

EBC Annual Congress 2015

Construction SMEs tackle the demographic challenge: more women and young people in construction

Geneva, 19th June 2015 – The European Builders Confederation organised its 2015 Annual Congress on 18th-19th June 2015 in Geneva with its Swiss Member, the Geneva Federation of Building Trades (FMB). The Congress provided a unique opportunity for 80 delegates from Switzerland and all around Europe to address the issue of inclusion of women and young people in construction trades. The conference resulted in some conclusions and an engagement from EBC's members to work towards a more inclusive sector.

Patrick Liébus, President of the European Builders Confederation (EBC) said *“In Europe, there’s a chronic under-representation of women. The construction sector employs 15 million workers. 90% of these people are men. We have to fight the stereotypes and cultural obstacles which suggest that women are not strong enough to work in our sector. On the contrary, today tasks in construction are more mechanical and handling machines are more adaptable thus making the sector more accessible. Without a diversified and qualified active population in construction, our sector cannot thoroughly develop. This issue is very close to my heart and I really want to emphasise that our profession can be carried out by both men and women in exactly the same way!”*

Patrick Liébus continued *“Along with the lack of women, our sector is also facing a demographic challenge. Today, we see that the active population is starting to get older and young people are struggling to take their place. Switzerland represents a very positive example for apprenticeship schemes. 70% of young people there start their career with an apprenticeship. The result is that in this country young unemployment is very low and has the same level as adults’ unemployment. Many times university seems to be the only viable option for many talented young people to pursue a good career. We have to show them that this is no longer true and that our sector offers many interesting opportunities which are completely disregarded”*.

Patrick Liébus concluded *“In order to unleash the potential of our sector it is essential that women and young people are included in the construction trades. A key element to our campaign will be improving the attractiveness of our sector and developing the skills of young people through apprenticeships and on-the-job training. To this end, we have presented a project to increase the participation of women in construction. We have also committed to bring the topic in the European sectoral social dialogue committee, while keeping the topic high on the agenda of our own Board of Directors. Finally, EBC has also signed an apprenticeship pledge in the context of the European Alliance for Apprenticeship to improve the supply, the quality, the image and the mobility of apprenticeship. Today I’m pleased to see that we are taking a great step towards making the sector more inclusive”*.

– Ends –

■ [Links](#)

[Click here to see the programme of the conference](#)

Note to editors

Established in 1990, the European Builders Confederation - EBC - is a European professional organisation representing national associations of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises working in the construction sector. Through its national members, EBC represents 2 million construction microenterprises and SMEs. EBC is a member of UEAPME (the European association of micro-enterprises and SMEs), on behalf of which it chairs the UEAPME Construction Forum.

The construction sector is of vital importance to the European economy. With 3 million enterprises, an annual turnover of around € 1600 billion and a total direct workforce of 13 million, the construction sector contributes at around 10% to the GDP of the European Union.

99.9% of the European construction sector is composed of small and medium-sized companies, which produce 80% of the construction industry's output. Small enterprises (less than 50 employees) are responsible for 60% of the production and employ 70% of the sector's working population.

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