

European Federation  
of Building  
and Woodworkers



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**Multiannual Action Programme  
for the  
Sectoral European social dialogue of the construction  
industry**

**2016-2019**



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## **A. Introduction**

The European social partners, EFBWW and FIEC confirm the importance of a strong and autonomous European social dialogue for the construction industry in order to develop a sustainable construction industry and will continue to reinforce their collaboration in order to achieve this.

In the framework of their joint initiatives, EFBWW and FIEC 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 construction industry for the years 2016-2019. EFBWW and FIEC may decide to tackle other issues than those contained in this work programme according to the developments at the national and in the EU agenda, amongst others in the framework of the consultations of the social partners that will be launched by the European Commission during this period according to articles 154 and 155 of the EU Treaty.

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

The EFBWW and FIEC underline the key role of the construction industry. The construction industry is very important to the EU economy. The sector provides 20 million direct jobs and contributes to about 10 % of the EU's GDP. It also creates new jobs, drives economic growth, and provides solutions for societal, climate and energy challenges.

## **B. Main priorities for the period 2016-2019**

### ***1. 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 construction industry, are becoming important challenges both for companies and for workers.



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The EFBWW and FIEC will address the impact of such demographic developments from the various angles of its components (image of the sector, health and safety, employment issues, etc.) by gathering examples of national best practice and identifying potential topics for action at EU level.

## **2. Initiatives for youth employment**

The crisis which started in 2008 has had and is still having a significant impact on the levels of unemployment of most of the Member States and is particularly affecting young people : according to Eurostat the youth unemployment rate stood at 20.6 % in May 2015, almost twice as high as the adult rate.

Despite what the EU and its member countries are doing, 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 under 24 are neither working, nor in education or training.

In addition, in most member States the construction industry is still suffering from a negative image which affects its attractiveness and which, to some extent, explains the difficulties in hiring and in keeping young people as well as skilled workers.

Therefore, improving the attractiveness of the construction industry, which in 2014 represented 8.8% of the EU28 GDP and which remains a labour intensive activity, towards young people can provide an important contribution in fighting against the extremely high levels of youth unemployment that the EU is facing nowadays.

### ***a) Updating, promoting and further developing the “Youth initiatives” website ([www.construction-for-youth.eu](http://www.construction-for-youth.eu))***

In the framework of the previous Social Dialogue work programme a website presenting “Initiatives for youth employment in the construction industry” was developed, with a co-financing of the European Commission (DG EMPL).



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The specific objective of this project was to develop a website presenting national best practices concerning tools/ initiatives in favour of youth employment and for improving their working conditions in the construction industry, as well as for improving the overall image of the sector and thereby improving its attractiveness amongst young people.

The exchange of best practices on initiatives for promoting youth employment and improving working conditions can provide an extremely useful input for the setting up and the development of targeted new initiatives, by showing how other stakeholders in other countries have addressed the same concerns.

The website was officially launched in January 2015 and gathered, at the launching, 40 initiatives from 13 different countries.

EFBWW and FIEC will jointly continue to update it on a regular basis, to promote it at the EU and at the national level and to further develop it.

### ***b) Increasing the number and the quality of apprenticeships***

The development of high quality vocational education and training (VET), in particular so-called "dual forms", combining elements of training at the workplace, in training centres and in schools, has been high on the EU agenda for quite a while and is considered an important mean for facilitating the transition from education and training to work. Taking into consideration the statistics for youth employment, countries practicing "dual forms" of VET, such as Austria, Germany or Netherlands, show better results than other countries and it seems to be the generally accepted view that such high quality VET is key, in order to ensure the necessary basis for many other EU policies, as well as for growth, jobs and competitiveness.

In 2013 the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) was launched and in 2015 DG GROW initiated a specific initiative aiming at promoting and developing apprenticeship within the construction industry.

In June 2015 EFBWW and FIEC signed a joint pledge in the framework of EAfA and both organisations collaborated on the apprenticeships initiative of DG GROW.



