

European Federation
of Building
and Woodworkers



E F IC
European Furniture Industries Confederation



**Work programme for the Sectoral European Social Dialogue of
the Furniture Industry
2020-2024**

Introduction

The European Furniture Industry has a very long tradition, is nowadays highly diversified and is, even against a highly globalized market and growing competition, successful, innovative and competitive. The European Social Partners in the furniture sector, EFBWW, EFIC & UEA, are as ever committed in working together for a stronger and more competitive furniture sector in Europe, providing sustainable and healthy workplaces and fostering a process innovation, a progressive work organisation and training opportunities.

EFBWW, EFIC and UEA confirm the importance of a strong and autonomous European Social Dialogue for the furniture sector in order to develop a sustainable and prospering Furniture Industry and will continue to reinforce their collaboration in order to achieve these long-term objectives. Good working conditions, an innovative and sustainable work organisation, based on highly qualified workforce and technological innovations, strong collaboration with the field of science and research and good cooperation with related sectors are crucial ingredients for the future prosperity of the sector.

In order to support and foster the abovementioned principles, the sectoral social dialogue will play a stronger role in an increasingly interdependent world at all levels: economical, political, as well as cultural and others. Social Partners are convinced that conflict or problem-solving processes are more and more depending on the involvement of all concerned parties into such processes. This means recognising the interests of the various types of workers and companies, but also the true interests of end-users, suppliers and consumers.

On the European level and in the framework of their joint initiatives, EFBWW, EFIC and UEA will take into account the repartition of responsibilities between the European and national level and will respect the role and autonomy of the national social partners in determining their labour market and terms and conditions of employment.

This four-year work programme is the guideline for the activities of the European social partners of the furniture sector for the period running from 2020 to 2024. However, depending on developments in the EU agenda and in the social partners' consultations by the European Commission, EFIC, UEA and EFBWW may work on other issues that are not included in the work programme. A mid-term evaluation of the work programme will be foreseen for 2022.

The work programme focuses on 5 main pillars:

1. Industry policy
2. Circular Economy & non-toxic environment
3. Labour market: durable employment, skills & education
4. Labour market: fostering a culture of Health & Safety
5. Industrial relations

Main priorities for the period 2020-2024

1. Industry Policy

Technological innovation and especially what is today discussed under the headline Industry 4.0 is paving the way for further developments in new ways of manufacturing and in different industrial processes including consequences in the areas of work organisation, training or safety and health at work. The European Sectoral Social Dialogue gives an important opportunity to Social Partners to exchange views and discuss new challenges and opportunities posed by European industrial policies.

The aim of EU industrial policies is to enable a successful transition towards digital, knowledge-based, decarbonised and more circular industry, seeking fairer competition, promoting innovation, building digital capacities, providing healthy and encouraging workplaces and increasing the sustainability of the EU industry. As such, Social Partners will closely monitor the EU legislative initiatives for the EU legislative term running from 2019-2024¹ and will actively contribute to the discussions. Social Partners welcome the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 of the EU Heads of States regarding their call for the EU to design 'an industrial policy fit for the future' and to 'urgently implement a more assertive, comprehensive and coordinated industrial policy'. Social Dialogue Partners believe that industrial and Single Market policies should be better linked with other key areas, such as research and innovation, trade, digitalisation, skills and funding, with the aim of fostering economically, environmentally and socially sustainable growth in the EU.

2. Circular Economy and non-toxic environment

Furniture is an innovative sector and EU research confirmed that the sector is, compared to other industrial sectors and in terms of innovation, the most competitive in the globalized economy. Furniture manufacturing requires different and new types of materials for various applications. The sector is leading in products design and combines traditional furniture qualities with innovative and modern ways of production. In this respect, Social Partners are convinced of the need to further collaborate with other sectors, as well as scientists and research centres to develop and promote innovative solutions that take into account both employers and employees' needs.

The Communication of the European Union's industry policy for Forestry and the Forest Based Industries as well as the Blueprint (2015) published in parallel and the initiatives under the Circular Economy Package, including on product policy, give sufficient legal ground to the Furniture industry to play a key role in implementing a circular economy, with an efficient consumption of raw materials, the reduction of energy consumption and of chemicals, with new material combinations, through the cascading use of raw materials and processed materials and the reuse, remanufacturing and refurbishment of products. As such,

¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39914/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024.pdf?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=A+new+strategic+agenda+term-2024

Circular economy is one of the top priorities for the furniture sector. The sector is willing to investigate ways of enabling a circular change through the development of new industrial strategies, which take into account principles like recyclability, sustainability and innovative design of products. The furniture industry looks forward to future initiatives under the Green Deal announced by the President of the European Commission and to new initiatives on Circular Economy.

