

The EU Pact for Skills – TLCF Regional Skills Partnership for Flanders

Part of the LSP for Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Ecosystem¹ (TCLF Skills Alliance)

This initiative is an integral part of the Large-Scale Partnership (LSP) for the Textile, Clothing, Leather, and Footwear ecosystem (the TCLF Skills Alliance). In Flanders, the partnership focuses specifically on the skills needs of the approximately 19,000 employees in the textile sector (T) and the fashion and clothing sector (C) for the coming years. While the leather (L) and footwear (F) industries have a limited presence in the region, they are explicitly included because the challenges regarding digitalisation and sustainability are nearly identical for these companies. The core objective is to ensure the long-term employability of all workers within the broad TCLF sector by anticipating the competencies that are and will be essential for the future.

The challenge

The Flemish TCLF sector is at a critical turning point. Radical industry shifts are directly impacting required competencies, highlighting several key challenges including recruitment and retention, an ageing workforce, and the need to adapt to the digital and green transition. The sector faces a genuine risk of losing vital professional expertise due to the retirement of older, experienced employees. The proportion of workers aged 50+ in the sector is considerably higher than the Flemish average in other secondary industries: among manual workers, this figure stands at 32% in the textile sector and 25.1% in the clothing sector, compared to a 20% average elsewhere. This gap is also evident among clerical workers, with 29.3% in textiles versus the 20% general average. Between 2025 and 2030, the sector will experience a significant replacement need. A large portion of the employees to be replaced are currently aged 55 or older; in the textile sector, this includes 41.4% of manual workers and 30% in the ready-to-wear sector. Simultaneously, attracting and retaining young talent remains a challenge.

Beyond demographic pressures, rapid technological developments are transforming job profiles. The automation of physically demanding tasks is changing competence requirements for both technical and managerial positions, necessitating continuous training in digital applications, data management, process automation and emerging technologies. All key positions require increased attention to a combination of hard and soft skills. This includes knowledge transfer, digital literacy, communication, project management, problem-solving and autonomy. As companies introduce new digital tools and working methods, they increasingly face challenges in ensuring that workers have the skills and confidence to use them effectively. This transition is accompanied by tensions between employees who recognise the need for digitalisation and those who resist it,

¹ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/textiles_en

potentially straining social cohesion in an increasingly digital and often remote work environment.

Finally, increasing European regulations and changing consumer expectations are forcing the sector to acquire in-depth knowledge of sustainable materials, circular production processes and corporate social responsibility. Creative and R&D functions must build expertise in the environmental impact of products and circular concepts such as cradle-to-cradle. Technically, this translates into a need for knowledge regarding sustainable energy consumption, waste management and emission reduction in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As sustainability requirements become increasingly embedded in business operations and regulatory frameworks, these competencies are becoming essential across a growing range of occupations within the sector.

These challenges are compounded by a degree of fragmentation within the regional skills ecosystem: schools, sectoral training centres and companies do not always systematically exchange practices or coordinate their efforts, which slows the pace at which new competencies can be scaled across the sector.

The ambition

Looking toward the future, the Flemish partnership aims to address the skills gaps and workforce challenges that affect the long-term competitiveness of the sector, including an ageing workforce, difficulties in attracting and retaining talent, the risk of knowledge loss, and the growing demand for digital, sustainable and transversal skills. The ambition is to **develop a sector that guarantees sustainable employability for all employees, regardless of their age or prior digital knowledge, while ensuring that companies have access to the skills needed for the green and digital transitions.**

To achieve this, the partnership seeks to **systematically embed professional expertise through effective knowledge retention and transfer, foster a culture of lifelong learning and agility, and support companies in adapting to technological and regulatory change.** In this context, committed leadership is essential to facilitate change, promote inclusive workplaces and strengthen the attractiveness of the sector for both current and future workers.

The proposal

To realise these ambitions, the sector has defined several strategic objectives as outlined below. These objectives address two interlinked dimensions: structural labour market challenges, such as the ageing workforce and difficulties in recruitment and retention, and the transformation of skills required by digitalisation and sustainability. The first dimension is primarily addressed through objectives 1 and 5, which strengthen knowledge continuity and cross-sectoral cooperation, while the second is addressed through objectives 2, 3 and 4, which focus on developing the digital, sustainable and soft skills the sector needs going forward:

- ✓ Securing knowledge through the development of structured methods and digital tools for knowledge transfer in companies, in particular to safeguard critical expertise as experienced workers retire and to accelerate the onboarding of new employees.

- ✓ Strengthening soft skills through a systematic approach to assessing and developing social, communicative and entrepreneurial skills, so that managers and employees are better equipped to navigate organisational change and digitalisation.
- ✓ Implementing targeted training policies to accelerate the uptake of digital and sustainable competencies, with specific attention to bridging the digital divide through basic training, enabling companies to respond more effectively to technological and regulatory change.
- ✓ Creating an environment where both formal and informal learning in the workplace are encouraged. This will be achieved by offering tailor-made vocational training and actively collaborating with educational institutions and knowledge centres to align curricula with evolving market needs.
- ✓ Promoting cross-sectoral knowledge sharing by collecting and disseminating best practices within and beyond the sector, thereby helping to reduce fragmentation across the regional skills ecosystem.

Activities

To achieve the objectives of the partnership and address the identified skills challenges related to ageing, recruitment and retention, digitalisation, sustainability and knowledge transfer, the partners will implement a coordinated set of activities structured around five areas of action.

