

European Federation
of Building
and Woodworkers



E#IC

European Furniture Industries Confederation



**Action Programme for the
Sectoral European Social Dialogue
of the
Furniture Industry**

2016-2017

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 various strength of the sector have various fathers and mothers, however, a functioning social dialogue is one of the main factors for its success.

EFIC and UEA, EFBWW confirm the importance of a strong and autonomous European social dialogue for the furniture sectors in order to develop a sustainable and prospering Furniture Industry and will continue to reinforce their collaboration in order to achieve this. Decent working conditions, an intelligent work organisation and work processes based on highly qualified workforce, good collaboration with the field of science and research and a cooperating industry with good relations to related sectors are main ingredients for the future prosperity of the sector.

In supporting and fostering the just mentioned aspects, our social dialogue is acting in an ever more interdependent world on all levels, economic, political, as well as cultural and others. We are convinced that conflict or problem solving processes are more and more depending on the involvement of all concerned parties into s means to recognize the interests of the various types of workers and companies, but also recognizing the true interests of end-users, suppliers and the population.

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 by themselves.

This multi-annual working programme serves as a guideline for the activities of the European social partners of the woodworking sectors for the years 2016-2017. However, EFIC, UEA and EFBWW may, according to the developments in the EU agenda decide to tackle other issues than those contained in this programme, amongst others in the framework of the consultations of the social partners that will be launched by the European Commission during this period.

During this period the EFBWW, EFIC and UEA will in particular strive to give a stronger visibility and follow-up to their joint actions, statements and projects.

Main priorities for the period 2016-2017

Strengthening 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 a particular attention in the strengthening of autonomous industrial relations within the woodworking sectors. 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.

EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW will continue to support the establishment of autonomous sectoral industrial relation systems for the woodworking sectors 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.

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 and this is due, amongst others, to a legislative framework that is sometimes unclear, difficult to enforce or 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.

Industrial policies and a "Greening" economy

When talking about a greening economy or a circular economy, the consumption of renewable raw material, energy consumption, new combinations or the cascade use of raw materials and processed materials are crucial. In this respect, the Furniture Industry can play a decisive role in the future. The Communication of the European Union's industry policy for Forestry and the Forest Based Industries as well as the parallel published Blueprint and a number of other related documents are underlining this prominent role.

Furniture is an innovative sector and EU research confirmed that our sector is, compared with other industrial sectors, in terms of innovation most competitive in the globalized economy. Furniture uses and combines new type of material for various applications; is leading in design; combines traditional furniture qualities with other and new qualities and functions. The latter aspect is also pointing on the need for a future fruitful collaboration with other sectors and between science, employers, employee representatives and other stakeholders aiming at the creation of innovation clusters.

Changes in demands due to the “greening” of the economy and of jobs represent, on the one hand, a significant opportunity for the Furniture Sector in terms of activity and creation of new jobs. On the other hand, they will also have an impact on the organisation of work (new technologies for the production process; new market opportunities, new skills needed, etc.) and in the working conditions (additional/new training, adapted health and safety conditions, etc.).

EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW are committed to address these issues 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. We pay particular attention to the need for an industry-wide dialogue between employers and workers at every level, as well as to the need for innovative research action, continuous sustainable financial investments and strengthening of lifelong learning. What is in our focus equally is the improved use of the European innovation programme Horizon 2020 to improve and innovative production processes, 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 material.

Demographic changes: taking account of an ageing workforce

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 a growing challenges both for companies and for workers.

EFIC, UEA and the EFBWW are going to 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.

Initiatives for youth employment and the quality of apprenticeships

The crisis which has hit the EU since 2008 has had and continues to have a significant impact on the levels of employment in most Member States and is particularly affecting young people. Despite the efforts of the EU and its member countries, employment prospects for young people in the EU are bleak. One in five under 25 years old who is looking for work cannot find a job. Approximately 7.5 million young people between 15 and 24 are neither working, nor in education or training.

In addition, in most Member States the Furniture Sectors are still suffering from a relatively negative image which affects its attractiveness and which, to some extent, explains the difficulties in hiring and retaining young people as well as skilled workers.

Therefore, improving the attractiveness of the furniture work towards young people can provide an important contribution in fighting against the extremely high levels of youth unemployment that the EU is facing nowadays.

The development of high quality vocational education and training (VET), in particular so-called "dual forms", combining elements of theoretical and practical training at the workplace, in training centres and in schools and targeting to support apprenticeships to arrange the whole work process autonomously, should be high on the EU agenda and is considered an important mean for facilitating the transition from education and training to work.

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 or regional authorities.

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. In turn companies partly find it difficult to find workers with the appropriate skills.

