks (Higher Level 4 upwards) in Northern Ireland. Funding for the directed (or 'off-the-job') training element is provided by the Department for the Economy (DfE) depending on level and age. A total of 1,815 participants have started in the academic year to October 2020²⁰.

¹⁴ BTEC stands for the Business and Technology Education Council. BTECs are specialist work-related qualifications. They combine practical learning with subject and theory content.

¹⁵ The list is available at: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/>

¹⁶ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

¹⁷ More information on their site focused on young people can be found at <https://www.apprenticeships.scot/about/>

¹⁸ Funding rates per framework can be found at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/apprenticeship-frameworks-funding-rates.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-meets-apprenticeships-target>

²⁰ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/apprenticeshipsni-bulletin-2013-oct-2020.pdf>

How are new Accredited Apprenticeships created in England?

A minimum of 10 employers (up to 20) designs the apprenticeship programme (called a 'standard') and an occupational profile around the *Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours* that a qualified apprentice in that role would need to demonstrate on completion.

The group must have all sizes of employers present, with a Chair who commits to see the process through. Employers agree on the level, make the business case, take advice from training providers and regulators, then submit their programme to the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education²¹ for approval. If approved, VET and Employers can start to put in place and deliver the apprenticeship. The Institute has a set of criteria to assess whether the apprenticeship should be developed at all. This mainly relates to market need for the occupation²².

The basic elements of all apprenticeships (England – key features)

- Employers design, promote and recognise training for an occupational role(s);
- Apprenticeships can include another qualification. For example, where there is a statutory requirement or licence to practice;
- High degree of cooperation is required between employers and VET centre during delivery;
- 20% of the apprentice's time across the timeframe of the apprenticeship must be spent on off the job training. The company must pay the apprentice for a full-time role, so basically, they are paid to learn;
- Length: 12-36 months depending on level / complexity, some nations minimum 2 years;
- A standardised *End Point Test* (also created by the employer group) determines whether an apprentice 'graduates' and to what level (fail, pass, distinction). He/she must be assessed independently by all parties;
- Employers may also, subject to criteria, deliver some of the training and therefore retain some of the levy. There are many nuances of employer/training provider arrangements;
- The fees for the training element are set by the government. Complexity, cost of training tools (e.g., equipment) and other factors determine the payment award. Each apprenticeship is allocated to one of 30 funding bands, which range from £1,500 to £27,000;
- A training provider must be approved by the government for each apprenticeship standard they deliver;
- There are additional rules and finances for a minimum English and Maths topics if not already achieved by the apprentice and for learners with extra needs.

Notes on the apprenticeship levy

The government implemented an apprenticeship levy for UK employers in 2017. The levy is payable by all employers with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million at a rate of 0.5% of their total pay bill. Employers can draw back from their levy payments to pay for training costs for their chosen apprenticeships. The

²¹ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

²² Some interesting graphics of the occupational maps per industry route can be found at <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/occupational-maps/>

financial relationship for training is between the employer and the training provider. The majority of firms do not pay the levy as they are too small to qualify. They also draw their apprentice training costs from this levy 'pot'. Small employers pay 5% of the training costs for their apprentices. If the apprentice is 18 or under and the firm has less than 50 employees, they can draw the entire 10% training costs from the levy.

The training element/provision (20%) of nationally accredited apprenticeships is funded by the levy system and ringfenced funding to varying degrees across the nations. In England, the employer pays the salary of the apprentice for a full week and must pay the minimum legal national apprenticeship wage (in 2021 this is £4.15 /hour, which equates to around £9,000 per year, higher in subsequent years on a sliding age scale).

Employers have to pay the apprentice full time to include the training activities. This is funded by the employer. Levy paying employers can now also transfer up to 25% of their levy funds²³ to other employers.

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/transferring-apprenticeship-service-funds>