1. Knowledge retention and transfer

The partnership will support companies in capturing and transferring critical expertise from experienced workers to new generations of employees. This will include the development of digital knowledge-retention tools such as instructional videos, photo-based work instructions, picture dictionaries and practical learning resources.

In addition, the partnership will pilot structured onboarding toolkits and mentoring schemes within participating companies. Dedicated workshops for HR professionals and managers will be organised to exchange good practices on onboarding, coaching and workplace learning. Companies will be supported in establishing mentoring programmes that facilitate the transfer of expertise from senior workers approaching retirement to younger employees.

2. Skills intelligence and future skills anticipation

To better understand current and future skills needs, the partnership will establish a structured skills intelligence process. This will include regular surveys of companies, consultations with social partners, focus groups with employers and workers, and exchanges with regional authorities and labour market actors.

The results will be analysed through the partnership's technical committee and translated into recommendations for training provision, curriculum updates and future partnership activities. The findings will also contribute to identifying emerging skills needs linked to digitalisation, sustainability and new business models in the TCLF sector.

3. Skills development for the green and digital transition

Partners will organise tailor-made training courses, workshops and information sessions focusing on digital skills, sustainability, circular economy principles, process automation and emerging technologies relevant to the TCLF sector. Particular attention will be given to supporting workers with limited prior digital experience and to strengthening the combination of technical, digital and transversal skills required by evolving job profiles.

To facilitate participation, the partnership will actively promote existing regional, national and European funding opportunities for training and workforce development. Partners will also engage with relevant public authorities and funding bodies to identify opportunities for additional support for skills development initiatives within the sector.

4. Strengthening lifelong learning and learning cultures

The partnership will develop practical tools, scans and assessment frameworks to identify skills needs and support the development of soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, collaboration and leadership.

Learning networks and communities of practice will be established to enable peer learning and the exchange of good practices between companies. Cross-sectoral learning activities, including study visits and benchmarking exercises with organisations from other industries, will be organised to support innovation, strengthen learning cultures and accelerate the adoption of effective workforce development practices.

5. Education-industry cooperation and talent attraction

The partnership will strengthen cooperation between companies, schools, higher education institutions and training providers to ensure that education and training provision reflects evolving sector needs. Activities will include joint curriculum discussions, knowledge exchange between education and industry, workplace learning opportunities, company visits and awareness-raising initiatives highlighting career opportunities in the TCLF sector.

These actions will contribute to attracting new talent, supporting workforce renewal and improving the long-term attractiveness of careers within the sector.

Track your impact

The progress of the partnership is closely monitored using the following KPIs for the period up to 2027:

KPI	Target	Timeframe for achievement	Key milestones
Members in the partnership	12 members	2027	2025: 10 2026: 1 2027: 1

			Total 12
Steering Committee meetings	3 meetings	2027	2025: 1 2026: 1 2027: 1
Technical Committee meetings	4 meetings	2027	2026: 2 2027: 2
Training needs survey	1 survey	2026	2026: 1
Trainings courses for (future) employees in the TCLF sectors on topics such as: - Upskilling or reskilling employees - Digital (basic) skills - Sustainability - Circularity - Mentoring - Soft skills	600 participants	2027	2026: 300 2027: 300
Provision of knowledge retention tools (e.g. picture dictionaries, instructional films, etc.)	25 tools	2027	2025: 5 2026: 10 2027: 10 Total: 25
Participation in and organisation of learning networks on themes such as: - Knowledge transfer and retention - Developing a learning culture - Formal, informal and social learning Cross-sectoral cooperation	6 networks	2026 2027	2026: 3 2027: 3
Participation in and organisation of events, information sessions and workshops on circularity	8 sessions	2027	2026: 4 2027: 4
Consultation on education and the labour market	2 consultations	2027	2026: 1 2027: 1

Partnership arrangements

The partnership is governed by a coordinating organisation and a steering group that determines its strategic direction. The collaboration is based on a broad representation of public and private organisations.

The Steering Committee consists of the following core partners:

- Cobot (Vocational training)
- Cefret (Vocational training)
- HOGENT (Higher education institution)
- Centexbel (Knowledge institution)
- IVOC (Vocational training)
- ACV-CSC METEA (Social partner – employees)
- FEDUSTRIA (Social partner – employers)
- POM West Flanders (Government)

In addition, the following organisations are part of the broader Partnership:

- ABVV-AC (Social partner – employees)
- SYNOVA (Social partner – employees)
- PTI Kortrijk – (Education institution)
- UGent CTSE – Centre for textile science and engineering (education institution)

The Partnership is overseen by two key bodies:

- The Steering Committee, composed of political representatives from the signatory organisations, provides strategic direction, validates annual action plans, and monitors progress using predefined evaluation indicators.
- The Technical Committee, including technical representatives from the signatory organisations and the other contributing stakeholders, is responsible for the operational implementation of the partnership's commitments and activities, ensuring that planned actions are carried out effectively.
- Meeting frequency: The Steering Committee meets at least once a year, while the Technical Committee meets at least twice a year and reports regularly to the Steering Committee.

Supported by:

Education



Government



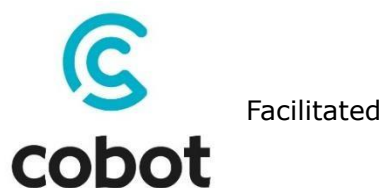
Knowledge institution



Social partners



Training partners



Facilitated



through:



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