



CONFERENCE

Wooden construction for CO₂ reduction in building sector

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CONCLUSIONS

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has looked into the advantages of modern industrial wooden construction at the request of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In March 2023, the EESC adopted an exploratory opinion focusing on how EU proposals such as sustainable carbon cycles, the bioeconomy strategy and the New European Bauhaus can be used to drastically reduce the huge amounts of construction-related CO₂ emissions, store CO₂ and make construction more efficient.

The conference, organised in the framework of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, presented the main conclusions of the EESC's exploratory opinion on *Wooden construction for CO₂ reduction in building sector* and further discussed the potential of timber construction in line with the EU's goal of climate neutrality with local experts, representatives of the wooden construction sector and civil society organisations.

Key conclusions and recommendations of the conference:

1. While wood is not going to solve all of our climate change issues, it already makes a huge contribution. If we can unleash wood by increasing demand for it within the built environment and through an acknowledgment by the wider community, where there's currently uncertainty around forestry, the wood industry at all levels can do the rest and exponentially increase the use of wood. It's a virtuous circle.
2. We see innovative, bio-based and sustainable construction materials, made using low-carbon procedures as an important engine to drive the green transition. We must promote the share of wood in construction to reduce carbon emissions through active and sustainable forest management in the EU. This should not be hampered by policy constraints.

3. The contribution of forests and forestry should be recognised both in climate change mitigation and design policy accordingly. Real-world developments in European forests over many years illustrate that an increasing carbon stock can be combined with simultaneously increasing harvests of wood and, if well managed, at the same time reducing the risks of naturally caused damages.
4. Most importantly, there should be recognition that it is the harvested wood that carries the climate value as a) it gives economic value to the forest, leading to investments for long-term sustainable management of it, b) it provides vast opportunities for reducing fossil dependency in other sectors by using wood-based products and c) it stimulates innovation and technological development for more advanced products with even greater climate benefits.
5. The tradition of timber construction is rooted in a centuries-old history of innovation. Among other things, the use of sustainable materials has been included in the thinking behind the New European Bauhaus (NEB). Wooden buildings, with their embodied carbon, will give us the opportunity to provide communities with high standards of housing that affordably incorporate great design and a beautiful living environment.
6. Member States should increase the use of wood in public buildings, which is below the overall average. We believe that the public sector has a leading role to play in harnessing the potential of timber construction to achieve climate change objectives.
7. Quality-based procurement procedures, including sustainability and lifecycle criteria, as well as the choice of appropriate procurement procedures that allow innovative solutions, are a prerequisite for achieving climate objectives and promoting timber construction. We call for both a stronger legal obligation with respect to quality-based competition and climate-friendly public procurement as well as for measures to train contracting authorities accordingly.
8. We believe that easily accessible support measures to help SMEs research, develop and innovate on alternative building materials are an important means of exploiting the potential of timber construction.
9. We suggest that barriers to timber construction arising from formal, legal and technical requirements should be scrutinised in terms of their necessity with respect to planning quality, and note that innovations must be able to comply with the state of the art not only by meeting standards, but also through the use of "equivalent alternative solutions".
10. As different building regulations also create barriers to the use of renewable building materials, we call for harmonisation measures and see the NEB as an important driver in this connection.
11. We recommend the consistent use of lifecycle assessments for expert sustainability assessments over the whole lifecycle of buildings and when comparing environmental impacts.
12. We stress the importance of minimum standards for lifecycle carbon emissions from buildings and for the corresponding carbon reporting requirement across the construction sector.
13. The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) is the main policy tool for setting requirements to reduce carbon emissions over the full lifecycle of buildings. We call on the European Commission to develop a carbon certification scheme that takes full account of the role that wood products play in offsetting emissions.

14. Technological and material changes in timber construction will change the organisation of work and the skills required. This creates overlaps between the construction and timber sectors and between traditional occupations in these two sectors. Adjustments to the existing curricula for individual occupations, or even redesigning occupations, are a must in this regard and should be coordinated at European level. The objective of attractive occupations with a wide range of tasks and corresponding organisation of the work will also help to make the construction and timber sectors more attractive.
15. We consider it essential to transfer know-how, as envisaged in the NEB Academy, and to provide appropriate training and development at national level. Training and development on the use of new sustainable construction methods and materials is needed for all those involved in the construction process: planners, architects, engineers, technicians, IT specialists and construction workers.
16. We call on the Member States to participate in the Austrian and Finnish Governments' Wood POP initiative, which aims to mobilise public and private players in the timber sector at national and regional level and to support the reorientation of investments towards sustainable bio-based solutions and timber-based value chains.