Social partners are committed to encourage the implementation of circular economy principles and will take joint actions to this aim. Moreover, these principles have already brought new demands in the economy and in the labour market, giving significant opportunities in terms of activity and creation of new jobs in the Furniture Sector. The greening of the economy will therefore impact the organisation of work (new technologies for the production process; new market opportunities, new skills needed, etc.) and the working conditions (additional/new training, adapted health and safety conditions, etc.), as well as business models and new ways of production.

EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW are committed to address these opportunities in the framework of their joint activities and to reflect the voice of workers and companies more closely in the debate on a strengthened competitiveness of our sectors at national, European and international level. Social Partners acknowledge a strong need for innovative research action, continuous sustainable financial investments and strengthening of lifelong learning. What is in our focus equally important is the advanced use of new technology and the development of intelligent work processes as well as the production and use of new combinations in terms of materials. Social Partners will also address the challenges of implementing a circular economy and its impact on the workforce in the furniture sector with projects such as the Sawyer project (CENFIM).

3. Labour market

Improving the functioning of the labour market

As most industries, the Furniture Industry has been hit significantly by the crisis, which is still affecting many Member States. One effect, observed by the Social Partners, is that unfair competition occurs due to, amongst others, a legislative framework that is sometimes unclear and difficult to enforce or due to difficulties in implementing adequate controls, in particular in the case of cross-border operations. Ensuring a level playing field for companies and fighting against social fraud will be amongst the priorities of the current work programme.

EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW apply a policy of zero tolerance against unfair and illegal practices in the Furniture Industry and will address the issue of the appropriate measures for combating "undeclared work". Where appropriate the necessary initiatives will be taken to this end at national and European level, in a broad partnership with the various actors concerned, i.e. labour inspectorates, national authorities and social funds.

Anticipating and influencing the skills needs

In several Member States, independently on whether the Furniture Industry was strongly affected by the crisis or not, there are changes in the use of technology and new work processes. As a result, companies partly find it difficult to find workers with the appropriate skills. In the context of pressure from

globalisation, new competences are essential. Business skills, knowledge of highly automated production systems and new materials, as well as ICT skills as well as communication/cooperation skills are key.

The so called “skills gap”, i.e. the difference between the skills available and the ones that are effectively needed by the work process is a serious obstacle to economic growth, creation of jobs and competitiveness. In order to reduce this “skills gap” there is a need, on the one hand, for a better “market intelligence” aiming at anticipating the changes in technology, tools, material and work processes more effectively. On the other hand, there is a need for a constant adaptation of the training schemes, curricular for apprenticeships and companies training activities, as well as of the respective work organisation.

Addressing the issue of anticipation of skills needs is of significant importance both for the competitiveness of furniture companies, as well as for employment in the sector. EFBWW, EFIC and UEA would therefore like to gather the experiences of some Member States and see how added value can be created by a better coordination at the EU level, in particular as regards mutual learning, creation of synergies and exchange of best practices between national stakeholders.

Durable employment and demographic changes: taking account of an ageing workforce & fostering youth employment and quality of apprenticeships

The demographic changes and in particular the ageing of the population and of the workforce, combined with the difficulties observed in several Member States to attract and maintain young people in the Furniture Sector, are growing challenges both for companies and for workers.

Employment rates in Europe were largely affected by the recent economic crisis that have particularly impacted youth unemployment rates. Despite the efforts of the EU and Member States, youth unemployment is still a relevant challenge. According to statistics, one in five under 25 years old who is looking for a job cannot find one. Approximately 17 million young people between 20 and 34 are neither in employment nor in education or training. In addition, in most Member States the Furniture sector is still suffering from a relatively low attractiveness and which, to some extent, explains the difficulties in driving the interest of young people and skilled workers on the sector. Therefore, improving its attractiveness towards young people can widely contribute in tackling the worrisome high levels of youth unemployment rates in the EU.

Support of the European Commission and national governments, as well as the commitment of Social Partners to tackle this issue is crucial. As such, EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW will address the impact of such demographic developments from the various angles of its components (image of the sector, health and safety, employment issues, further training and career paths etc.) by gathering examples of national best practice and identifying potential topics for action at the EU level.

Workers’ qualifications and boosting competences and skills in the workforce remain fundamental in the furniture sector, both for the young and the older workforce. As such, social partners will work together to find possible solutions to train older workers to keep them updated with newly developed

technologies and enhance the attractiveness of the sector to young people. Social partners are convinced that high quality vocational education and training (VET), in particular the so-called “dual forms” (combining practical and theoretical knowledge), as well as further promotion of apprenticeships in EU Member States, must be crucial issues for the EU agenda because they are tools that facilitate the transition from education to employment.