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EFBWW and FIEC will continue to develop actions in the framework of their joint pledge, as well as promoting apprenticeships amongst construction companies of all sizes both quantitatively and qualitatively, through the creation of strong partnership involving employers, trade unions, paritarian funds, VET institutes as well as local or regional authorities.

### ***c) Developing responsible entrepreneurship***

Responsible entrepreneurship includes on the one hand sense of initiative, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives and therefore needs transversal skills and attitudes as well as more specialised knowledge and business skills. On the other hand, it includes social skills and responsibilities towards the workforce and society. The latter is basic for a fair economy and competition too and recognizes, amongst other, the role of collective agreements for a level playing field.

In order to stimulate employment, jobs, innovation and social coherence, it is necessary to develop the entrepreneurial mindset of young people and the important role of education in promoting such an entrepreneurial attitude is widely recognised. Entrepreneurship in this sense is more than focussing on a business but being able to cope with challenges, driving change and taking responsibilities

The construction industry offers significant opportunities and perspectives in both aspects as pointed out above and promoting entrepreneurship could effectively contribute to more jobs in the sector.

EFBWW and FIEC will focus on both aspects of entrepreneurship and assess existing initiatives at the national level and on these basis envisage possible joint actions.

### **3. Vocational training**

Beside the high levels of unemployment observed in the EU, figures indicate at the same time that within the EU there are approximately 2 million vacant jobs.

In other words, in some countries companies cannot find workers with the skills needed on the market. Various factors can explain this "skills gap", such as, for example, on-going technical developments, inadequate training schemes, difficulties over the recognition of qualifications, barriers to mobility, etc. In order to overcome this there is a significant need



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to foster investment in training, to facilitate access to training, in particular for SMEs, to better anticipate the skills needed and to adapt the training schemes accordingly, with a particular focus on young people.

In contrast to other industrial sectors, in construction it is not the “final product” that moves within the single market, but rather the enterprises and their workforces that have to move to where the “product” is to be constructed. Such mobility plays a crucial role in the competitiveness of the sector and should therefore not be hindered by training and education policies, which are national competences, and which - due to the specificities of each country – sometimes differ significantly.

#### ***a) Anticipating the skills needs***

In several Member States, where construction activity has less been affected by the crisis, there are companies that have difficulties in finding workers with the appropriate skills.

Several elements can explain this situation :

- demographic changes, with an ageing workforce and difficulties in attracting young people into the sector;
- changing policy drivers, with a greater focus on “greening” and on energy efficiency for example;
- changes in technology impacting construction products but also machineries and tools;
- training schemes tailored for national practices;
- time gap between changes in work processes and needed changes in curricular for vocational education and consequently the training and the availability of the trained workers on the market;
- etc.

The “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 and must therefore be reduced.



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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 and the respective work organisation.

Addressing the issue of anticipation of skills needs is of significant importance both for the competitiveness of construction companies, as well as for employment in the sector.

EFBWW and FIEC 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.

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 (companies and workers, national observatories, sectoral paritarian funds, public and private bodies involved in training, private and public research centers, academics, etc.).

#### ***b) Validation of informal and non-formal training***

Non-formal and informal learning activities constitute an important aspect of education and training because they complement formal learning and are of importance for the labour market, particularly in the construction sector, by helping to acquire complementary knowledge, qualifications and other key skills.

In order to facilitate mobility within the Internal Market a greater recognition should be given to non-formal and informal learning and this can be achieved through better comparability and transparency, whilst at the same time preserving and continuing to strengthen the existing formal learning schemes.

Non-formal and informal learning are important elements in the learning process and are effective instruments for making learning attractive, developing lifelong learning and promoting the social integration of young people. They encourage the participation, active citizenship and social inclusion of young people, and



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EFBWW and FIEC will gather and examine existing methodologies for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and, whilst recognising the possible diversity linked to different national practices or situations, will envisage to define and promote possible EU principles, without interfering nor affecting the existing formal learning schemes.

### ***c) Facilitating the mutual recognition of qualifications***

Despite the instruments put in place at the EU level (EQF, ECVET, Europass, etc.) mobility within the Internal Market is in some cases hindered by a lack of recognition of qualifications between Member States.

