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JOINT STATEMENT

ON

A successful green and digital transition of the EU Textiles Ecosystem (TCLF sectors)

On 30 March 2022, the European Commission released its [EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles](#) which aims to ensure that by 2030, the ecosystem's products placed on the EU market are long-lived and recyclable, while the industry moves from a linear to a circular business model.

The Strategy focuses mainly on sustainability, including new design requirements for textiles and leather products under the Eco-design for Sustainable Products Initiative, clearer information on products and a Digital Product Passport, measures to tackle greenwashing, and action to discourage the destruction of unsold or returned articles.

The Strategy also recognises the need to build a resilient textiles ecosystem, based on innovation and global competitiveness. To this end, the European Commission launched a stakeholder consultation with the aim to co-create a [transition pathway for a more resilient, sustainable and digital textiles ecosystem](#) (TCLF sectors).

TCLF social partners' reaction

The European textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear (TCLF) social partners, [CEC](#), [Cotance](#), [Euratex](#) and [industriAll Europe](#), welcome the increased recognition by the European Commission of the strategic importance of the TCLF sectors. They encourage the move to a more sustainable ecosystem, noting that Europe should lead the way in high-quality and high-value production. However, the move to a sustainable sector in Europe will require huge investment and planning at regional, national, and European level, and the social partners insist that they must be involved at every step of the process. **Moreover, the TCLF sectors face global competition, and action is needed to ensure that the green and digital transitions of the ecosystem are a success and do not leave any sector, region or worker behind.**

An ambitious textiles ecosystem transition pathway to ensure a sustainable future

TCLF social partners have long been calling for a **coherent and holistic European sectoral industrial policy** which supports their industries and workers, and includes all relevant aspects: trade, competition, skills, decarbonisation, authenticity, sustainability, and social standards. The launch of the Textiles Ecosystem Transition Pathway is a real opportunity for the TCLF sectors to become even more sustainable, but the TCLF social partners insist that concrete measures are needed to ensure that the transition is a success.

A resilient ecosystem

For a sustainable EU textiles ecosystem to survive on the global market, it must be resilient. This will require a coherent set of quality regulations and standards applied by all, with compliance efficiently verified by EU national market surveillance and customs authorities, adequate funding and investment in research and technology, changes in consumer behaviour to encourage sustainable production (with sustainable products sometimes costing more), and a clear and common understanding of what sustainability is. This needs to be complemented with a strong EU trade policy that ensures free but fair trade, whereby the TCLF sectors in Europe can become more sustainable while remaining globally competitive, and as such, safeguard the industries and their workers.

As such, the TCLF social partners call for:

1. **Adequate funding at regional, national, and European level** to support the green and digital transitions of the TCLF sectors.
2. The launch of **awareness raising campaigns, plus incentives**, with the aim to change consumer behaviour and increase the demand for sustainable TCLF products made in Europe.
3. EU Member States to encourage sustainable production in Europe via **green public procurement**.
4. Initiatives at regional, national, and European level to **attract new workers to the sector and reskill/upskill current workers**, including via concrete actions under the [EU Pact for Skills](#).
5. EU action to guarantee that the European textiles ecosystem remains competitive, **including ensuring a global level playing field**.
6. Decisive action by Member States and the EU to **tackle strategic dependencies** through re-industrialisation, the right incentives for a circular economy, and reciprocity in trade policy measures.
7. The **adoption of an ambitious review of EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences** which creates quality jobs in some of the poorest third countries, while not negatively impacting TCLF production or workers in Europe.
8. An ambitious review of the **Trade and Sustainable Development chapters**, with full enforcement, to level the global playing field and increase the environmental standards and working rights in the TCLF supply chains outside Europe.

A sustainable ecosystem

Sustainable production must be good for people as well as the planet. As such, the decarbonisation of the European TCLF industries is an excellent opportunity for the EU sectors to focus on producing good quality, long-lasting products made by skilled workers with good working conditions, as opposed to competing on lowest-cost production.

