

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FUNDS NEW UEA PROJECT

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In the past three years, the UEA has warned about the problems created by the structural changes in the furniture industry in the EU 15. The European Commission has officially recognized the fact that the sector is undergoing structural changes and has made it a priority sector for a number of actions. DG (Directorate General) Enterprise is undertaking a competitiveness study of the furniture industry; DG Trade has moved up the importance of the market access for the furniture in the WTO discussions; DG Research has made the furniture industry the pilot sector for its study to define the research needs for user centered innovation in manufacturing industry, centered around the product, not the material, DG Enlargement has put assistance for the compliance with the EU "acquis" in the furniture sector as a priority and now DG Employment has decided to co-fund a 1.6 million€ project of the UEA to study best practices and develop methodologies to help companies deal with the structural changes in the sector particularly by integrating co-operation in their operations. Partners in the project called FIRST (Furniture Industry in Restructuring: Solutions & Tools) are MIP (Polytechnic University - Milan), Aidima, (Spanish Furniture Research Center), BFM (British Furniture Manufacturers Federation), Medifa (French Furniture Manufacturers Federation), EIAS (Furniture Co-operation Consultancy) and EFBWW (European Organization representing the Workers in the Furniture Industry).

Companies that have passed through restructuring using co-operation, subcontracting or outsourcing and that are willing to share their experience with other companies, and companies that are interested in the methodology that will be developed can contact their national furniture manufacturers' organization or the UEA secretariat.

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