Without putting into question the fact that training and the related qualifications are and should remain under the responsibility of each Member State, in order to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications the EFBWW and FIEC will discuss the feasibility of a possible "EU licence" for operating specific types of large machines used on worksites, such as pile rigging machines for example, and possibly initiate a joint project on this topic.

### ***d) Exchange of best practices on EU instruments***

The formal European instruments like EQF, ECVET, Europass,...developed with the aim of achieving a better transparency amongst the different national training schemes, meet highly different national practices and conditions.

The EFBWW and FIEC consider further research and exchange of best practices on status, differences and perspectives of the respective national systems as a precondition for any progress in direction to a better implementation of such European Instruments and towards mutual recognition of qualifications. The Social partners will initiate such sector related research.





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### ***e) “Greening” of the economy and of jobs***

Buildings are responsible for 42% of EU final energy consumption and produce about 35% of all greenhouse gas emissions and therefore the construction industry plays a key role in the achievement of the EU agenda for cutting greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change is a powerful instrument to create jobs in the construction industry.

The changes in the demand due to the “greening” of the economy and of jobs represent, on the one hand, a significant opportunity for the construction industry in terms of activity and creation of new jobs, but, on the other hand, they will also have an impact in the organisation of companies (new market opportunities, new skills needed, etc. ) and in the working conditions (additional/new training, adapted Health and Safety conditions, etc.).

The EFBWW and FIEC 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 the construction sector at national, European and international level. Attention will be paid here in particular to the need for an industry-wide dialogue between employers and workers at every level, as well as to the need for continuous sustainable financial investments and strengthening of lifelong learning.

### ***f) Taking up the challenge of the current refugees crisis through training***

The unprecedented high number of refugees and asylum seekers in the EU and their integration represents a major challenge also for the social partners. EFBWW and FIEC will address the issue, in order to identify and promote opportunities for their integration in the EU labour market, amongst others through targeted training and education schemes.



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## **5. 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 construction sector and therefore one of EFBWW and FIEC's main priorities. It also remains a priority because of the dynamic of construction work that potentially produces new emerging risks, caused for example by new technics, used products and substances or changes in economic conditions and forms of employment.

The improvement of health and safety 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.

The EFBWW and FIEC jointly monitor the EU-policies in the area of working conditions and aim at influencing these policies by presenting common positions whenever they can act on common ground. In this respect, the EFBWW and FIEC are also aiming at a better mainstreaming of European OSH policies in other policy areas of the EU and in its own policies.

In the framework of the previous Social Dialogue work programme FIEC and EFBWW jointly addressed the issue of "Asbestos" and produced specific "Information modules" targeted to construction companies and workers. The dissemination of these "Information modules" was positively assessed by the stakeholders concerned and therefore possible new joint follow-up activities will be envisaged in the framework of this work programme. Possible new joint activities on asbestos could include learning from good national examples regarding registration of asbestos, programmes for safe removal of asbestos and links with the sustainable construction and energy efficiency policies.

### ***a) Assessment of the EU H&S legislative framework***

An overall evaluation of the practical implementation of all the EU H&S directives undertaken on behalf of the European Commission has been finalised in June 2015 with a view to assessing the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of such Directives and identifying possible improvements to the regulatory framework.



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The EFBWW and FIEC will discuss the outcome of this study and will closely follow forthcoming initiatives in this respect. Whenever possible they will undertake joint actions in this respect with the aim of ensuring that the specificities and the needs of the construction industry are adequately taken into account.

Our general policy is guided by the intention to improve the quality of the EU-legislation. Better regulation shall improve the consistency of EU law without compromising the level of protection and shall not question the principle of equality, meaning the same level of protection for all workers, no matter on what type of contract the work is carried out or in what type (size) of company the work is executed. FIEC and EFBWW however recognise that in order to be effectively enforced and applied the overall H&S framework should consist in instruments that adequately take into account the needs and capacities of each company according to their size.

