Slovenia’s construction sector addresses skills gap

As shown in the recently published [European Construction Sector Observatory](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/construction/observatory_en) (ECSO) [Slovenia Country Fact Sheet](https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/44167), the number of job vacancies in the construction sector in Slovenia in 2019 experienced an impressive growth of 413.1% compared to 2010 levels. In addition, Slovenia’s job vacancy rate increased from 1.1% in 2010 to 6.2% in 2019, demonstrating a growing demand for construction professionals that is currently unmatched. Despite the large availability of openings, Slovenia’s economy, including its construction sector, continues to experience consistent labour shortages. In fact, up to [40.1% of the employers in the construction sector](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0523&from=EN) reported labour shortages in 2019.

According to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, the narrow construction sub-sector lacks a qualified workforce also due to i) low salaries that reduce the sector’s attractiveness for young and qualified workers; and ii) low numbers of graduates who finish a construction-related degree, which shrinks the number of potential qualified workers. As a result, availability of skilled staff is considered [a barrier to investment by 78% of the businesses](https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/eibis_2018_slovenia_en.pdf) in the broad construction sector.

To address these challenges, the [Adult Education Act](http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7641) was adopted in January 2018. The law provides services such as consulting, mentoring, training for educators, primary school for adults and counselling. Slovenia is also introducing an [apprenticeship system](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/slovenia-piloting-apprenticeship-upper-secondary-vet) to better tailor vocational education to the needs of the labour market and improve the participation of local companies. This new system will benefit from a funding of EUR 2.7 million by 2021, of which EUR 2.1 million originate from EU funds. To this, an additional EUR 28.4 million (of which EUR 22.7 million come from EU funds) are being invested to implement practical training by working in cooperation with employers. To date, [most companies and apprentices of the pilot phase were satisfied](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/slovenia-evaluation-apprenticeship-system) with the apprenticeship system.

The Slovenian Chamber of Engineers also plays an active role in the provision of lifelong education through its [Training Academy](https://www.izs.si/en/education-and-informing). The Chamber organises workshops, seminars, conferences and symposia on a variety of topics, from fire safety to Eurocodes. In terms of training, the Chamber covers subjects such as nearly-zero energy buildings, energy-efficient buildings, design and installation of heating systems, as well as legal and contractual aspects. Furthermore, the Chamber operates a portal allowing its member companies to publish job vacancies and facilitate matchmaking between job seekers and employers.

Regardless of the potential setbacks caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the Slovenian construction sector presents important margins of untapped potential. The digitalisation and sustainability trends will require a more and more qualified workforce, which is currently a significant bottleneck in the country. However, the government has recognised the issue and has taken several initiatives to tackle it. Moving forward, ensuring an adequate provision of skilled workers will prove to be pivotal for the sector’s growth and competitiveness.