



RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES

BUILDING A RESILIENT EUROPEAN WOODWORKING INDUSTRY

by anticipating changes, increasing attractiveness,
building skills, and promoting inclusiveness





The RESILIENTWOOD project (Grant Agreement number 101051974) is co-funded by the European Union and is granted under the Social Prerogative and Specific Competencies Lines (SOCPL) funding. The project aims to offer to Social Partners concrete recommendations to tackle specific challenges in the Woodworking Industries (WI) through strengthened social dialogue. It focuses on the adaptation of the industry and its outlook after the Covid-19 crisis, including the adaptation needs linked to expected technological changes and the need to increase the attractiveness of the sector for skills attraction and retention, with special attention given to gender balance. Possible solutions to these are investigated through a cooperation involving social partners and VET providers.

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Introduction



The European woodworking industries are a key player in the development of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy. They are set to play a pivotal role in the green and digital transitions. The raw material they use, wood, combines the triple advantage of carbon sequestration, storage and substitution. It stands out as the best ally in the fight against climate change and in meeting the ambitious targets set by the European Union for 2040 and 2050, by reducing CO₂ emissions and decarbonising the built environment.



In today's rapidly changing environment, anticipating changes (be it in technology or consumer demands) has never been more crucial. For a sector often regarded as deeply rooted in traditions, it is important to show how forward-looking it is and a cornerstone in the fight against climate change. To ensure the transition of the sector (and of our planet), it is key to be able to count on an abundant, varied and skilled workforce.

Building skills and inclusiveness lies at the heart of sustainable growth and prosperity. In an industry consisting almost exclusively of SMEs, nurturing talent, fostering diversity, and creating opportunities for all are of vital importance. From apprenticeships that pass on secular techniques to training programs that incorporate the latest technologies, the woodworking industries have a unique opportunity to empower individuals, strengthen local communities and shape a future where talent knows no limit.

During the course of the RESILIENT-WOOD project, social partners and training providers had the opportunity

to meet at various occasions, to organise thematic workshops, to carry out company visits and to engage in numerous exchanges with experts. Drawing on these experiences and testimonials, they have now put forward a series of recommendations designed to anticipate changes, increase attractiveness, build skills and inclusiveness in the European woodworking industries.

These recommendations are the result of this project. They stress the importance of life-long learning, social dialogue and social partners' involvement, as well as the need to attract and retain a skilled workforce. Above all, the partners recognise that if the woodworking industries are to contribute to a more sustainable and resilient economy, a reliable and affordable sustainable raw material availability is a sine qua non.

Finally, the project partners underline that these recommendations should not be considered as an exhaustive list of actions to be implemented at the different levels mentioned. Rather, they form a list of suggestions, ideas and food for thought designed to inspire stakeholders, and to be considered and adjusted according to different national and local cultures and realities.



