



13 June 2017

Framework of Action agreed
between the European Social Partners for the Chemical Industry
on
Sustainable Employment and Career Development
in the European Chemical Sector

This framework of action is signed between the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) and industriAll European Trade Union (industriAll Europe), hereinafter referred to as “the signatories”.

The purpose of this framework of action is to provide a European sectoral approach shared through national social partners in the chemical, pharmaceutical, plastics and rubber industries¹, shaped as a set of guidelines enabling national member organisations on both sides of the spectrum to deal effectively with challenges such as:

- defending the competitiveness of the European chemical sector and job growth through sound anticipation and management of change,
- tackling the changing population pyramid in the sector by keeping older workers employed under sustainable conditions, contributing to reduce youth unemployment and enhancing women’s share in the labour force.
- improving the attractiveness of the sector through good practices benchmarks, safe working places, attractive working conditions, acknowledged competences and skills, innovation and digitalisation.

Setting the scene - Employment and demographic change in the chemical sector

Competitiveness and employment are synonymous with prosperity. Despite the economic crisis which started in 2008 and which is still not overcome in all member states, employment rates in the chemical industry have held up reasonably well compared to other industries, both in terms of direct and indirect employment. The needs of a competitive production in the globalised economy of the 21st century requires companies to be more flexible than in the past and to take this flexibility into account when handling employees’ careers in this sector. HR and industrial relation policies as well as skills development have to support employees and companies in this task. Inter alia, as a result of demographic change, subjects such as work-life balance, youth employment, knowledge transfer,

¹ Abbreviated in the following document as “chemical industry”.



management of the career throughout its duration, inclusion of women in the sector, work mobility and employability of workers are themes which became more important for Social Dialogue.

In this context both concrete actions were developed and additional ones are being considered.

With approximately 3.3 million direct employees in more than 94,000 enterprises, the chemical industry is one of the biggest and most dynamic industries in the EU. The industry thereby not only plays an important role in improving the quality of life for citizens, but also provides direct and indirect employment for many Europeans. In order to stay an attractive employer, the sector must continuously improve its image to the outside world.

While specific demographic challenges vary from company to company, there are a number of areas for joint activities of European Sectoral Social Partners. Due to demographic change many member states pursue a policy in which the retirement age is raised. This is a reality to which the sector and its employees need to adapt. In this respect, it is essential to organise sustainable working lives in Europe. Thus, sustainable employment is key not only to enable older employees to stay longer, but also to attract young people and women to a sector where the average workers' age today is over 45.

1. Scope of the framework of action

- Sectoral scope:
NACE codes 20, 21 and 22: chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics industries, further referred to as European chemical sector.
- Geographical scope:
All affiliates of ECEG and industriAll European Trade Union.

2. Aims

This voluntary framework of action on sustainable employment and career development in the European Chemical Sector stems from 12 years of sectoral social dialogue experience, where competitiveness and industrial policy, job growth and quality of employment, education, training and lifelong learning, LLL, and occupational health and safety have played a central role. It is also a product of the European Chemical Industry Social Partners' Roadmap 2015-2020, with support of the European Commission through project VS/2015/0033.

Our joint strategy, which links economic success, social equity with social and environmental responsibility of companies, is, in addition, inspired by existing international commitments (ILO, OECD, UN)² and national sector-specific actions among our members, and intends to give orientation to all our members and provide a useful example for other stakeholders.

² United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ILO Core Labour Standards



The European sectoral social partners are committed to promoting the attractiveness of the chemical industry in Europe towards future and current workers. Well-skilled and dedicated workers appreciate the sustainable working environment characterised by high environmental, security and safety standards, quality jobs and remuneration, and their personal opportunities regarding voluntary mobility and career paths within the sector.

The European Sectoral Social Partners work to:

Defend the competitiveness and employment of the European chemical industry and promote sustainable development

Bearing in mind the three pillars of sustainability – economy, society and environment – the European chemical industry promotes sustainable development and job creation within Europe as one of the largest and most innovative and diversified industries.

The European chemical industry plays a major role in the creation of value within the manufacturing industry, while sustainable employment creates a solid basis to attract and retain workforce, thereby allowing the European chemical industry to stay a key business partner on the global scale.

