



**Serving crisis demand: Best  
practices and lessons  
learned from the pandemic  
in the textile sector**



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*The RESERVIST project (funded by the European Union under Horizon 2020) was born out of the urgent and extreme need for a mass supply of medical and protective equipment, that manifested during the COVID pandemic in Europe, and highlighted the shortages and lack of local capacity for immediate production to meet the needs of first line workers and citizens. The project envisions the repurposing of manufacturing lines for providing medical and protective products and services in spiking demand times, safeguarding European supply chains in case of a future crisis.*

*RESERVIST aims to create a network of core partners that, following a trigger, will activate a defined 'call-to-action' to build an operational cell to provide medical products under 48 hours.*

## **The European textile sector during the pandemic**

The European textile sector, as almost all sectors, suffered significant loss and faced many challenges during the pandemic.

In a situation unlike any in recent history, besides the – obvious – priority for the fast production, sufficient supply and timely delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical textile products, new products had to be tested and certified, which overwhelmed testing- and certification centres and slowed down production and delivery of products to the market. Furthermore, keeping sustainability in mind and avoiding unnecessary waste-creation (e.g. inefficient stock-management: stock piling, then destroying expired products) was still a factor to be considered, both for the sake of efficiency and sustainability.

The SME-heavy industry not only faced general supply shortages and an important drop in usual orders during the pandemic, but a number of manufacturers who decided to convert production to face masks and other protective equipment were also left disappointed after the first demand spike in the early phase of the pandemic, when finding themselves losing the price competition to non-European suppliers without lasting support of EU public procurers and policy makers for local manufacturing.

As part of the RESERVIST project, the Textile ETP organized a webinar, gathering affected key stakeholders from the textile sector to share and discuss their experiences, challenges and lessons learned. The webinar was attended by several textile SMEs, research and technology institutions and clusters, representing 12 European countries.



	Challenges	Lessons learned	Action needed (for the future)
<p><b>The industry SMEs' experiences</b></p>	<p><i>During the pandemic;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of usual orders/end market demand</li> <li>• Urgent need for new skills &amp; production capacities for COVID-response products</li> <li>• Lengthy certification procedure for PPE and other medical/protective products</li> <li>• Lack of available information</li> <li>• Dependency on slow/inconsistent (local) authority action</li> </ul> <p><i>After the pandemic;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable price competition with Asian producers</li> <li>• Lack of on-going support by public procurers/authorities to maintain local production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong, <u>local</u> networks are indispensable for rapid demand responses</li> <li>• Digitalization is key</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparedness and coordinated action on a local and European level</li> <li>• Funding/procurement authorities should follow through with purchases, once the funded products reach the market</li> <li>• Need for close collaboration with (local) research and certification centres</li> </ul>



	Challenges	Lessons learned	Action needed (for the future)
<b>Testing and Certification</b> Research technology centres' experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of accredited test labs</li> <li>• Shortage of staff and equipment</li> <li>• Need for testing new products on short notice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying local helps speed up procedures</li> <li>• Clusters play an important role in connecting local companies and test centres</li> <li>• Non-accredited test labs should be involved in certification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmonization of EU test protocols</li> <li>• Building research networks to facilitate the exchange of experiences</li> <li>• More serious consideration of sustainability aspects</li> </ul>
<b>Connectivity</b> Clusters' experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of information</li> <li>• Lack of cluster capacities &amp; competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for preparedness (<i>"Prepare for the worst"</i>)</li> <li>• The EU needs to be self-sufficient regarding PPE and other critical medical/protective products</li> <li>• Clusters should develop further capacities and competences on local and regional level</li> <li>• Need to build/maintain networks at national and EU level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a security stock of PPE</li> <li>• Better management of stocks, to be synchronized between national, regional and local level</li> <li>• R&amp;D needed in automation in order to decrease the cost of "Made in EU" PPE</li> </ul>



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Across all discussed sectors, there are a handful of recurring keywords, which reflect the overall experience of the European textile industry during the COVID pandemic, while also summarizing the lessons learned, and showing the way to go to be better prepared for a future crisis situation. These are:

- Focusing on LOCAL resources and collaborations
- Building on existing and new NETWORKS
- Better planning, coordination and standardization on a EUROPEAN level
- Easy access to up-to-date INFORMATION

### *Local resources and collaborations*

In time of crisis, addressing needs and challenges locally contributes to quick actions and fast solutions, while keeps all interventions on a smaller scale, therefore more manageable. Keeping it local also contributes to a more transparent crisis management.

In this case, involved parties are closer to the clients they serve – local workers, authorities and local population -, which also promotes citizen support towards the actions taken and facilitates the involvement of the population through volunteering, donations and enabling connections.

### *Networks*

When talking about connections, a well-functioning network across stakeholders and if needed, across borders is crucial for an efficient crisis management. Textile manufacturers who changed their production profile in a matter of weeks to start producing PPE needed to rely on new suppliers for new type of raw materials and machines, and needed to find a testing and certification centre for fast product testing before going to market. Those companies with an extended and well-functioning network throughout the supply chain could rely on these connections to quickly move through all phases of adjustment.

However, not all companies could rely on a broad, existing network. In these cases, clusters played an important role, by mapping out all local / regional stakeholders and helping to establish the missing connections throughout the supply chain.

The resource scarcity, lack of information and time pressure highlighted a clear need for more clusters on all geographical levels and within all sectors. The more synergies are created in times of “business as usual”, the more resilient a region becomes in times of crises.



## European level

The industry also calls for a well-organized European coordination among countries and regions in times when the crisis affects several or all regions of the EU.

Considering the example of the pandemic, authorities should not only provide financial support for the start of local PPE production, but should also follow through with purchasing locally manufactured PPE, once it arrives to the market – instead of favouring slightly lower prices and importing PPE from non-EU countries, hence making the initial funds and investment unsustainable.

European standards for testing and certification would contribute to clearer guidelines, more transparency and faster progress due to better allocation of resources (e.g. possible cross-border collaboration between test centres and manufacturers).

Finally, a better view on European PPE resources (stocks, production capacities, testing capabilities, etc) would also contribute to a more stable supply management and access to PPE across countries, and could put an end to stocking products beyond expiration date, and therefore having to destroy supplies.

## Information

The last keyword, relevant across all three that have been mentioned above, is access to information.

The importance of access to up-to-date, clear information from credible and transparent sources in a fast-changing crisis environment cannot be stressed enough. When time is of the essence, clear information fuels fast and efficient decision-making to help minimizing damage and risks – regarding the population and resources.

Networks and connections, once again, play an important role when exchanging best practices and lessons learned – information that enables mutual learning from recent experience. Hence, (international) research networks, and the previously mentioned clusters will be able to help to speed up these processes and contribute to quicker and safer response to serve crisis demand.

## More information and contact



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