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**European Confederation of the Footwear Industry**

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**ERASMUS+ DIGITALFABLAB: MAKING THE MOST OF AUGMENTED REALITY**

*On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2021, the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and partners from Italy, Portugal, Poland, Spain and Romania met remotely to kick-off the new **Erasmus+ project digitalFABLAB** “Footwear virtual learning-by-doing – Transition from analogue practices to digital education”. New, innovative Vocational Education and Training (VET) approaches must be developed for the European footwear sector to be able to attract new professionals, broaden the geographical scope of footwear VET provision, and adapt to a highly digitalized 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.*

**Digitalising Footwear VET**

The European footwear sector is a manufacturing-intensive sector where know-how and craftsmanship play a big role in its ability to craft and produce high-quality products. Today, more than 35% of footwear employees are over 50 years of age, making the sector at risk of losing precious know-how and skills. The sector needs to attract a new, young, and skilled generation of footwear professionals to maintain its competitiveness and keep up with the global competition. And the first step to attracting qualified professionals is to propose engaging footwear VET and broaden the geographical scope of footwear VET programmes to reach more people. In addition, COVID-19 has changed the rules of the game when it comes to education delivery, and a shift to more digital practices in footwear VET is also needed to keep up with this new reality. 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.

**Ensuring technology adoption**

Along with the digital Fablab, project partners will develop a joint international course, certified at national level and recognised at EU level, for the development of practical skills for footwear students and young 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 rights skills to produce quality footwear. By simulating real-world experiences in a digital environment with acute precision, the project’s digital FabLab will offer a stimulating experience to students by using new technology. 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.