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ECO4VET
Improvement of Vocational Education and Training
related to Ecodesign and Sustainable Production
in the Furniture Sector

Progress Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The main objective of ECO4VET project is to **develop tools and methods for training professionals in the furniture industry in Ecodesign and Sustainable Production**. They will benefit **individuals working in furniture companies** (design, production, environment, logistics,..), **students or unemployed, training organisations and any European and national entity or authority participating in education or employment active policies**.

The project is currently involving 10 partners from 7 different European countries (representing the 40% of the whole furniture production in Europe) and 3 complementary fields: **the world of work or labour market, the world of Vocational Education and Training and Vocational Education and Training Policy Makers**. Thus, the partnership includes a high level of implication in the furniture sector, experience in training, interactive learning, ecodesign and/or sustainable production and good relations to regional or national authorities in charge of education and work.

The approach adopted for achieving the project objectives is as follows:

1. **Identifying training needs** of the furniture sector regarding Ecodesign and Sustainable Production in the form of learning outcomes¹
2. **Development of different qualifications** according to the needs of each professional profile and defining the units and learning modules that cover the desired learning outcomes
3. **Development of appropriate content and materials** for these qualifications **and an e-learning platform** considering innovative learning tools
4. **Conducting 5 pilot tests** in different countries in order to test learning outcomes achievement and training experience and, if necessary, to improve the developed curriculum.

The project has **already finalized some key stages**. The first one has been the **identification and definition of vocational skills, knowledge and competence mismatches** among professionals of the furniture sector, regarding concepts of Ecodesign and Sustainable Production. These findings have greatly contributed to the **design of the curriculum** where **three qualifications have been defined** corresponding to three professional profiles (general manager, production manager and designer), another key step for the project that has been completed.

The two previous results are contributing as key inputs to the on-going tasks **creation of the on-line platform framework** that will host the online course **and to the development of the training materials**. Once the platform and all materials will be ready, **the pilot training tests will be conducted in 5 different languages (English, Spanish, Polish, Romanian and Turkish)**.

The project is being supported by **dissemination activities**, which will include, among others, a website (www.eco4vet.com), a newsletter and various publications.

Regarding the sustainability of the project, **it is planned to provide these customized courses during next years to the furniture sector professionals** in order to reduce the Ecodesign and Sustainable Production knowledge gap within the sector.

¹ See chapter 7. Technical glossary

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1. Project Objectives

The main objective of ECO4VET project is to **develop tools and methods for training professionals in the furniture industry in Ecodesign and Sustainable Production** and thus, at long term, **reducing the furniture industry's environmental impact**.

There's an identified educational gap between training offer and skills demand related to ecodesign and sustainable production. Furthermore, **there is not an official curriculum in these matters at European level**.

This fact directly affects the traditional manufacturing furniture industry. **Some new factors have appeared that make companies need this knowledge and skills**, such as new restrictions in environmental legislation, the release of standard guidelines for incorporating ecodesign, and specially the appearance of emerging markets very demanding with the product sustainability.

ECO4VET aims at addressing this situation through its specific objectives:

1. **To define the training needs** regarding Ecodesign and Sustainable production in the furniture sector.
2. **To design and develop an Official Curriculum** on *Ecodesign and Sustainable Production in the Furniture Industry* that considers innovative learning methods.
3. **To develop a Platform for distance training** with content in different languages.
4. **To promote innovative methods for vocational education and training** like learning from experience or personal project development.
5. **To involve vocational education and training policy makers** contributing to disseminate the curriculum and the possibility of recognizing it as a standard model.
6. **To develop a Memorandum of Understanding** for recognition of this training among different entities.
7. **To develop training recommendations** for teaching these subjects that can be adopted by training institutions in all EU countries.

The training methods and tools developed will benefit:

- **Individuals working in furniture enterprises** (design, production, environment, logistics,..) by increasing their skills and thus their company competitiveness.
- **Students or unemployed** by increasing their skills and thus their employability and access to better jobs.
- **Training entities** that will increase their curriculum offer.
- **Any European and national entity or authority participating in education or employment active policies** by increasing employability and competitiveness in their region.

