

Introduction

From the perspective of the woodworking industries, the simple answer is that **quality jobs are provided by competitive companies that make it possible for individuals to thrive.**

The more complex answer requires to look beyond employment contracts or job classifications and involves multiple factors: skills and education, innovation, predictability and flexibility, dialogue between social partners, smarter regulation, etc.

Before addressing those elements in details, we would like to raise a key concern about the way this conversation is framed.

The woodworking industries are often seen as deeply rooted in tradition. Manufacturing, in general, still suffers from an outdated image. CEI-Bois is well aware of this and actively working on it. For example, in 2023, we completed the Resilientwood project to improve the attractiveness of our sector, together with our European trade union counterpart EFBWW, as well as other international partners from trade unions, employers' organisations, training and research centers. Many of our members are engaged in initiatives to attract and retain a skilled workforce and show that our sector is also forward-looking, digital, and essential to Europe's climate strategy.

It is important that the **Quality Jobs Roadmap does not undermine these efforts.** If the public narrative starts distinguishing between “good” and “bad” jobs, we risk devaluing professions that are vital to Europe's economy and to the green transition.

In the woodworking industries alone, there are **dozens of different professions.** Some are highly technical, others involve skilled manual work. Some are physically demanding. Some are rooted in centuries-old craftsmanship, others depend on cutting-edge technologies and digital tools. All of them are essential. And **none should be stigmatised.**

To prevent unintended consequences, we recommend **avoiding a one-size-fits-all definition of a “quality job”.** It cannot meaningfully apply across all sectors, occupations, national labour market traditions, and individual circumstances. Such an approach may unintentionally alienate or undervalue many valuable forms of work.

Instead, the Roadmap should be a chance to **reaffirm our pride** in being a cornerstone of Europe's circular, bio-based economy, transforming a renewable resource into sustainable solutions for construction, furniture, packaging, and more.

It should be a platform to **empower individuals**, to attract talent from all backgrounds, and to renew the public perception of sectors like ours, as **modern, inclusive, dynamic, and future-oriented.**

But to seize this opportunity, we must get the narrative right. Above all, we suggest that the focus should probably not be on jobs, but rather on the people who perform them.

And this narrative should also feature **education**, especially vocational education and training (VET). VET is crucial to our sector, yet it also suffers from outdated perceptions. Many of the most rewarding



and secure careers are rooted in VET pathways. Reversing the stigma and ensuring real investment and visibility is an urgent task.

These principles will guide the rest of our contribution.

Competitiveness first

It is competitive companies that create sustainable quality employment. Without a supportive business environment, job quality cannot be sustained. That means predictable regulatory frameworks, economic stability, and access to skilled labour.

Our sector illustrates how industrial competitiveness and social responsibility go hand in hand. We contribute directly to Europe's green transition, rural economies, and export strength. Supporting our competitiveness supports the long-term sustainability of employment.

Avoid additional regulatory or administrative burdens

Regulatory complexity remains one of the greatest challenges facing SMEs and industrial employers. **Additional EU-level rules, however well-intentioned, can reduce managerial flexibility, raise costs, and slow innovation.**

Additionally, high labour costs, driven by taxes and quasi-tax payments, are also holding back the development of quality jobs.

Therefore, we support efforts to simplify, not expand, the EU regulatory framework around employment. Smart deregulation and subsidiarity must remain guiding principles.

Skills, education & innovation

Ensuring a future-proof workforce starts with **education that reflects labour market needs**. High-quality basic, vocational, and higher education systems are prerequisites for both the creation of quality jobs and ensuring these jobs can be filled. It is essential that education systems remain responsive to labour market needs and maintain a high standard of excellence.

At the same time, we need to **raise the profile of technical and manual professions**. These careers are increasingly digital, high-tech, and sustainable, but remain undervalued in the public eye.

We welcome EU support for skills policies but stress the need for implementation to be demand-driven and co-designed with industries.

Social dialogue is valuable but should remain voluntary

We support social dialogue that is relevant, pragmatic and sector-based. Collective agreements in our sector have enabled flexible, balanced solutions adapted to industry realities.

However, **we oppose any attempt to enforce coverage targets or standardised dialogue structures**. Freedom of association also means the freedom not to join a bargaining system. EU efforts should support capacity-building and mutual respect, not mandates or quotas.

Should the Commission be serious about promoting social dialogue, the role of the parties and in their belief in collective bargaining on working conditions, the EU legislator must also have faith in the parties. It is simply not possible to recognise the importance and value of social dialogue without at the same time actually giving the parties the room to negotiate and the competence to regulate



conditions, even in a way that may deviate from EU law. This must, of course, be done in a way that prevents abuses.

Image and attractiveness

Our industries suffer from image challenges. Yet, they offer meaningful, modern, and secure careers, with a strong contribution to Europe's sustainability goals.

We are addressing this through various initiatives such as projects, awareness campaigns, engagement with schools, etc. But these efforts require reinforcement. Therefore, we call on the European Commission to support:

- **Public campaigns** to modernise perceptions of vocational and technical careers,
- **VET excellence initiatives** with strong industry involvement,
- European **funding streams accessible to SMEs** for training and promotion.

Conclusion

We share the Commission's ambition to make quality work the standard across Europe. But we caution against oversimplification or overregulation. We believe the Roadmap should focus on two core objectives: the creation of jobs across Europe and the education and training of a skilled workforce, capable of filling these roles.

To succeed, the Roadmap should:

- **Respect sectoral diversity,**
- **Prioritise competitiveness,**
- **Invest in skills and education,**
- **Support voluntary, meaningful dialogue,**
- **And promote the full dignity of all forms of work.**

Finally, we would shift the focus from "how to make the jobs future-proof" to "how to make the people who perform them and the companies who offer them future-proof". Indeed, Europe's future competitiveness depends on a well-educated workforce trained in fields aligned with business and economic needs. Through this approach, relevant skills and employment opportunities will continue to emerge and evolve sustainably.