

The bet of Digital Literacy for Albania's Footwear Sector

Albania's footwear industry—one of the country's most long-standing manufacturing pillars—is undergoing a fundamental transformation. As more companies shift from basic subcontracting models (M, CM, CMT) toward higher-value Full Package (FP) and Own Brand (OB) production, the sector is facing an urgent need for a better-trained, digitally competent workforce. Recent surveys among Albanian footwear companies highlight a common challenge: the growing shortage of qualified workers who can operate in increasingly digitalized production environments.

The move toward FP and OB models requires skills far beyond traditional stitching or assembly. Today's competitive footwear manufacturing relies heavily on digital design, CAD/CAM tools, automated cutting systems, advanced pattern engineering software, and integrated production planning platforms. Workers who can navigate these tools are essential for companies seeking to improve efficiency, reduce errors, and produce more complex, higher-value products.

Yet the skills gap remains significant. Many workers lack basic digital literacy, while younger employees often have general computer knowledge but limited exposure to sector-specific technologies. As a result, companies struggle to meet customer demands for speed, precision, and design innovation. This gap not only limits productivity but also constrains the industry's ability to move up the value chain and capture more of the final product value.

To bridge this divide, companies must invest intentionally in re-skilling and up-skilling their workforce. Internal training programs, partnerships with vocational schools, and participation in EU-funded initiatives can accelerate learning and adoption of new tools. Projects like Digi4Wearables play a crucial role by offering innovative training methodologies built around digital manufacturing, user-friendly learning tools, and inclusive approaches suitable for workers of all backgrounds.

Digital competence is no longer optional—it is a strategic necessity. Companies that embrace training, encourage digital learning, and integrate advanced design and production technologies will be the ones best positioned to compete regionally and internationally. Strengthening the skills foundation today will determine Albania's ability to build a modern, sustainable, and globally competitive footwear sector for the future.

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