



European Federation  
of Building  
and Woodworkers



## **COVID-19: To fight the Corona pandemic, the European Woodworking and Furniture Industries propose measures to protect workers' health, support economic activity and the sector's recovery**

Facing the Covid-19 outbreak, the world is fighting a pandemic of unprecedented proportions in modern times, currently causing a full-blown health emergency.

This is a joint statement of the Social Partners from the two recognized European Social Dialogues for the Woodworking sectors (CEI-Bois and EFBWW) and for the Furniture sectors (EFBWW, EFIC and UEA), and the Social sectorial Federations of the Wood Panel Industry (EPF) and the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS).

The undersigned European associations represent the European Woodworking and Furniture Industries, worth 1.7% of the EU GDP and employing more than 2 million Europeans, the 5<sup>th</sup> largest manufacturing sector in the EU in terms of employment. In light of these difficult times, we wish to reiterate our commitment to supporting public authorities to overcome this crisis.

We underline that the key priority and focus of the national, regional and local social partners of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries be on protecting a safe and healthy work environment for contractors, workers, owners and society. Jointly, we underline the need for a fast economic recovery and for measures to revitalise the sectors after the crisis.

We call national employer and workers organisations of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries to work together with the national, regional and local governments in order to do everything possible:

- To ensure that specific measures are taken to protect all workers in the woodworking and furniture industries against Health and Safety hazards and job or income losses;
- To absorb and curb the negative consequences of this crisis and to keep companies functioning to the extent possible;
- To keep borders open for goods at all times. Checks or health screenings of freight vehicles carrying goods should be thorough and well organized to minimize time losses and the impact on truck drivers. The functioning of the single market, provided it does not endanger public health, should be upheld and enforced. The free movement of workers across national borders should remain possible as long as there are no health threats.

We ask the national social partners of the woodworking and furniture industries and national/regional/local authorities to honour the right to compensation, rehabilitation, and curative services for woodworking and furniture workers infected with COVID-19.

We underline the importance of our industries for the overall economy, for the transition towards a climate-neutral Europe and for rural development, to name some important aspects. In many Member States a de jure or de facto lock down situation has been imposed by national authorities to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. We recognize the responsibility of politicians and the enormous pressure they are currently facing. We are of the opinion that it could be helpful that the national, regional and local authorities find an agreement with the employers and workers organisations of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries to identify essential activities. This decision process should be done after a careful risk-assessment and with specific preventive measure for contractors, workers and society. We also underline the importance of our sectors for the immediate future after the crisis and for the long-term perspectives of our European Industry and Economy as a whole. Wood and wooden products, as the most appropriate basis for a circular and recycling-oriented economy are absolutely vital for Europe and especially for the Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Renovation Wave. We also underline the importance of our sectors for the immediate future after the crisis and for the long-term perspectives of our European Industry and Economy as a whole. This insight should guide EU and national recovering plans for the period after the crisis and should be reflected in all related programmes, in line with the joint statement of the Members of the European Council on COVID-19 crisis released on 27 March.

For this, we strongly urge the national employer and workers organisations of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries to negotiate jointly with the national/regional/local authorities swift practical solutions to take practical temporary solutions in order to allow woodworking and furniture activity to continue working, in compliance with the national restrictive measures, during the current exceptional circumstances.

**We strongly encourage that all public authorities** provide financial support for companies in the Woodworking and Furniture Industries that are obliged to stop their commercial activities or suffer from a significant drop in demand due to COVID19 and to:

- Allow an extended recourse to temporary unemployment, without penalising companies and workers, as it has always been the case in some EU countries;
- Provide regular updates on the necessary information and safety equipment in order to continue to work in correct conditions, for those companies who can do it / decide to do it, both now and in the coming months where activity will slowly restart;
- Provide an exceptional legal framework, which enables companies to ensure their economic survival during this exceptional crisis period;
- Ensure that there is no administrative delay and a swift procedure to support companies and workers;
- Promote and implement accessible initiative to reskill and upskill (Council Conclusions from 26 March 2020) workers and promote apprenticeships after the end of the crisis, to support the recovery of the economic sectors;
- Protect companies that experience financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 crisis against their creditors and oblige banks and other financial institutions to support the economy and the woodworking and furniture industries.