2. Project Approach

The approach adopted for achieving the project objectives is as follows:

5. **Identifying training needs** of the furniture sector regarding Ecodesign and Sustainable Production in the form of learning outcomes
6. **Development of different qualifications** according to the needs of each professional profile and defining the units and learning modules that cover the desired learning outcomes
7. **Development of appropriate content and materials** for these qualifications **and an e-learning platform** considering innovative learning tools
8. **Conducting 5 pilot tests** in different countries in order to test learning outcomes achievement and training experience and, if necessary, to improve the developed curriculum.

It was considered that this approach is the most appropriate because it **comes from the real needs of the furniture industry** to develop and deliver **tailored training that really cover these needs**.

For this reason, **the furniture industry has been involved from the beginning of the project**, both through entities that are part of the consortium as by having an important role in the first activities, in which industry experts and manufacturers' employees have been consulted.

During the development of the curriculum, e-learning platform and training content, **training institutions and policy makers** that are part of the consortium **are involved**. This ensures the representativity of all the targets and the applicability of results.

Moreover, **it will be end users who will perform the test of this training in a real environment** so that it can be checked whether the project results meet the expectations or not. These users will be **monitored and surveyed** to collect their feedback and suggestions for improvement. The more feasible improvement suggestions will be considered for their implementation.

The **profiles of the furniture sector** that have been considered in the project, for being those who can act on ecodesign and sustainable production in a company are:

- **General Manager**
- **Production Manager**
- **Designer**

Regarding the issues that training will cover, the partners had previously identified four **pillars of interest in which training should focus** and it has been confirmed by the study of the sector needs that has been performed. These pillars are:

- Basic principles of **management systems**
- **Environmental management systems** and their application in the furniture industry
- Strategies for **reducing the environmental impact** of the industrial processes and the final product in the furniture sector
- **Ecodesign** and its application in furniture

Concerning the methodology for the development of the qualifications **ECVET², EQF¹ and learning outcomes¹ are being used.**

To implement ECVET, which is an European instrument to support lifelong learning, the mobility of European learners and the flexibility of learning pathways to achieve qualifications, it is necessary that qualifications are described using units of learning outcomes so as to be able to relate the outcomes of assessed or validated learning experiences in a common methodology.

According to this, **the furniture industry identified needs have been translated into learning outcomes** that are statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process defined in terms of knowledge¹, skills¹, and competences¹.

These **learning outcomes were used for defining three qualifications** (one for each professional profile: general manager, production manager and designer), designing the curriculums, and to guide assessment based on knowledge, skills, and competences, etc. A set of those learning outcomes make up a study unit, and a collation of study units make a full qualification.

Regarding EQF, each level has some descriptors for the type of learning outcomes that are achieved through a qualification of that level. For ECO4VET qualifications, according to the learning outcomes that learners achieve through each qualification, **an EQF level has been established.**

The use of these recommendations and instruments of the European Commission will **make easier the recognition and integration of the developed qualifications into the European Union education systems** and thus, the sustainability of the project.

² See chapter 7. Technical glossary

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project has **already finalized some key stages according the initial project planning**. The most relevant outcomes will be achieved and released during the project's second year.

One relevant project phase has been the **identification and definition of vocational skills, knowledge and competence mismatches** among professionals of the furniture sector, regarding concepts of Ecodesign and Sustainable Production and its integration in the furniture industry. The completion of this phase entails the **achievement of objective 1**.

These mismatches have been identified through:

- **Interviews with experts and questionnaires to furniture sector professionals** to define the importance and grade of achievement of different learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) related to Ecodesign and Sustainable Production.
- A research to **identify current training programs on Ecodesign and Sustainable Production and its contents analysis** in four European countries.
- **A comparison between the contents** of current training programs **and the learning outcomes that professionals from furniture industries consider important and needed**.