Only an internationally competitive and growing European chemical sector can ensure economic growth, quality jobs and sustainable social security systems, which leads, consequently, to an enhanced societal well-being, wealth and a more sustainable future.

To make the transition towards sustainable development a success, the European policy framework needs to favour a strong manufacturing industry, which ensures sustainable workplaces and decent working conditions within Europe, promotes competitiveness, innovation and investment in the development of innovative technologies.

Its highly skilled workforce and targeted investments in R&D are key to the sector's future and need further commitment by all stakeholders, in order to allow the sector to develop and produce innovative solutions, products and services tackling the key global challenges of society today and tomorrow.

Promote the attractiveness of the sector and encourage a diverse workforce

European Sectoral Social Partners are committed to a diverse workforce. Therefore, the sector works to

- stay an attractive, innovative and competitive employer, which offers sustainable jobs in a competitive global environment;
- encourage overall diversity of the workforce and equal access to work and promote the recruitment for all. We highlight our commitment to equal employment opportunity; this includes the non-discrimination in any aspect of employment on the basis of race, colour, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, age or disability.
- preserve and develop the competences and skills of employees in the chemical sector.



European chemical industry's competitiveness and global image are closely linked to the highly qualified workforce in Europe. In this regards, transfer of knowledge is crucial. Moreover, we believe that workforce diversity, in general, and gender equality, in particular, are directly linked to work-life balance and sustainable career development.

Young workers

In the light of the consequences of the economic crisis on youth employment in Europe until today, the sector works to

- attract young people to start their career within our large and diverse sector, which offers multiple career opportunities across Europe;
- stimulate young people to choose for a technical and/or scientific education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM);
- emphasise STEM subjects from a very early age along the education system throughout Europe. Via awareness-raising campaigns among pupils, parents and teachers, we aim to demonstrate that choosing STEM subjects is an investment towards their future.

The chemical sector supports young people not in Education, Employment or Training, NEET, via tailored apprenticeship programmes. Facing the issue of intergenerational equity, we are committed to support the young generation within our sector, for instance by reinforcing preventive health measures, such as info cards on ergonomics, LLL, Vocational education and Training (VET), and attractive career paths.

Female Workers

We welcome the European Commission's initiative to promote equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work.

We promote gender balance, equality and work to reinforce the participation of female workers in the chemical industry. The proportion of women in the workforce increases steadily as well as the percentage of women occupying leadership roles in, for example, human resources, finance, plant management and research.

Nevertheless, European sectoral social partners are convinced that there is still a room for improvement, for example in assisting women to accede top-level positions, and work to:

- attract women in career paths, where they are less represented;
- encourage to study STEM science and take into consideration vocational education and training opportunities.



Older workers and demographic change

The European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy and the EU strategic framework on H&S at work 2014-2020 highlight, inter alia, demographic change as one of the major challenges: "By 2030, workers aged 55–64 are expected to make up 30% or more of the total workforce in many countries".

Thus, age management is of high priority, including ageing-appropriate working conditions. Social Partners play a crucial role in managing an ageing workforce while ensuring competitiveness and sustainable employment.

Taking into account similar documents at European level, such as the autonomous framework agreement on "active ageing and an inter-generational approach", signed on 8 March 2017 by BusinessEurope, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC;³ we work to

- anticipate and analyse the implications on the EU economy, growth and the labour market as well as on social security schemes and the risk of skills losses;
- put in place the management of working life throughout the career and keep older workers at the workplace, also as mentors for younger generation, and vice versa.

Anticipate, prepare and manage change and employability across our sector

In May 2008, European Sectoral Social Partners signed a joint paper on "Joint Lessons Learned on Restructuring, Managing Change, Competitiveness and Employment"⁴. We agreed that "restructuring maintains competitiveness" and promotes "an extensive dialogue between all players that have an interest in the restructuring [...] to find sustainable solutions". The SSDC foresees to re-evaluate the document in the near future taking into account recent developments, for instance the EU Quality Framework for Anticipation of Change and Restructuring (QFR), which works to "facilitate investment in human capital and lead to the reallocation of human resources to activities with high growth potential and quality jobs as per the Europe 2020 strategy, while increasing the quality of working conditions" published in 2013.⁵

Furthermore, the European Commission is aware of the fact that "technological change and innovation may force adjustment strategies for companies and labour, but there are also indications that innovation, combined with research and education can build an effective way to pull Europe out of the crisis."⁶

³ BusinessEurope, "Reform Barometer, Reform to Perform. Annex 2, Demographic change: is the EU sufficiently prepared?", 2016, page 6.