**In order to facilitate the lifting of confinement measures**, we ask that the national social partners of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries to take the following elements into account and that these actions are properly enforced:

- Provide clear Health and Safety information, guidance and training to all workers and all those who are in contact with workers, regardless whether they have COVID-19 disease symptoms or not – according to international, EU and national specific recommendations – and involve workers and their representatives in all planning and execution of related measures at company level;

- Provide all needed Personal Protective Equipment in sufficient quality and quantity;
- Provide all facilities to keep the needed level of hygiene at workplaces;
- Companies to guarantee that all necessary preventive and protective measures are taken to minimise occupational safety and health risks;
- Observe that proper protocols and behaviour is respected at the workplace. The fear of the coronavirus must not lead to discrimination or indecent behaviour.
- Ensure a safe distance between workers at the workplaces, in all facilities and circumstances, in particular as regards posted workers, and this during working time and all breaks;
- Ensure that transportation of all workers is done in compliance with the specific requirements;
- Take appropriate measures to ensure that posted workers are not accommodated in collective spaces where social distancing cannot be respected;
- Where needed ensure, in an open and constructive dialogue, that posted workers can safely return home;
- Guarantee that no worsening of working conditions occurs after temporary unemployment or other forms of work stoppage.
- Ensure a safe restart of furniture and woodworking trades in those countries where trading activities are locked down for safety reasons at the moment. Certainly, the protection of staff and customers comes first, however good examples from the food and non-food sectors show that business operations are possible under strict hygienic rules and with limitations of customers per sales area.

**In case economic activities in our sectors are stopped by national decrees of the responsible authorities,** we ask that the national social partners of the Woodworking and Furniture Industries seek a common solution with their authorities for the following circumstances:

- Guarantee as much as possible financial stability for workers and companies.
- Evaluating feasible solutions for temporary unemployment in order to prevent negative consequences on income;
- To prevent companies from liquidity problems, adequate funds should be made available, immediately for the current situation and via national programmes for the recovery after the crisis;
- The construction sector, one of the pillars of the economy and a very important partner for the woodworking industries, needs to be supported, too. Public procurement oriented at low-carbon timber construction will play a crucial role for an European green recovery, supporting the market in times of substantial decrease of private demand.

For EFBWW and employer federations in the Woodworking and Furniture Industries the first priority is that work can take place in a safe way. Therefore, we urgently ask all our affiliated organisations to take the current COVID-19 treat very seriously and take all actions needed, which simultaneously guarantees the sustainability and viability of companies, while securing the income, social protection, well-being and health of their workers.

EFBWW and employer federations in the Woodworking and Furniture Industries ask for an open dialogue with the European Institutions to identify and implement the appropriate measures allowing for a quick recovery after the crisis. We invite our national affiliates to do the same at their level. We believe that our industries can play an important role in the achievement of the goals of the Green Deal.



CEI-Bois represents 21 European and National organisations from 15 countries and is the voice of the European woodworking sector: close to 180.000 companies generating an annual turnover of 144 billion euros and employing 1 million workers.



European Furniture Manufacturers Federation (UEA) is a European-level social partner organisation representing European employers and involves furniture national organisations from 6 countries. UEA supports furniture National associations exchanging information, participating to specific projects and to the work of the European Social Dialogue Committee on Furniture, of which UEA is an official social member. UEA involves: ACN (Czech Republic), APIMA (Portugal), APMR (Romania), CENFIM (Spain), MOBIDER (Turkey) and BFM (UK). It aims to maintain and strengthen the permanent contacts among members and to act as their voice towards other trade organizations, EU authorities and international entities such as WTO, OECD, UNIDO. It aims to establish and represent the general interests of its members while ensuring the greatest possible influence on rules, decisions and directives made or issued by international organizations and authorities



The European Panel Federation has members in 25 countries and represents the manufacturers of particleboard, MDF, OSB, hardboard, softboard and plywood. The EU wood panel industry has an annual turnover of about 22 billion Euros, creates over 100,000 jobs directly and counts more than 5,000 enterprises in Europe.



EFIC is the voice of the Furniture industries in Europe. Founded in 2006, EFIC now represents more than the 70% of the total turnover of the industry and its membership is composed of 16 national associations and 1 individual company member. The EU Furniture industry employs around 1 million people in about 120 000 enterprises and generates a turnover of 96 billion Euros.



Through its member federations and associated members, the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS) represents some 35,000 sawmills manufacturing sawn boards, timber frames, glulam, decking, flooring, joinery, fencing and several other wood products. Together they represent around 80% of the total European sawn wood output in a sector that has a turnover of around 35 billion EUR and employs about 250,000 people in the EU.



The EFBWW is the European Trade Union Federation grouping 75 national free trade unions from 34 countries, representing members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Furniture, Forestry and Allied sectors. The EFBWW is an officially recognised European social partner for the Construction, wood and Furniture sectors, defending workers' rights at EU level.