



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Working Conditions and Social Dialogue
Social dialogue

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEES FOR FURNITURE AND WOODWORKING

13 February 2023
Working group- Expert Meeting on Skills
Draft MINUTES

Chair: Ana DIJAN (Croatian Wood Cluster)

1. Welcome and Opening of the meeting

EFBWW President Bruno BOTHUA opened the meeting by pointing at the different professions in development within the sector. A lack of skills and knowledge is noticeable, while these are important for a correct use of materials. The sector has to become carbon neutral, and it also faces a transition to digital. Therefore, the needs in the different sectors need to be analysed. In addition, awareness of the planet is necessary, since the forest is a source of oxygen.

David JOHNSON, Chairman of the CEI-Bois Social Affairs Working Group, pointed at the specific composition of the sector, which mainly consists of SMEs and micro-firms. It is key to secure employment in Europe, while maintaining the environment. The sector is indeed facing the transition to a low carbon economy. Skills gaps are present in the renovation and construction sectors, which are linked to woodworking. Social dialogue is the main tool to discuss common challenges, such as skills and competitiveness.

2. Keynote speech

DG EMPL pointed at the need to have a clear picture of transferable skills and knowledge in a context of obvious climate change, a war in Europe and the resulting energy crisis. Climate neutrality by 2050 will require significant efforts. The Fit for 55 package is expected to boost the job market for low- and medium-skilled workers. There will be winners (e.g. in the construction sector) and losers (in brown industries and low-skills services). Thus the aim is to ensure new jobs in promising sectors without periods of unemployment. According to the Commission's projections, climate policies will create 1 million jobs by 2023 and 2 million by 2050. Several European initiatives for skills such as the European Year of Skills, the Erasmus+ programme, the Pact for Skills, the Green Deal Industrial Plan with the creation of net zero industry academies (one of which will be for sustainable construction), and the upcoming wood Bauhaus academy were also mentioned. Finally, he also raised the importance of continuing work on the recognition of qualifications, mobility and internationalisation of VET, as well as of acquiring soft skills.

Silvia MELEGARI added that the Wood for Bauhaus platform will offer training courses, notably on the use of "waste" as material.

Rolf GEHRING stressed the need to link EU VET activities to the national and company levels, where sometimes interest is lacking. He also pleaded for more

ambition of Commission initiatives in the field, pointing at the 8% objective for mobility in the autumn Recommendation from the Council on VET. Kees HOOGENDIJK mentioned the decline in the number of VET students, which calls for a reality check next to raised targets. Brigitte DÖTH claimed that there is a lack of employers' and workers' awareness of the programmes, which is sometimes aggravated by language barriers. On the other hand, Julio RODRIGO said that Erasmus is well known by VET providers. Henry O'SHEA added that in Ireland apprenticeship schemes are abandoned, and VET mobility has also become too expensive in the current context of crisis.

DG EMPL replied that information on Erasmus+ can be found on the dedicated website. In addition, information is sent to member states, and the programmes are regularly reviewed. On the request for more ambition, he pointed at the influence of other actors in the decision-making process (such as MEPs). The declining number of VET students may also be a demographic problem rather than one related to attractiveness. Possible solutions may be found in automation and promotion of STEM in schools.

3. Panel 1 : Cross-border collaboration between training institutes and companies

In the first half of the meeting representatives from the woodworking and furniture industries, trade union and VET, discussed how to set up effective and meaningful cross-border cooperation in the sectors aiming at contributing to the social right of vocational education and adapting training schedules and curricula to future skills needs. The prospect of creating special courses on innovative aspects that are changing in economic processes and company functions as for example circular economy, sustainability, and applications of climate-friendly material such as wood were also raised. Promoting cross-border exchange has the potential to increase the attractiveness of the sectors and improve the industries' image. At the same time, it benefits the learners by providing them with an opportunity to study abroad, gain experiences, learn other techniques, and work organisations and improve their language skills. The panellists also addressed the legal and organisational prerequisites for the cross-border exchange of apprentices and the need to align Member State schemes. They committed themselves to fostering related structures on sectorial level and to supporting companies in their practical implementation. All panellists agreed that cross-border training and education opportunities must be of high quality and with financial support for the individual.

Jonas HERNBORG pointed at the need for a common language for craftsmanship, and for preparation on e.g. safety aspects, in order to overcome national differences. Jeroen DOOM made reference to the Bolster Up projects, focussing on core profiles for three professions. He added that in Belgium cross-border collaboration is set up through the schools.

Kees HOOGENDIJK stressed the challenges faced by micro-companies. Staff shortage is such a challenge, which can be tackled by re-training and re-skilling; in addition, one should recognise the importance of apprenticeships and learning by doing.

4. Panel 2 : Future of work, skills and changing societies

The second session was opened by the intervention of an expert on qualifications and credentials, from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), who gave an overview of CEDEFOP activities and research priorities,

focused on the EU framework, e.g. on the Recommendations on Vocational Education and Training and the Osnabrück Declaration, on the dual transition and transferability of qualifications and on the EU Qualifications Framework and micro-credentials. Speaking about the future of VET, he called for considering the role of VET in the overall education system, which cannot be seen in isolation and must also take into consideration the social economic and labour market perspective.

Following a question by Kees HOOGENDIJK on the balance between VET and higher education frameworks, the expert confirmed that progress is being made to ensure transparency regarding frameworks all over Europe. Permeability between systems is not an easy process. He added that VET on-line courses are heavily used, although a high level of personal training is taking place for micro-credentials.

Ana DIJAN asked whether VET could offer a solution for the lack of skills and knowledgeability on safety when people are recruited in third countries to tackle staff shortage. The CEDEFOP expert replied that institutions should elaborate on recognition of qualification frameworks from third countries, combined with increased mobility using European platforms.

5. Sum up and concluding remarks

Jeroen DOOM stated that companies are often further evolved than schools in digital and green skills, hence the need to integrate skills in existing jobs. Also, more mutual understanding is needed between companies and schools. He added that parents have to be convinced that the woodworking sector uses renewable resources.

Kees HOOGENDIJK pointed at the need to develop a circularity vision in companies. What is needed, is Life-Long Development; on-line courses fit in this approach.

Jonas HERNBORG pleaded for a long-term career prospect. By way of example, he mentioned that re-skilling is common in Sweden. Also, wood is perceived as being sustainable there.

Rolf GEHRING stressed that wood is sustainable. However, to make jobs more attractive, it is necessary to focus on safety, pay (which is a societal question) and a career path. In general, broader apprenticeships have to be developed.

Kenneth JOHANSSON pointed at the added value of projects, such as “Resilient Wood”. He also said that the woodworking sectors offer career prospects, although they are often not visible. However, language is often an obstacle.

Both Gabriella KEMENDI and Teodora ILIEVA pointed at the need for more focussed meetings with concrete deliverables.

Slavica UZELAC welcomed the fact that workers and employers agree on the subject, and on the challenges stemming from the twin transition. Social partners need to work actively on innovative ideas, which is often too burdensome for SMEs. The current context requires decent salaries, quality criteria for qualifications, better crisis management and possibly financing for job mobility.