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DesignSmart

Empowering VET and Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Fashion Innovation

WP2 - Sustainable Fashion and AI Curriculum

DESK RESEARCH REPORT Cyprus

Prepared by People Forward

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1 SUSTAINABLE FASHION

1.1 National context and relevance of the sector

In 2023, the domestic fashion economy was dominated by retail. Retail sales of clothing (NACE 47.71) counted 1,049 enterprises employing 5,085 people; retail footwear and leather goods (NACE 47.72) counted 223 enterprises employing 1,301 people. The average store size was small (roughly 5–6 employees per enterprise), consistent with a micro-enterprise retail model¹. (Statistical Service of Cyprus, 2025). Manufacturing was small and fragmented. In 2023, manufacturing divisions 13–15 (textiles, apparel, leather/footwear) comprised 273 enterprises and employed 888 people, with very small average firm sizes in apparel and leather/footwear². Trade flows confirm high import dependence and limited export scale. In 2024, Cyprus imported €483.8m of “Textiles and textile articles” (HS XI) and €135.6m of “Footwear, headgear...” (HS XII), while exporting €23.9m (HS XI) and €10.0m (HS XII)³.

The waste system is important. In 2023, municipal solid waste generation was 653 kg per person, one of the highest in the EU, and 76.8% of treated municipal waste was disposed of in landfills. This raises the value of prevention, repair, reuse, and textile-specific separate collection and sorting capacity.⁴ Policy direction is clear: focus first on (1) retail and importers (product and information standards, take-back, consumer information), (2) textile waste systems (separate collection, sorting, reuse, preparation for recycling), (3) SMEs and skills (repair, resale, eco-design capability), and (4) government demand (green public procurement for textiles).

Cyprus’ “fashion economy” should be read primarily as a retail and trade system, supported by a small local manufacturing base and an even smaller repair and second-hand segment.

In 2023, the largest employment and enterprise concentrations relevant to fashion were:

- Retail sale of clothing (NACE 47.71): 1,049 enterprises; 5,085 employed.
- Retail sale of footwear and leather goods (NACE 47.72): 223 enterprises; 1,301 employed.
- Wholesale of clothing and footwear (NACE 46.42): 127 enterprises; 376 employed.
- Wholesale of textiles (NACE 46.41): 43 enterprises; 134 employed

On the production side in 2023 (industrial survey):

- Textiles (NACE 13): 88 enterprises; 549 employed; production value €38.1m.
- Wearing apparel (NACE 14): 171 enterprises; 289 employed; production value €12.2m.
- Leather and related products (NACE 15): 16 enterprises; 30 employed; production value €1.5m.
- Footwear is mainly produced for retail and imports, but local production exists: in 2023, “Manufacture of footwear” (NACE 15.20) comprised 13 enterprises employing 28 people.

Value-chain structure: The 2023 trade survey shows retail clothing reached €588.7m, footwear/leather goods €149.1m, and wholesale clothing/footwear €46.42m. Cyprus’s fashion sector relies on imports, has many small retailers, has limited local manufacturing, and is seeing growing digital sales. Domestic activity in textiles, apparel, and footwear exists but is small, mainly in apparel and leather/footwear. Wholesale of textiles (46.41) and clothing/footwear (46.42) act as intermediaries, employing around 510 people across 170 firms, with a turnover of €89.5m. Retail employs 6,386 people and has about €737.9m in turnover. E-commerce signals

¹ https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/ENTERPRISES%26EMPLOYMENT-ECON_ACT_NACE-2018_2023-110925.xlsx

² https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/INDUSTRY-INDUSTRIAL_SURVEY_RESULTS-A2023-100925.xls

³ https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/INTRA_EXTRA_EU_TRADE-DEC24-120325.pdf

⁴ https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/Municipal_Waste-2023-EN-130325.pdf





include 402 enterprises and 608 employees in mail-order and online retail, not fashion-specific, with 23.5% of firms receiving online orders in 2022. Second-hand retail had 56 enterprises, 75 employees, and €3.1m turnover; “Repair of footwear and leather goods” had 23 enterprises and 30 employees

Sustainability trends: EU policy drives sustainable fashion in Cyprus through three key areas: product sustainability, eco-design, microplastics, green claims, and producer responsibility. The EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles aims to make textiles more durable, repairable, and recyclable by 2030. (European Commission, 2022, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/textiles-strategy_en).

Traceability and transparency. The European Union has adopted the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), which sets a framework for product requirements and enables tools such as the digital product passport for priority product groups. Textiles are explicitly in scope as a high-impact product group in EU policy planning. (European Union, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1781/oj>).

