



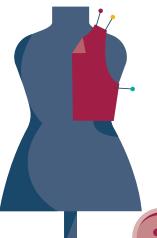
# BACKGROUND



extiles and apparel represent a critical economic sector in most Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. This sector has a lengthy history in the EaP region and has experienced different development stages. Over the recent decades, textiles and apparel in the EaP region have gone through radical transformations due to rapid technological advancements, the evolution of production costs, the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergence of new competitors from the global market. As the textiles and apparel sector continues to globally grow, the geographical distribution of economic opportunity is shifting toward Asia and countries in the EaP region.



**Moldova and Armenia** are emerging as important producing powers in the sector. However, in order for textile and apparel businesses in both countries to take advantage of all available opportunities and remain competitive in both domestic and global markets, it is important to assist their efforts in the areas of creativity, innovation, design, workforce skills development, and productivity. To support these efforts, RECONOMY facilitated the design and implementation of a pilot intervention with the main goal to increase economic opportunities by improving the competitiveness and sustainability in the textiles and apparel sector in Armenia and Moldova.



RECONOMY is an inclusive and green economic development program of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in partnership with local and regional organizations in the EaP and the Western Balkan countries. RECONOMY stands for "starting afresh," which refers to its role in revitalizing the developing economies in the regions.

The goal of RECONOMY is to enable women and youth, including the most disadvantaged and excluded, to benefit from economic opportunities by increasing their income and taking up decent and green jobs, inclusively and sustainably. To accomplish this goal, RECONOMY works along three workstreams:



**Services:** When businesses embrace the new or better services facilitated by RECONOMY, it is expected that their investment and growth would increase as a result, making the private sector more competitive. These changes on the demand side, however, are insufficient.



**Competencies:** Competencies of the labor force are required, as is the ability to join companies or launch one's own economic endeavors. These come from inclusive, affordable, and demand-driven skills and intermediation services and support systems, leading to the employability and mobility of women and youth.



**Influences:** Further, businesses benefit from an enabling environment that is tailored to their industry or company, as it influences their productivity and spurs them to do business in a better way.



### PPROACH OF RECONOMY

**RECONOMY** has used the inclusive systems approach - also known as the Market Systems Development (MSD) approach - to build initiatives that fit a specific country while examining how these can be adapted to other countries in the region, as opposed to choosing a one-sizefits-all strategy.

To effectively implement its activities, **RECONOMY** relies on creating partnerships to generate significant and sustainable results.





In response to the dynamic nature of the new reality, especially upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, RECONOMY evaluates concepts and initiatives that foster collaboration and quick learning. The program addresses common challenges and leverages common opportunities to benefit more than one country.



RECONOMY aims to serve as a multistakeholder initiative by bringing together and creating synergies among private-sector enterprises, publicsector institutions, academia, and civil society organizations. To support improvements in all systems and for all target groups, RECONOMY focuses on cross-cutting sectors and engages stakeholders that can anchor the common challenges and opportunities.

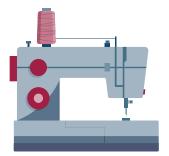


**RECONOMY** cooperates with local partners to develop innovative ideas and harness diversity to put forward initiatives with high potential for regional replication. The target groups of the program live in different countries and hence RECONOMY needs to check if the thematic issues in the different countries are relevant and feasible for stakeholders to play a role.





### THE TEXTILES AND APPAREL SECTOR **ARMENIA AND MOLDOVA**



the textiles and apparel sector significantly contributes to social and economic development in Armenia and Moldova. This sector is a significant source of formal jobs. The sector gives women, especially young ones from rural areas, important alternatives to work. It is essentially one of the few sectors in which manufacturers are evenly distributed across the countries, assisting in both territorial development and job creation for the populations of the rural areas. In addition, the sector plays a critical role in the modernization and innovativeness of the whole value chain. Both countries do have similarities and particularities as described below.







