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# **Italian Fashion, Textile Cos. Convert Production to Fight Coronavirus**

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**MILAN** — An equipment shortage for medical and factories' workers is one of the most serious problems affecting [Italy](#), where the [coronavirus epidemic](#) has already killed more than 3,500 people.

Thousands and thousands of face masks manufactured in China which every day get stuck at customs for bureaucratic reasons, and an additional 200,000 medical face masks produced by Turkish company Comitec, already paid for by the Emilia-Romagna region to supply its hospitals, have been stopped since March 4 at the Ankara port waiting to get a green light from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Trade. Time is of the essence, so Italian [textiles](#) and [manufacturing](#) companies are evaluating options to reconvert their production to meet the needs of the country.

"In this emergency, we saw a strong desire in the Italian companies part of our supply chain to give their contribution. I perceived a lot of solidarity, but also a lot of confusion," said [Claudio Marenzi, president of Confindustria Moda](#). "For this reason, we worked with several associations to define a protocol, which is now going through a series of approvals, that will enable the different companies to have guidelines for their productions."

Professional services company PwC Italia played a key role to coordinate the project. In particular, last week PwC Italia's partner and retail and consumer consulting leader Erika Andreetta launched a call for action via social media to [fashion](#) companies and private laboratories stocked with TNT textile. The posts were shared by fashion journalists and influencers — including [Chiara Ferragni](#) — magnifying the response and attracting over 200 candidates to the cause in three days.

"We had really all sorts of contacts....It was a beautiful gesture and a sign of the huge will to participate in such a project," said Andreetta. "Things got structured when Confindustria Moda and CNA Federmoda [the confederation of craft trades and small- and medium-sized enterprises] activated their respective companies."

With the collaboration of the Sportello Amianto Nazionale, which promoted the idea of converting Italian manufacturers to aid the country during the health emergency, all parties established a single protocol to follow to produce disposable TNT medical smocks, caps, shoe covers as well as professional surgical masks. The government's "Cure [Italy](#)" decree, allocating 25 billion euros as an aid package and issued this week, also helped the process as it includes some extraordinary bureaucratic measures to speed up the production of medical kits and certification procedures.

Andreetta said the first sample of the medical kit is now in the process of being

certified. "The certification is essential since what will be produced will be for professionals and destined to hospitals. We hope that the production will start mid-next week, but it really depends on when we will get the certification first."

Meanwhile, the Sportello Amianto Nazionale is checking the availability of TNT declared by the candidates, and scouting firms that could join the cause. In particular, the organization is prioritizing companies producing TNT in Italy, using certified materials, with an available stock and a production capacity.

"To face the current sanitary emergency the Italian government has introduced new rules to place on the market surgical masks and Personal Protective Equipment including working coveralls, shoes' covers, and gloves, as well as glasses and visors. By a dedicated section of the "Cura Italia Decree," the government has provided for new, more flexible provisions for manufacturers from now on, until the end of the emergency," explained Daniele Vecchi, partner from consumer law team of Italian law Firm Gianni, Origoni, Grippo, Cappelli & Partners. "Particularly, given the peculiarity of the circumstances, manufacturers which are willing to bring surgical masks or PPE on the market are no more required to obtain that their products are provided with the "CE marking", which in general is a guarantee that a product is safe. Differently, they are allowed to autonomously certify that their products are safe, as they have been projected and are manufactured in compliance with applicable legislation."

Vecchi also explained that, for this purpose, manufacturers of surgical masks have to submit self-declarations in writing to the ISS, or the Istituto Superiore di Sanità. Manufacturers are liable for the content of their declarations, which therefore must be true and accurate. In the following three days, they have to provide the ISS with any element regarding their products which may consent the ISS to evaluate whether the same products are safe or not under the applicable legislation. In turn, the ISS has three days to communicate to the manufacturers the outcome of its assessments. The same procedure is applicable for Personal Protective Equipment, but in this case INAIL — Istituto Nazionale contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro, is the authority in charge.

"To better manage the process, the ISS has created a task force, which includes the Ministry of Health, the Italian Civil Protection, and Confindustria. In our view, manufacturers are now having a good opportunity to do business in a social and responsible way. Lawyers should now assist them in this process, helping them better understand the legal framework clear and assisting them in relation to the following distribution phase," Vecchi said.

Ninety-nine percent of the medical face masks are crafted from TNT, a non woven fabric-like material which is made from short and long fibers bonded together through chemical, mechanical, heat or solvent treatments. For example, the Ermanno Scervino Atelier is using this to craft surgical masks certified by the Florence University and

destined to Tuscan hospitals. At the same time, a wide range of Italian textile companies are trying to find alternatives in order to give their contributions to fight the COVID-19.

Among them, Serica 1870, which is specialized in the production of high-end silk fabrics, found in its stock a stretch cotton textile that features all the characteristics to be used for face masks for nonmedical use, but that can be worn by workers in factories.

"We are applying an anti-bacterial and anti-drop treatment to the stretch cotton, which will be able to be washed and used several times, as well as a primer able to stop the particles carrying the COVID-19 virus," said Serica 1870 chief executive officer Filippo Baldazzi, who on Tuesday will bring the treated fabric to Milan's Politecnico university to test it and get a certification. "If we will get the green light to proceed, we will start the production of the face masks in collaboration with garment [manufacturing](#) companies, such as Castor."

Baldazzi expects to sell the face mask at cost, without any profit margins. "Of course we cannot lose money in this super delicate and difficult moment, but at the same time we are not reconverting our production to generate revenues. We simply want to do our part," he said.