Textile waste systems and circularity. EU waste law mandates separate textile collection from 1 January 2025, prompting Member States to develop systems for reuse and recycling. In 2025, the EU revised the Waste Framework Directive to boost circularity and cut waste. Cyprus-specific readiness is mixed:

- Strategic direction exists. Cyprus adopted the circular economy action plan for 2021–2027, coordinated by the Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment⁵.
- Waste system performance is a constraint. Cyprus generated 625k tonnes of municipal waste in 2023 (653 kg per capita), and landfill remained the dominant treatment route for treated waste (76.8%)⁶.
- Some infrastructure steps include textiles explicitly. The Department of Environment highlighted a “Green Kiosk” model for sorting at source, including textiles.⁷

National and regional characteristics

Cyprus has cultural assets that align naturally with sustainable fashion, even if industrial scale is limited. These assets mainly sit in craft, heritage techniques, and tourism-linked retail. Traditional craft is considered “slow fashion”. UNESCO recognises “Lefkara lace (Lefkaritika)” as intangible cultural heritage, associated with embroidery and textile craftsmanship. This reinforces a policy case for heritage-based, low-volume, high-value production and authentic provenance in fashion and accessories⁸. Potential for rural value creation. Cyprus’ national intangible heritage inventory includes “Fythkiotika weaving” (traditional weaving), which offers another anchor for place-based sustainable textiles and visitor-economy linkages⁹. Regional disparities in fashion employment and enterprise counts (by district, 2023) are unspecified in sources located for this brief. A district-level establishments dataset exists but is outdated (2016) and is not used here for current allocations.

1.2 National policies and regulations

⁵ European Environment Agency, 2024, https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/circular-economy/country-profiles-on-circular-economy/circular-economy-country-profiles-2024/cyprus_2024-ce-country-profile_final.pdf

⁶ Statistical Service of Cyprus, 2025, https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/Municipal_Waste-2023-EN-130325.pdf

⁷ Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, 2024, <https://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/environment/environmentnew.nsf/All/280FE55298FC03CFC2258BE3004918FF?OpenDocument=>

⁸ UNESCO, 2009, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/lefkara-lace-or-lefkaritika-and-tirl-00255>

⁹ Cyprus National Commission for UNESCO, n.d., <https://www.unesco.org.cy/en/fythkiotika-weaving-2/>





EU market rules define Cyprus' operating environment. The EU textiles strategy and ESPR framework will shift compliance expectations for importers and retailers on product durability, information, and substantiation of sustainability claims¹⁰. Waste regulation is an immediate operational pressure point. Separate collection for textiles from 2025 requires coordination with municipalities, collection operators, and downstream sorting and treatment capacity¹¹.

- At the national level, Cyprus's waste management policy is framed explicitly around the waste hierarchy (prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery, disposal). (Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment)¹².
- Public procurement: Green public procurement is a direct instrument for sustainable fashion, especially for uniforms and textiles in the public sector. Cyprus has a Green Public Procurement National Action Plan, with the Department of Environment involved in integrating EU GPP criteria and with textiles listed among product categories¹³. (INTERACT/CDE material, 2018).
- Funding and capability support: Cyprus can link sustainable fashion support to broader SME finance and innovation measures.

However, policy-relevant funding channels exist: The Recovery and Resilience Facility, channelled through the Cyprus plan, includes support for SMEs' access to finance (€43.4m) and for research and innovation investment (€74m). This can be directed towards circular business models, resale platforms, repair services, and compliance systems. Skills programmes specific to sustainable fashion (repair, textile sorting, eco-design) are unspecified in official national sources captured for this brief.

1.3 Existing initiatives and projects

The initiatives below are active and documented on official pages and in EU project databases. They are not all "fashion-only", but each has direct relevance to sustainable fashion outcomes (reuse, repair, sustainable materials, skills, or collection systems).

- **Green Kiosks network for separate collection (Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan measure)**
Organisation: Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment. **Objective:** install and operate 50 Green Kiosks across districts, explicitly including textiles as a collected stream, with awareness functions and service coverage for remote areas. **Target groups:** households in mountainous and remote communities, municipalities, licensed recyclers and operators. **Relevance:** provides physical collection points needed for 2025 textile separate collection compliance and for scaling reuse-first sorting. (Department of Environment, 2024–2026)¹⁴
- **Cyprus Action Plan for the transition to a circular economy (2021–2027)** **Organisation:** coordinated across Cyprus ministries (Energy/Commerce/Industry; Agriculture/ Environment; research and digital policy), approved by Council of Ministers. 32 33 34 35 32 31 **Objective:** drive circular culture, investment incentives, infrastructure, and municipal waste management under a national plan with priority sectors. **Target groups:** businesses (including SMEs), consumers, municipalities, and the public sector. **Relevance:** provides the policy and funding frame Cyprus can use to add a textiles-specific package (repair skills,

¹⁰ (European Commission, 2022, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/textiles-strategy_en; European Union, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1781/oj>)

¹¹ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/waste-and-recycling/separate-waste-collection_en

¹² https://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/environment/environmentnew.nsf/page20_en/page20_en?OpenDocument=

¹³ <https://www.interact.eu/media/553/download/04%20Green%20Public%20Procurement%20-%20CDE.pdf?v=1>

¹⁴

<https://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/environment/environmentnew.nsf/All/FB34918F1C84B9E2C2258BB800270DA0?OpenDocument=>





reuse markets, sorting capacity, GPP textiles). (EEA, 2024; Cyprus Circular, 2021)

- **Cyprus Handicraft Service training programmes and vocational training centre Organisation:** Cyprus Handicraft Service with the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA), reported by Cedefop. Objective: develop vocational training programmes (700 hours) in embroidery, ceramics and weaving, combining classroom learning with in-workshop training across Cyprus, leading to a vocational certificate. Target groups: unemployed participants and young entrants to crafts; craft workshops; designers and tourist market channels. Relevance: sustains textile and craft skills that support durable, locally made products and repair capability, aligned with sustainable fashion and tourism-linked demand

1.4 Required competences in the sector

Cyprus' fashion sector is mainly import- and retail-based, with many small firms, focusing on market skills (buying, compliance, product information, customer communication) and end-of-life skills (collection, sorting, reuse, repair). EU rules increase requirements: textile collection starts January 2025, and policies are shifting toward eco-design and Digital Product Passports.