A significant part of the **Moldovan economy** is devoted to the textile, apparel, footwear, and leather goods (TAFL) sector, which accounts for almost 14.4% of the country's total exports. Approximately 80% are exported to European Union countries while the remaining to CIS countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) or to domestic consumption. This sector employs 29,600 people which counts for around 4% of the total national employment. For example, 84% of those employed are ruralbased and occupied by women. Since 2000, the sector has had ongoing growth that has outpaced Moldova's overall sector growth by a wide margin. Approximately 680 businesses, ranging in size from micro to large, are already active in the sector. Moldovan businesses of this sector fall into two types of business models. First, micro and small businesses with a domestic focus that uses private labels or regional brands made primarily of locally sourced materials and trims. Second, medium to large businesses with a regional and/or international focus that are large enough to manufacture for export and occasionally export their own brands to surrounding countries.

The textiles and apparel sector in Armenia crucial to the country's economy, strategically. This sector, which makes up 2% of the manufacturing industry, is constantly expanding. The output volumes for the apparel sector rose from 56.3 million USD in 2019 to 59.8 million USD in 2020 while the production of apparel increased by 28% in the sector between 2018 and 2020.

The State Revenue Committee of Armenia estimates that the value of apparel exports in 2019 was around USD 166 million, representing around 6.6% of the total export on the national level. Approximately 71% of the entire realized production for the same year was exported. Over the years 2015 to 2017, this sector's exports increased on average by 35% to 43%. In addition to its impact on exports and production value, this sector makes a significant contribution to employability. It employed 8,039 people in 2019, a 13% rise from the previous year. There are currently 106 large and small businesses in Armenia's textiles and apparel sector. Large businesses have primarily concentrated on producing outerwear while there are numerous home-based makers, small and medium-sized businesses, and local retailers who sell their products locally.







There is enormous potential for development in Moldova and Armenia's textiles and apparel sector. To unleash this potential, a series of challenges need to be addressed.

First, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in this industry lack the innovative skills, thinking, and knowledge needed to modernize their operations and compete on a global scale. Armenian SMEs are now operating much below capacity as compared to international ones, and their products are less competitive in international markets.

**Second**, there is a significant gap between demand and supply, as enterprises operating in the textile and fashion industry are not linked to the education system (art universities, colleges and other closely connected fields of study). As a result, businesses lack skilled labor, while education systems provide students with theoretical knowledge but not enough practical expertise.

**Third**, there is a lack of regional/international networking and partnerships between textile/apparel producers and sellers that could facilitate the internationalization of Armenian potential brands. Large companies have primarily focused on the 👂 production for other labels (toiling), while smaller producers, SMEs, and designers sell their products mainly locally.

Fourth, the fashion textiles sector is the second most polluti sector in the world a so it is in Armenia an Moldova. This requires special attention in incorporating princity of circularity in orde to make the sector sustainable and Fourth, the fashion and second most polluting sector in the world and so it is in Armenia and Moldova. This requires incorporating principles of circularity in order competitive.



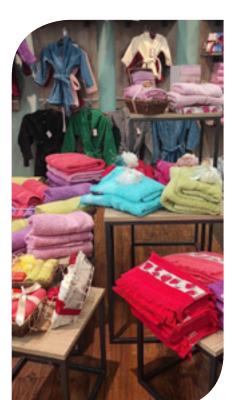
To leverage the potential and address the challenges of the textiles and apparel sector in ` Armenia and Moldova, RECONOMY facilitated the design and implementation of a pilot intervention that aimed to increase economic opportunities by improving competitiveness and sustainability in the sector. To do so, RECONOMY partnered with the Fashion and Design Chamber (FDC) in Armenia and the

Design and Technology Excellence Center "ZIPhouse" in Moldova.



## 4. FROM DESIGN TO PRODUCTION: CASE OF ARMENIA

he FDC is a non-profit organization founded in November 2017 by a group of Armenian designers. The FDC's mission is to strengthen the Armenian fashion and textile industry by providing them with the skills and tools they need to fully integrate into both domestic and global creative ecosystems. FDC unites more than 200 designers, SMEs, and textile producers by helping to establish a network between Armenian fashion companies/designers and the foreign international community.



RECONOMY has been partnered with FDC in addressing the challenges of the textiles and apparel sector in Armenia in the following ways.

First, support the development of business, technical, and sustainable fashion skills among Armenian designers, students, and sector representatives.

