

ECOSTEP (ECOnomy design criteria for Sustainability in footwear and Testing methods for Evaluation of Performance) launches to support the transition towards more sustainable, circular and transparent footwear in Europe

Madrid, Spain. 01 September, 2026 – A new Horizon Europe project, **ECOSTEP**, officially started in June 2026 to support the transformation of the European footwear sector through ecodesign, circularity, standardised testing methods and digital innovation. Funded under the Horizon Europe programme with a budget of nearly **4 million euros**, **ECOSTEP** will run for **48 months**, from **June 2026 to May 2030**, under Grant Agreement No. **101271608**. The project is coordinated by **CETEC** in Spain and brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of **10 partners** from Spain, Germany, Belgium, Czechia, Bulgaria and Portugal.

The footwear sector faces growing pressure to improve sustainability, transparency and circularity across the full value chain. Footwear products are often complex, multi-material goods that require reliable methods to assess environmental performance, durability, reparability, recyclability, biodegradability and end-of-life options. At the same time, evolving European sustainability requirements, including the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, are increasing the need for practical tools that can help companies integrate ecodesign principles into product development and communicate sustainability performance in a more reliable way.

ECOSTEP responds to these challenges by developing, testing and validating an advanced ecodesign methodology specifically designed for the footwear sector. The project will combine Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment, predictive modelling, AI-powered tools and Digital Product Passport functionalities to support the evaluation of ecodesign requirements and the verification of footwear performance. At least six footwear products will be analysed to identify priority raw materials for circular substitution and validate new testing methods that assess durability, reparability, recyclability and biodegradability.

The project will also develop digital platforms, practical tools and tailored training resources to support footwear manufacturers, SMEs, designers and policymakers in implementing ecodesign principles and preparing for future sustainability requirements. Through collaborative validation and stakeholder engagement, **ECOSTEP** will work to ensure that its results are usable, scalable and relevant for the European footwear industry.

By improving data quality, assessment methods and product transparency, **ECOSTEP** aims to contribute to a more competitive, innovative and circular footwear sector. Its results will help strengthen trust in sustainability claims, support better-informed

decisions across the value chain and accelerate the adoption of circular economy practices in Europe.

Project partners

The **ECOSTEP** consortium is composed of 10 partners from 6 different countries:

- **CETEC** – Asociación Empresarial de Investigación Centro Tecnológico del Calzado y del Plástico de la Región de Murcia (Spain, coordinator)
- **INESCOP** – Instituto Tecnológico del Calzado y Conexas (Spain)
- **RWTH Aachen University** (Germany)
- **UNE** – Asociación Española de Normalización (Spain)
- **CEC** – Confédération Européenne de l'Industrie de la Chaussure (Belgium)
- **Contactica** (Spain)
- **ORTO+** (Czechia)
- **KVC** – Senior Europa Sociedad Limitada (Spain)
- **ALAC** – Sdruzhenie za pravna pomosht na potrebitelite (Bulgaria)
- **CARITÉ** - Calçados, Lda (Portugal).

Together, these partners bring expertise in footwear research and development, product testing, ecodesign, digital tools, Digital Product Passport development, standardisation, Life Cycle Assessment, consumer behaviour, communication, stakeholder engagement and industrial implementation.

More information

The **ECOSTEP** project will run from 2026 to 2030. More information about the project, its activities and future results is available on the official website: <https://www.ecostepproject.eu/>. Stakeholders can also follow the project's progress on **LinkedIn**, **BlueSky** and **YouTube**.

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