A. Sustainability and compliance competences (retailers, importers, wholesalers)

- Sustainability basics for textiles: fibres (cotton, polyester, blends), main impacts (water, chemicals, microfibres), and what "circular" means in practice (reuse, repair, recycling).
- Claims and labelling control: how to verify supplier claims and avoid misleading "green" claims; checking labels and documentation before products are placed on the market.
- Regulatory readiness: understanding that new EU measures can require more product information, and that products may need to meet eco-design and information rules.

B. Eco-design and circular product development (designers, makers, brands, craft-based producers)

- Design for durability: stronger seams, better components, repairable construction, care instructions that extend life.
- Design for repair and reuse: modular parts, spare buttons/zips, easy disassembly, standardised trims.
- Material selection skills: choosing lower-impact materials where possible (recycled content, mono-material choices) and understanding trade-offs (performance vs recyclability).
- Small-batch and craft innovation: applying sustainability thinking to local craft and niche products, especially for tourism-linked markets (quality, story, traceable origin).

C. Traceability, data, and digital competences (across the value chain)

- EU policy is pushing toward more product data and traceability tools such as the Digital Product Passport. This creates a clear skills gap for SMEs.
Key competences:
- Product data management: keeping structured data on fibre composition, supplier identity, batch/season, care, and compliance documents.
- Basic supply-chain mapping: knowing where products come from, which suppliers are "critical," and how to request minimum data from them.
- Digital tools for SMEs: simple systems (spreadsheets, inventory tools, POS integrations) that can later connect to stronger product-data requirements.

D. End-of-life, collection, sorting, reuse and repair competences (municipalities, operators, social enterprises, repair actors)





Textile collection and treatment is becoming a “must-have” capability. The legal baseline is a separate collection of textiles starting in 2025, and the revised rules set expectations for screening and sorting so that textiles follow the waste hierarchy (reuse first). Competences needed:

- Separate collection operations: bin management, contamination control, safe handling, logistics planning.
- Sorting and grading: distinguishing reusable vs non-reusable textiles; quality grading; preparing items for reuse markets; basic knowledge of fibre-to-fibre recycling limits.
- Repair and refurbishment skills: alterations, mending, footwear/leather repair, and quality control for resale.
- Partnership working: cooperation between municipalities, retailers, and social economy actors to build collection points and reuse channels.

E. Training and skills transfer competences (trainers, VET, craft services)

Cyprus already has relevant foundations in traditional craft skills training (embroidery, weaving) with structured programmes that combine classroom and workshop learning. These can be expanded with sustainability modules (eco-design, repair, product data).

Competences for trainers:

- Practice-based teaching (workshop learning, mentoring, assessment).
- Embedding sustainability into craft (material choices, waste reduction, durability, repair).

1.5 Barriers and opportunities

Barriers

- **High import dependence.** In 2024, Cyprus imported €483.8m of textiles and textile articles (HS XI) and €135.6m of footwear/headgear/etc. (HS XII). This reduces local control over fibre choices and manufacturing emissions. It makes buyer-side tools more important than factory-side tools, such as procurement specs, supplier requirements, due diligence, and product information.
- **Small domestic manufacturing base.** Cyprus has limited local capacity in textiles, apparel, and leather/footwear manufacturing. This limits fast scale-up of fibre-to-fibre recycling or industrial garment production without a targeted industrial policy. (*CYSTAT Business Register and Industrial Survey 2023, see references.*)
- **Waste system pressure.** Municipal waste generation is high, and landfill dominates treatment. In 2023, **76.8%** of treated municipal waste was disposed of in landfills. Without textile-specific collection and sorting, textiles will continue to leak into mixed waste streams.

Opportunities

- **Retail scale gives a policy lever.** Retail clothing and footwear turnover exceeded €737m in 2023, with many small operators. A phased approach that starts with large importers and chain retailers can set the rules, then cascade templates and tools to SMEs. (*CYSTAT Trade Survey 2023 and Business Register, see references.*)
- **Repair and resale can grow fast.** Footwear and leather repair (NACE 95.23) and second-hand retail (NACE 47.79) already exist, but at small scale. These activities fit Cyprus’ micro-enterprise structure and can reduce waste quickly if supported with standards, training, and clear consumer guidance. (*CYSTAT Business Register and Trade Survey 2023, see references.*)





- **Tourism supports provenance-based sustainable products.** Heritage crafts such as Lefkara lace and Fythkiotika weaving provide a strong base for traceable, place-linked products that compete on authenticity and quality, not fast-fashion price.