In this framework, RECONOMY supported the development of training modules for a variety of topics, including "Social Media Marketing," "How to Get the First Profits," and "How to Make the Fashion Industry Sustainable?". These modules are designed based on the needs of the

industry and have been used to steadily strengthen the knowledge and capacities of enterprises operating into the fashion and textile industry and those aspiring to join the market. In this intervention, 50 participants enrolled in these three training courses and they were equipped with all the theoretical knowledge starting from how to prepare a business plan, how to make the business profitable, how to use social media for promoting and utilize it as a sale channel. These training courses were attended by 30 students, 10 starts-ups and 10 businesses with some years of experience into the market. Close to 99% of participants were females.





Sarin is one of the beneficiaries of the Social Media Marketing course. She was capable of taking her company to the next level with the new knowledge and skills she acquired during the course.



Sarin was only 18 years old when she and her family were displaced from Syria to Armenia in 2016 because of the conflict. Sarin and her family started over e new life in Armenia. She graduated from the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction. At the age of 24, right after the 44-day war of 2020, Sarin decided to start her own business in the textile industry by producing and selling bedlinen, pillows, sheets, and towels for the Armenian market. Initially, she employed three women in the production unit and two others in the physical shop. She was seeing good growth in her business.

However, because of the market constraints primarily due to the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the COVID-19 pandemic, she tried to diversify her selling channels to reach out to more customers. To achieve this, she began using social media, particularly Instagram. Her company did not, however, scale up significantly. Sarin had a keen business sense and guickly saw a piece missing from her business model's overall picture. She decided to enroll in some training courses to get deeper knowledge on the marketing strategies that could in turn help to reshape her current business marketing strategy. Hence, in February 2022, she enrolled in the Social Media Marketing training course supported by RECONOMY.

During this course, she learned how to develop her business goals, analyze her target audience, generate compelling social media content, analyze, and choose the best social media platforms to market and sell her products, and lastly assess the performance of her marketing campaign.

Before Sarin undertook the training, her business had a social media marketing strategy, but it did not seem to be the proper one. During the course, Sarin realized that she was promoting and selling products, utilizing improper social media platforms, and targeting the wrong market niche. For example, Sarin had been using Instagram to advertise and sell, but after talking with the trainer, she understood that her target market was women between the ages of 25 and 45 from Armenia, and that, according to the statistics, in Armenia this age group was primarily using Facebook. The knowledge that Sarin gained over the training, helped her to create a new social media marketing strategy which was completely different from the previous one.

It has been almost one year since Sarin undertook that training which completely changed her business social media marketing strategy. With all these changes into the social media marketing strategy, her business turnover has increased by almost 40%. In addition, Sarin hired 10 additional women (8 for the manufacturing unit and 2 for the shop) due to the rise in demand. Currently, she pays them around 400 euros a month.

With all these positive developments, Sarin plans to broaden the range of products by starting to make underwear for the Armenian market.





Meri is another beneficiary who at the beginning was struggling to manage her informal small business. With all the knowledge and skills she acquired throughout the course of "Financial Management for Small and Medium Enterprises", she not only formalized her business but also created a successful business model.

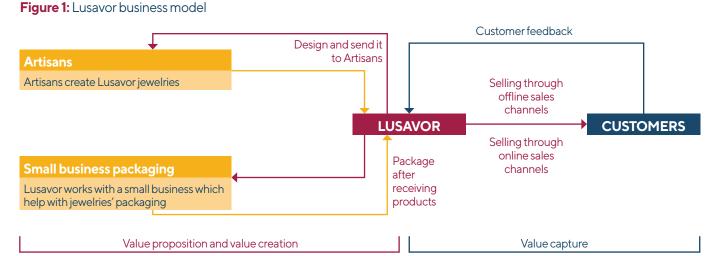
### "Lusavor" - the Bright Story of Jewelry Brand of Meri Petrosyan

Meri, a passionate woman about design and inspired by fashion, started creating her jewelry line in June 2021. She began making rings and later expanded her product line to earrings as well. Her education background had nothing to do with her passion. She has a bachelor's degree in intercultural communication and a master's in public administration.

"Everything appeared simple to me at first. Nevertheless, things became extremely complicated as the activity scaled up. I had no knowledge or experience in how to calculate the items' cost and eventually how to calculate their price. I was so passionate about what I was doing. That, however, was insufficient to manage my activity successfully financially".

