



Trade union workshop on the Future of Work in the Construction and Wood-based Sectors

How will digitalisation and new technologies impact the world of work? How will these factors change workplaces and workers? How can trade unions turn this challenging reality into advantages, protect workers, reduce the unemployment risk and increase learning and development opportunities? How can we anticipate these challenges and limit possible damage? These questions were debated in a workshop jointly organised by EFBWW and ETUI under the title “Future of Work in the Construction and Wood-based sector”.

“The future of work is now” stated EFBWW president Johan Lindholm. This turned out to be one of the most repeated messages during the event. It shows the urgency of the discussion about digitalisation and its impact on the world of work. The objective is clear however: decent jobs for everyone and making sure no one is left behind.

The conference counted on the participation of Irene Mandl, Eurofound head of Employment Unit, and Isabelle Schömann, ETUC confederal secretary responsible for digitalisation. Testimonies from workers and companies described how the new reality was already being integrated in the workplace. Two working groups discussed how trade unions and social partners can ensure that technological transitions lead to a just transition.

EFBWW general secretary, Tom Deleu, said: “trade unions are not against transition, we must embrace it, but also be critical. A social and inclusive transition for all categories of workers is the aim, be it for young and older workers, women and men, blue and white-collar workers, for construction sites, production sites and forests. Technology can be a driver for social progress. It can and should help fight social dumping and create more quality jobs”.

Isabelle Schömann warned that “this innovation cannot happen at the expense of health and safety and workers’ rights. A closer look on subcontractors and temporary employment agencies (TEA) is needed as it is simply not acceptable to externalise all costs. The TEA problem was also raised by Tom Deleu, who stated “intra-EU mobility is all too often linked to fraud and exploitation, due to subcontractors. This must end.”

On the second day of the workshop, Nicola Countouris, ETUI Research Department director, spoke about possible options to develop a common trade union strategy to ensure a social transition. Countouris highlighted the fact that “not all that is technologically possible is socially acceptable”. The idea was confirmed by Mercedes Landolfi, chair of the EFBWW Standing Committee Wood: “There is a risk that we get caught in a race towards technology, where everybody is forced in one direction, but where not all is acceptable from a social point of view. We need to approach the future of work together”. Gijs Lokhorst, vice-chair of the EFBWW Standing Committee Building, also stressed the importance of the involvement of workers in the technological transition process: “It is very important to know what workers think of the developments and to try and find an answer together to be able to

face the future. We cannot do it alone: companies cannot do it on their own, trade unions cannot do it on their own, employers cannot do it on their own”.

To conclude the internal strategic workshop a panel discussion was organised with high-level representatives from the European employer federations for construction (FIEC) and the wood-based industries (CEI-Bois). The digital transition will have a deep impact and needs to be part of the social dialogue on all levels: company, sectoral, national and European. This conviction was also shared by the employer representatives.

The results of the webinar will be part of a report that will be presented to the sectoral Standing Committees, Building and Wood. A follow-up discussion in the respective social dialogue committees will also be tabled.