1.6 National best practice

Title / Organisation: Green Kiosks under LIFE-IP CYzero WASTE (Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment)

Short description: Green Kiosks are local “sorting points” that support **separate collection** and **reuse** of materials, including **clothing and footwear**. They are part of the **LIFE-IP CYzero WASTE** programme and are used to improve access to recycling in communities, including remote and mountainous areas. This supports sustainable fashion by keeping textiles in use longer and reducing textile waste going to landfill.

Key elements that can be transferred/replicated in DesignSmart

- **Collection model:** accessible local drop-off points for clothing and footwear, linked to reuse pathways.
- **Quality control at source:** staffed points that can guide citizens and reduce contamination, improving sorting outcomes.
- **Collaboration model:** national programme led by public authorities with municipalities and partners, which can be replicated for fashion education and industry coordination.¹⁵

2. AI-DRIVEN ECO-DESIGN

2.1 Context and level of digital maturity

Cyprus’ fashion ecosystem is retail- and import-driven, with limited manufacturing, shaping digital maturity. Most adoption occurs in retail, marketing, and product selection, while advanced manufacturing tech like automation, digital twins, and AI-driven planning remains confined to a few firms and niches.

Use of AI and advanced digital tools in creative industries and manufacturing:

Across Cyprus, enterprise AI adoption is low but increasing, with 7.9% of enterprises using it in 2024, rising to 34.9% among large firms. Smaller firms are likely to lack the skills and time to implement AI, despite the availability of tools. In fashion and design, the most common “advanced digital” use is likely to be:

- **e-commerce and digital marketing** (online stores, paid ads, social media content tools)
- **basic analytics** (sales trends, stock optimisation)
- **design and prototyping** using digital fabrication tools where accessible (3D printing, laser cutting, CNC, rapid prototyping)

Cyprus has infrastructure that supports digital prototyping and experimentation for designers and creatives. CYENS runs a Thinker Maker Space and Techub that gives access to digital fabrication and rapid prototyping, workshops, and technical support.

Level of digital readiness among SMEs, designers, and product teams:

¹⁵

<https://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/environment/environmentnew.nsf/All/FB34918F1C84B9E2C2258BB800270DA0?OpenDocument>





Cyprus has advanced in digital connectivity and public services, but faces gaps in skills and SME digitalisation. The European Commission's 2024 Digital Decade Report for Cyprus notes strengths in connectivity but ongoing challenges in skills and adoption. Many SMEs in fashion retail and small design studios tend to be:

- **digitally active** in sales and communication (POS systems, marketplaces, social media)
- **less mature** in structured product data, traceability, and advanced analytics
- **dependent on external suppliers** for technical product information, which limits sustainability-related decision making¹⁶

Innovative technology companies, start-ups, and AI-oriented clusters relevant to fashion/manufacturing

Cyprus' innovation ecosystem is expanding, supported by national policies for digital transformation and R&I. The Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy directs digital strategy and aims to make Cyprus a regional innovation hub. Key enablers include:

- **CYENS Centre of Excellence** (interactive media, smart systems, emerging technologies, including AI) and its entrepreneurship/prototyping spaces.
- **EU-backed research and innovation investments** (e.g., RISE/CYENS origins and scale through EU programmes).
- **Public initiatives that promote AI adoption** (e.g., "AI in Government" funding calls) which can spill over into private-sector capability and supplier markets.

Integration of AI tools in product development, design, prototyping, and sustainability decisions

In Cyprus, AI use in fashion is still early-stage and more likely to appear in:

- **design support** (content generation, mood boards, pattern planning support)
- **demand forecasting and stock planning** for larger retailers
- **sustainability support** via structured product information, supplier declarations, and basic lifecycle thinking¹⁷

2.2 National policies on AI and digital innovation

National AI strategy and digital transformation plans: Cyprus' digital policy is led by the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, which has a mandate that includes a national digital strategy and broader innovation policy. A dedicated national Artificial Intelligence strategy and action plan has been reported as planned for launch in 2026, to coordinate AI initiatives across ministries and support AI use in key public systems. Cyprus also runs a national Digital Skills Action Plan (2021–2025) to raise digital skills among citizens, the workforce, ICT specialists, and schools, thereby supporting AI readiness through skills supply¹⁸.

Programmes supporting SME digitalisation: Cyprus uses EU-funded instruments to help businesses digitise. Under the Cohesion Policy Programme THALIA 2021–2027, there is a "Scheme for the Digital Upgrade of Enterprises" that supports SME investments in digital tools and advanced digital technologies (including AI), aiming to increase ICT and e-commerce uptake and strengthen digital identity. Digital transition measures also

¹⁶ European Commission. *Cyprus 2024 Digital Decade Country Report*.

¹⁷ Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy (mandate and objectives)

¹⁸ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/cyprus-digital-skills-national-action-plan-2021>



fall under the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan Axis 4, “Towards a digital era,” with multiple calls and schemes (e.g., a broadband connectivity voucher scheme)¹⁹.

