Workers in this occupational group can be involved in treating and processing raw materials from the agriculture and fisheries sector, which are then transformed into food and other products.

The five key skills for food, garment, wood and other related workers are teamwork, job-specific skills, problem solving, learning and communication.
These workers are a **shortage** occupation in just two EU Member States; **surpluses** are reported in eleven EU countries.

Greater mechanisation and automation in manufacturing processes will likely play a significant part in reducing the total number of people employed in this occupation.

More than two thirds of these workers are employed in just four sectors: food, drink and tobacco (almost one quarter of overall employment); textiles, clothing and leather (almost one fifth); other manufacturing (13%); and the wholesale and retail trade (13%).

All of these sectors will see a reduction in the number of jobs for workers in this occupational group between 2015 and 2025, a fall that is likely to be in total more than 700 thousand jobs.

However, even if the outlook for total job change is negative, almost one million workers will still be required to fill positions that have been vacated due to retirement or other reasons.

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### Who are they?

Workers in this occupational group[^1] can be involved in treating and processing raw materials from the agriculture and fisheries sector, which are then transformed into food and other products. Others within this group can be responsible for the production and repair of textile, wood and leather goods, which may require skills using machinery or hand-powered tools. Occupations within this group vary significantly from butchers, tanners and fishmongers, which can have both client facing and non-client facing roles, to shoemakers, dressmakers and furriers, where advanced and specialist technical skills are vitally important.

### What skills do they need?

According to Cedefop’s **European skills and jobs survey (ESJS)** the key 5 skills for food, garment, wood and other related workers are **teamwork, job-specific skills, problem solving, learning** and **communication**. These skills could support employees in this occupation to also tackle anticipated future skill challenges (see drivers of change below).

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**Figure 1: Most important skills required for food, garment, wood and other related workers**

![Diagram of skills required for food, garment, wood and other related workers](image-url)
Where are they mostly in demand?

The labour market dynamics for this occupation differ across EU Member States:

*Figure 2: Shortages and surpluses for food, garment, wood and other related workers across the EU*

According to Cedefop, Malta and the Netherlands report a **shortage** of all craft and related workers. Contrariwise, a **surplus** of food processing, wood working, garment and other craft and related trades workers concerns Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal and Finland.
What are the trends for the future? [2]

Greater mechanisation and automation in manufacturing processes will likely play a significant part in reducing the total number of people employed in this occupation. More than two thirds of these workers are employed in just four sectors: food, drink and tobacco (almost one quarter of overall employment); textiles, clothing and leather (almost one fifth); other manufacturing [3] (13%); and the wholesale and retail trade (13%).

All of these sectors will see a reduction in the number of jobs for workers in this occupational group between 2015 and 2025, a fall that is likely to be in total more than 700 thousand jobs. However, even if the outlook for total job change is negative, almost one million workers will still be required to fill positions that have been vacated due to retirement or other reasons [4]. This is a challenging task, given the fact that many of these jobs may not be attractive enough for young people [5].

Over the next decade, the share of highly-qualified workers in this occupational group is expected to increase slightly. Nonetheless, about two thirds of these workers will hold medium-level qualifications, and will likely constitute around 90% of the total occupational group when combined with workers holding low-level qualifications. This trend corresponds with the notion that European companies are moving towards more high-value design and production techniques [6].

Which drivers of change will affect their skills?

- **Globalisation** affects jobs and skills of these workers, but in different ways, depending on the sector they work for: globalisation of markets and production lines has had negative effects on employment in the European fashion and textile manufacturing. However, potential opportunities arise for those able to capitalise on increasing demand in emerging markets, including those working in tailoring, dressmaking and upholstery [7]. To ensure better correspondence of products to international clients’ needs, it will be important to understand and meet changing trends in different countries, along with second language skills. Furthermore, in light of rising costs outside Europe and adverse publicity regarding the labour conditions of production workers abroad, some retailers are beginning to ‘re-shore’ their supply-chains [8]. Reshoring can provide food process and garment workers in Europe with new employment opportunities, since they possess the required technical skills and an ability to adapt to new production processes.