Policy recommendations

EU INSTITUTIONS

- In today's global context, Europe cannot, and should not, cede its role as a manufacturing leader to others¹. Policymakers and all stakeholders shall therefore adopt policies that ensure a reliable, affordable and sustainable raw material availability, a sine qua non for the development of jobs within the European woodworking value chain. They need to recognise the importance of a more stable outlook for future harvested timber supply, to support long-term investments in capacity expansion, state-of-the-art technologies and higher value-added production. Policymakers shall support manufacturing industries and their workers by fostering innovation, sustainability, facilitating the development of circular business models and skills development. By investing in these areas, the EU will strengthen the competitiveness of European industries, create quality jobs, and ensure a fair and inclusive transition to a more sustainable economy. Full support and a long-term vision are needed.
- Policymakers shall strive to complete the single market, a.o. by harmonising as much as possible the performance of construction products and standards for construction products, as this would open up opportunities for companies providing wood building solutions and enable them to scale up.
- Policymakers shall create "Career Pathway Roadmaps" for the manufacturing sector, in collaboration with the social partners, companies and training providers, in order to guide students towards accessible and appropriate certificated and vocational school programmes, which may need to be created where they do not exist.
- The new European fiscal rules should facilitate investments for professional education and training. Investment in training, education and life-long learning needs to be among the public spending priorities and exempt of financial cuts to secure a skilled workforce for a successful digital and green transition.
- The European Commission shall provide more tailor-made information and support material in all EU languages for potential users of Erasmus+ programmes, including Erasmus+ for apprentices. In particular, smaller firms need easy access to the programmes and support for the application procedures.
- The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) shall provide detailed data on the use of Erasmus+ programmes, including Erasmus+ for apprentices on a yearly basis. The Erasmus+ for apprentices shall be better equipped financially and with corresponding staff at EACEA.
- Considering the fact that the European woodworking industries comprise a large number of SMEs in rural areas, the use of European structural funds should be envisaged to create more attractivity in those regions through education, upskilling and reskilling as well as preurban infrastructure for socio-cultural activities. European (or national) structural funds shall also be used to support the establishment of economic clusters with other types of companies and manufacturing industries, which would lead to a supportive business environment and interconnected companies, thereby increasing collaboration, facilitating access to talents and markets, improving raw materials supply, reducing costs, etc.
- Engineers, architects, designers, etc. should also acquire more skills in the use of wood sustainable products and processes to integrate timber into their projects in the best possible way to maximise durability, service life as well as reuse, repurposing, recycling and waste management. The New European Bauhaus Academy shall facilitate the upskilling and reskilling in the wood construction ecosystem in order to support this objective.

EU SOCIAL PARTNERS

- The European social partners shall enhance communication between the European actions/policies/programmes and the national social partners/companies. International benchmarking and cross-border study visits shall be encouraged to foster mutual understanding and help identify the best practices in

¹ Letta, E. (2024) *Much more than a market: Speed, security, solidarity: Empowering the single market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU citizens.*

each country in order to determine the ones that can be transposed and/or adapted from one country to another. Policymakers shall provide full support and incentives to make these initiatives more successful.

- The European social partners shall promote and support Vocational Education Training (VET) as it plays a critical role in skills development through the recognition of qualifications, while considering the differences between Member States. Indeed, VET is highly valued by employers due to its emphasis on practical job skills required in modern workplaces. Policymakers shall provide full support and incentives to make these initiatives more successful.
- The European social partners shall promote the concept of European core qualifications, supporting the structured improvement of the quality of apprenticeships underneath the harmonisation of VET structures or curricula.
- The European social partners shall regard the wood-working industries in the broader context of the man-

ufacturing industries and seek cooperation with other sectors (e.g. maintenance, automation, etc.). This could include implementing and promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives to create an inclusive work environment. The stakeholders concerned shall make the most effective use of existing mechanisms and tools at the supranational, national or local level, such as support and structural funds, dedicated programmes and structures, etc.

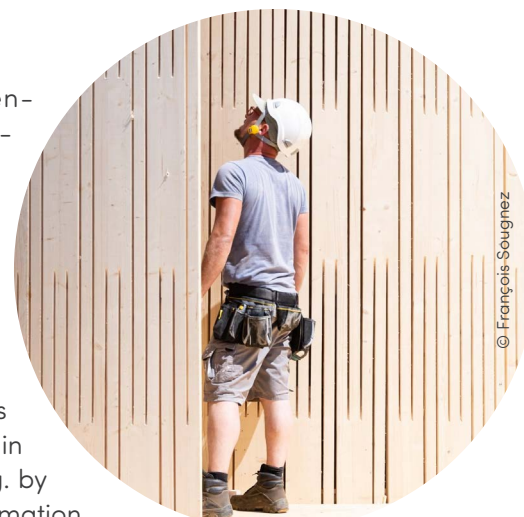
- The European social partners shall support a better and more frequent use of the Erasmus+ programmes and a.o. encourage increased mobility for apprenticeships and cross-border cooperation.
- The European social partners shall promote diversity and inclusion through mentorship programmes, networking events, portrayals and promotional materials to share best practices, success stories, and strategies in order to demonstrate that manufacturing, and woodworking, is a welcoming and inclusive industry.