Tax benefits or financial support linked to Industry 4.0/Industry 5.0: Cyprus supports advanced tech uptake through financial incentives, including the RIF’s STEP programme funding facilities, production lines, and training to move from development to production in key areas like digital and AI, supported by a 120% super-deduction for R&D from January 2026.²⁰

Competence centres, digital innovation hubs, AI labs, research institutes: DiGiNN is Cyprus’ European Digital Innovation Hub, positioned as a “one-stop-shop” for digitisation support, bringing together expertise in AI, high-performance computing, cybersecurity, and access to infrastructure, mentoring, and networks. National research and innovation funding is coordinated through the Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF), which runs competitive programmes and flagship actions that stimulate AI development in Cyprus.

Policy trends and strategic priorities for AI adoption in industrial and creative sectors. Policy signals shift from “general digitalisation” to “applied AI deployment,” notably via public-sector challenge calls (AI in Government), funding Cypriot organisations to develop and test AI solutions for operational issues, issued by public authorities. This fosters reusable tools, suppliers, and skills that may transfer to the private sector, including creative and manufacturing. Another trend is scaling digital adoption through SME schemes (THALIA and RRP), enabling small firms to adopt advanced digital tools necessary for later AI processes in design, manufacturing, and sustainability decision-making.²¹

2.3 Applications of AI in fashion / eco-design

Generative design tools for sustainable products, components and patterns: Public, fashion-specific examples in Cyprus are limited. Most current use is through cross-sector creative-tech hubs where designers test AI for concept creation, pattern ideas, and faster iteration. CYENS Thinker Maker Space supports designers and entrepreneurs through technology-led innovation and rapid prototyping, often paired with off-the-shelf AI tools for early-stage design work (idea generation, variations, and visual concepts before production).²²

Virtual prototyping, 3D sampling, and digital simulation technologies: Cyprus’s key capability is access to digital fabrication and prototyping for fashion and eco-design, including 3D sampling and small-batch testing. CYENS Thinker Maker Space offers these resources and workshops on 3D digital twins via photogrammetry, aiding virtual prototyping, reducing sampling time, and cutting material waste, even with overseas core production.

AI-supported material optimisation and environmental impact prediction: Cyprus’s AI capacity is mainly through national digital innovation structures, not fashion-only labs. DiGiNN, the European Digital Innovation Hub in Cyprus, serves as a hub for companies to access advanced digital technologies, including AI, from ideation through prototyping and pilots. This is the best way for Cypriot fashion SMEs and designers to access AI for decision-making on materials and sustainability, such as comparing materials, checking supplier data, and screening impacts using available datasets and tools.

Predictive analytics for production planning, energy efficiency and resource management: Cyprus’s fashion system is import- and retail-driven, so predictive analytics mainly forecasts demand, manages stock, and handles logistics rather than factory planning. DiGiNN helps SMEs adopt advanced digital tools, boosting digital maturity. Cyprus is also developing skills through vocational AI and VR programs, encouraging

¹⁹ <https://www.fundingprogrammesportal.gov.cy/en/programs/4-towards-a-digital-era/>

²⁰ <https://www.cyprusprofile.com/articles/cyprus-tax-reform-legislation-enacted-and-effective-january-1-2026>

²¹ <https://www.fundingprogrammesportal.gov.cy/en/programs/thalia-2021-2027/>

²² <https://makerspace.cyens.org.cy>



businesses to adopt analytics over time.²³

2.4 Required competences

To support AI-driven eco-design in Cyprus, teams need a practical skill set that aligns with SME realities and import-led value chains. You need basic data literacy (clean product data, supplier data, materials lists, and the habit of checking evidence before decisions). You need to use entry-level AI tools and dashboards for simple tasks like drafting product briefs, comparing options, spotting gaps in supplier information, and creating structured decision logs. You also need CAD and 3D skills (2D pattern design or CAD basics, 3D modelling, and simple simulation) to move from ideas to testable prototypes without repeatedly making physical samples. Virtual prototyping and digital sampling skills matter because they cut time and waste, especially when production happens abroad. Finally, you need the ability to use AI-supported decision processes responsibly: define what good looks like (durability, repairability, recycled content, restricted substances), apply basic sustainability metrics (material choices, longevity, waste prevention), and document decisions in a way that supports future EU requirements on product information and eco-design rules²⁴.

2.5 Challenges and barriers to adoption

High investment costs (software, hardware, infrastructure): SMEs and VET providers in Cyprus face tight budgets due to licence fees, hardware upgrades, and data storage costs. They also worry about whether their investments will pay off, as their production remains mainly outside Cyprus, focusing on retail, design, and small batches.

Limited digital culture, awareness, and resistance to change: Many small firms operate informally, making quick decisions with little documentation or data use. AI eco-design demands new habits like data storage, testing, and dashboards, which can seem slow or unnecessary. In VET, teachers may resist change due to unfamiliar tools, limited training, or overloaded curricula. Without clear benefits and simple workflows, adoption remains superficial.