⁴ Full text: <http://www.eceg.org/uploads/DocumentsLibrary/Joint%20Lessons%20Learned.pdf>

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions, "EU Quality Framework for anticipation of change and restructuring /* COM/2013/0882 final */".

⁶ Green Paper on Restructuring and anticipation of change: what lessons from recent experience? Europe 2020 Strategy and the Industrial Policy Communication of 28 October 2010



The digital transformation is underway and changes production and service patterns along the supply chain. In the past, our sector invested heavily in automation and information technology, to which professions successfully adapted. Nevertheless, European Sectoral Social Partners believe that digital transformation and upcoming inventions create an ongoing challenge for employers and employees. As a consequence, we have to anticipate change and analyse its concrete impact on the workplace in our sector.

Against this backdrop, in order to stay competitive and ensure jobs in Europe, the European Sectoral Social partners work to:

- promote employability which is closely linked to the individual and his/her level of education;
- encourage companies to offer training and apprenticeships to all of its employees throughout the career;
- enable the workforce to adapt to a modernised labour market and changing work environment; and motivate workers to engage in their personal skills development and take on opportunities for training and LLL inside of the workplace (provided by employers) and outside of the workplace;
- upskill, reskill or reemploy the workforce continuously taking into account their expectations.

Support measures for career development and voluntary professional mobility within the sector

We believe that our member associations, i.e. national social partners, and their members, i.e. companies and trade union representatives, are crucial for supporting initiatives for career development and voluntary professional mobility on all levels.

We will work to:

- share good practices and exchange experience among our members at European level, which could ensure better coordination and avoid duplication;
- highlight the advantages of involving national social partners in the design and organisation of funds and programmes dealing with career development and voluntary professional mobility which could improve their feasibility, effectiveness and overall quality.

Promote safe and healthy workplaces and well-being of all workers

We are committed to improve further employment conditions across Europe and believe that the well-being of all workers at safe and healthy workplaces contributes to the attractiveness of the sector. Therefore, European Sectoral Social partners work to

- foster safe and healthy working practices at the workplace;
- encourage the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and develop good working conditions and safety practices.



3. Means

Having in mind the above-mentioned aims and various aspects of sustainable employment and career development, ECEG and industriAll Europe (“the European Sectoral Social Partners”) and their members agree to orientate their actions on the following methods:

- raise awareness and exchange good practices;
- facilitate information exchange among our members;

At the same time, the European Sectoral Social Partners agree to leave ample room for national practices, having also in mind the principle of subsidiarity, experience of effective practices on the ground and different situations within the EU28.

In the framework of regular exchange among our members at EU-level, we wish to:

- publish framework of action and good practice toolbox online and in other forms, if necessary;
- in the framework of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee of chemical industry, and once a year:
 - o add the topic of sustainable employment to the agenda,
 - o report on the state of play, update the annex, if necessary, and every two years:
 - o look at member state specific social partner actions;
 - o monitor the implementation of the framework of action;
- communicate updates through joint circular letters and other forms if necessary;
- meet among member organisations and stakeholders;
- enquire whether specific events, seminars or discussion roundtables could be organised, either sector-specific or together with other sectoral social partners both on national and the EU levels;
- publish material resulting from above-mentioned actions for the wider audience on our websites or other means of publication;
- enquire whether to create a questionnaire for companies and their employee representatives to evaluate their state of play regarding sustainability;
- build a sustainability network among sectoral social partners and relevant stakeholders.
- Other means could be developed in the future.

By creating a sector-specific toolbox on good practices, we wish to share good practice examples and also learn from less successful experiences. In detail, these measures offer to our members and interested third parties the opportunity to pick and choose the most suitable tools depending on their specific needs and demands at sectoral, national and company levels.

Promoting success stories and practical tools among our members, such as skills assessments and professional career guidance, would, in addition, increase the attractiveness of the sector. Moreover, this exchange could lead to new initiatives and projects among our members at sectoral, national and/or company levels. It could also establish the first step towards a more formalised sustainability network among social partners in the sector.



