

## JOINT POSITION PAPER



European Federation  
of Building  
and Woodworkers



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### **Building together a greener future**

The Social Partners, the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) and the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) are in favour of a Renovation Wave that accompanies and supports the Green and Digital transformations by creating the right opportunity to deliver in Europe equal access to working opportunities, education, training, fair income, safety in the workplace and social protection for families while increasing productivity, competitiveness of European Industry, reducing energy poverty and fostering innovation in the construction sector.

Governments' priorities in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic have been to overcome the health emergency and to implement rapid, durable, sustainable and resilient economic measures. The signatories of this joint paper are committed to "build back better" promoting solutions for better and healthier living spaces for the people that occupy buildings as well as the surrounding environment.

There are strong synergies to be found between the Renovation Wave and the New European Bauhaus initiative with the Bauhaus focus on sustainability, affordability and beauty also being applicable to the Renovation Wave.

#### **Building and renovating for a better environment and climate**

- *Decoupling economic growth from emissions is possible*, particularly in the construction sector where the use of sustainable products, such as wood, wood components, straw and clay or hemp fibres as building material outweigh other products when looking at the complete environmental impact and performance, especially when considering the whole life carbon impact.
  - When compared to other building materials, the life cycle of wood has a lower overall impact on the environment than its counterparts and as a result, also costs significantly less to produce.
  - Wastewater production and environmental impact are also significantly lower in wood manufacturing processes.
  - Additionally, wood helps to reduce energy consumption across the life cycle of growth, harvest, transport, manufacture and construction compared to other structural building products according to life cycle assessment (LCA).

The transition to “green buildings” is an important component of the wider transition to a low carbon economy.

- *The Renovation wave offers the opportunity to recognise the potential of the existing European housing stock and wider built environment to become a ‘new’ carbon sink.* Wherever possible and appropriate, sustainable, renewable construction materials such as wood should be used in renovations, with the specific intention of increasing Europe’s carbon sink through an integrated approach to renovation:
  - There is a need to reduce the impact on the climate of new and existing buildings by taking into account the carbon emissions of buildings over their whole life cycle from construction and the production of construction materials. To do so, it is essential to boost the use of bio-based sustainable materials in construction.
  - To limit the effects of climate change, wood is the building material of choice as it can store carbon. As trees grow, they take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and, even when they are harvested, carbon remains stored in the wood for the lifespan of the product.
  - The Renovation Wave should also explore opportunities related to building structural improvements e.g building on top. Increased off-site factory prefabrication can help reducing waste, improve quality and minimizing construction process emissions. For new building construction, the development of engineered wood products – such as glulam and Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) – can increase the opportunities for building multi-floor buildings with a structural core of timber. CLT buildings can handle the world’s strongest earthquakes with no loss of life or structural damage. They have excellent acoustic performance and are very efficient at insulation.
  - The renovation of building envelopes, such as façades and roofs, with highly insulated wooden components, can significantly reduce the transmission heat losses and related heating energy demand of existing buildings. The EU should make sure that investments are oriented towards projects that support the green and digital transition and help regions across Europe reduce their carbon emissions and increase the wellbeing of their societies.

### **Building and renovating for healthier living spaces**

- The current COVID-19 pandemic is having a debilitating impact on the global economy, causing, at the same time, unprecedented curbs on social interaction and marking significant marked effect on people’s mental health. For this reason, there is *increasing focus on financing future projects on greener, more resilient and sustainable buildings solutions that also contribute to the well-being of inhabitants:*
  - It is well established that increased contact with the natural environment improves the health and well-being of those living in a primarily urban environment. People tend to respond to natural materials in the built environment in a similarly positive manner. Moreover, wooden surfaces in interior use hold potential for improving human health and wellbeing. The antibacterial properties of wood might reduce the possibility of cross-contamination from surfaces. Wood has antibacterial parts and a diverse range of bacterial pathogens that were sensitive to it. The Renovation wave

should be focused on a greater use of natural materials and integrate the ambitious to plant 3 billion trees as part of the European Green Deal.

- Over the last years we have seen numerous new developments of combinations of wood with other materials, new products based on wood components, new qualities of wood (outdoor, wood in bathrooms, more fire resistant wooden products ...) based on ecologic treatments of wood or wooden products with much higher statically qualities (CLT). We consider an integrated European research as extremely promising to make further progress in the potential use of wood. The Horizon programs should strongly support those research clusters.

### **Upgrading skills, creating green and safe jobs**

- *The acquisition of the right skills is the prerequisite to make the successful transition to greener buildings.* Upskilling workforce with green and digital skills is essential. Today, skills gaps are already recognized as a major bottleneck in a number of sectors, including the renovation of existing buildings and the construction of new buildings. There is a burning need for more investment in upskilling of workers.
- *Social partners, including workers' and employers' representatives of the Woodworking sector at nation and European level, should be involved in the design and implementation of measures to achieve these goals, as they have solid expertise in upskilling workers, attracting new talent and promoting an inclusive working environment:*
  - Together we play an active role in the European sectoral social partners dialogue at the European level;
  - Social transition should be organized in a targeted and structured manner, together with sectoral social partners;
  - Social partners are looking forward to playing their role in the development of curricula and the promotion of training and high-quality vocational education and formal structures for workers and apprentices;
  - Social partners can potentially manage the change in work organisation; shaping further training; having responsibility for the implementation of new technology and new materials;
  - We are convinced that a participatory approach is the best way to mobilize knowledge and to successfully manage transition in work process, product innovation or business models.
- *The Renovation Wave should not only be seen as a tool for boosting initiatives to promote sustainable and energy efficient buildings but at the same time allow the creation of green and safe jobs.* In this respect, the social partners call for specific instruments to be developed with professional associations in order to attract, skill, reskill and redeploy workers of all ages – including an increase in the number of women and young - and to better integrate them in order to close the existing gap between labour demand and supply.
- *Renovation activities can be dangerous, and workers need to be protected in all work processes* (e.g. exposure to dangerous substances coming from dangerous materials like asbestos or PCB and to materials that are potentially treated with hazardous substances, during transport, the recycling process or disposal of old materials). Sound risk assessments should become a standard in the Renovation Wave.

The Commission is expected to further assist Member States in developing targeted financial solutions for lower-income households, together with easier access to essential services, energy audits and energy performance certificates. In order to guarantee that local social housing projects have access to all necessary technical capacity, the Commission will launch the **Affordable Housing Initiative**. It will pilot **100 lighthouse renovation districts** in a smart neighbourhood approach and provide blueprints for replication, setting liveability and the latest innovations at the forefront.

In this respect, the Social Partners welcome the speeding up of the Renovation wave with specific attention to affordable housing and initiatives to combat energy poverty.

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Background information:

[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.

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[The European Confederation of Woodworking Industries](#) (CEI-Bois) represents 22 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.

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