Shortage of professionals with combined design, digital, and sustainability skills: AI-driven eco-design requires a mix of skills: design thinking, CAD/3D, data literacy, and sustainability basics like materials, durability, circularity, and compliance. Small markets lack these profiles, making it hard for SMEs to hire specialists or for VET providers to find trainers who teach both digital tools and eco-design, slowing adoption and lowering output quality.

Limited availability of targeted training opportunities: Even with general digital training, SMEs and VET providers need specific training on eco-design, product data, traceability, AI tools for design, and 3D sampling. Often, training is brief, generic, or not aligned with daily tasks. Without structured pathways, reliance on self-learning leads to inconsistent results and low confidence in AI tools.

Low accessibility of advanced digital tools for micro and small enterprises: Micro firms often lack access to shared labs, demo licences, or technical support. They may also lack time to test tools, set up workflows, and maintain systems. If tools are only accessible through expensive licences or high-end hardware, adoption becomes limited to larger firms. In VET, limited access to equipment reduces hands-on practice, so students graduate without real-world experience in digital sampling and simulation.

²³ <https://www.oeb.org.cy/en/drasis/current-projects/diginn/>

²⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1781/oj/eng>





Regulatory uncertainty, ethical concerns, and lack of clear standards for AI use: SMEs worry about data protection, IP ownership of AI outputs, and accountability for sustainability claims. They face uncertainty about upcoming EU product rules and how digital product info will be checked. Without clear standards and guidance, firms delay adoption or use AI only for low-risk tasks like marketing content, not for product decisions.²⁵

2.6 National best practice

Title / Organisation: DiGiNN: European Digital Innovation Hub, Cyprus

Short description: DiGiNN supports SMEs to adopt advanced digital technologies through assessments, mentoring, lab access, and pilot support. (diginn.eu)

How AI is applied in eco-design or sustainable production: It helps companies test AI-enabled workflows (product data structuring, material and component option comparison, digital prototyping support) before investing in full systems. (diginn.eu)

Why the initiative is innovative or relevant: It reduces cost and skill barriers by offering shared expertise and infrastructure in one national “one-stop shop”. (diginn.eu)

Transferable elements: Test-before-invest pilots, shared labs, and a replicable collaboration model between industry, academia, and innovation actors. (oeb.org.cy)

3. VET DIGITALIZATION

3.1 State of the art of VET digitalisation

Use of LMS, blended learning, microlearning, hybrid models: Cyprus VET uses a mix of LMS and blended delivery, but it is not fully uniform across providers. Many private colleges and training providers use established LMS solutions such as Moodle for online and blended learning delivery. At system level, teacher upskilling for digital delivery is supported through the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute’s Digital Competences Development for Educators programme, delivered through the institute’s e-learning platform and planned to continue to 2026²⁶.

Level of digitalisation of VET training provision and pedagogy: Digitalisation is progressing, especially in continuing vocational training and teacher development. A key structural change is the HRDA shift to digital processes for training providers and trainers, with accreditation and related procedures handled electronically via the HRDA digital portal (replacing older paper-based workflows). This supports more digital administration and makes it easier to scale online and blended provision, but adoption still varies by provider capacity and trainer skills.

Digital collaboration mechanisms between VET providers and companies: Cyprus is strengthening digital collaboration through platforms and portals that connect training provision with labour-market needs. HRDA’s portal-based system supports the registration and participation of large numbers of individuals, providers, facilities, and trainers in subsidised schemes, which improves coordination at scale. Cyprus also has a VET employers-matching platform referenced in national VET policy tracking, which supports links between employers and technical professions.

Integration of digital technologies and methods into VET curricula: Curriculum-level integration is moving forward through two main channels: (1) teacher upskilling for digital pedagogy via CPI’s structured programme,

²⁵ <https://digitalcoalition.gov.cy/strategy/digital-skills-cyprus-national-action-plan-2021-2025/>

²⁶ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vet_policy_briefs_2024_cyprus_cedefop_2025.pdf

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and (2) wider education-sector digital transformation projects. The direction is clear: more digital tools in teaching, more online resources, and more consistent use of digital methods. The pace depends on equipment access, trainer readiness, and how quickly programmes update learning outcomes to include digital and AI-related skills.

3.2 National policies for digital education

National strategies for digital education, lifelong learning and teacher training: Cyprus' main umbrella approach is the Digital Skills National Action Plan 2021–2025, which is coordinated by the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy in collaboration with other ministries and stakeholders. It targets digital skills for citizens, the workforce, ICT specialists, and the education system, and it includes actions on teacher training, digital culture, and lifelong learning. The Recovery and Resilience Plan also supports digital education and skills through investments in school infrastructure and tools, as well as training/upskilling measures²⁷.

Digital competence programmes targeting learners, teachers and trainers: A core national direction is to scale digital competence across education and training, with a strong focus on teacher capacity to use digital tools in teaching. The national plan explicitly links education actions to EU competence frameworks and includes mechanisms such as a Digital Citizens' Academy concept (self-assessment and learning pathways based on DigComp) and structured programmes to raise digital skills across groups, including educators and trainers.

