
PRESS RELEASE: THE WOOD INDUSTRIES ENGAGED FOR A TRANSITION PATHWAY FOR A RESILIENT, GREENER AND MORE DIGITAL CONSTRUCTION ECOSYSTEM

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“If we want to keep the effects of man-made climate change to within tolerable limits, we need to choose materials and products with a strong benefit, when looking at the complete environmental impact and performance.” said Dr Andrew Norton, Technical Advisor of the European Wood Industries (CEI-Bois and EOS). Buildings generate approximately 40% of global emissions therefore we must make substantial changes to the way we design, build, and manage our built environment. The potential climate benefits of wood products are numerous: they offer solutions based on existing business models and proven technology which simultaneously store carbon and substitute fossil resources, thus diminishing the CO₂ emissions caused by the global building stock. Wood is a versatile and aesthetic building material that can store large quantities of atmospheric CO₂ above the earth's surface easily and without risk. The beams in medieval timbered houses in many European cities bear witness to the resource efficiency of these “CO₂ sinks”.

The manufacturing and construction process is responsible for embodied greenhouse gas emissions before buildings are occupied, and when they reach the end of their service life. A corresponding possible action for the construction ecosystem is to reduce embodied emissions in design and construction practices, including at the stage of manufacturing of construction products.

It is therefore crucial that building materials have a low overall impact on the environment, which can also result in significantly lower production costs. Materials should also help with reducing across the whole life cycle, and this should be properly accounted for through an appropriate life cycle assessment (LCA), such as the dynamic LCA methodology. In addition to measuring the amount of CO₂ stored in construction materials and products, this methodology also provides essential information about the duration of CO₂ storage. Furthermore, wastewater production should also be as low as possible in the manufacturing of construction materials and products.

Similarly important for the transition to a green construction ecosystem is its resilience, which is not at its highest point due to issues related to accessibility to raw materials necessary to produce construction products. Overall, COVID-19 has shown disruptions in the global supply chain and led to shortages of certain critical products in Europe. Specifically in construction, after the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, a rising demand and important supply challenges were observed. At the same time, export restrictions are being implemented by Ukraine and Russia, with detrimental impacts on the competitiveness of the EU industry.

The challenges associated with accessibility to raw materials to produce construction products are amplified by barriers to trade, WTO infringements, and a lengthy legislative framework for intervention in the WTO. This creates an uneven level playing field, negatively affecting the competitiveness of the sector. In turn, this results in delays in delivering construction products down the supply chain, as well as significant price fluctuations.

To ensure the resilience of the construction ecosystem, a level playing field on raw material supply, within and outside of the European Union, must be guaranteed and accompanied by relentless vigilance against all kinds of trade distortions.

Not less important for strengthening the resilience of the construction ecosystems is the ageing of the workforce and the reduction of the skills gap, two major challenges recognised in many sectors, including in the renovation and construction of buildings. Developing and supporting the acquisition of adequate skills, digital and green competences is the prerequisite for the construction ecosystem to “bounce forward” in the twin green and digital transition, while at the same time meeting Europe’s climate ambition.

In addition to the attraction and retention of new, younger, and more skilled workforce, efforts will also be needed to promote a better gender balance distribution, making the construction industry more appealing to women and minorities and thus reinforcing its inclusiveness. Managing those processes of image improvement, skills development and increased inclusiveness successfully will increase the resilience of the construction ecosystem.

Notes to editor:**About CEI-Bois** www.cei-bois.org

The European Confederation of Woodworking Industries represents 20 European and National organisations from 14 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.