NATIONAL SOCIAL PARTNERS

- A sound functioning social dialogue shall be the key to commonly identify challenges and develop solutions. This shared responsibility is crucial to improve the effectiveness of the organisations involved and to promote social cohesion.
- National social partners shall engage in negotiations regarding skills development, training opportunities, as well as vocational education and training for employees in collective agreements.
- National social partners shall promote on-the-job learning and work to improve the right for training period, and provisions regarding the costs and form of training.
- National social partners shall promote a generational relay. In a sector where the average age is increasing and facing difficulties to hire specialised workers, a company policy of generational turnover shall be promoted. The social partners will have to promote the voluntary part-time employment relationships of outgoing workers or other forms of flexible arrangements for aging workers, avoiding income losses, maintaining the social security contribution equal to full-time and

company seniority, favouring specific schemes for hiring young people and women.

- National social partners shall engage in Erasmus+, e.g. by creating information points for companies and apprentices, supporting the dissemination of information material and guidance for the use of Erasmus+. Where appropriate, they can establish provisions for apprentice mobility within the framework of collective agreements, ensuring the right of every apprentice to have a certain period of apprenticeship in another country.
- National social partners are requested to engage in European structures and initiatives, including the participation in public consultations.



NATIONAL OR REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

- The responsible national or regional authorities shall consider life-long learning for all as a priority. They shall therefore invest in education and training programmes that enable workers to develop the skills needed in relation to emerging technologies, improve existing skills, or take up new positions within the industry.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall offer incentives to companies that provide pathways for career advancement, continuous learning, and skill development, particularly having a focus on young professionals, women and other underrepresented groups in the labour market.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall support and encourage company policies for generational turnover, with specific actions to avoid income losses of outgoing workers.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall reduce barriers and increase permeability in education and training, in particular between vocational training and higher education.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall put in place a system for formal and non-formal learning validation, in cooperation with social partners and trade/industry associations.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall engage with companies to support the establishment of apprenticeship programmes, also tailored for women, which will provide individuals with hands-on training and experience while earning a wage, helping to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application and providing a pathway towards employment in the woodworking industry.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall foster the recognition of qualifications by eliminating all existing barriers, and focussing on competences and the recognition of core profiles and core qualifications.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall explore curriculum enhancement possibilities with educational institutions and social partners to update and align curricula with the skills needed in modern manufacturing, including the woodworking industries.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall facilitate the establishment of affordable childcare services and family support programmes to help employees balance work and family responsibilities. Guidelines and recommendations shall be drafted on work-life balance of workers with caregiving responsibilities, through part-time work, remote work, flexible hours, gender-balanced use of parental leaves and childcare subsidies.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall provide leadership and management training specifically aimed at women to help them advance in their careers. Additionally, they shall establish mentorship schemes connecting women entrepreneurs and employees with experienced business leaders to provide guidance, support, and career development opportunities.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall provide support to companies who engage in creating an inclusive workplace and take measures for the activation of underrepresented groups in the labour market, a.o. over-55-years-old unemployed, women, young people, low-skilled workers, people with a migrant background, persons with disabilities, etc.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall tap into a diverse talent pool and contribute to the integration of refugees into society and include them in the work environment. They shall offer language and skills training programmes for refugees to help them overcome language barriers and develop the necessary skills for the workplace. This can include language classes, vocational training, and job-specific skills development.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall encourage skills validation for people with a migrant background as soon as possible during their integration and inclusion process for their swift integration into the labour market.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall provide targeted incentives to companies who decide to adapt their infrastructure to take account of gender equality, e.g. the construction of dedicated sanitary and changing facilities, the acquisition of adapted personal protection equipment, etc.



