

USWE Project – A success story about sectorial social partners cooperation in anticipating skills and training needs for the European Maritime Technology sector

Brussels, 27 November 2020

In November 2018 the EU Social Partners of the Shipbuilding and Maritime Equipment sector, [SEA Europe](#) and [industriAll Europe](#), together with [Tknika](#), the Basque VET Applied Research Centre, and [Turku University of Applied Science](#), launched a joint project for *Upskilling Shipbuilding Workforce in Europe (USWE)*.

The social partners were mandated to undertake this important project by their national members of the EU Social Dialogue Committee for Shipbuilding. The aim of the project was to continue the important work and recommendations of the previous joint EU social dialogue skills projects. In particular, the project sought to **further identify the main skills gaps in the sector in relation to the adaptation to industry 4.0 and green technologies and the further digitalisation of the workplace.**

The project, co-financed by Erasmus+, has involved 70 organisations including shipyards, suppliers, industrial associations, trade unions and education providers from across Europe.

MEP Izaskun Bilbao, keynote speaker at the final event of the project, said *“This programme deserves my admiration, hope, emotion and gratitude because it’s all thanks to genuine European social dialogue, it beautifully translates the commitment in the expression “sailing together in the same boat”. It is great to see that so many sectorial stakeholders have come together under the social partners, with the Basque Vocational Training Service and the University of Turku, to set out recommendations to improve the training of workers in the sector. The aims to predict which skills will be needed in the future, integrate new skills into the training curricular, encourage cooperation between Member States, and in turn, strengthen the commitment to talent, intelligence, and sustainable growth are most welcome. Skills are fundamental in ensuring that the European shipbuilding industry can maintain and increase its global leadership, and they will be key in successfully facing the challenges of digitalisation and de-carbonisation.”*

Christophe Tytgat, Secretary General of SEA Europe, added that *“The success of the USWE project is thanks to the strong cooperation between the EU social partners, industry, workers and VET experts in a trustworthy environment, generated after years of collaboration in the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Shipbuilding, where SEA Europe and industriAll Europe have worked together since 2003. Moreover, the deliverables and conclusions from the USWE project will form a strong basis for a Pact for Skills for the shipbuilding and maritime technology sector”*.

The USWE project has delivered an innovative methodology for managing sectorial skills and profiles in the shipbuilding industry. It identified the main skills and occupational needs, both now and in the next 5 and 10 years, and analysed the impact of 4.0 technologies on existing occupations and skills while identifying new ones that will be in high demand in the future. Moreover, the USWE Project has renewed 25 VET professional profiles identifying technical, green, digital, and transversal skills for the further elaboration of new curricula. This information has been submitted to the ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) Secretariat in order to be included in the European database.

Given that one of the main challenges is the scarcity of sectoral skills and workers, increasing the need to attract new workers, the partners of USWE project has also delivered a booklet to promote career opportunities in the sector to young people.

As explained by **Tiina Perho, Member of the Board of South West Finland, and Chair of the Group on Maritime Issues of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)**, the shipbuilding industry has been hardly hit by the COVID-crisis, impacting regions like Turku, where shipbuilding and maritime equipment are a key economic and employment engine. *“Despite the current layoffs, we know that the need for specific skills and skilled workforce is great and will be even greater in the future. A well-known fact is that in 10 years more than 40% of the current workers will retire. The technological development also requires new skills. Therefore, we need to take care that the industry will have skilled labor force also after the crisis. I’m certain that the maritime industries will recover from this hit, as it has survived the previous ones as well. I see that now when the business is slower it is a good time to invest in education and future development plans.”*

In this regard, several participants raised the need of EU action to support industry and workers to overcome the current crisis. In words of - **Florin Spataru, HR Manager at Damen Shipyards in Romania and President of Anconav** *“In times of crisis the first cuts made by companies are usually on training and education. However, if we want that the sector meets the goals of the digital and green transition, we must be able to keep knowledge and employment in the sector, and it is more necessary than ever to allocate the available resources to the right place”.*

The Final Conference of the project, held on 26 November 2020, was well attended with 70 participants including industry representatives, trade unions, regional administrations, EU institutions, education providers and other interested stakeholders. The partners presented the main results of the project and experts provided an overview of the concrete skills needs and several training activities carried out by the industry across Europe.

IndustriAll Europe presented the recommendations of the project, including the next steps that the European social partners will take in order to safeguard the industry and in turn the jobs of thousands of workers dependent on the sector. In words of **Judith Kirton-Darling, Deputy General Secretary of industriAll Europe**: *“We need to produce high-value, high-tech green vessels and equipment here in Europe in order to both remain competitive and meet our European climate ambitions. It is essential that workers are up-skilled and/or re-skilled in order to meet these challenges, we cannot lose these contracts and jobs to our non-European competitors. European social partners must continue to lead in discussions and projects on skills, as it is the national social partners will implement these changes on the ground. The social partners will continue to work on the recommendations in the USWE project as a priority.”*



Pictures: USWE visit to Meyer Turku Shipbuilding School & Navantia Shipyard

Background Note: *SEA Europe and IndustriAll Europe represent close to 100% of the European shipbuilding and maritime equipment industry and its workers in 16 nations, encompassing the production, maintenance, repair and conversion of all types of ships and floating structures, commercial as well as naval, including the full supply chain with the various producers of maritime systems, equipment material, and services.*

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