At that time, Meri was eager to learn more on the financial aspects of her business (an unregistered business). It was March 2022, when she heard about the course on Financial Management for Small and Medium Enterprises supported by RECONOMY and executed by "Call to Action", a Digital Marketing company in Armenia. So, Meri enrolled in the three-day financial training course, which was followed by 10-day individual consultancy sessions. She learned a lot about financial management, for example how to calculate each item's variable cost, which helped her to define the price and profit margin. In addition, she was introduced to all the legal steps to register her (unregistered) business and find a suitable legal form.

After the training, Meri felt well prepared to fully formalize her business. Hence, in the summer of 2022, she registered her activity as a private entrepreneur and gave it the name "Lusavor". Over the training, Meri gained knowledge on how to be fully compliant with legal obligations and avoid running into problems with tax officials. Meri is currently paying taxes through her registered firm and contributing to the jewelry-making supply chain. She has thus established a successful business model,, as illustrated in the following figure. Meri has built business relationships with the proper artisans. The artisans start producing final products after receiving jewelry design specifications from Lusavor. Lusavor pays artisans 25% of its turnover. Lusavor has also established relationships with a company that provides packaging support. To reach its final customers, Lusavor uses both online and offline channels. Customer feedback helps Lusavor improve its products to meet customers' needs.





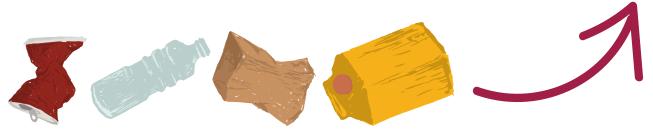




### **RECONOMY** supported the process of:

- designing a training package on sustainability; (i)
- developing the methodology to develop the (ii) "TRASH to Treasure" exhibition and:
- (iii) developing the photography campaign of the exhibition so as to promote the activity and raise awareness about circularity.

This new training module on sustainability and the exhibition was executed by Made-vel-e, a social enterprise based in the town of Dilijan, Armenia. In addition to providing practical advice on how to promote sustainability in the textile and apparel sectors, the "TRASH to Treasure" exhibition sought to create a line of jewelry from recycled paper and plastic. 10 students and 5 professional designers attended two workshops of the exhibition. The awareness campaign of this exhibition reached to more than 40,000 people though social media channels.

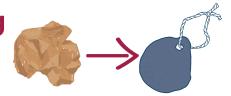






# Tatev was one of the entrepreneurs that participated in the sustainability training and exhibition's workshop. Upon the completion of both the theoretical and practical course, Tatev started producing circular products for her business.

### Small Shop Turning Recycled Paper into Valuables



It was December 2021 when Tatev Chaltakhchyan established her small business and started producing handmade jewelries and ceramics. In May 2022, Tatev was scrolling through her Facebook page when she came across a post that Natacha Kalfayan, a prominent Armenian fashion designer, had published. Participants were invited to attend Natacha's session on making jewelry from recycled paper and plastic. This 20-day workshop was created and developed by Natacha, the founder of Madevel-e, with the support of RECONOMY. By attending this workshop, Tatev learned how to apply the processes for turning recycled paper into a final product. The workshop offered a practical and professional guide to creating jewelry utilizing eco-production methods and other cuttingedge sustainable techniques. The entire process had so inspired Tatev that she made the decision to adopt those methods for creating recycled products in her small business right after the workshop.

Tatev began working in partnership with banks and governmental institutions to take all the recycled paper for free and use it to make bookmarks, coasters, envelopes, Christmas tree ornaments, cards, jewelry, and other related items. Tatev states that currently recycling production contributes 30% of the company's revenue and almost eight months after the workshop, her business revenues have scaled up by 30 %. For this new production line Tatev hired a permanent woman employee, who receives monthly salary of 120,000 AMD (around 270 euro) for her job. Tatev has been able to sell circular items by utilizing both individual and business clientele. For instance, Tatev sells circular items to a lot of Armenian restaurants or hotels, which have a souvenir shop for their visitors.

In addition to offering circular products for sale, Tatev has been highly promoting the circular economy after her participation in the workshop. She frequently organizes master classes for children in their schools or during different touristic festivals, where she also discusses the benefits of circular economy.







# Another beneficiary of the sustainability training course and the exhibition workshop was Ellada. She was so inspired through the course that she decided to open an online platform to sell circular products. The story that follows explains this in more detail.