EFIC, UEA and EFBWW will develop actions aiming at the promotion of apprenticeships amongst Furniture companies of all sizes both quantitatively and qualitatively, through the further creation of strong partnership involving employers, trade unions, paritarian funds, VET institutes as well as local and regional authorities (example: Bolster-Up project).

4. Labour market: Fostering a culture of H&S

Despite the overall reduction in the number of work-related accidents, improving health and safety in the workplace continues to be an important field of action for the furniture sector and therefore one of our main priorities. We are still confronted with a high share of traditional hazards like musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), exposure to dust, chemicals, noise and vibrations, but we are also facing new emerging risks. The improvement of health and safety very much depends on knowledge and a proper legal framework, providing a level playing field for companies. It can also be achieved by promoting the development of a real culture of health and safety within each company, with the involvement of all the concerned stakeholders and in particular the workers.

Referring to previous paragraphs of this programme, dealing with innovation and new working processes, Social Partners will also pay attention to new emerging risks, related to the use of new materials, combination of materials, changes in the work processes and work organisation or the implementation of new technologies.

With specific regard to H&S issues, the Social Partners of the furniture sector will therefore focus their activities on:

- Assessment of the EU H&S legislative framework
- Operational action for better working conditions, including joint projects
- Fostering the better prevention of psychosocial hazards
- Addressing potential new hazards and precautionary prevention strategies
- Collaboration with the OSHA Agency and supporting its campaigns

5. Industrial Relations

Functioning industrial relations are a major element of a level playing field for economic activities. Shaping working conditions in all its aspects by joint agreements is a cornerstone in this respect and the best guarantee to avoid and to fight competition by wage dumping or other kind of dumping related to working conditions.

EFBWW, EFIC and UEA will therefore pay particular attention in the strengthening of autonomous industrial relations within the furniture sector. They also reaffirm the primary responsibility of the national sectoral social partners, through autonomous industrial relations, for finding a common understanding about the organisation of their national labour market.

Social Partners support the establishment of industrial relation systems in all the Member States and in this respect, they will examine specific needs or demands raised by national social partners and, where needed, jointly develop specific capacity building initiatives, paying specific attention to the Central and Eastern European countries.

The following annex is tabling the specific planned activities, also indicating aims, responsibilities and timing.

Social Dialogue Furniture: draft work programme 2020/2024

Policy Area	Topic	Aim	Period	Responsible
1. Industry Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the EU-Industry policy for our sector • Digitalisation / Industry 4.0 • Initiating a debate with the CCMI Committee of the EESC • Expert Group for the Forest-Based Industries • (see below) Goods Package • Consumer product regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine whether joint position and policy papers are possible • Joint position paper • A CCMI Opinion • Jointly taking initiatives • Identify common ground and sector's specific issues • Monitor legislative framework and updates from the Commission 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both parties – secretariats • Secretariats / Working Party • Secretariats • Secretariats • Secretariats • Secretariats / Working Party • Secretariats / Working Party

2. Circular Economy & non-toxic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor new initiatives part of the Green Deal • Challenges and opportunities • Products design, circularity, reusability, recyclability, sustainability • Incentives to circular economy implementation • Flame Retardants • Eco-Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying common issues and sharing best practices • Exchanging information, increasing awareness • Sawyer project • Identifying call for proposals and EU ad hoc programmes. Joint projects • Exchange of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All parties • All parties • All parties
Industrial Relations and Labour Market Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social dialogue in candidate countries and to Balkan countries • Refugees and their integration in the society/labour markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving our ties and communication with CEE countries • Exchange of good practices – possible joint activities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat / Chairman • Secretariats / Plenary Meeting

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3. Labour market: assessing demographic changes; Training & education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster Up II Project • Skills agenda • Evaluation of the EU policies in the area of VET – especially the new “skills strategy” • Durable employment / Demographic Change and education / • Quality apprenticeship schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further establishment of the concept – follow up project • Monitoring “Sector Skills Alliance” (Erasmus+) and “European Alliance for Apprenticeships” (EU Commission level) • Joint project (drafting ongoing) • Evaluation of possible joint initiatives/project • Information on, promotion and support of quality apprenticeship schemes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working party / Secretariats / EFBWW • Working party / Secretariat • Working party / Secretariat • Working party / Secretariat

4. Labour market: Occupational health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood Dust • Examine the application of Nano-Technologies in the furniture sector • Revision of the carcinogenic directive and possible directive on musculoskeletal disorders • Psychosocial Hazards • New OSHA campaign on chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on the European Conference on Wood Dust / possible social partner project • Early awareness of possible innovative opportunities / negative health effects – influencing the EU policy • Better lobbying for a progressive revision of the Directive • Mutual information on facts, policies and initiatives • Participation in the EU OSHA campaign in 2018 - 2019 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
Horizontal issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Pillar of Social Rights • Horizon Europe • Other relevant EU initiatives 			