However, a huge amount of work will be needed to decarbonise fully the TCLF industries. This will include improved official metrics of the environmental footprint of materials and products, funding for R&D, plus new technology and processes (including upscaling projects), measures to ensure access to clean and affordable energy (noting that Europe is currently in the middle of an energy crisis), initiatives for a more circular economy, including incentives for the uptake of natural and renewable by-products, or via collection and the use of secondary raw materials, and investment in the current and future workforces in relation to skills.

As such, the TCLF social partners call for:

1. Appropriate **funding, sound metrics, legal incentives and support** to help the European TCLF sectors decarbonise their production and become more circular, while also remaining competitive on the global market.
2. Measures to ensure **access to green and affordable energy** for the TCLF sectors.
3. Assistance for economic and business models, such as **recycling activities**, including those supporting cross-value chains in setting up the ReHubs for textile waste, acknowledging tanning as a recycling activity, and the completion of the comprehensive **review of the EU Waste Shipments Directive**.
4. Policy gaps to be addressed, such as promoting a **harmonised Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** approach across the EU, regulating **leather authenticity**, adopting sound allocation rules for by-products of animal origin, and ensuring that SMEs can use **Product Environmental Footprints (PEF)**.
5. Action to ensure that the **Sustainable Products Regulation** will offer a transparent, predictable and SME-friendly framework for the TCLF industries, including the social aspect of sustainability, which is currently missing.
6. Initiatives to ensure that workers have the right green skills for the future, including concrete **funding for the EU Pact for Skills**.

A digital ecosystem

To remain competitive, digitalisation will play a key role, from design to production. It must be remembered that not all TCLF companies across Europe are equal when it comes to high-tech equipment and processes. More investment will be needed in some factories than those with older, more manual equipment, while also remembering the pressures on energy (price and access) and the need to upskill workers to ensure that the digital transition is a Just Transition.

This will entail a huge transformation of the ecosystem, and the TCLF social partners insist that they must be fully involved in this transition, which will require appropriate planning, funding and support to ensure that the industries can transform successfully, with no region or worker being left behind.

As such, the TCLF social partners call for:

1. Appropriate **funding and assistance** to help the European TCLF sectors become more digital.
2. **Quality social sectoral dialogue** to ensure that the digital transition is a Just Transition.
3. Action to ensure that workers have the right digital skills for the future, including concrete **funding for the EU Pact for Skills**.
4. Appropriate training to ensure that **occupational health and safety** are respected across international value chains considering new technology and processes.

A social ecosystem

The green and digital transitions of the TCLF industries should result in a competitive European sector, leading in high-quality, sustainable production. The transitions should help create a more resilient and attractive European sector with quality jobs and highly skilled workers. The TCLF social partners hope that the transitions will be beneficial for industry, workers, and regions, some of which are hugely dependent on the jobs and income that they bring, with measures needed to ensure a Just Transition for industry, regions, and workers.

As such, the TCLF social partners call for:

1. Further action and investment to attract workers to the sector and to reskill/upskill workers, including via concrete funding for the **EU Pact for Skills**.
2. The respect of collective bargaining, according to national practice, to ensure fair wages for workers.
3. **Quality sectoral social dialogue** at plant, regional, national, and European level.
4. Continued **backing for social dialogue projects**, such as the current EU-funded project 'Ensuring a Sustainable Future for the South-Eastern European TCLF industries', plus the allocation of EU- and national funding for capacity building for social dialogue and collective bargaining.
5. **Social conditionality of EU funds** to ensure that they support collective bargaining, high-quality jobs and high-quality apprenticeships.
6. **Rights for every worker to job-to-job transitions**, through law or collective agreement, according to national practice.
7. Measures to make sustainable products more accessible to consumers, for example via a different VAT rate for 'green products'.

Conclusion

A successful transition to more sustainable and circular European TCLF sectors will require all European stakeholders to come together and agree on a truly combined effort. The TCLF social partners will be at the heart of this transition and call for concrete action and measures at regional, national and European level to ensure that the ecosystem can remain resilient on the global market and provide thousands of quality jobs in Europe.

The TCLF social partners commit to fully engaging with the European Commission in the co-creation of a transition pathway for a more resilient, sustainable and digital textiles ecosystem, and urge Member States and the EU to increase their ambitions and support to ensure that the transition is a real success story.