Major public investments and policy measures supporting the digital transformation of VET training provision: Public measures are primarily delivered through reforms and investments under the Recovery and Resilience Plan. These include upgrading digital infrastructure and tools in schools, teacher digital training, and wider upskilling and reskilling actions that also support VET and adult learning. The European Commission's RRF measure for the e-skills Action Plan confirms the focus on broad digital competence building, digital infrastructure for learning, and an e-learning platform with digital skills content accessible to target groups.

Alignment with EU frameworks and initiatives (Digital Education Action Plan, DigComp, AI in education guidelines): Cyprus aligns its digital skills and education actions with EU frameworks. At EU level, the Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 sets priorities for a stronger digital education ecosystem and improved digital skills, and Cyprus' national plan references DigComp and DigCompEdu as guidance for building digital competence in education and training. For AI in education, the European Commission has published ethical guidelines for educators on the use of AI and data in teaching and learning, providing practical and ethical guidance for teacher and trainer development²⁸.

3.3 Initiatives and projects

1) EULEP + DiGiNN (AI, VR and Social Innovation for C-VET)

Title / Organisation: EULEP project and DiGiNN (European Digital Innovation Hub Cyprus)

Short description: Erasmus+ project and national hub collaboration to make continuous VET more attractive through programmes and initiatives on AI and VR. It targets businesses and public-sector organisations and supports hands-on upskilling aligned with real needs.

2) DigiTrain platform pilot (digital mentoring and traineeship for technical schools)

Title / Organisation: DigiTrain (Erasmus+) implemented by GrantXpert Consulting

Short description: A digital platform pilot in Cyprus that supports technical-school teaching with modern

²⁷ <https://digitalcoalition.gov.cy/strategy/digital-skills-cyprus-national-action-plan-2021-2025/>

²⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/TH/4617905>





methods, mentoring and industry input. Students work on projects with teachers and industry mentors through the platform, strengthening work-based learning links.

3) Teacher Training Programme for digital competency development (incl. VET teachers)

Title / Organisation: Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) with university partners, delivered via CPI “eLearn”

Short description: National teacher upskilling programme for digital competence delivered in blended mode and running until the end of 2026. It supports teachers at all levels, including VET, in integrating digital tools and methods into teaching and learning.

4) CHAT2LEARN (chatbots and AI tools in adult education)

Title / Organisation: CHAT2LEARN (Erasmus+) coordinated by the University of Cyprus SEIT Lab

Short description: Develops chatbot-based learning and AI-supported tools for adult education, with training content and resources for educators and trainers. Relevant for VET/adult learning providers that want personalised support and scalable digital learning methods.

5) CYENS Thinker Maker Space (digital fabrication + “3D twins” via photogrammetry)

Title / Organisation: CYENS Thinker Maker Space (Nicosia)

Short description: Provides access to digital fabrication and rapid prototyping plus workshops that create “three-dimensional twins” using photogrammetry. This is a practical entry point for VET-style labs to use 3D capture/digital twins for design, prototyping, and technical training

3.4 Required competences for teachers and learners

General digital literacy: Teachers and learners need solid day-to-day digital skills, including using cloud storage, managing files, ensuring online safety and privacy, and basic troubleshooting. They also need confidence with common productivity tools (documents, spreadsheets, presentations) and digital workflows used in training and workplaces. This matters because digital VET delivery quickly fails when basic skills are weak and support is not available.

Proficiency in CAD, 3D modelling and digital prototyping tools: For technical and design-related VET, learners need practical ability in CAD and 3D tools, plus basic simulation and prototyping steps. Teachers need enough proficiency to demonstrate workflows, set assignments, assess outputs, and connect tools to real tasks (patterns/components, product parts, assemblies, tolerances). Where equipment exists, both sides should be able to move from digital model to prototype (3D print, laser cut, simple CNC) and document iterations.

Basic AI and data literacy: Teachers and learners need data basics (what data is, how to structure it, quality checks, simple interpretation) and entry-level AI literacy (what AI can and cannot do, prompting, verification, bias risks, and safe use). They should be able to use AI tools to support learning and project work, while keeping human judgment for decisions and assessment.

Ability to manage and use LMS platforms: Teachers should be able to build and run courses in an LMS: upload and organise content, create quizzes and assignments, track attendance and progress, give feedback, and manage learner support. Learners should be able to navigate the LMS, submit work correctly, follow learning pathways, and use feedback to improve. This is the core competence for blended and hybrid delivery.

Digital collaboration, communication and content-creation skills: Teachers and learners need to collaborate online using shared documents, project boards, messaging and video calls. They also need content skills: creating short learning assets (microlearning videos, step-by-step guides, templates), clear digital communication, and basic visual documentation of practical work (photos, short clips, annotated screenshots). This matters for work-based learning, remote mentoring, and sharing outputs with companies.





3.5 Gaps and emerging needs

Insufficient training and upskilling opportunities for teachers and trainers related to digitalisation: Cyprus has structured teacher digital upskilling, but scale and coverage remain a gap, especially for VET trainers who need hands-on skills in digital tools, simulation, and AI-supported teaching. The national Teacher Training Programme for digital competency development runs through to the end of 2026, showing progress, but it also confirms that continuous professional development remains a key need.