### Turning Waste into Jewelry



In May 2022, Ellada Rafayelidu, a 37-year-old resigned kindergarten teacher, learned from a friend about the workshop on jewelry-making out of recycled paper and plastic. Ellada decided to attend the workshop facilitated by Natacha Kalfayan, a successful designer in Armenia. The workshop offered a practical and professional guide to creating jewelry and other staff by using eco-production techniques and other sustainable innovative tools.

Ellada was amazed at how "waste" was turned into necklaces and other jewelry. As a result, she and her friend organized a summer camp for 20 children from different regions of Armenia (with Greek origin) and during it instructed them in the use of recycled paper to make cards, bookmarks, and other items. This was the first time that children were introduced to such important ideas.

Motivated by Natacha's work, Ellada also began considering how she could use the knowledge and positive energy she had acquired during the workshop, to create a related business idea. After some brainstorming with Natacha, she decided to work on developing a website (https://rafailidou.com) to promote and sell circular products (starting with jewelry made by waste), which will become operational once she shapes her business model. Because of her Greek origin, she is initially targeting the Greek market. She has a team of friends and family in Greece who will be promoting this website to tourists and other potential customers. The website will also serve as an intermediation platform for Armenian and other nationality designers to sell their circular products. Currently, Ellada has established cooperation with six designers, five from Armenia and one from India. Her vision is to increase this number and turn the website into a global platform for selling circular products.

Ellada speaks passionately about this idea and believes that it will soon become a sustainable business model that promotes circularity in the textile and fashion industries.





Third, connect the three key players in the fashion industry- companies, designers, and students to enhance the creativeness of each stage of the value chain.

Fourth, RECONOMY has been introducing the FDC to a diverse group of regional partners in order to identify partnership opportunities.

RECONOMY helped the FDC to design and launch a unique project that brings together textile companies, a team of designers and experts, and graduates/students. This project, the implementation of which has already begun, has created working groups within each chosen textile producing company, which makes together design teams with business staff to support collaboration and knowledge exchange and create an appropriate production cycle beginning with trend forecasting, moldboard development, sketching, sample design, and technical sketching and concluding with production. Strengthening this triangle relationships, will ease the transition of students from university to labor market, thus increasing their employability, will increase the creativity and innovation of the production cycle and finally the likelihood for the companies to compete internationally, will be increased.

More particular, the FDC is collaborating with the ZIPHOUSE Center of Excellence in Technology and Design in Moldova which was made possible with the support of RECONOMY, to share experiences and solutions to common textile and fashion industry difficulties. They have now joined forces in order to apply for and work on regional projects. Finally, this collaboration has provided FDC's members with additional partnership options in Moldova.

FDC is trying to make enterprises in this sector more capable of competing not only nationally, but also internationally, with the new training courses' modules and innovative approaches for bringing students, designers, and businesses together. The FDC is trying to change Armenian business models from being outsourcing service providers for well-known multinational brands to businesses that can control all stages of their value chain, from designing to creating and selling their national brands.

## 5 FROM DESIGN TO PRODUCTION: CASE OF MOLDOVA

n 2015, the Technical University of Moldova established the Design and Technology
Excellence Center "ZIPhouse". ZIPhouse, as a fashion innovation platform which ties academia-industry actors, provides opportunities to young designers, start-ups, professionals, and academic staff, to upscale their technological and design skills. ZIPhouse mission is to connect the Moldovan fashion with the global fashion world. To accomplish this mission, ZIPhouse works around the following pillars:



**Community building:** ZIPhouse has established this collaboration platform to provide professionals and young designers from the fashion industry with a space to work, exchange knowledge, and cooperate.

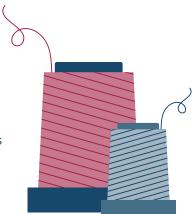


Acceleration Program: ZIPhouse has created an acceleration program that allows developing young designers and start-ups the chance to upscale and turns their business concepts into reality. This program helps them by providing mentorship for improving their business models as well as business support chances to investigate new sales channels and enter untapped markets.



**Fashion Academy:** ZIPhouse improves the skills and knowledge of companies' staff through quality advanced technical education Fashion Leadership Program.

