

## Portugal's mix of tradition and technology

Exploring the background behind this Iberian nation's footwear industry.

by Mike Winters



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As the westernmost country of Europe bordering the north Atlantic and lying west of Spain, Portugal covers 92,225 square kilometres (35,606 square miles). The population of Portugal is approximately 10.3 million, which makes it the 15th most populated country within Europe. It is the oldest state on the Iberian Peninsula, and is one of the most ancient in Europe. The climate is generally cool and wet in the north and warm and dry in the south.

In 1986, Portugal became part of the European Community – now known as the European Union (EU) – and has benefited from significant investment in the country's infrastructure. The most noticeable improvements have been thousands of kilometres of new highways linking the major distribution centres of Lisbon in the south and Porto in the north. The new road network, along with improved rail links and the redevelopment of new port facilities, now enables the fast delivery of goods throughout Europe from the ports of Lisbon, Porto, Setúbal and Sines. Porto has also benefited from a new international airport, improving international links to the north of the country.

After joining the EU, Portugal's manufacturing industry saw a considerable expansion, both in the level of output and the value added – particularly from the period beginning in 1991. Traditional manufacturing, such as of ceramics, clothing, footwear, textiles and ornamental stone, still has significant importance in Portugal, although age-old skills are now supported by state-of-the-art technologies.

Large investment in new manufacturing processes from both the EU and private investors have helped Portugal to remain competitive in an increasingly diversifying marketplace. A few examples of this stand out, such as the automotive sector and its components, moulds, electrical machinery, paper and plastic materials. While the textile and clothing industry still remains one of the most important elements in Portuguese manufacturing, it has seen a significant reduction compared to how it stood in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, this loss is still much lower than in most European manufacturing countries, mainly as a result of Portugal's continued commitment to innovation. A good example of this is demonstrated in the development of 'intelligent fabrics' with flame retardant, anti-bacterial and moisturising capabilities.

Antonio Costa is the current prime minister (the country's 119th) and has been in office since 26th November 2015. He is accountable to parliament, and reports to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who has been in post since 9th March 2016.

Portuguese shoemaking and leatherworking dates back to the 12th century. Some of Lisbon's oldest streets are named after its heritage, and include Rua Dos Sapateiros ('Shoemakers') and Rua Dos Correeiros ('Saddlers'). Footwear producers in northern Portugal have been making high-end luxury shoes with skills inherited and refined over many generations. Historically, as one of the Portuguese footwear industry's best-kept secrets, these shoemakers have started to emerge to develop their own brands while using the same high level of quality.

Many Portuguese shoemakers have successfully blended tradition and modern technology. In tough economic times, the nation's footwear manufacturers have refused to compromise on quality, and instead have

concentrated on utilising their skills, making Portugal one of the world's leading players in the luxury shoe market. Geographically, the footwear industry is firmly established in the north of the country, focused around the city of Porto. The areas of Felgueiras, Guimaraes, Feira, São João da Madeira and Aveiro are all key shoemaking locations.



Major cities in Portugal

## Portugal – the facts and figures

<b>Official name</b>	Portugese Republic
<b>Population</b>	10.3 million (2017 estimate)
<b>Capital</b>	Lisbon
<b>Land area</b>	92,220 sq km (35,606 sq miles)
<b>Major language</b>	Portuguese
<b>Currency</b>	Euro
<b>Main exports</b>	Agricultural products, base metals, chemical products, clothing, cork, foodstuffs, footwear, hides, leather, machinery and tools, wine, oil products, paper, plastics, rubber, textile materials, wood, wood pulp
<b>Main export partners</b>	Spain, France, Germany, UK, USA, Netherlands

## Portuguese footwear companies

**Atlanta Components** is a producer of soles. It was founded in 1995 with just two machines, five employees and a production capacity of 500-700 pairs of monochrome soles per day. Today, the company's modern facilities has a capacity to produce 20,000 pairs a day of monochrome, bicolour or tricolour soles in thermoplastic rubber (TR/TPR), styrene butadiene rubber (SBR) and prefabricated material. Located near Macieira da Lixa, Atlanta Components has a certified quality management system in compliance with ISO 9001.

The materials used to manufacture Atlanta's soles are also available locally, thanks to companies such as **Industrias Invicta SA**, which supplies the rubber compound for use in sole production. Traditional hand-made footwear manufacturing is thriving in Portugal, one company involved being **2002 Calçado SA**, which produces men's fashion footwear.

With 25 years of experience, **Bolflex** makes up to 20,000 pairs of rubber soles per day from its modern factory. Producing a wide range of soles in various materials, the company also has its own 2D and 3D design and modelling office to assist with the design and creation of new products.

Founded in 1968, **Cipade** produces adhesives for a number of different sectors, including shoemaking and leathersgoods, wood products, the building industry and automotive applications, as well as fabric for the footwear industry. Located in São João da Madeira, the company has been certified since 1995 under ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 standards.

**Eccolet** is the Portuguese arm of the international brand owner Ecco, and has been producing footwear in Santa Maria de Feira (25km from Porto) since 1984. In 2011, to provide cover for lost production due to flooding in Thailand, Eccolet rapidly increased the number of shoes it manufactured, and today it is reported to have one of the most modern shoe factories in the world. The company produces millions of pairs of shoes from four production lines.

**ICC** (Indústrias e Comércio de Calçado) is one of Europe's largest producers of professional footwear. Based in Guimarães, the company manufactures professional footwear for diverse sectors, including construction,

logistics, transport, maintenance, electronics, mining, health and forestry, as well as for the security forces, military and civil protection agencies.

**Lorcol** is a manufacturer of adhesives, varnishes and other chemicals for various industries. A private company located in São João da Madeira, it is certified by the ISO 9001 and OHSAS 18001 standards, and produces items for both the domestic and export markets.

*Lorcol manufactures adhesives, varnishes and other chemicals for various industries*



**MACAP** designs, produces and markets a wide range of items for the footwear industry and its associated companies, including steel shanks for shoes. The company is represented in more than 20 countries.

**Planeta Plásticos** is a leading international manufacturer of safety footwear. Its products are sold in more than 50 countries worldwide, and are said to provide comfort and protection for workers in agriculture, fisheries, food processing, heavy industry and the oil, gas and mining sectors.

**Procalcado** has been making soles for the shoe industry for over 40 years, using a wide range of products such as rubber compression, thermoplastic, ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA), rubber and polyurethane (PU) casting. Located in Pedroso, the company produces footwear components for a wide variety of applications, from fashion to military usage.

Shoe component producer **PROMOCOMPO** began trading in 1981. When during the late 1990s, many brand owners who had previously bought from Portuguese factories started to move their production to countries with lower wage bills (in particular Asia), PROMOCOMPO adjusted its business strategy. One way was to make itself known in the international market, and so visits were made to potential customers around the world. Soon, shoe components were being exported from its Portuguese site to such countries as Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

How can we help?

Please email [membership@satra.com](mailto:membership@satra.com) for further information on the footwear industry in Portugal.

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