These findings have greatly contributed to the **design of the curriculum**, another key step for the project that has been completed (**achievement of objective 2**).

From the identified learning outcomes needs, **three qualifications have been defined** that correspond to the three target profiles (general manager, production manager and designer). Each qualification has been named and weighted according to ECVET points and EQF level and also the possibilities of different and adapted training paths is being considered.

Qualifications and their units, recommended training and assessment methods have been summarised in the **document “Training guidelines”** with a **dual functionality**:

- **For VET providers:** reference document for implementing the qualifications. Qualifications are detailed in this document with their corresponding units and learning outcomes so that, from this document, they can generate related training contents.
- **For VET trainees:** reference document about the different qualifications available, their units and its requirements and the learning outcomes that can be achieved depending on the selected units for a personal training path.

This document, which corresponds to the **achievement of objective 7**, is public and can be found at the ECO4VET website: www.eco4vet.com/images/results/D1.2.pdf.

The two previous results are contributing as key inputs to the **creation of the on-line platform framework** that will host the online course **and to the development of the training materials**. Both can be considered the key project outputs and **will represent the achievement of objectives 3 and 4**. These are **on-going tasks** which, since they are based on these previous findings, aim to represent a complete set helping to strongly reduce the gap between the existing educational material currently available across Europe and the ones required by the industry.

Other on-going activities of the project are **focused on dissemination** for spreading the objective, the evolution and results of the project and creating awareness among stakeholders from companies, workers (active and unemployed), students, vocational education and training policy makers, associations and organizations of the furniture sector and educational sector at local, national and European levels. This **will contribute to the achievement of objective 5**.

Regarding dissemination activities:

- A **first project leaflet** was released in printed and electronic format in April 2014. The consortium distributed **1.000 printed copies** among stakeholders of the furniture sectors during the first 12 months of the project. The electronic version can be downloaded at: http://www.eco4vet.com/images/PDF/Leaflet_initial.pdf
- Since July 2014 the **project website** www.eco4vet.com is online. This website, containing information about the project, its implementation and outputs, will be enriched during the length of the project and it is considered as an on-going and alive dissemination tool.
- All **partners** contributed to the project dissemination on the net using their **own websites**. **More than 30 news were published** about the project, spreading information about the project activities and future outcomes, reaching in total hundreds of people visiting all partners' webpages. Because of the different nature of the partners involved, different target groups were reached through their websites.
- The consortium organized **three dissemination events** during 2014: one in Poland (May), one in Spain (September) and one in Turkey (November). In these events local partners could involve key stakeholders from the local/national communities of the furniture sector. Specifically, professionals (medium and top managers and workers) of the furniture sector, representative of furniture companies associations, local governments and one chamber of commerce, in addition to some journalist of generalist and specialized media.
- After each of the three dissemination events, all partners sent out the corresponding **press releases to different press agencies** and media. In total we consider that at least **100 agencies/media were reached** by each press note.

It is not easy to identify the precise number of people reached (directly or indirectly) through all these actions; anyway, we can consider that they should be in the order of some thousands.

4. Partnerships

The project is currently involving 10 partners from 7 different European countries and 3 complementary fields:

- **The world of work or labour market.**
Partners who are in direct contact with furniture industries and relevant stakeholders. They have the expertise for skills needs analysis and will play an important role during dissemination, exploitation and pilot test activities.
 - AMUEBLA - Innovative business association of furniture manufacturers and related in the Murcia Region - SPAIN
 - OIGPM - Polish chamber of commerce of furniture manufacturers - POLAND
 - UEA - Union Européenne de l'ameublement Communications asbl - BELGIUM

- **The world of Vocational Education and Training**
Partners who are familiar with the joint curriculum design and delivery, the development of the learning platform, and quality assurance for ensuring that the project developments and results comply with the expected quality.
 - CENFIM - The wood and furniture technology centre of Catalonia - SPAIN
 - PERA - Pera fine arts Education Centre - TURKEY
 - GM - GRIGORE MOISIL Technological high school Braila - ROMANIA
 - CCS - Crystal Clear Soft - GREECE
 - KAIROS - Kairos S.p.A. - ITALY

