

TEXTILE IN TUSCANY

How the sector operates

The sector is mainly concentrated in the Prato district, where the number of units and workers has strongly reduced in recent decades, and the remaining firms have partly externalized production and partly entered niche quality markets. Production is still based on the division of the manufacturing process between leader firms – focused on customer relations, intangible functions like planning and quality control, and the manufacturing of the “noblest” products – and third-party subcontractors.

The change and expansion of the target market involved the reorganization of both production and marketing, especially as regards customer care and quality control, and the computerization of the production processes, with subsequent cost cuts and selection of sub-suppliers. A strength of the Prato district is the diversified technical expertise which, apart from the impoverishment due to the general decline and to the loss of attractiveness for the new generation, requires today specialist training programs. In fact, to make a leap in quality, the most dynamic firms necessitate employees with improved professional competencies and profiles.

Skill needs: strategic competencies and job profiles

The skills required in the textile sector are very specific, because firms are engaged in separate phases of the production process, and even because they tend to gain a distinctive position within that single phase. In summary, the key aspects concerns (i) **production** and (ii) **marketing**.

In the production phase, the most demanded technical positions should couple specific skills and a general knowledge of the whole process. The role of the local institutes as recruitment sources has been partly undermined, due to a reorganization process and a reduction in the number of available graduates – students tend to choose other subjects, or enrol in university. While the current crisis is changing job expectations, a good **career guidance** policy might describe the transformation of traditional vocations, and offer youth more information on the early, professional development opportunities these careers can promise. The training of production technicians (the most cited being **chemist dyers, combbers, spinners, chief engineers**) can only be completed through in-company work experiences. A profession peculiar to the Prato district needing skill updates is the **dispositore** (plant manager), i.e. the person in charge of assigning tasks, providing technical instructions and guaranteeing the product’s quality: to meet the higher required standards with quicker response rates and reduced warehouse capacity, he must possess much more advanced technical competencies than in the past, especially as regards logistics and products’ details. Also required are workers with a professional profile enabling them to mediate along the different production phases and sub-supplier levels. Research and planning analysts are also fundamental, in particular to check on the compliance with environmental and health standards.

In the marketing phase, due to the increased importance of customer care and to the diversified demands from global buyers, the skills required include the knowledge of foreign languages, a sector-specific training and a technical knowledge of products.

Firms have a clear understanding of the training needs required, and often their quest for qualified personnel proves difficult. A faster and better performing training system should be more closely connected to the territory, focused on the in-company experience, and play a complementary role with technical

institutes, being more capable of renovating according to production changes and more attractive for the new generation.

A taxonomy of the required professional qualifications

The table below combines data from three sources: the mandatory employment notices from firms to job centres, introduced in 2008; the IRPET survey on the training needs of the Tuscan firms having recorded higher-than-average turnover and employment rates after the crisis; the focus groups with firms belonging to strategic sectors for regional growth. The quantitative and qualitative data collected were used to classify occupations by employment capacity (number of newly employed), and job stability (combination of days worked and contract type).

Overview of the most sought-after and in-demand textile jobs*

		Job stability	
		Medium-high	Medium-low
Employment capacity (number of newly employed)	Medium-large	Hand and hand-loom weavers and knitters Artisan tailors, cutters, pattern makers and hatters Handicraft workers in fabric, leather and related materials Linen makers, manual embroiderers and related workers Industrial sewing-machine operators, fabric clothes and similar Fibre preparers Textile printing machine operators	Power-loom and weaving- and knitting-machine operators Spinning- and winding-machine operators Other textile and apparel machine workers, and related workers Non-qualified industrial workers and related workers Textile dry-cleaning, bleaching and dyeing machine operators Packaging equipment operators and industrial packaging workers Composite products assemblers Porters, deliverers and related workers
	Medium-small	Industrial designers and related workers Manufacturing technicians Upholsterers and mattress makers Suitcase and bag makers, and related workers (even in pleather and cloth articles) Mechanical technicians Footwear craftsmen and workers, and the like Machine operators in other rubber product manufacturing Off-set and rotary printing operators	Leather- and fur-products machine operators in large-scale processing and production Production planning technicians Laundry and dyeing artisans and workers Painters, sculptors, designers and restorers of cultural goods Application technical experts Chemical technicians Tool-makers and related workers Chemists and related professionals

*Key professional qualifications, whatever class they belong, are highlighted in bold.

The analysis of recruitment capacity resulted in two occupation groups (medium-large and medium-small), depending on the number of newly employed (larger/smaller than the median value). The analysis of job stability resulted in two occupation groups (medium-high and medium-low), depending on the value of the composite indicator (higher/lower than the median value).

Territorial localization

The map below shows the location of local units in the sector, highlighting the most dynamic firms in terms of turnover rate and number of workers for the period 2007-2011. This graphical representation allows to appreciate the degree of diffusion/concentration of production activities on a regional basis.

The textile firms