- In garments, **most employers in Europe are SMEs, or even micro establishments** (less than 10 persons). For such enterprises, garment production workers may need to get in direct contact with clients [9]. In these cases, marketing and social media skills will rise in importance, as clients increasingly use these social media platforms to provide feedback on products, share ideas and send other enquiries [10]. Marketing skills will also facilitate the effective use of social media to reach a greater number of clients across a region or even other countries, via the internet [11].

- Social media is one of a number of tools which can be used to develop a brand, or product, identity or narrative with which consumers can associate and interact. **Brand interaction and values have become more important to consumers**, especially in the textiles, clothing, footwear and leather sectors [12]. So, workers in these sectors should be able to develop, understand and communicate the benefits of their own firms’ craftsmanship, manufacturing methods and materials, which can then act...
benefits of their own firms' craftsmanship, manufacturing methods and materials, which can then act as unique selling points to customers.

- **As consumer awareness of the social and environmental impacts of production** increases, businesses must develop their practices to tackle these issues. In food processing, new measurement systems are being used to reduce wastage, requiring employees to be able to develop new skills quickly and also to possess a strong aptitude in both numeracy and literacy, in order to measure and report on potential wastages.

The EU has funded an online learning platform project, which focuses specifically on reducing wastage in food processing. In line with many recent developments, and the expansion of ‘anytime anywhere’ training methods, the Food Recovery Waste Reduction Project has the potential to provide workers with professional development opportunities, such as adapting to new equipment and processes, active learning and various other important skills relevant to the drivers listed above. The fact that this training can be accessed online allows many people in this occupational group to fit these activities into their schedules.

Source: The Food Recovery Project

- **National and EU-level regulation** provide part of the operating environment in this occupation. For example, hygiene regulation and frequent inspections are the norm in food processing, whilst clothing and textiles occupations are affected by limitations such as on the use of certain chemicals and substances in production. Workers need to keep abreast of regulatory changes and be flexible and responsive to any changes that may occur in the future.

- **As one of the key drivers of shifting employment demand, technological change** will continue to heavily impact upon the skills required of staff in this occupational group. Examples of these advances in the food-processing sector include sensor monitoring, non-thermal pasteurisation and sterilisation heating. Workers in this occupation will likely have to diversify their production and processing skillset to adapt to new machinery and equipment in food, fashion and woodwork production. Technical skills are required in the set-up, monitoring and maintenance of such specialised equipment.

- **The growing importance of sustainable agriculture and aquaculture, animal welfare, and organic production** is changing the way that many butchers, fishmongers and other food processing workers source and market their products, as new opportunities emerge in consumer markets. Knowledge of environmental issues and of supply chains is important to ensure the quality and sustainability of production.

**How can these skill needs be met?**

Specifically in food processing, companies can provide training to integrate waste saving activities into workers’ regular practice to respond to environmental drivers. Frequently held information sessions can be used to help staff learn and develop new strategies to reduce food wastage in processing and also help in identifying where other wastage may be. Similar methods can equip staff with the skills required in dealing with evolving machinery and processes, changing regulatory environments and new products being manufactured using by-products.
In order to respond to the ageing workforce in this occupational group, it is in firms’ best interests to ensure the transfer of knowledge to younger workers, so that in-house expertise is retained after retirees leave. European projects have been established to facilitate this diffusion of knowledge and expertise from older to younger workers. The ‘Be a Mentor in the Workplace’ programme provides support to business owners looking to set up mentoring initiatives within their own businesses.

In industries/companies (such as garment and clothing production) where these workers also carry out client-facing roles, developing entrepreneurial skills and competences can boost their productivity and potential to grow the business. Training in business acumen and marketing can enable these workers to establish connections with greater numbers of clients and expand their distribution lines. Additionally, education and training programmes, for example on fashion degrees, could promote the work-readiness of their students by incorporating compulsory internships to curricula and take upon collaborative projects between students and businesses.

References


[2] Cedefop forecast


[4] The need to replace workers leaving a profession for various reasons, such as retirement, is referred to as replacement demand. For more information on replacement demand and how it drives employment across sectors, can be found on the Skills Panorama here, accessed 30 June 2016.