One of the pillars that ZIPhouse has been increasingly paying special attention is the **Acceleration Program which targets start-ups**, **designers and SMEs**. Since 2017, ZIPhouse has been developing its annual ZIP Acceleration Program with the goal of assisting young designers, start-ups, and SME's in enhancing their entrepreneurship skills with the guidance of local and international professionals. More than ever, the textiles and apparel sector is required to undergo a digital transformation process in order to keep up with international trends in digital sales due to the market's shifting direction following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it was important that this program pay particular attention to sustainability principles, which are barely implemented in the Moldovan fashion businesses.









RECONOMY at this time provided support to ZIPhouse in creating this customized accelerated program which targeted both (i) start-ups/designer and (ii) interested people as well from the local fashion community. The acceleration program for start-ups/designers brought together 13 participants (five start-ups and eight designers). These 13 participants went through an eight months' program (September 2021 till April 2022) and gained new knowledge on branding, legal advising, marketing, funding opportunities, sales and retailing, wholesaling, accounting, sustainable fashion and circularity, social media management, product development, and pricing strategies. In the context of Moldova, this program has two notably innovative developments. First, the fashion industry's circularity was first made more well-recognized. Some of the participants have begun applying these principles to their business processes already. Second, the ability of participants to digitize certain of their value chains was also improved.

Additionally, ZIPhouse created a number of training sessions (during the same 8 months of the implementation) for those members of the fashion industry who expressed interest in joining. As a result, 68 members of the fashion community (unemployed women, employees of companies, and business owners) completed these training sessions and acquired expertise in marketing, pricing strategy, accounting, fashion sustainability, and legal counseling. Because of these training sessions, businesses have hired more people and experienced a rise in sales. This immediate effect portends a large long-term influence on sector growth and employability.

With all these new courses available, professors at the Technical University in Moldova have starting to teach their students all the crucial information found in training materials created under RECONOMY. Soon, the Technical University will start procedures of formally incorporating all this new knowledge into the educational curriculum. This systemic change will positively influence the textiles and fashion sector in Moldova by becoming up to date with global trends on fashion development and by increasing the willingness of youth to work into the Moldovan fashion businesses. To this perspective, just recently RECONOMY has supported ZIPhouse in acquiring special access to an international library called WGSN that is the world's leading consumer trend forecaster. It provides global trend insights, expertly curated data and industry expertise which will help ZIPhouse and students at the Technical University to understand consumer behavior and lifestyles and therefore create the right products.







In addition to the acceleration program, ZIPhouse has been closely collaborating as a market actor with the FDC in Armenia to put into place a special program supported by RECONOMY, which addresses the lack of communication between large producers and creative teams (designers, illustrators, content creators, etc.). This lack of communication has created unfashionable, untrendy, and unmarketable products and collections. This unique project has brought together teams of designers and professionals, textile firms, and students to collaborate in a way that has never before been possible. Four teams comprised of designers/mentors, students, and graphic designers have already been formed by ZIPhouse and are working with four Moldovan businesses. This practice has made it easier for large producers and designers to communicate and work together, as well as for large producers to trust, value, and understand the significance of the high value of local designers' work in the production process. This success will also serve as a model for replication to other businesses. A proper production cycle, starting from trend forecasting, moldboard development, drawing, sample design, and technical sketching up to manufacturing, has been made possible by these four working teams. Finally, under this special project, four new collection contents have been established which are to be promoted internationally. The final exposure of the four collections will take place at WHITE exhibition in Milano, during 24-27th of February 2023.

## 6. KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSIONS

he textiles and apparel sector in **Armenia and Moldova** have significant growth potential. For this sector to compete on a national and international scale, it is crucial to increase the number of value-added products using cutting-edge technologies, improve design, creativity, skills, and knowledge of people, facilitate internationalization and collaboration, support the development of educational systems, establish local and regional networks, and encourage the sector to move towards more sustainable production.





Armenia and Moldova have now set the groundwork for reaching these standards, with the facilitative support of RECONOMY. The staff of SMEs, start-ups, designers, and students have started increasing their skills and knowledge due to the proactive role of skills development providers. This case study includes examples of each of these success stories. In addition, both countries now have more knowledge about sustainable production and digitization, which will help the textiles and apparel sector to be more competitive and improve both countries' images. Finally, the hitherto nonexistent "businesses-designers-students" model has been established and is now operational in both countries.

This case study and its human stories demonstrate the positive effects that this intervention has had on increasing the sustainable distribution of economic possibilities to women and young people, particularly the disadvantaged and excluded groups.