Italian clothing manufacturer Moda Impresa — which counts I'm Isola Marras, Marco Bologna and Annarita N in its portfolio — started to produce protective cotton masks this week. "We did a prototype last week, but it all started by chance. I have a friend working in a clinic and he suggested the production of masks because they couldn't find any anymore," said the company's chief executive officer Romolo D'Orazio.

D'Orazio underscored that since the COVID-19 spread in Italy, all the company's fashion-related activities stopped, including orders, sales campaigns and collection deliveries. He decided to convert the entire production and supply 10,000 masks weekly to those in need also to safeguard the job of its 35 employees.

"This whole initiative has two goals: help our country by supplying masks and save jobs...We have also involved other local laboratories to help us in the production process, especially the stitching part, as we only have 10 tailors here," he said. Each unit's price covers the production cost slightly increased to guarantee to all employees their salaries.

The company mainly distributes the masks to retirement houses and to other firms, enabling them to continue to run their businesses. "I have received calls from hospitals across all Italy, desperately requesting masks because they have run out of them but unfortunately the ones we produce are not certified so I can't supply them to doctors,"

said D'Orazio.

As for his business, the executive forecast a slow recovery for the company when the crisis will be over and an "inevitable" severe impact on its revenues, "which we first estimated to be around 5 million euros this year," he said.

Also innerwear company Calzedonia Group, which controls the Calzedonia, Intimissimi and Tezenis labels as well as knitwear brand Falconeri, bridal line Atelier Emé and wine retailer Signorvino, has pledged to reconvert its production to face masks and overalls. In particular the group's plants in Avio and Gissi, in the Trentino Alto Adige and Abruzzo regions, respectively, as well as units in Croatia have been equipped with new industrial machinery allowing for an initial production of 10,000 face masks per day starting March 23.

Specializing in manufacturing fashion accessories for luxury brands, Italian company Waycap also converted its facility to produce protective masks. For the moment, the firm plans to supply the civil defense and the Italian regions in need with 100,000 units in waterproof cotton per day.

"We want to give a tangible help to our country, answering the institutions' request in this state of great emergency," said Waycap's chief executive officer Manuel Faleschini, who is also promoting the concept of "circular solidarity" to involve other companies in the project.

"This system would solve many problems at the same time. First, we would answer to the urgent demand of masks. Then, we would give a job to many Italian small and medium-sized manufacturers now suffering for the temporary decrease of clothing's global demand. Plus, we would enhance the raw materials stocked in the warehouses. This [system] would enable us to support the workforce locally, unburdening the country from the 'cassa integrazione' redundancy pay," said Faleschini, adding that the Waycap is open to coordinate and train other companies interested in joining the initiative. So far, 20 firms are said to be interested in collaborating with Waycap.

Among the companies trying to convert their production to face the shortage of protection equipment, Santini Maglificio Sportivo — a family-run business producing cycling clothing on the outskirts of Bergamo, Italy — has developed prototypes for a waterproof face mask that are being tested by the Politecnico di Milano University to obtain the BFE, or Bacterial Filtration Efficiency certification.

"Since the beginning of this emergency, we have wondered how we could do our part. We know that in hospitals, but also in companies, there is a strong need for face masks to reduce the spread of contagion from COVID-19," noted Paola Santini, the company's marketing manager.

Following the institution's feedback, which the company expects to receive next week, Santini will partially convert its production lines to craft face masks, using a polyester and Lycra blend developed by Bergamo-based textile manufacturer Sitip, that can be used by citizens as well as by healthcare professionals, pledging to sell them at the factory price.

As reported, Miroglio Group was among the first firms to dedicate part of its fashion and textile production to manufacture sanitary masks in rewashable waterproof cotton to support the specific demand of the Piedmont region, where the group is based.

The company — which comprises the Miroglio Fashion branch controlling labels such as Elena Mirò, Caractère, Motivi and Per te by Krizia, and the Miroglio Textile division producing for the house's brand as well as for other groups — initially said it will manufacture 600,000 masks in two weeks, but now forecast it will be able to supply a million masks per week.

In particular, Miroglio's facility is supplying the Turin-based branch of the country's civil defense, but the company is said to be at disposal of whoever might need the masks and open to collaborate with other [fashion](#) companies on the initiative.

For the moment, the costs of the first batch of sanitary masks to be delivered to the civil defense have been covered personally by the company's president Giuseppe Miroglio and a range of local associations.

However, face masks are not the only equipment missing in Italy.

For this reason, designer Marina Spadafora, Italy's coordinator of London-based nonprofit organization Fashion Revolution, along with Giusy Bettoni, founder of C.L.A.S.S., a Milan-based platform that promotes and brings forward responsible textile and fashion projects, and journalist Diana de Marsanich called the country's fashion industry to action to support doctors and nurses working at the San Gerardo hospital in Monza, near Milan.

Launched through their respective social media platforms, the project aims to involve textile companies, designers, seamstresses and artisans to "sew the armors for our fighters," such as waterproof coveralls, an essential personal protective equipment that the hospital is lacking.

Bettoni said the collaboration between the three of them was pivotal in setting up the initiative, which is supported by "a shared vision on a new way of living and consuming," in addition to responding to the current emergency. In particular the C.L.A.S.S. founder is leveraging her network to involve the entire supply chain. "We've received a lot of entries either through a direct conversation with major players of the textile industry and via social media. These will soon turn into concrete actions by

seamstresses and cooperatives throughout the country, as well as big textile companies," Bettoni explained.

Acknowledging the shortage of protective equipment is a countrywide issue, Bettoni described the project as a pilot and added "our shared goal is to establish a national network," potentially benefiting other health-care centers.