- The responsible national or regional authorities shall support companies in the development of human resources policies which a.o. objectify their recruitment and selection processes to overcome stereotypes, draft vacancies in an inclusive manner, provide for role models and mentoring, participate in awareness campaigns against harassment, provide first support in case of violence.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall support a good collaboration between schools and higher education institutions to educate on the use of the same modern equipment and technologies that are used in companies.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall facilitate collaboration between industry and public employment services, technical teaching institutes, design institutes, universities, VET institutions and schools.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall support data collection on skills needs and should link the outcomes to the education and training systems. In many cases, the sectoral and regional levels are the most relevant for gathering reliable data on skills needs. Moreover, the responsible national or regional authorities shall support a system of fast job profile updates, together with workers and first line managers, at the same pace of the fast-changing technologies to create modern descriptions of the needed production skills and competences.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall, in collaboration with the social partners, create platforms for training providers and companies engaged in the support of Erasmus+ actions.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall provide incentives to companies who are active in developing the next generation of wood products, as they play a significant role in driving innovation within the manufacturing industry and because they are essential if we are to achieve the objectives set as part of the green transition. Targeted support can be envisaged through grants, loans, and technical assistance programmes aimed at overcoming barriers to innovation, such as limited access to finance and resources.
- The responsible national or regional authorities shall support collaboration between different sectors and higher education to work on innovative projects, a.o. in the field of design, to facilitate the transfer of research to industry and foster the development of new circular biobased products.

COMPANIES

- The industry shall further enhance collaboration with policymakers to define long-term objectives and strategies, while fostering strong partnerships with educational institutions in order to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
- Companies shall build on life-long learning to achieve greater agility and show commitment to their employees' career advancement. Employee training should be based on appropriate skills assessments, designed according to the workers' and employers' needs, and based on the expected developments in the industry and workers' tasks. This assessment shall be part of a worker's competence development cycle and re-evaluated regularly. The European skills passport could prove a valuable tool for effectively presenting a worker's skills and competences.
- Companies shall apply and improve skills intelligence. They shall contribute to identifying new skills shortages and needs, monitor supply and demand for skills, identify positions for which there is a shortage of skilled workers and collect and share with the national sectoral social partners data on sectoral needs (skills gaps, skills mapping and development, skills forecasts).
- Companies and local VET institutions shall be facilitated and encouraged to establish a cooperation to define the required skills and cooperate to boost innovation on both levels (machinery, teaching methods, etc.).
- Companies shall collaborate with schools, colleges, and vocational training institutes to promote STEM education and technical training opportunities.
- Companies shall consider the possibility of setting up a network to share the costs for training during working hours. These networks could a.o. be useful for establishing joint training centres, exchanging employees, sharing training mentors or counsellors depending

on the companies' structures. These networks could also prove valuable to capitalise on the know-how and experience of older workers (more than 15% of woodworkers) and facilitate the transfer of knowledge from older workers to newcomers.

- Companies shall plan a voluntary generational relay, allowing a work organisation that provides flexibility for part-time employment relationships of older workers so that they can transfer know-how and experience, while maintaining the social security contribution equal to full-time employment, and favouring specific schemes for the hiring of young people and women.
- Companies shall organise dedicated visits aimed at educating and inspiring young people and women about the modern technologies they use in their operations. These visits shall not only showcase the innovative techniques, but also emphasise the climate

benefits inherent to wood-based products and how they contribute to sustainable practices and mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration, storage and substitution. Companies can attract the younger generations by fostering environmental stewardship and promoting the transition to a more sustainable future.

- Companies shall engage in Erasmus+ programmes and offer international experiences to students and/or their employees and welcome students and/or employees from other countries in their premises, thereby improving the workers' skills and the attractiveness of the industry.
- Companies shall be more closely involved in forest issues and develop synergies with forest operators in order to ensure a constant wood supply.

TRAINING PROVIDERS

- Training providers shall intensify collaboration with the sectoral social partners, companies and their national authorities.
- Training providers shall identify the skills needs that are emerging in today's rapidly changing job market through consultation with the industry and adapt curricula and qualifications to match the recent and expected technological changes (artificial intelligence, imaging technology, data management, etc.) as well as product innovations (new or lesser-known timber species, hybrid products, etc.).
- Training providers shall provide further education opportunities to trainers and teachers, thereby enhancing their skills, knowledge, and instructional capabilities.
- Training providers (continuous or work-related training) shall consider rebranding and refocusing certain educational programmes and course names to make trainings and courses more attractive to youngsters and in line with their interests and concerns and to stay as close as possible to actual and future trends.
- Training providers shall offer flexible learning formats, in line with the schedule and commitments of workers with caregiving responsibilities (just in time training). This should enable workers to freely opt for the format

that best suits their needs: online courses, workshops, massive open online course (MOOC), part-time apprenticeships, etc.