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 needs to be on the one hand a better “market intelligence” aiming at better anticipating the changes in technology, tools, material and work processes and the skills needs and, on the other hand, a constant adaptation of the training schemes, curricular for apprenticeships and companies training activities as well as 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, on the one hand, 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. On the other hand, experiences regarding the same aspects from company level needed to gain a comprehensive picture.

In a second step, they will also try to set the basis for a longer term and more structured cooperation/coordination between national stakeholders and to extend the involvement of further national stakeholders, i.e. companies and workers, national observatories, sectoral paritarian funds, public and private bodies involved in training, research centres, academics, etc..

Fostering a culture of H&S

Despite the overall reduction in the number of work related accidents and illnesses, the Furniture Sector and therefore one of our main priorities. We are still confronted with a high share of traditional hazards like MSD or noise and vibrations but also facing new emerging risks. The improvement of health and safety very much depends on knowledge and a proper legal framework, also providing a level playing field for companies, but can also be achieved through 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, we also pay much 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.

The Social Partners of the furniture sector are focusing their activities for the next two years especially on:

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

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

Policy Area	Topic	Aim	Period	Responsible
Industry Policy	Examine the EU-Industry policy for our sector	Presenting a joint policy paper, covering the various aspects	2016 - ongoing	Both parties – secretariats
	Initiating a debate with the CCMI Committee of the EESC	Specific action related to single initiatives of the EU	When requested	Secretariats
	Timber Regulation	Follow up	2016-2017	Secretariats
	Expert Group for the Forest-Based Industries	Jointly taking initiatives – Pushing for a sub group for Furniture	2016-2017	Secretariats in collaboration with members of the Expert of the Group
	Initiatives for innovation in the sector (Horizon 2020)	Joint Position Paper	2016 or 2017	Secretariats

Policy Area	Topic	Aim	Period	Responsible
Industrial Relations and Labour Market Policies	Social dialogue in candidate countries and to Balkan countries	Improving our ties and communication with CEE countries	Ongoing	Secretariats / Chairmen
	Working conditions and fair employment	Evaluation of changes in the forms of employment and subcontracting	2016 – 2017	Secretariats / Plenary Meeting
	Refugees and their integration in the society/labour markets	Exchange of good practices – possible joint activities	2016 – 2017	Secretariats / Plenary Meeting
Environment	Promotion and awareness activities	Defining our interest in these issues	2016 -2017	All parties Secretariats
	Eco-label	Collecting existing national positions/policies	2016 -2017	All parties secretariats
	Consumer product Regulation	Preparing a joint policy	2016 -2017	All parties secretariats
	Green Public Procurement	Mutual information – Preparing a joint policy	2016 -2017	All parties secretariats
	Flame Retardants	Evaluation of possible joint initiatives	2016 -2017	All parties secretariats

Policy Area	Topic	Aim	Period	Responsible
Training & education	Bolster Up project	Further establishment of the concept – follow up project	2016 – 2017	Working party / Secretariats / EFBWW (project)
	Evaluation of the EU policies in the area of VET – especially the new “skills strategy	ongoing	ongoing	Working party / Secretariat
	Demographic Change and education	Assessment of the specific situation in our sector – evaluation of possible joint initiatives	ongoing	Working party / Secretariat
	Quality apprenticeship schemes	Information on, promotion and support of quality apprenticeship schemes through development of strong partnerships	ongoing	Working party / Secretariat

Policy Area	Topic	Aim	Period	Responsible
Occupational health and safety	Psychosocial Hazards	Running a joint Social Partner Project	2016–2017	Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting
	Examine the application of Nano- technologies in the furniture sector	Early awareness of possible innovative opportunities / negative health effects – influencing the EU policy	Timing is not clear	Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting
	Revision of the carcinogenic directive and possible directive on musculoskeletal disorders	Better lobbying for a progressive revision of the Directive	Ongoing	Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting
	Evaluation of the OSH legal framework	Joint position paper	2016	Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting
	Active Ageing	Participation in the EU OSHA campaign in 2016 - 2017	2016 - 2017	Working party, Secretariats, Plenary Meeting



**European Furniture
Manufacturers Federation (UEA)**

Na Porici 12
CZ - 110 00 Prague 1

Tel.: ++420 777 294 404
E-mail: secretary@ueanet.com
www.ueanet.com



**European Furniture Industries Confederation
European Furniture
Industries Confederation (EFIC)**

Rue Montoyer 24
B – 1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 2 287 08 86
E-mail: info@efic.eu
www.efic.eu

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**European Federation of
Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW)**

Rue Royale 45
B – 1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 2 227 10 40
E-mail: info@efbh.be
www.efbww.org