***b) Better collaboration between stakeholders for improving the quality and safety of earth moving machines on construction worksites***

Construction machinery and in particular earth-moving machines are the source of many serious and sometimes fatal accidents on worksites. Hazard sources are the large machines themselves, but also the large amount of moved ground or material, as well as the interaction with other parts or types of machinery (for ex. quick couplers) and the organisation of the worksite, especially in order to avoid interferences with other activities taking place in the sphere of action of the concerned machine. Equally, a proper training contributes as a precondition for the safe use of machines.

Potentially, the operators of these machines are also exposed to further risks, mainly stemming from inadequate design (access to the machine, overall ergonomics of the machine, etc.). Despite remarkable improvements, this aspect still concerns the overall ergonomics of machines and specific activities such as maintenance or the ordinary cleaning of the machines.

EFBWW and FIEC therefore intend to bring together producers and users of some specific types of machinery, with the aim of establishing a direct channel of communication and collaboration between them and thereby paving the way for improvements in the design of such machines in order to improve safety and health at the workplace.



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### ***c) Improving the safety culture in our sector***

Even though the number of fatal and serious accidents shows a falling trend, the number is still high and can further be reduced by improving the safety culture. Improving the safety culture needs links to the vocational education but also the stronger involvement of other protagonists, influencing the safety conditions on construction sites.

The EFBWW and FIEC will aim at the better involvement of clients, safety coordinators, designers, contractors and workers in the overall process of the health and safety planning for construction work, encompassing the construction phase as well as the planning phase and the maintenance or other type of activity. We will promote the state of the art regarding effective accident prevention, based on an organised and strong participation of workers.

We also consider the new EU Directive on public procurement as a good opportunity to improve health and safety. We target to strengthen the role of the public authorities as a client that takes care of the health and safety aspect of buildings during its whole live cycle, including the construction phase and all following construction activities.

### ***d) Health and safety for all types of workers***

Mobility is one of the main features of construction activities. This relates to the temporary nature of construction worksites, but also to the mobility of the workforce in general. Migrant workers, fixed-term contracts and other types of working relations (self-employment, agency workers, etc.) are widespread in the construction sector.

The EFBWW and FIEC will strengthen the inclusion of the above-mentioned categories of workers by gathering and exchanging best practices of their full integration into the health and safety organisation of companies.

The EFBWW and FIEC will look for possible common actions regarding prevention of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), in order to limit reductions in the ability to work – an issue which is highly related to the challenge of the ageing workforce.



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#### ***e) Harmonisation of statistics on H&S***

In order to be able to compare the various situations in the different Member States and to be able to benchmark them at the EU level the EFBWW and FIEC consider that further improvements in the availability, the quality and the comparability of statistical data on occupational health and safety are needed. In collaboration with the various concerned bodies (EUROSTAT, the Bilbao Agency, the national statistical institutes, etc.) they will therefore examine how to achieve these goals, in the framework of the application of Regulation 1338/2008 establishing a common framework for the systematic production of Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work.

#### ***f) Addressing potential new hazards (ex. : nano-products)***

Innovation and new technologies have an impact on construction products and processes and may introduce new hazards and new forms of occupational diseases. It is therefore important that any initiative at the EU level in the field of H&S adequately takes into account such new developments on the basis of the "precautionary principle".

According to a project on nano-materials in the European construction industry (2009), it is expected that these technologies will have a strong impact on our industry in the future. Positive aspects are expected in terms of new qualities of construction materials and in consequence in housing, and probably also in terms of workers' qualification.

There is therefore a need for further research regarding possible health effects and for monitoring the implementation and efficiency of tools developed, focusing on the specificities of the construction sector.

#### ***g) Collaboration with the OSHA Agency***

On the basis of their long term collaboration with the OSHA Agency the EFBWW and FIEC will discuss and possibly initiate joint actions in the framework of the campaigns launched by the Agency whenever they address specific topics that are of relevance and of interest for the construction sector.



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FIEC and EFBWW agreed to jointly address the issue of better prevention of psychosocial hazards at the workplace, amongst others on the basis of the experiences and outcomes from the last campaign of the OSHA Agency. The joint actions shall focus on the specific conditions in the construction sector, in particular on the mobile character of construction activities, as well as on changes in the work process.

