

PRESS STATEMENT

A TRANSFORMING EUROPEAN SUGAR INDUSTRY: NEW AND BETTER JOBS IN A COMPETITIVE, INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY

Brussels, Tuesday, 14 December 2021

Since the end of the quota period in 2017, the EU beet sugar sector has undergone an important period of transition, with low sugar prices leading to factory closures.


Rethinking the future of the industry was the goal of an EFFAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions Federation) - CEFS (European Association of Sugar Manufacturers) conference, held on 14 December 2021, for the conclusion of a joint project: **"A transforming European sugar industry - New and better jobs in a competitive, innovative and sustainable industry."**

Sustainability is at the core of beet sugar production in both factories and field. Beet sugar factories offer skilled, remunerative industrial employment and are often at the heart of the rural communities in which they operate. With this in mind, both social partners in the sugar sector pointed out the importance of placing people at its core. Opening the conference, **Marie-Christine Ribéra**, Director General at CEFS, stressed that "we need a legal framework with incentives to support new diversification and decarbonisation strategies."

A final report, compiled by **Areté consultancy**, pointed at different actions needed to safeguard/boost employment and promote regional development in sugar beet growing areas, further increase the sector's sustainability, secure the skills required of the workers in a sector in transition, support the diversification of the activities of the factories and increase the sector's attractiveness to young workers.

The industry considered the Fit for 55 package will heavily impact the beet sugar industry. The package must be fit for purpose and should facilitate the energetic self-use of biomass residues from beet sugar production, which is essential for the sector's decarbonisation.

Equally, employers stressed the importance of diversification of activities towards new products such as bioplastics and betaine. Tracking skills requirements will be essential to adapt trainings and focus on the "basic skills of the future", such as digitalisation and automation of production and handling. Collaboration with educational institutions is key to attract the future workers into the sector. The regulatory barriers burdening intra-EU skills mobility must be removed.

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Workers' representatives said that the sustainability of the sector should be environmental and economic but also, and foremost, social. To guarantee its readiness for the future, the sugar sector needs to look out for its ageing workforce and tackle the limited availability of skilled workers while enhancing the sector's attractiveness to younger generations through improved working conditions.

Wiebke Warneck, EFFAT Political Secretary in charge of the food sector said: "No transition is just without workers' involvement. The issue is not whether the sugar sector needs to prepare its workforce for the way to the future. The issue is how it is going to do that to be truly sustainable."

Marie-Christine Ribéra, Director General at CEFS, said "People are at the heart of our sector. This study highlights some of the changes that should be made to ensure they are attracted by, and equipped for, a career in sugar. At the same time, the industry needs the right policy frameworks to ensure it can continue to provide value to the economy, environment and society."

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EFFAT is the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions. As a European Trade Union Federation representing 116 national trade unions from 37 European countries, EFFAT defends the interests of more than 25 million workers employed along the food chain. EFFAT is a member of the ETUC and the European regional organisation of the IUF.

Founded in 1953, CEFS represents European sugar manufacturers in 18 EU countries, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

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