

FIRST-PHASE CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE EU ACTION ON ACTIVATION OF PERSONS FACING SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

CEI-Bois contribution

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1. Introduction

The European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the European Commission's first-phase consultation on possible EU action on activation of persons facing significant barriers to enter the labour market.

CEI-Bois strongly supports measures that effectively and sustainably increase employment. Higher labour market participation is essential for Europe's competitiveness, productivity and long-term sustainability of public finances. At a time of persistent labour and skills shortages, Europe cannot afford that large groups remain outside the labour market.

Activation policies should therefore aim to enable more people to become self-sufficient labour market participants and to contribute productively to the economy.

At the same time, activation must be designed in a way that strengthens, rather than weakens, competitiveness. Sustainable employment depends on companies that are able to invest, grow, adapt and create jobs. This is particularly relevant for the European woodworking industries, where employers need to be able to recruit workers with the skills required by their businesses.

Any EU action in this field must avoid adding administrative burdens, additional costs or employment-related risks for employers. It must also respect subsidiarity, proportionality, national competence and the autonomy of the social partners.

Against this background, CEI-Bois provides the following responses to the specific questions raised by the European Commission.

2. Do you consider that the issues and possible areas for further EU action are correctly identified in this document?

The statistics presented by the Commission clearly demonstrate that certain groups remain underrepresented in the labour market.

CEI-Bois recognises the importance of addressing barriers to labour market participation, including skills gaps, care responsibilities, health-related limitations, insufficient access to employment services and financial disincentives to work.

However, CEI-Bois considers that the policy directions identified by the Commission should place greater emphasis on the conditions that enable employers to create jobs and recruit workers.



Sustainable job creation depends on companies' ability to remain competitive, invest and grow. Recruitment decisions are guided by business needs, the skills and qualifications required for the position, and the overall conditions associated with employment. It is therefore essential that the regulatory framework facilitates recruitment rather than introducing additional costs, administrative burdens or employment-related risks that could discourage employers from hiring.

A genuinely effective strategy for improving labour market inclusion should therefore reduce the disincentives associated with recruitment and employment, while strengthening the economic incentives to participate in the labour market.

Labour market activation is primarily the responsibility of Member States, public employment services, education and training systems, social protection systems and other public authorities.

Employers have an important role as partners and as providers of real employment opportunities, but they cannot be made responsible for solving barriers that originate in welfare systems, tax-benefit design, insufficient skills, health-related limitations or lack of public services.

CEI-Bois therefore considers that a successful activation policy must be based on flexible labour markets, effective public employment services, demand-led skills development and well-designed tax-benefit systems that make work pay.

3. Do you consider that EU action is needed to address the identified issues? If so, what should be the direction and scope of that action?

CEI-Bois considers that EU action in this field should focus on simplifying and streamlining employer obligations towards all employees. Any EU initiative should avoid introducing new binding obligations on employers and should be coherent with the Commission's wider simplification and competitiveness agenda.

Within this framework, CEI-Bois identifies several areas in which further efforts could contribute to improving labour market participation without imposing additional burdens on companies.

a. Improving the effectiveness of public employment services

Better identification, outreach and registration of persons outside the labour market can contribute to more effective activation, particularly for those not currently reached by public employment services.

Better cooperation between public employment services, social security institutions, education providers and other relevant public authorities can help address the barriers preventing individuals from entering employment.

The EU can add value by promoting evidence-based approaches, peer learning and better use of data and digital tools to improve job matching and reduce administrative burdens.

Such approaches should remain adapted to national and local labour market conditions and should not result in new reporting obligations for employers.

b. Strengthening skills development and links to labour market demand

Lifelong learning is crucial for the introduction and reintegration of people into the labour market.

Individualised pathways to employment, including guidance, skills assessment, training and follow-up support, should be closely linked to actual labour market demand.

Training that is not connected to real vacancies or employer needs risks wasting public resources and delaying labour market entry.

Public employment services should cooperate actively with employers to identify vacancies, relevant skills needs and suitable forms of work-based learning.



For the woodworking industries, this means ensuring that training and activation measures respond to the actual skills needs of companies.

Employer participation must remain voluntary and based on real business needs. Obligations to accept candidates, provide placements or give preferential treatment in recruitment would be counterproductive and could undermine genuine job matching.

c. Strengthening financial incentives to participate in the labour market

Activation will not succeed unless work clearly pays more than inactivity.

Tax-benefit systems should be designed to avoid inactivity traps, unemployment traps and other financial disincentives that discourage individuals from entering employment.

Strengthening the economic incentives to participate in the labour market is therefore an important element of effective activation policies.

These questions fall primarily within national competence. EU action should respect national systems and should not interfere with national wage-setting arrangements or collective bargaining.

d. Reducing administrative burdens and simplifying cooperation with public authorities

For employers, cooperation with public authorities must be simple and predictable.

Companies should have clear points of contact and should not be required to submit the same information repeatedly to different authorities.

The once-only principle should guide digital and administrative solutions, and any EU initiative must be assessed against its impact on companies' administrative burden.

Reducing administrative burdens, direct and indirect costs, and unnecessary regulatory obligations can improve the conditions for recruitment and sustainable employment.

This is particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises in the woodworking industries.

e. Respecting national competences and the autonomy of social partners

Labour market participation, work organisation, training and flexible working arrangements are addressed through national systems, sectoral solutions and collective bargaining, where relevant.

EU initiatives must not interfere with well-functioning industrial relations models or reduce the space for social partners to negotiate balanced solutions.

Social partners can contribute to activation by identifying skills needs, supporting practical cooperation and developing sector-specific approaches. However, their role must not be confused with the role of public authorities.

Enforcement, benefit design, public employment services and social protection remain public responsibilities.

CEI-Bois therefore considers that any EU action should be limited to supporting the effectiveness of existing systems, promoting the exchange of good practices and facilitating labour market participation without introducing new binding obligations on employers.

4. Conclusion

CEI-Bois supports the objective of increasing labour market participation and reducing the barriers preventing individuals from entering employment.

Achieving this objective requires competitive companies, effective public institutions, skills development linked to real labour market demand and economic incentives that make work attractive and worthwhile.



Any EU initiative should focus on simplifying and streamlining employer obligations, strengthening the effectiveness of existing systems and supporting Member States in addressing barriers to labour market participation.

The EU should support Member States in making existing systems work better, rather than creating new regulatory burdens for companies.

For the European woodworking industries, sustainable activation requires an approach that facilitates recruitment, responds to companies' actual skills needs and preserves their ability to invest, grow and create jobs.