The ageing of the workforce is of particular concern for the construction industry. Therefore in the framework of the OSHA campaign 2016-2017 FIEC and EFBWW will envisage possible joint initiatives on this issue. In this area special attention will be paid to the ergonomics of work processes, material and tools, in order to better prevent Musculoskeletal Disorders.

## **6. Improving the functioning of the labour market**

The construction industry has been significantly hit by the crisis, which is still affecting many Member States : approximately 2.4 million jobs have been lost between 2008 and 2013 and construction companies are facing a sharp increase in competition.

Situations of unfair competition occur and this is due, amongst others, to a legislative framework which is sometimes unclear, to difficulties in enforcing it or to difficulties in undertaking adequate controls, in particular in 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.

### ***a) Posting of workers***

The "Posting" Directive (96/71/EC), the "Enforcement" Directive (2014/67/EC) and the Social security Regulations (883/2004 and 987/2009) are key EU legislations for the construction industry. In this respect the EFBWW and FIEC will continue to envisage a joint approach and where needed joint specific actions, in particular as regards the regular updates of the joint "Posting" website ([www.posting-workers.eu](http://www.posting-workers.eu)), the implementation and the monitoring of the "Enforcement" Directive, prevent errors, abuse and fraud and further elements envisaged in the EU "Mobility package" to be adopted by the Commission in 2016.



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### ***b) Combating undeclared work***

The EFBWW and FIEC apply a policy of zero tolerance against unfair and illegal practices in the construction industry and will address the issue of the appropriate measures for combating "undeclared work", amongst others through an active involvement in the EU Platform that should be set up by the European Commission towards the beginning of 2016.

In addition, 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 or social funds.

### ***c) Fighting against social fraud***

The EFBWW and FIEC reconfirm their mutual will to deliver a responsible contribution to prevent and combat "social fraud" and "unfair competition", with the aim of ensuring non-discrimination and an equal transparent level playing field within the construction industry.

In the framework of the joint position paper entitled "Towards a level playing field in the construction sector" (dated 27/2/2015) the EFBWW and FIEC will ensure a follow-up of the proposals submitted and where appropriate undertake joint actions.

### ***d) Analysis of changes in social dialogue models***

The economic and financial crisis that started in 2008 has had an impact on trade unions and employers at the national level and a reduction of membership has been observed in several Member States, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries, but not only.

These developments brought changes in industrial relations and in social dialogue models, with an impact on the EU level as well.

In order to better understand these changes and with the aim of further strengthening their cooperation at the EU level the EFBWW and FIEC will undertake a joint analysis of the developments in social dialogue models at the national level.



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### ***e) Strengthening industrial relations and the capacity of social partners***

Given the specific characteristics of the construction sector and its fragmented organisation, mainly composed by SMEs, it is absolutely vital that there are structural, stable and properly functioning industrial relations between employers and workers both at the EU and at the national level. EFBWW and FIEC will therefore pay a particular attention in the strengthening of autonomous industrial relations and the capacity of the social partners within the construction industry.

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 the labour market.

The EFBWW and FIEC will continue to support the establishment of autonomous sectoral industrial relation systems and the capacity of social partners in the construction industry 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.

Previous experiences in this field have shown that in order to provide tangible results such initiatives need to be based on clearly identified topics/problems and objectives to achieve.

### **f) Third countries companies on the EU labour market**

Today within the European construction industry market we observe a stronger presence of construction companies from third countries, visible either via the takeover of European companies or through biddings in European tender procedures.

EFBWW and FIEC will assess the impact and consequences of the increased presence of construction companies from third countries, in particular state-owned companies, on the European construction market. A particular emphasis should be on creating a level playing field between the EU and non-EU countries where workers and companies do not fall victim to unfair practices and where the appropriate social standards are effectively applied and enforced. The analysis will include an assessment and possible joint recommendations.



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### **g) Internal Market Package**

The European social partners of the construction industry will closely assess the social and labour market aspects and consequences of the EU Communication “upgrading the Single market: more opportunities for people and business” [COM(2015)550].

Those matters which directly affect the construction industry will be discussed, with the aim of delivering tools and policy matters, which reflect the needs and demands of both sides of the industry.