- **Vocational Education and Training Policy Makers.**
Entities involved in developing VET policy and socially inclusive practices and who are in contact with occupational orientation services, representative educational organisations and relevant national, regional or local authorities.
 - SOC - Catalanian occupation service - SPAIN
 - BUDOWLANI - Związek Zawodowy Budowlani Trade Union - POLAND

Thus, the partnership is very well **balanced in terms of the partners' field**: most of the partners have a high level of implication in the furniture sector, experience in training, interactive learning, ecodesign and/or sustainable production, good relations to regional or national authorities in charge of education and work, which is an excellent basis for mainstreaming the project results at political level, and cover all the target groups of the project.

The **geographical balance** of the consortium **ensures the European Perspective** and is a guarantee for the successful project objectives and results dissemination and exploitation, covering a big European area. Additionally, the Belgium partner (UEA), is in fact an international furniture federation that involves furniture associations from 25 different EU countries.

Since some of the objectives of the project is to define a **harmonised European Curricula** and to draft training recommendations that can be adopted by **training institutions in all EU countries** the **added value of carrying out the project with partners from several European countries** is evident, as cooperation is needed to **align the same curriculum for EU avoiding differences between the European countries**.

Moreover, ECO4VET platform will connect experts and students from the furniture sector. Users will have the chance of sharing information, knowledge and experiences with other EU users. ECO4VET will also become the first step for collaborations, which is aligned with the purposes of the EC: an approach to enhance the **EU cooperation in ecodesign activities**.

Finally, from the dissemination and exploitation point of view, the **European coverage** is a good point in order to publicize the project and its evolution and results in all the consortium countries: the participating countries **represent the 40% of the whole furniture production in Europe**.

5. Plans for the Future

The plans to carry out the remaining work to achieve the project objectives are the following:

The “**Training guidelines**”, document only available in English at the moment, **will be translated into Spanish, Polish, Turkish and Romanian** in order to reach a wider spectrum of target users.

The **development of training materials will continue** during the upcoming months **as well as the finalisation of the platform** configuration and set up and the gradual transformation of training content to interactive multimedia learning objects. “**How to**” **guidelines will also be delivered** in order to make possible the use of the platform by trainers and learners.

Once the platform and all materials will be ready, **5 Pilot training tests will be conducted in 5 different languages (English, Spanish, Polish, Romanian and Turkish). In January 2015 an enrolment period will begin** and interested persons will be able to enrol in each training pilot. Dissemination activities will be very important at this stage to get the target test users. These users, **in addition to training, will give their feedback** in order to improve the modules composing the course on Ecodesign and Sustainable Production, that will be available on the e-learning on-line platform for the test and after the finalization of the project. The aim is **improving these courses and to offer them during next years** to the furniture sector professionals in order to reduce the knowledge gap within the sector and support the sustainability of the project on the long term.

The second year **dissemination activities will mainly focus** on highlighting the **importance of improving the capacities regarding Ecodesign and Sustainable Production in the furniture sector** among stakeholders and workers. **The online course (project main output)** will represent a tool to make companies more competitive and workers and unemployed more qualified to find jobs with higher demand.

The main dissemination activities foreseen for the next months are the following:

- The **project website** will be continuously updated with information related to the project implementation in relation to project steps and results, project outputs, project events, information coming from the furniture market and relevant for the project and a special focus will be dedicated to the presentation of the Pilot Tests and the launch of the online platform course. Also, translation of web site main parts to other consortium languages will be done in order to reach a wider public.
- The dissemination system via **newsletter** will be ready in December 2015. 6 e-newsletter will be published and distributed during 2015 in the months of January, March, May, July, September and November. The newsletter will be sent to associations and companies in Europe related to the furniture sector. Also, those interested professionals will be able to receive the newsletter register through the registration in the project website
- All **partners** will publish on **their own websites** information and news related to the project, its activities and implementation. Some partners will play a key role in involving some professionals for testing the online course on the e-learning platform and their websites can have a key role in achieving this objective.
- **Press notes** related to next project events, the opening of the training pilot test enrolling period, the starting of the **on-line** course and the finalisation and results of the project will be sent to general and furniture sector and education sector

specialized media. Publications will increase awareness of the project, its development and results among target groups.