- Training providers shall create networks for an increased use of Erasmus+ programmes, mainly targeting on the exchange of students, apprentices and supporting companies and individuals in using the Erasmus+ programmes.
- Training providers shall provide continuous professional development programmes and certifications to enable professionals across various sectors to stay updated on the latest trends, best practices, and technologies related to the circular economy. These programmes provide opportunities for skill enhancement, networking, and knowledge exchange, enabling professionals to play a more active role in advancing the development of a circular biobased economy within companies and communities.

About the project



RESILIENTWOOD: ANTICIPATE CHANGES, INCREASE ATTRACTIVENESS, BUILD SKILLS AND INCLUSIVENESS IN THE WOODWORKING INDUSTRIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The CEI-Bois-led project, together with the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), Woodwise and FCBA aims to offer recommendations to tackle specific challenges in the woodworking industries through strengthened social dialogue. CEI-Bois and EFBWW are the official recognised European Social partners for the woodworking sector and as such participate jointly in the dedicated European woodworking sector social dialogue committee meetings.

The project builds on a strong transnational dimension. To implement it, the partners conducted research and collected data from 5 countries (Belgium, France, Croatia, Italy, Sweden) and the European sawmill sector, identified key findings, shared best practices and proposed strategies on how to tackle the above-mentioned social challenges of the woodworking industries in Europe. The project is further supported and implemented by EOS, the Croatian Wood Cluster, FILCA-CISL and GS, the Swedish Union of Forestry, wood and graphical workers.

OBJECTIVES

> Provide social partners with an overview of the latest developments of the woodworking sector in Europe, including the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as expected technological and organisational changes within woodworking companies.

> Develop recommendations and guidelines for companies, VET and public authorities to overcome the above-mentioned challenges.

> Stimulate the joint social partners' discussion on 4 specific issues through dedicated workshops:

- Adaptation of the industry and outlook after the Covid-19 pandemic and crisis,
- Gender equality in the industry,
- Expected technological changes in the industry and adaptation needs,
- Increasing the attractiveness of the sector through education.

> Disseminate results within and outside the membership base of the European social partners of the woodworking sector.



Consortium partners

The **European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois)** represents 21 European and national organisations from 16 countries and is the body backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: more than 180.000 companies, generating an annual turnover of 152 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.



The **European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW)** is a European trade Union Federation with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Furniture, Forestry and allied sectors. The EFBWW represents blue- and white-collar workers from 76 national trade unions in 34 countries.



The **Forêt, Cellulose, Bois-construction, Ameublement (FCBA) technology institute**, whose mission is to promote technical progress, to participate in the improvement of yield and to guarantee quality in the industry. Its field of action covers the entire forestry, wood and furniture sectors. As a privileged partner of companies, FCBA is attentive to their technical and economic environment, to help them integrate technological innovations and adapt to the rapid evolution of markets.



WOODWIZE is the paritary sectoral organisation for wood and furniture sector in Belgium. It boasts a thorough knowledge of the Belgian timber and woodworking sector and takes great care in transmitting to employers and workers, teachers and students! Training courses, information sessions and professional services help to make the sector both sustainable and safe.



The **European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS)** consists of national sawmilling federations and associated members from 11 European countries, representing 80% of the European sawnwood production.



The **Croatian Wood Cluster (Hrvatski Drvni Klaster, CWC)** is the oldest industrial cluster in Croatia, established in 2003. The CWC acts on the national level as a triple-helix organisation, and counts about 60 members from all sectors in the forest-based value chain. Its main objectives are to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of the sector by encouraging innovation, investments, research, knowledge and technology transfer.





Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Costruzioni e Affini (FILCA-CISL) is the Italian sectoral union representing construction, wood, cement, brick, marble and stone workers. It is affiliated to CISL (Italian Confederation of the Workers' Unions) and represents around 243.000 workers in all provinces of Italy.



The Swedish Union of Forestry, wood and graphical workers (Facket för skogs- trä- och grafisk bransch, GS) was established in 2009 and organises workers in the forestry, woodworking and graphic industries in Sweden.



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