The following paragraphs explain in detail measures which could be envisaged for specific aspects of sustainable employment and career development. The annex provides an initial list of existing projects and initiatives of our members and their company-members.

Sustainability as part of our shared responsibility for the future of European chemical industry

The joint ambition of the European Social Partners in chemical industry is to continue to be part of a strong industrial pillar in the European Union which stands for competitiveness, investments, jobs, growth, and decent working conditions. We engage in sustainable employment to build up a long-term perspective for our companies and workers based on shared responsibility for our industry's future.

Encourage age management policies and promote a diverse workforce

European Sectoral Social Partners underline the importance of sustainable work and healthy ageing throughout the entire working life. We believe that age management policies need to respond to companies' current and future demographic challenges. We encourage to develop age management policies within the national social dialogue and at company-level. We recommend a life-cycle approach in companies, where it does not yet exist. For instance, assessing the age composition of the workforce would facilitate anticipating future skills gaps. Consequently, steps for joint strategies to overcome these challenges could be discussed and developed.

A diverse workforce is essential for our sector. By showcasing good examples, we would like to underline the skills and competences of each individual and support inter-generational solidarity.

Promote training and lifelong learning

The promotion of quality education, training and social development throughout the working lives of our workforce as well as further investment in this regard are an ongoing process in our sector. We would like to continue this exercise and believe that raising awareness on the benefits of training, especially among low-skilled workers, would improve their career opportunities. Moreover, improved coordination among stakeholders, such as public-private partnerships, could facilitate the access to LLL.

We aim to set up a toolbox of good practices for exchange among our members in order to ensure high quality training, LLL and career development for our workforce throughout Europe.

Regarding young workers, European Sectoral Social Partners wish to

- devise measures to recruit and retain young workers;
- discuss methods on how to stimulate young people for jobs in the chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics industries;
- promote the advantages of apprenticeships (i.e. dual-based learning), traineeships (i.e. company-based learning only) and LLL in general;



- exchange good practice examples, for instance regarding skills development and how to take on opportunities for training.

Stimulate Vocational Education and Training

The European Sectoral Social Partners pledged together for the European Alliance for Apprenticeship in 2015 and focus their work on good practices exchange and modern challenges, such as innovation including digital transformation at the workplace.

We wish to enable workers of all ages to take part in education and training, which supports employability and prevents the erosion of skills and competences, i.e. via LLL.

We invite stakeholders to get informed on developments regarding [VET in Europe](#) via the website of CEDEFOP, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

Develop work-life balance policies

The European Sectoral Social Partners highlight the importance of a positive work-life balance for all.

We support the European Commission's aim to further elaborate possible avenues for EU non-legislative actions, such as country-specific recommendations within the European Semester or promoting mutual learning and the exchange of good practices.

Career development of older workers and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) measures

The European Sectoral Social Partners emphasise the need to retain the growing numbers of older workers in working life. A flexible working environment and flexible forms of transitions and retirement are further relevant. We need to ensure that the valuable experience and specialist skills, so-called "silent knowledge" of older workers are transferred to younger generations, and vice versa, before the older ones leave companies. This is particularly relevant in a continuously changing environment in the world of work, such as change of individuals and changing methods, processes and working patterns. This topic is linked to the need of LLL and willingness to train at all ages.

Our goal is to devise inter-generational coaching and mentoring programmes, which would allow to link sectoral experts to those being new to the sector.

Furthermore, European Sectoral Social Partners believe that it is important to provide a suitable working environment for older workers to stay in the workforce. We are aware of the challenges arising from demographic change. Hence, occupational health and safety measures are crucial for all workers. Moreover, we highlight the need of continuously preventive actions and information dissemination.



Recognition and validation of acquired competence

The sector's assets remain the innovative character and quality of our products, which are directly linked to the high-level and specific skills of our workforce. Therefore, the recognition and validation of acquired and officially approved competences is necessary to ensure that people develop professionally, engage in their jobs and choose adequate career paths within our industry.

Health and well-being at work are vital for all

The European Sectoral Social Partners believe that occupational health and safety, OHS, is critical for companies and workers in all sectors. Very high standards in our sector underpin health and safety at the workplace and have led to a reduction in workplace accidents and occupational diseases.

The framework of action will not entail a regression compared to national/regional/company laws/practices that are more favourable to employees.

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Annex: Toolbox of good practice examples