- The **partners** who have their **own publications** (electronic or printed editions) will publish other articles related to the project and also some publications are expected to be published in specialized magazines of the furniture sector.
- The consortium will also use **social networks** already used by partners to disseminate their own activities in coincidence with every event, delivery of milestone and newsletters publication.
- **Small Group Meetings** with target users will be organized by different partners in order to present the project and its outputs together with the usability of the online course, etc.
- A **dissemination event in Romania** is planned for **September 2015** in coincidence with Bucharest International Furniture Exhibition. A special focus will be given to the usability of the online course and to support the long-term sustainability of the project.
- The project last **dissemination event** will take place in **November 2015** (location to be defined) to spread the results of the project and support the project long-term sustainability.
- A **final project leaflet** will be published in printed and electronic versions and distributed among target groups, in the final dissemination event, among partner's contacts and through the website.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The EU 2020 strategy and its two **flagships Initiatives on “Sustainability growth” (“Resource efficient Europe” and “Industrial Policy”)** are EU policies where **ECO4VET project can strongly contribute**, as these policies emphasise the objectives of sustainable development and give an increased attention to resource efficiency and EU competitiveness.

Regarding competitiveness, a key goal under EU 2020 is **to support companies to compete globally while they shift to a greener economy**. Thus, to increase competitiveness of the European Furniture Industry while making their activity more sustainable, professionals from the sector will have to acquire the skills and training needed to work in the green economy. **ECO4VET project develops tools for it**.

In relation to the above, another EU 2020 flagship initiatives **“New Skills for New Jobs agenda”** addresses the transition to a low carbon economy by helping Europe anticipate its future labour market needs in this area.

Furthermore, one of the main training pillars that **ECO4VET will address** is **Ecodesign** and **it is foreseen the extension of the Ecodesign Directive to cover non-energy related goods (i.e furniture)**. This will be a very important instrument for sustainable growth policy and will contribute to get a coherent framework for policy implementation.

7. Technical glossary

- **Competence**

Competence is the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and other abilities to perform a function against a given standard in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development. In the EQF, 'competence' is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

- **Ecodesign**

Ecodesign is a design methodology responds to demand for using more environmentally friendly materials and processes by developing products that reduce their environmental impact throughout their life cycle (raw material selection and use, manufacturing, packaging, transport and distribution, installation and maintenance, use and end-of-life).

- **ECVET points**

European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training is a common methodological framework that facilitates the accumulation and transfer of credits for learning outcomes from one qualifications system to another. It aims to promote transnational mobility and access to lifelong learning. It is not intended to replace national qualification systems, but to achieve better comparability and compatibility among them. ECVET applies to all outcomes obtained by an individual from various education and training pathways that are then transferred, recognised and accumulated in view of achieving a qualification. This initiative makes it easier for European citizens to gain recognition of their training, skills and knowledge in another Member State.

- **EQF level**

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a translation tool that helps communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe. Its eight common European reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences. This allows any national qualifications systems, national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and qualifications in Europe to relate to the EQF levels. Learners, graduates, providers and employers can use these levels to understand and compare qualifications awarded in different countries and by different education and training systems.

- **Knowledge**

Knowledge is the outcome of the collection and assimilation of information through learning. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.

- **Learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

- **Skills**

A skill is the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

- **Sustainable Production**

Sustainable Production is the manufacturing of products using processes that are non-polluting; conserve energy and natural resources; economically viable; safe and healthy for employees, communities, and consumers.

- **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

VET is defined as education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market.

