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**Joint position of the European Sectoral Social Partners  
of the chemicals, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastics industries  
on social and employment-related aspects of digitalisation**

The European Sectoral Social Partners in the chemical industry consider that a targeted sectoral approach is necessary to analyse the impact of social and employment-related aspects of digitalisation on the chemicals, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastics industries<sup>1</sup>.

Stemming from our long experience in matters relating to employment, health and safety, education, training, lifelong learning and skills, we consider this joint position as a first step towards our joint assessment of the digitalisation of work in our industries through national case-based studies, as planned in our Social Partners Roadmap 2015-2020.

Recent actions and documents by the European Commission, the European Parliament<sup>2</sup>, and ongoing discussions by the European Economic and Social Committee as well as cross-sectoral and sectoral social partners at all governance levels show that the topic is of concern to many stakeholders and a sector-specific position therefore seems imperative.

In this context, the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) and industriAll European Trade Union (industriAll Europe) concur that a joint European Social Partners' response to Industry 4.0 is necessary to guarantee high quality standards, which will lead to competitiveness and job creation for Europe's manufacturing industry.

While our sector is only at the very beginning of launching specific actions to tackle employment-related impacts of digitalisation, chemical companies have already invested billions in automation and information technology. Digitalisation is a mean, which will continue to lead to increased productivity and quality, reduced costs, and will create greater operational efficiencies in production and supply chain management. Moreover, it can lead to the creation of new jobs in Europe.

Technological changes are inevitably affecting the working patterns and imply adaptation of the workforce. As a result of digitalisation a certain amount of jobs will fall into obsolescence or face radical redesigning with the incorporation of new digital technologies. On the other hand, some jobs will remain unchanged while others, newly created, will require specific and new skill sets. A well-

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviated in the following text as "chemical industry"

<sup>2</sup> For instance, European Commission Communication 'A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe' (COM(2015)0192), European Commission staff working document (SWD(2015)100 final), European Parliament report on Towards a Digital Single Market Act (2015/2147(INI))

skilled workforce in the chemical industry in Europe is key to the sector's economic performance, innovation, job creation and competitiveness. The Sectoral Social Partners will therefore focus on this matter in particular.

Our priorities regarding the social and employment-related aspects of digitalisation in Europe are:

**I. A well-skilled workforce in the chemical industry is key to the sector's economic and social performance**

Industry 4.0 requires adjustment of education, vocational, job-related training and lifelong learning, for instance via close involvement of social partners in schooling and curricula, and sector-specific training programmes for workers at company and national levels. Training and education is a topic on which the European sectoral social partners in the chemical industry have worked jointly since the inception of their Committee. Employability and anticipation of changes at the workplace are indeed crucial areas of focus to maintain and develop quality jobs in our industries in Europe. We encourage a positive attitude towards science, technology, mathematics and creativity at a very early age. Changes need to be put in place together with the workers and the trade unions concerned, taking into account that sector-specific training of workers is beneficial to the employer as well as to the personal development of each worker. In this context, we underline our joint pledge for the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. We bear in mind that the ageing workforce in our industry has a serious impact on the labour market. Upskilling, re-skilling and lifelong learning are therefore key to the future of our industries in Europe.

**II. Inclusion of European Sectoral Social Partners in the digital transformation process**

The Sectoral Social Partners welcome the invitation of Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen, to work together on the implementation of the New Skills agenda for Europe. We are convinced of the added value that the sectoral social partners play at all levels be it on the EU, national or regional, as well as works councils and company level in mitigating digital transformation processes by raising awareness and exchanging best practices.

**III. Promote competitiveness, job growth and sound working conditions for the European chemical industry**

Our sector needs to take advantage of the transformation process and unlock business opportunities while maintaining job growth, decent working conditions and social protection for its workforce. We call for raising awareness and share information among Social Partners and shape the process of digital transformation, considering that digitalisation is an ongoing process along the entire supply chain, affecting blue and white collar workers alike, which may lead to a different organisation of work. Legislation will adapt to this new reality and must allow an environment conducive to innovation, hence the interest of the European chemical social partners in anticipating these changes on behalf of the employers and workers they represent, keeping in mind the overall favourable climate for growth, competitiveness, innovation and employment in our industry. Opportunities and challenges lie ahead on both sides. A joint understanding and a joint approach will be crucial to help shape new legislation and better manage the quality of work life as well as work-life balance. In this respect national collective bargaining agreements will help determine adequate working patterns.

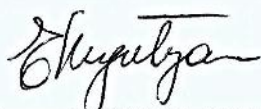
## ACTIONS

The European Sectoral Social Partners in the chemical industry have agreed to take on the following actions:

- Engage with the European Parliament, Commission and social stakeholders, and promote the European Sectoral Social Dialogue as part of the solution to take an advantage of the social and employment-related impact of digital transformation;
- Assess jointly how a tailor-made approach could be put in place in the framework of an EU-funded project, entitled "The impact of digital transformation and innovation on the workplace: a sector-specific study of the European chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics industry in Europe" (VP/2016/001/0080);
- Take on the opportunity to have a positive social and societal impact and to shape the European discussion by underlining the evolution of work life;
- Draw up an action plan/tool box aimed at sharing good practices and learning from less successful experiences, with the help of case-based studies from our member associations and their members;
- Emphasise that European Sectoral Social Partners via their members are ready to provide input on updating of curricula and required sector-specific skills;
- Provide our support towards European Institutions in the process of digital transformation by delivering sector-specific data from our member associations if available, pending the approval and implementation of project VP/2016/001/0080;
- Promote a sectoral discussion at European and national levels in order to raise awareness on this issue as well as exchange on future skilling, up-skilling and re-skilling needs of the existing workforce.

The European Sectoral Social Partners of the chemical industry wish thereby to contribute to a constructive sectoral debate on national and European level in order to shape the social and employment-related implications of digitalisation in favour of a competitive and social European Industry.

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