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## **Joint reaction of the European social partners of the construction industry on the consultation on the update of the skills agenda for Europe**

### **Overall construction professional skills and qualifications background**

According to the Cedefop Skills forecast, the changes in skills demand in terms of overall percentage for the construction industry between 2018 and 2030 should be 4.3 percent. This might not seem a high percentage, but the future skills' needs will impact the construction industry significantly. Overall there are seven main reasons for this:

1. the construction industry is considered as highly labour intensive;
2. there is a significant progressive ageing demographic development of construction workers in many Member States;
3. due to the continuous increase of emigration and mobility flows, a skills drain was created in the construction industry in many CEECs;
4. there is an expected positive impact of employment and an increased need for qualified and skilled workers in construction due to the transition to a greener, circular and climate-neutral economy, resulting in new combinations of material and new materials;
5. a predicted investment increase driven by the increased demand for energy-efficient structures, should boost employment in the construction industry;
6. the impact of automation, digitalization and other technological changes to improve resource efficiency, which will also lead to a substitution of labour in construction and the necessity to provide training to many construction workers;
7. changes in the work organization and the division of work, also driven by social partner decisions

The overall increase of jobs in construction by 2050 is expected to be between +0.3% to +2.8%.

EFBWW and FIEC expect that measures to address future skills challenge in the greening industries, such as the construction industry, will in the future mainly strongly impact the non and low skilled workers.

Already today we observe an overall increased demand for skilled construction workers. Probably because of increasing demand for renovation and upgrading of the building stock, including insulation and more efficient heating, electricity or plumbing. In addition, the construction sector is currently undergoing a rapid technological change in its production methods, such as pre-fabricated housing and greening of materials. This increased demand mainly results from policy changes and related shifts in relative prices for energy and other natural resources.

Given the pace at which new and emerging green jobs in the construction industry are emerging, higher skilled levels in the construction industry are needed rapidly. For this, many construction workers will need a fair transition support.

Currently, there are significant differences between member states on how they address the challenge of increasing the professional skills and qualifications of construction workers. The differences vary from almost excellent to poor. Although, each country has a specific labour market model and vocational and professional training framework, the exchange of best practices is overall considered a very useful.

Despite this it should be noted that within the construction we are confronted with a labour market contradiction: on the one hand unemployment rates remain at high levels in many Member States, in particular amongst youngsters, whilst, on the other hand, many vacancies are available in the construction industry. Workers and construction companies are confronted with difficulties in matching the right skills and professional qualifications with the needs of the companies. Also the proportion of female construction workers in the overall construction industry remains low.

## **Reaction of the European social partners of the construction industry**

The European social partners of the construction industry regret that the European Commission failed to use the updated skills agenda to operationalize the Education, training and life-long learning ambitions set in the European Pillar of Social Rights and in particular the first (Education, training and life-long learning) and eight (Social dialogue and involvement of workers) ambitions.

The European social partners of the construction industry are currently involved in the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation and skills. As this 4-year project started in 2019, it would be premature to evaluate the outcome or identify new priorities regarding skills intelligence.

The proposed European updated skills agenda has a very homogeneous vision of the future skills agenda and of modernizing VET. EFBWW and FIEC would like to underline that workers and companies are not a homogeneous groups and there are substantial differences between the different sectors or differences based on a chosen type of work organisation. In addition to this there are also completely different challenges, needs and solutions for high skilled and

low skilled workers, workers employed in a large sized company and workers employed in a micro company. As sectoral social partners, EFBWW and FIEC have doubts on the added value of the proposed actions for the construction industry. EFBWW and FIEC emphasize that the updated skills agenda needs to also deliver solutions for the specific skills and VET challenges and problems in the construction industry.

In addition to this, EFBWW and FIEC think that an overall general skills and VET approach will have little impact at the individual company/workers level where changes have to take place.

The EFBWW and FIEC wish to underline the added value and necessity of industrial relations in the construction industry at all levels to up-skill and re-skill the professional competences and qualifications. The sectoral social partners are best placed to find workable solutions which have a real impact. The proposed updated agenda rightfully stresses this importance of industrial relations and the role of social partners.

In line with the previous observations the EFBWW and FIEC wish to underline the positive role of paritarian vocational and education training schemes and institutions in the construction industry. They already exist in many member states. These paritarian organisations are able to organize the adequate training programmes to construction workers and companies, according to their needs. Through the system of collective bargaining the social partners, through paritarian bodies, are capable to finance and manage their programmes in the most effective and efficient manner.

The EFBWW and FIEC consider that, before establishing a new vision on skills agenda, it would absolutely be needed to properly assess the implementation and the practical application of the 2016 ambitions. In this sense, the conclusions of the European Commission that the VET ambitions of 2016 (annex 1 of the EC consultation) are already delivered seem to be overoptimistic.

The EFBWW and FIEC consider that a skills and VET agenda should be interconnected with collective bargaining discussions at national level.

The EFBWW and FIEC deplore that the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships is still not put in practice in many Member States. This should be implemented through sectoral collective agreements aimed to ensure that the sectoral needs and requirements are taken into account.

The social partners of the construction industry underline that improving the professional skills and qualifications of construction workers requires a long-term investment, vision and cooperation between the authorities, training and education partners and the social partners of the construction industry. The proposed updates to the skills agenda remain vague on this.

Since the construction industry is mainly composed of micro and small companies, who have a limited knowledge and experience on training possibilities, a long term targeted effective and efficient communication and awareness plan on the necessity to upgrade the professional skills and qualifications should be implemented in all the Member States.

The EFBWW and FIEC would like to underline the need to increase the number of apprentices, offering quality training and a stable job prospect in the construction industry. This should be reflected in the updated skills agenda.

The European social partners of the construction industry urge the European Commission that the sectoral social partners are consulted and involved when the Commission intends to propose any actions regarding the introduction of individual learning accounts or the validation of skills in the construction industry.