

What does it take to create the glass industry of the future in Europe?

Document adopted by the 24th IndustriAll Europe Executive Committee
Stockholm, 24-25 May 2022 | 2022/141

The European glass industry is a strategic sector, indispensable for the green and digital transitions. It comprises the five subsectors: container glass, flat glass, domestic glass, fibres and special glass. In total, it employs around 290 000 people in the European Union.

The glass industry is one of the Energy Intensive Industries. It has continuously improved its energy efficiency, but the dependency on high temperatures in the production process poses boundaries to further progress with given technologies. Pilot projects test new furnaces that could be heated with renewable electricity and studies explore the use of hydrogen.

The glass industry has a long tradition. Glassworks can be found in many areas in Europe. For smaller companies in these regions, the investments to cut emissions are particularly challenging, especially in critical infrastructure such as hydrogen pipelines.

Companies in the glass sector are often an important source of employment in structurally weak regions. Nevertheless, the glass industry has experienced difficulties to recruit young workers in many European countries. This can be explained by the priority given to economic efficiency criteria and, as a result, by the relatively low wages of the workers.

Therefore, there are currently unused production lines, as it is not possible to recruit workers under these conditions. This issue concerns all the sectors of activity and not only the 'fields of expertise'.

The recent decline in automotive production has hit the flat glass producers in the automotive industry supply chain and led to several cases of job cuts and restructuring. Despite this, the labour shortage persists throughout the production of float glass.

The current surge in energy prices has brought some companies to the brink of collapse.

IndustriAll European Trade Union has welcomed the [opinion](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee: "Glass in Europe at a crossroads: delivering a greener, energy-efficient industry, while

enhancing competitiveness and maintaining quality jobs” as a balanced analysis of the challenges and opportunities for the sectors of the glass industry. We agree with its recommendations.

To maintain a strong glass industry with good jobs in Europe, industriAll Europe demands:

- to fully engage the sector in a Just Transition, providing adequate resources to cover the sector, workers and its value chains. This means concrete political and financial support for the capital expenditure, efforts to retrain workers, and operational expenditure to secure the energy transition
- massive investments in low carbon production technology and energy sources
- reliable access to affordable renewable energy
- switch to fully circular, reusable and recyclable glass, based on comprehensive separation and collection systems (recycling rates for container glass are comparatively high, but could be substantially improved for construction and automotive glass. Separation and collection systems for these are hardly in place)
- in this context, it will also be necessary for the creation of new products or new types of glass products to be developed close to recycling facilities to support the development of a truly local circular economy, also allowing the manufacture of high value-added products from recycling in the regions
- new EU policies for strategic value chains, e.g. restarting the production of photovoltaic cells in Europe
- protect the European glass industry against carbon leakage
- ambitious goals for the EU’s Renovation Wave
- investment in education and training to provide new and young workers with the necessary knowledge and capabilities, as well as to enable current workers to keep up with innovation and transitional changes in the industry
- continuous improvement of occupational safety and health and working conditions
- a clear regional approach: maintaining industrial workplaces in structurally weak regions to preserve the added value of companies and the vital income of workers is of utmost importance. The possibilities of state aids must therefore be coherent and support the development of industrial projects in the so-called ‘weak’ regions and not reinforce the inequalities that already exist between the regions. These state aids must really support the Just Transition and leave no region behind.
- strong social dialogue at all levels that serves the interests of the workers, companies and the welfare state (sustainable financing of social security and pension systems)
- legal framework for the anticipation of change and ensuring the workers’ participation throughout the transformation of workplaces and regions