

-Opinion article-

SAVE MEDITERRANEAN TEXTILE

Barcelona, 17 September 2020 – By **Anwar Zibaoui**, General Coordinator at [ASCAME](https://ascame.org) –

The Mediterranean textile sector has suffered millions in losses and company closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In an exemplary way, some companies have reoriented their production to respond to the health crisis, but the drop in demand affects all countries in the region, where the textile sector is very important for local economies.

Faced with this exceptional situation, the sector must rethink its position in the market and bet on sustainability. Textile is a key industry that employs millions of workers and can generate large numbers of jobs. The Mediterranean can compete with any region in the world in terms of speed of communications, logistics, infrastructure, skilled workforce, access to new and high-quality textile materials, creativity and talent to produce.

The manufacture of masks in the region was a breath of fresh air that helped lessen the impact of the coronavirus and demonstrated the imagination and inventiveness that emerged in the textile sector. Now it is necessary to have a real recovery plan and to take measures to save and restart the sector in this context of crisis. A new, strengthened development model that implies a more environmentally and social sustainable production model, also modernised by available technologies.

The textile sector, one of the most important industries in the world, is an industry valued at 2,500 million dollars that employs more than 60 million workers throughout the production chain, being a true engine of development for the Mediterranean region.

It is obvious that the Mediterranean textile industry should also redesign its social and environmental footprint, take into account natural resources, the problems of pollution, the exploitation of people or animals, and the uneven production and distribution of products. It is a global business valued at more than a trillion dollars, but it must be reinvented.

In addition, the fourth industrial revolution is already here and is impacting the textile business through digital manufacturing technologies, additive manufacturing, 3-D printing and new computational design techniques. Therefore, the time has come for the Mediterranean textile industry to come together to tackle the rapid pace of change and join the fourth revolution.

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Many measures can be taken, such as enhancing the value of "Made in Mediterranean" through public-private action in media communication, or the development of a label that symbolises quality, respect for the consumer and the environment.

It is also possible to take advantage of the Mediterranean's prominent position as a textile producer to strengthen the fight against smuggling and under-invoicing of imports, as well as to promote consumption, regional textile investments and sustainable partnerships between retailers and manufacturers, with a reorganisation of the production based on flexibility, speed and nearshoring. Furthermore, workers in supply chains must be protected and the lack of protection for informal workers addressed.

The pandemic has reversed globalisation, raising awareness of the importance of regional supply chains, shorter and simpler and therefore more efficient, taking advantage of local workforce, and promoting innovation and the development of new technologies.

It is convenient to support the return to the region of a certain number of industrial activities that promote the local Mediterranean economy. The Mediterranean offers the ideal location as an alternative base to Asia, thus shortening logistics circuits with the European Union and reducing the carbon footprint.

The fashion industry has reinvented itself numerous times. Now it must participate in this revolution towards sustainability, going beyond the next season. There are good prospects for the area if the competitiveness of Mediterranean exports is strengthened, partnerships between Mediterranean companies are promoted to better compete in the international market, and platforms are created to promote and attract investment in the region.

It is the moment to bet on young creatives who are passionate about new values in fashion, design, innovation and sustainability, providing them with tools and opportunities to influence decisions and create new perspectives. The Mediterranean textile sector must certainly explore the potential of collaboration.

For a long time, the textile and clothing industry has dominated commercial exchanges in the Mediterranean. Today it continues to play a leading role in improving economic conditions, especially in the south of the region, where the sector is of key importance. About 40% of the European textile and clothing trade goes to the Mediterranean region. The vision of a bilateral development aimed at creating a fully integrated market should create a win-win situation for both sides of the Mediterranean.

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