

PRESS RELEASE:

European Year of Skills: The European woodworking and furniture social partners address in a high-level meeting with EU institutions and experts the common challenge of staff shortages, as well as skills and training needs in both sectors to support the green and digital transition

Brussels, 14 February 2023

In the context of the European Year of Skills¹, on 13 February, the Woodworking and Furniture European Social Partners, CEI-Bois, EFBWW and EFIC organised a dedicated expert meeting on challenges and perspectives for skills and training in both sectors. The event was moderated by Mrs Dijan from the Croatian Wood Cluster and high-level speakers investigated cross border collaboration between training institutes, companies and trade unions and explored the question of the future of work, in a context where shortages of staff and boosting the attractiveness of both industries are a common challenge and where new skills needs are emerging due to the green and digital transitions.

Combined, both industries employ in the EU over 2 million people in over 300.000 companies, mostly SMEs. The woodworking and furniture industries maintain employment in Europe, boost excellence in the European manufacturing ecosystem, contributing to a low-carbon bioeconomy and circular economy through, e.g. the use of wood as a material.

The keynote speaker, Felix Rohn from DG Employment (European Commission) underlined the direct contribution of the woodworking and furniture sectors in reaching the Green Deal goals and highlighted the importance of addressing the variety of skills needed in today's Europe, which must consider technological developments and the digital and green transition, as well as global and demographic challenges. In this context, one of the Commission's main goals is to monitor supply and demand for skills, to assure that workers adapt to digital and green skills requirements and that they acquire transferable skills. According to the Commission's projections, climate policies will create 1 million jobs by 2023 and 2 million by 2050. Several European initiatives for skills such as the European Year of Skills, the Erasmus+ programme, the Pact for Skills, the Green Deal Industrial Plan with the creation of net zero industry academies, and the upcoming wood Bauhaus academy were also mentioned. Finally, he also raised the importance of continuing work on the recognition of qualifications, mobility and internationalisation of VET, as well as of acquiring soft skills.

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

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-year-skills-2023_en

committed themselves to fostering related structures on sectorial level and to supporting companies in their practical implementation. All panellists agreed that cross-border training and education opportunities must be of high quality and with financial support for the individual.

The second session was opened by the intervention of Iraklis Pliakis, expert on qualifications and credentials, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), who gave an overview of CEDEFOP activities and research priorities, focused on the EU framework, e.g. on the Recommendations on Vocational Education and Training and the Osnabrück Declaration, on the dual transition and transferability of qualifications and on the EU Qualifications Framework and micro-credentials. Speaking about the future of VET, he called for considering the role of VET in the overall education system, which cannot be seen in isolation and must also take into consideration the social economic and labour market perspective.

Furthermore, the panellists discussed the problem of a relatively low attractiveness of traditional handicrafts in our societies. The influence of technological developments on the skills required for the sectors was emphasised and panellists discussed the expected effects on the furniture and woodworking industries and the training for related professions. During the panel discussion specific examples, ongoing projects and national initiatives were shared.

The European woodworking and furniture social partners reconfirmed their commitment to keeping up their joint efforts in addressing the above-mentioned challenges and opportunities with the aim of helping to make both industries more attractive to the workforce.

[The European Confederation of Woodworking Industries \(CEI-Bois\)](#) represents 21 European and National organisations from 15 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 the European Trade Union Federation grouping 76 national free trade unions from 34 countries with members in the building, building materials, woodworking, forestry and allied industries and trades.

[The European Furniture Industries Confederation \(EFIC\)](#) represents over 70% of the total turnover of the European Furniture Industries, a sector employing 1 million people in about 120.000 enterprises across the EU and generating a turnover of 100 billion Euros. The EFIC membership is composed of 17 national associations, one individual company member and several clusters.