

The vision of young industrial workers in a digital world

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This year, industriAll Europe held the ‘Youth Seminar 4.0’, with youth representatives from a variety of European industrial sectors playing a key role, both in the participation and in the organisation of this event. Together with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Bratislava, industriAll Europe created a forum to discuss industriAll Europe’s Youth Working Group’s vision on the future of industrial workers in a digital world. Digitalisation takes many forms, but essentially it entails the mechanisation and automation of our jobs. It is a common part of our everyday life at work and at home and is a phenomenon which extends beyond all borders. This digital evolution has created, is creating, and will continue to create mass disruption for industrial workers. However, there are still windows of opportunity, in spite of these challenging and difficult times. Amongst these, four key areas were identified and discussed.

With the devastating impact of digitalisation on our industrial sectors, [industriAll Europe’s Youth](#) Working Group members believe that the **education system**, which is at the root of the changing work landscape, should better define the new skills needed to develop efficient education programmes for industrial workers. The way forward would be to increase coordination between employers and schools with the involvement of trade unions. Member states should improve coordination of these bodies and invest in the future in order to shape the mindsets of future generations. Providing lifelong learning (LLL) to teachers during work time and improving vocational education and training (VET) will be key elements of this ongoing effort to ensure that young people are adequately equipped for the future.

Our generations are being pushed into jobs which lack **work-life balance** (leading to the ‘liquidation’ of work-life balance). Our unions are adapting to the young workers’ new mindsets and pushing, for instance, for ‘two-way flexibility’ for employees and employers, to increase autonomy and job satisfaction. However, the lack of boundaries between workers’ working lives and private lives is increasing the incidence of occupational diseases. Innovative ideas proposed in [collective agreements](#) such as the right to disconnect by shutting down the company server after working hours serve to inspire others. Trade unions need to take the lead on the ‘working time’ debate in order to achieve a fairer redistribution of work and create jobs. Digitalisation increases productivity and cuts production times. However, working lives continue to get longer, putting workers under great strain at a time when, on the contrary, they should be enjoying their well-earned free time.

Digitalisation is eradicating a significant number of industrial jobs in Europe. However, for some of us, it has brought about improvements on **health and safety** issues. The automatising of tasks on supply chains has prevented and reduced the number of accidents in factories. Member states and the EU are lacking legislation on transparency and are now facing new challenges brought about by the rise in ‘**On-Demand Economies**’ such as precarious jobs and other issues relating to the young working poor (ie. UBER, Mechanical Turk, etc.). The industriAll Europe Youth Working Group welcomes the initiatives of alliances between trade unions and social movements to raise the awareness of consumers and fair trade issues and to forbid the idea of individual workers’ company ratings and to shift legal responsibilities back to the crowdwork platforms.

In an increasingly polarised Europe, we are all interlinked and industriAll Europe’s Youth Working Group will fight against all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the workplace. Reaching out to young people is a common challenge for unions all over Europe. Young unionists stress the importance of extending the reach beyond unions’ bubbles by rethinking the ways in which we communicate and strengthen alliances. IndustriAll Europe’s Youth Working Group calls on the need to confront the new forms of dissolution of employment relationships, which have been triggered in part by [wage inequalities across Europe](#). We strongly believe that national and European level policies should be shaped in such a way that they ultimately improve the prospects of young workers to find decent work and to exert control over their own lives.