Press Release

The Circular Economy has a skills gap — the Wood2Wood (W2W) project is anticipating the work profiles that will bridge it!

Rotterdam, The Netherlands, July 13, 2026: Climate change, inconsistent policies, greenwashing concerns and the promise of AI-powered sorting systems are reshaping how the wood sector must adapt. The Wood2Wood (W2W) project is addressing a structural blind spot in circular economy transitions: the future occupations needed to make wood reuse viable at scale.

People power the Circular Economy

The circular economy transition doesn't just need new technology - it needs foresight tools to anticipate future skills needed for workforce development. This means urgently addressing skills gaps, identifying future occupations and guide reskilling strategies to support inclusive and forward-looking policy frameworks.

As part of Wood2Wood, a Horizon Europe project on wood waste upcycling, VTT (Finland) researchers are asking exactly these questions. Through a horizon scanning survey for trend and signal analysis, engaging 380 experts from over 20 countries across Europe, they are exploring how jobs in sorting, material assessment, digital traceability, circular design, and bio-based processing may evolve by 2035.

The team mapped more than 4,000 trends and signals across social, technological, economic, environmental, political, and values-related drivers of change. The findings reveal a complex transformation landscape. While environmental drivers such as climate change and resource scarcity are pushing industry to rethink material flows, economic and regulatory barriers such as fragmented markets and inconsistent policies are holding back circular solutions from scaling. On the technology side, AI-powered sorting systems and digital material tracking show great promise for unlocking efficiency and transparency, but their adoption is still in early stages. Meanwhile, social and values-based shifts – including evolving consumer behaviour, concerns about greenwashing, and the urgency of addressing skills gaps – are reshaping expectations of how the wood sector must adapt.

Taken together, these drivers and barriers highlight the need for proactive planning.

The survey delivers anticipatory insights into changing labour market dynamics, helping policymakers, educators, industry, and social partners prepare for disruptive changes and support a just transition. The focus is on sectors such as bio-based materials and industrial symbiosis, where circularity and employment intersect most prominently.

As Dr Jorge Martins, Senior Scientist, Foresight and Data Economy at VTT, puts it: "In practice, this helps anticipate who will enable Wood2Wood cascading, ensuring recovered wood is redirected into new products and materials rather than lost to disposal or energy recovery. By envisioning future roles and work profiles, we are supporting more resilient and waste free wood value chains."

If you want to more about our work in Skills Development, join our webinar on *Green Skills for Europe's Circular Future* on July 17, 13:00-14:15 pm CEST. **Click here** to register.

What is the Wood2Wood project?

EU-funded Wood2Wood project employs a cascade valorisation approach to improve resource recovery and maximise value, targeting mainly polluted wood from industrial and urban waste. Using advanced sorting and separation technologies and digital tools, the project will transform unused wood waste from Construction & Demolition Waste (C&DW) into high-value products.

This integrated approach combining sorting, separation and upcycling technologies, digital tools and supportive policy frameworks, will allow to demonstrate how wood can be recovered, recycled and upcycled into valuable resources to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy.

Our approach comprises of four key components:

➡ Advanced separation and sorting technologies;

➡ Upcycling processes and technologies;

➡ Digital tools for improving circular flows of secondary materials; and

➡ Supportive framework in policy, market, and skills.

Three distinct Use Cases will demonstrate the efficiency and sustainability of value chains, including producing wood without pollutants, bio-composite building materials, biopolymers, polyols, personal care products and facilitating nutrient recovery.

For more information, visit the Wood2Wood Project website.
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