Insufficient digitalisation of training provision (limited digital pedagogy, learning platforms, tools): Digital delivery exists, but use is uneven across providers and specialisations. Many VET programmes still rely on traditional classroom delivery and limited digital learning design. The wider EU evidence base (used by Cedefop) stresses that VET systems need stronger digital infrastructure and systematic integration of digital technologies into teaching and curricula, which remains a practical gap for smaller providers.

Weak or underdeveloped digital collaboration with industry: Links with employers exist, but digital collaboration mechanisms are not yet mainstream across VET. Cyprus has an employer communication platform for technical occupations to support employability and matching, but it is mainly a labour-market link rather than a full digital work-based learning ecosystem (shared content, co-designed modules, digital assessment in workplaces).

Limited use of emerging technologies (VR/AR, AI, simulation tools): Emerging tech use is still concentrated in hubs and pilots rather than daily VET practice. Cyprus has national capacity through DiGiNN to offer “test before invest” access to labs, AI services, and training, but VET providers and SMEs still face access, time, and capability constraints that slow adoption of VR/AR, AI, and simulation.

Need to update curricula in line with industry practices and digital skills requirements: Curricula need to be updated more quickly to reflect current workplace tools (data-driven workflows, basic AI literacy, digital prototyping, and modern technical methods). Cyprus’ VET policy monitoring highlights persistent skills gaps and weaknesses in digital skills among the working-age population, increasing pressure on VET to modernise learning outcomes and practical training.

3.6 National best practice

Title / Organisation: Teacher Training Programme for digital competency development (Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, CPI)

Short description of the organisation’s role and activities: CPI is the national body that supports teachers’ professional development. It runs the Digital Competences Development for Educators programme and delivers the Teacher Training Programme for digital competency development for teachers across levels, including VET.

How digital technologies are used within VET: The programme is delivered through CPI’s eLearn online environment in blended mode (in-person and distance learning). It builds practical skills in using digital tools and methods in teaching, and it includes modules designed to meet teachers’ needs and align with EU and national directions.

Why the initiative is significant for digital transformation: It is a structured, national-scale pathway to raise the digital competence of VET teachers, with an ongoing phase that runs until the end of 2026. This supports consistent use of LMS, blended learning, and digital pedagogy across the system.

Transferable practices or approaches relevant for the partnership: A modular training structure (intro plus modules), delivery via a stable e-learning environment, and a blended methodology that can be replicated for





VET trainers and sector-specific upskilling. The approach is needs-driven and can be adapted to eco-design, AI, and advanced digital tools.

CONCLUSIONS

Cyprus's sustainable fashion transition is mainly a market and system challenge, not a factory challenge. The sector is import- and retail-led, with many micro and small firms. This shifts the biggest levers to buyer behaviour (what is purchased and sold), product information and compliance, repair and reuse services, and better textile collection and sorting. AI and advanced digital use are still in early stages, so DesignSmart should focus on low-cost, practical workflows that SMEs and VET can adopt quickly.

Final reflections

Main common critical issues: SMEs face the same barriers across partner contexts: limited budgets, weak digital routines, and skills gaps spanning design, digital tools, and sustainability. Product data is often incomplete, so eco-design choices are not documented and sustainability claims are hard to verify. In VET, digital delivery and advanced tools are uneven, and many trainers need upskilling to teach modern workflows.

Differences compared to partner countries: Cyprus has limited domestic manufacturing, so it has less influence over upstream production impacts. This makes buyer-side action more important than factory-side upgrades. Cyprus also has a strong tourism and heritage craft base that can support traceable, higher-value, slower products. Advanced capabilities are more likely to emerge through horizontal hubs (innovation hubs and makerspaces) than through a large fashion-tech cluster.

Priority areas for training

1. Product data and traceability basics (materials, composition, supplier info, evidence for claims).
2. Entry-level AI use for eco-design support (option comparison, checklists, drafting briefs, simple dashboards).
3. CAD and 3D basics (digital sampling, simple simulation, prototyping workflows).
4. Circular practice skills (repair, resale grading, take-back basics, sorting and consumer guidance).
5. Trainer capacity (blended delivery, microlearning content, assessing digital and practical work).

Strategic opportunities: A small market can standardise quickly if large importers and chain retailers lead first and SMEs reuse the same tools. Repair and resale can scale through micro-enterprises and reduce waste faster than waiting for industrial recycling. Tourism can absorb traceable, place-based products tied to local craft. National hubs can offer “test before invest” pilots so SMEs and VET can access tools without large upfront costs.

Operational recommendations

1. Use a phased rollout: start with large importers/retail chains, then adapt tools for SMEs.
2. Produce a Cyprus eco-design starter kit: product data template, supplier questionnaire, claims checklist, repairability checklist, and simple decision log.
3. Run short pilots with SMEs and VET: one workflow for product-data capture, one for digital sampling, one for AI-assisted option comparison.
4. Train teachers and SMEs together on the same tools and assignments.
5. Link training to reuse systems: repair, resale grading, and collection guidance.
6. Deliver labs through existing hubs to reduce equipment barriers and scale faster.

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