

A commitment to using natural materials, well-thought-out design and confidence in the skill of its shoemakers – these are the pillars on which Croatian children's footwear brand Froddo has built its success.

Every step they take

Croatia-based children's footwear brand Froddo takes an interesting approach to product design, seeking advice from medical professionals, such as paediatricians and orthopaedic experts, to supplement the knowledge of its own design team. Even more fascinating is the involvement of child psychologists, which the brand says allows it to "understand what is and what is not important from a child's point of view".

This is not to say that Froddo believes every child is the same. "Every foot, just like every child, is different," it insists. In fact, it celebrates this diversity, declaring that there is a certain beauty to developing and producing shoes that will be worn by a wide assortment of children. This does bring its own challenges, however. Ivana Vuglac Skvaric, Froddo sales manager, tells World Footwear that designing a shoe for a child is "totally different" to designing a shoe for an adult.

Chief among the challenges is the broad range of sizes Froddo must consider. Its products are aimed at children up to the age of 12, which equates to European sizes 17-42. Each size requires its own sketches and its own mould, making for an expensive process. The brand tries to ensure this increased expenditure does not reach the customer at the cash register. "We like to say that Froddo shoes are the best value for money," Ms Vuglac Skvaric says.

Homemade by hand

The brand is part of larger Croatian footwear group Ivancica, which was founded in the town of Ivanec in 1946. It was established by a group of shoemakers who came together to share their knowledge and their skills. It is now a company of more than 1,000 employees and produces 5,000 pairs of shoes per day. This makes it one of Croatia's leading footwear manufacturers. Amid its success, Ivancica has expressed pride that the "spirit of enthusiasm and solidarity" present at its genesis remains intact today.

Froddo insists on using only EU-certified natural materials in its products.

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Froddo is its flagship brand. It exports to around 40 countries, with its main markets being Germany, France, the UK, the US, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. It also operates an own-brand retail network of some 30 shops in Croatia.

Ivancica's headquarters in Ivanec is home to all aspects of Froddo's business, including design, production and its warehouse. "This means we can control the process at all stages," Ms Vuglac Skvaric explains. Its shoes are manufactured here by hand. "We have always been focused on the skilful hands of our workers," the company states. This faith in its shoemakers has led it to invest in machinery that aids manual work, rather than in automation. It simply does not believe a machine can offer the same level of knowledge or quality of work. Each shoe goes through four production stages and up to one hundred production operations. The number of components in each product varies from six to sixty.

Feet first

Froddo's shoes are designed to cope with the rigours of a child's everyday adventures and activities. Above all, they must be healthy for the feet. It describes its footwear as "anatomically designed", with some products featuring flexible soles intended to mimic the sensations of barefoot walking. This encourages the child's foot to develop and strengthen as it should naturally. They also have plenty of room to allow for growth.

The anatomically-shaped insole present in a number of models moulds to the child's foot to maximise comfort, increase foot stability and prevent foot roll. The brand has also developed a patented removable antibacterial insole that employs a three-layer system to increase breathability and reduce perspiration. Froddo's removable insoles have an imprinted foot outline which shows a parent whether the shoe fits and helps them realise when the child has outgrown a pair of shoes. It does so through a smiley face icon, which is placed in the position where the big toe should ideally sit.

Froddo also offers a collection of light, soft shoes for pre-walkers. The supple leathers used allow the feet to bend, while

the flexible sole imitates the effects of barefoot walking.

For the coming autumn/winter season, Froddo created a new durable outsole for this product range. Products to incorporate it have proved popular in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as in Germany.

The brand says the average child spends more than half their time in slippers and so it is essential that they are comfortable. Its range of slippers are made from leather and cotton and, like its shoes for use outside, are designed to complement the natural development of the feet.

It sells waterproof boots that feature its FroddoTex membrane, which keeps the child's feet dry in all weather conditions. An inner lining absorbs any moisture that gets in or is generated.

Nature knows

Froddo's belief that nature knows best when it comes to the development of the feet extends to its choice of materials. It only uses natural materials, which must adhere to its strict





standards, including for the chemicals used when manufacturing them.

"We use only natural leather," Ms Vuglac Skvaric says. It sources cowhides from European Union (EU) countries, principally Italy and Portugal. Froddo's Prewalkers collection is totally free of chrome. Its other products contain leather from suppliers who source REACH-compliant chemicals and test for the presence of chrome VI. For some models, it also uses vegetable-tanned leathers treated with natural tannins, such as those derived from flower petals, tree bark and other plants. The brand believes these materials offer a unique appearance and sensory quality, with their natural surfaces left untouched to preserve their individual character.

Beyond leather, Froddo uses a range of EU-certified materials from trusted suppliers. These include various textiles, wool and sheepskin, which often features in the insole and linings of its shoes. The company says Croatia's accession to the EU has made it easier to guarantee the quality and safety of its materials, describing its footwear as "the fruit of European cooperation".

The brand now has a new market in its sights. "We are planning to expand to Nordic countries," Ms Vuglac Skvaric reveals, adding that discussions are underway with retailers and sales agents in the region. For now, Froddo will continue to rely on the quality of its materials, the creativity of its designers and the skill of its shoemakers to provide shoes which lead to happy children and healthy feet. 🦶



All Froddo's shoes are designed and hand-made at its headquarters in Croatia. It says this allows it to keep a tight hold on the production process during all stages.

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THUMBS UP FOR GALLERY SHOES

With Germany a key market for Froddo, Düsseldorf-based footwear exhibition Gallery SHOES, which launched in 2017 following the demise of GDS, is an important event. The brand attended the inaugural edition of the biannual show last August. Ms Vuglac Skvaric says the new event is better for Froddo than its predecessor. "GDS had become too big," she explains, adding that the brand prefers the "more concentrated" nature of Gallery SHOES.

The second edition of the event took place in this March, welcoming nearly 10,000 professional visitors, a slight increase compared to the August show. After the show, Ulrike Kähler, project director of Gallery SHOES and managing director of organiser IGEDO Company, said: "The European footwear industry has shown its acceptance of this new platform and the role that it will play in its future. Gallery SHOES has a solid reputation based on professionalism and expertise."