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Climate protection: Lack of qualified personnel hampers energy renovation in building stock

New study reveals high demand for training and qualification in construction and architecture industries

Energy renovation of buildings offers many opportunities in the areas of climate protection and job creation. Nearly 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions could be saved in the construction industry by 2030. As shown in a new UBA study, however, there is an increasing lack of qualified personnel to plan and carry out restoration operations optimally. For the same reason, a mere one-third of economically feasible and energy-saving potential in building stock is being tapped. UBA President Jochen Flasbarth commented on the study results, remarking, "We need to go on an offense training and education campaign in energy renovation of buildings. Green jobs are a huge chance for the future. Energy saving should play a more central role in all construction-related occupations throughout training and continuing education. Otherwise, climate protection and the labour market will suffer. Degree study courses such as architecture or civil engineering should devote more attention to energy renovation in buildings." The construction industry has seen the writing on the wall: some 80 percent of all craft trade companies and another 90 percent of engineering firms perceive their future area of focus as concerns construction to be in the renovation of old buildings.

Should economically beneficial energy-saving measures either not be carried out at all or executed unprofessionally, it will firstly hamper climate protection efforts. Secondly, unnecessarily high costs to building owners and tenants will be incurred, mostly due to the rising cost of fossil-based energy sources. The effect of the abovementioned lack of qualified personnel will brake investment—with concurrent negative effects on employment.

Specialist personnel in energy renovation of buildings must continuously acquire new information and knowledge about the technologies and products on offer in addition to disposing of solid fundamental skills. Besides the professional competences they need, so-called soft skills are becoming ever more important. Energy renovation of buildings requires considerably more planning and material expenditure than refurbishment that foregoes energy modernisation. An eye for the overall picture is key, as is coordination of work on individual building sites.

The selection of construction materials should take into account their entire life cycle; that is, the energy and consumption of resources needed in the production of building and insulation materials as well as their recyclability. Since the planning and executing enterprises consult on and influence choice of materials, specialised qualification is called for. There is also a need for training courses that seek to achieve interaction and closer cooperation between planners and executing trades.

A summary of results, along with recommendations for action as concerns the impact of energy renovation in buildings on employment and the demand for training and qualification in the field, is available for free download (in German) at <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3970.html>. The complete study will be published shortly.

The study was conducted on behalf of UBA by the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW) in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Karin Rebmann and Dr. Tobias Schlömer of the University of Oldenburg and Wissenschaftsladen Bonn.

Dessau-Roßlau, 24 February 2011