

# A future-proof European graphics industry (offset and engraving)

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## The facts

Both employers and employees agree that the European graphics industry is suffering from an enormous production overcapacity, which stands at approximately 20%. Major investments have been made in the production capacity throughout Europe. Prices are under great pressure. Digitalisation and print are emerging. The European graphics industry now finds itself in a downward spiral. Bankruptcies, reorganisations and mass redundancies abound. Employment figures are falling fast. The banks see the graphics industry as a high-risk industry, and businesses are having difficulties in securing their financing.

## The labour market

The labour market of this industry is extremely tight at the moment: the number of employees in the Netherlands has dropped from 60,000 to 33,500 in a period of ten years. That number is expected to fall even further to 25,000 employees in the next three years. Another fact is that the employees in the graphics industry are ageing (partly due to the many reorganisations during which many young employees lost their jobs). The average age is rising fast. In general, employees have enjoyed limited education, are at an advanced age and have been employed for a long time. In addition, they see themselves as graphic designer, they are proud of their jobs and are not really prepared to leave the profession. They dig themselves in, stay put and hope it will not happen to them. Unfortunately, it *does* happen to them.

The influx of young people in the graphics industry (offset and engraving) is lagging behind.

## Employers and technology

The graphics industry is technology-oriented. More and better machines, that is what it is all about. Just open a trade journal or visit a graphics trade fair: new machines that can do more and better. Businesses are trying to find solutions in better machines in order to survive. They make large investments with finance charges to match.

## Battlefield

This is why the graphics industry has been a battlefield for years now. Employers are trapped by their investments, finance charges and cut-throat competition. They open branches in Eastern Europe in the hope that here they will survive thanks to lower wages. A generous European subsidy to a German company in Poland has caused a lot of (justified) unrest and has stirred up ill-feeling.

Employees fail to act, have everything to lose and dig themselves in. It is a permanent battle between trade unions and employers. Terms of employment are under pressure and collective agreements are no longer complied with. This is stony restructuring, a battlefield. A battlefield that covers the whole of Europe. That is what we are facing these days. It is a situation that has to stop: the European graphics industry is destroying itself, a lot of employees have no perspective, and it is unnecessarily expensive.

**The solution: perspective!**

Employees have no perspective, they have everything to lose and dig themselves in. I think the solution lies in offering them perspective. We know the skills of the employees. Training sessions help them develop these skills. The skills of employees in the graphics industry are very much like one another. My solution would be to compare the skills *we* have to the skills found in similar professions. Professions of which it is certain that demand for them is much higher. I am thinking about the processing industry, the construction industry, the foodstuffs industry and logistics. Perhaps there are more of them. Compare the skills and teach the employees in the graphics industry any skills they are lacking.

On a European level, the number of employees in the graphics industry will fall sharply. Do not wait until they have lost their jobs, but offer them perspective. Train them now and offer them future perspective. Make arrangements with other industries. As joint parties of employers and employees, we in the Netherlands were extremely grateful for the possibilities offered by the EGF subsidy (European Globalisation Fund). Unfortunately, the EGF has no preventive effects, it becomes effective only when the employee has lost his job. I call on the EU to make this possible for the European graphics industry. FNV KIEM wants to come to arrangements with other industries, and make inter-industrial mobility truly feasible. Offer employees true perspective. Help us do it. We are going to do it.

Employers should support this initiative. Offer your employees perspective. Stop bleeding dry terms of employment and cooperate in offering perspective. Stop making large investments aimed at an even higher production capacity. To suppliers I would like to say this: focus on (energy) savings, and environmentally and labour-friendly machines.

It is absolutely vital to leave the battlefield and to work together on a solution where everyone is a winner. Working together, offering perspective and support from the EU will have to be cast-iron conditions. I also ask the EU for its approval to have employers work together as well. Working together on reducing the existing production capacity. We as trade unions will closely follow this, and we want to make arrangements with the employers. We would also like to work together with the EU on offering employees perspective. FNV KIEM is willing!

Thank you for your attention.

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