

Italy: fashion industry gears up to re-open

Planet Labor, 21 April 2020, n°11858 - www.planetlabor.com

On 15 April a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the social partners that enables the re-opening of the fashion industry, a fundamental 'Made in Italy' pillar, while guaranteeing workers' safety. Although the catalogue of preventive and protective measures to combat coronavirus is not particularly original in content, the social partners have been innovative in giving consultation an ongoing role at both national and company level.

The MoU signed by Confindustria Moda confederation, the employers' organizations within it (Sistema Moda Italia, Assocalzaturifici (footwear), Assopellettieri and UNIC (leather goods), and the trade unions Femca-Cisl, Filctem-Cgil and Uiltec, intends to 'prepare the ground' for resumption of business. While the government has still not communicated the date when non-essential production activities can restart, and which could coincide with the end of the lockdown that is scheduled for 4 May, there is talk of allowing certain sectors with fundamental significance for 'Made in Italy' that includes the fashion (around 65,000 companies and 600,000 employees) and the automotive industries, to restart as early as next week.

Ensuring the protocol is consistent and adaptable. The agreement lays down markers to ensure the measures are appropriate to companies and that they are internally consistent. Before being able to restart business, each company in the sector will have to adopt the protocol and it will thereby become a company protocol that then will have the potential to be integrated with other company specific measures. Firms that had already adopted their own measures will have to check their consistency with the new document.

National Fashion Industry Covid-19 Committee. The social partners have set up a national joint committee as they 'face as allies' the challenge of combining workers' health with economic activity. The committee will operate until 30 September, will be able to collaborate with experts, and will be responsible for informing companies and workers of the protocol's contents. It will also be responsible for organizing the protocol's implementation in each company, verifying its application and effectiveness, collecting and disseminating best practices and updating the protocol as the situation evolves.

Specific committee set up per company. In addition, each company will have to set up a committee comprising the employer, the trade union representatives, the 'relevant workplace doctor', and the prevention and protection service. This committee will cooperate with management in drawing up the company protocol, define the procedures for informing employees, monitor its application and the effectiveness, propose any changes and updates to the employer, and cooperate with the national-level committee. SMEs without trade union representation are encouraged to consult the regional trade unions.

Preventive and protective measures. The protocol document provides for a series of measures now considered to be standard, including the requirement to stay at home in the event of fever, body temperature (optional for companies) checks before starting work, maintenance of social distancing, supply of masks (to be distributed as a priority to businesses with a high labor density), the supply of personal protective equipment if safe distancing is not possible, restricted access to communal areas

and the canteen, disinfection of the premises, procedures for managing those displaying Covid-19 symptoms and so on. Companies are also encouraged to stagger entry and exit times. If firms do have to reduce business activity, they are urged to prioritize instruments that avoid a loss of salary (leave periods, time bank periods, holidays). The social partners also intend for the use, if needed, of the 'Cassa Integrazione' (technical and/or partial unemployment). Companies can decide to shut non-production related premises and instead use smart working arrangements as much as possible to carry out these services. Production methods may be reviewed, for example by increasing the number of daily or weekly shifts or by reducing the number of people working per shift. All business trips and outplacements will be cancelled.

The tricky issue of transportation. The protocol also raises what will become a crucial question in the coming weeks, namely how will employees get to their workplaces? Company organized transport solutions (shuttles buses etc.) will have to safeguard employee safety. Otherwise, workers are encouraged to use their own means of transport and preferably individually. If they have to use public transport, they will have to use a mask and will receive instructions on the appropriate behavior standards to adopt. 'If a significant number of workers have to use public transport, companies are encouraged to coordinate with local authorities' in order to identify the most appropriate measures, the protocol states.

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