



## **Joint Recommendations on Digital Transformation in the Workplace for the European Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals, Rubber and Plastics Sectors**

The European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) and industriAll Europe hereby issue their Joint Recommendations on how to anticipate, prepare and manage change in the workplaces as result of innovation and digital transformation in the chemical industry at the European level. The following Recommendations are the result of the 2-years Social Partners' project "Our Future Workplace – Digital Transformation in the Chemical Industry" (January 2018 - December 2019) and are built on the basis of the results of the Research Report "Digital transformation in the workplace of the European Chemicals Sector", realised by the research institute Prognos AG.<sup>1</sup> In order to effectively address the following Recommendations, ECEG and industriAll Europe agree on a common definition of "digitalisation" and "digital transformation":

"Digitalisation is the massive adoption of digital technologies, from the digitisation of analogue data, to augmented or virtual reality systems, to the Internet of Things, and potentially beyond; as well as the way in which players adjust to the new conditions that arise. Apart from its technological and business aspects, digital transformation also refers to social, organisational and transformative aspects."

In Europe, we see that digital transformation is a reality in the chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics industries. While the first wave has been widely completed, companies are either engaging in the second wave of transformation at the moment, or are about to embark on it.<sup>2</sup> This transformation will bring about advantages but also problems or difficulties. Some professions will undergo major changes, some will become redundant and some will change. As the division of labour between employees and digital technology is being redefined by digitalisation, it has implications for the working environment, for work organisation and for health and safety. However, digitalisation is not optional. It is essential to keeping our industries competitive and, hence, to offer quality employment. ECEG and industriAll Europe are convinced that this future face of the industry can and should be shaped together.

The survey, commissioned in the realm of the project, highlights a number of areas for social dialogue on the local, regional or national levels that were identified by employers and employees alike. ECEG and industriAll Europe recommend that their affiliated organisations consider engaging in a constructive dialogue on these topics, namely: mobile working & working-time arrangements, qualification, data protection, performance monitoring, occupational safety, work-life balance, job

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<sup>1</sup> The report builds upon a strong empirical basis. It includes extensive desk research, a comprehensive online-survey with 500 respondents from across the European Member States (aimed at employers and employees of large, small and medium-sized enterprises), and around 30 expert interviews.

<sup>2</sup> We understand the first wave to encompass, e.g. improving connectivity, digitizing analogue data, integrating cloud solutions. The second wave will be characterised by the Internet of the Things, augmented reality applications, and Artificial Intelligence, etc.



substitution and loss of workload, working hours, and employee participation. Some agreements already contain these topics and can serve as examples or inspiration for others.

The survey also concludes that change management and the involvement and support of employees is currently the biggest challenge in the digital transformation process. The introduction of new technologies on the expected scale will bring major shifts in work organisation, required skills, etc. It is essential that employees are represented from the moment of decision-making. This will, on one hand, accompany the change in a positive and constructive spirit and, on the other hand, ensure that change management can draw on the knowledge and experience of the workforce.

Management, trade unions and work councils should consider possible future scenarios and anticipate the changes that the digital transformation may entail in the workplace. If fear and scepticism are addressed, and benefits highlighted from an early stage through communication, constructive social dialogue and transparent information exchange, the interests of all parties can be taken into account and the transformation can be perceived as a successful joint effort. To name but a few, relevant topics that merit social partners' joint consideration are:

1. the physical/actual introduction of new technologies, software, etc. into production, research, and administration processes
2. the expected increase in remote working opportunities
3. working in heterogeneous and interdisciplinary teams
4. multitasking and flexibility
5. new health and safety concerns and provisions

One of the central areas when dealing with the digital transformation is the need for lifelong learning, digital and transversal skills.<sup>3</sup> The survey results confirm that there is a strong need for upskilling and reskilling programmes to meet the challenges of the digital transformation.

Digitalisation requires employees to remain up to date with new technologies, causing a continued need to reskill. Lifelong learning leads to both better employability for workers and enhanced competitiveness for companies.

Education and work are likely to change from the linear pattern of schooling, training, employment, to a constant rotation between work, (re-)training and new positions in one's work life. Lifelong learning is indeed one of the most decisive factors for the digital transformation process. It implies, on the one hand, that employees have the willingness and self-management to keep learning during their whole working life. It requires companies, on the other hand, to offer their employees adequate training strategies. Lifelong learning thus implies a joint effort from both sides. Moreover, it should be understood as a must-have and not as an available option: both for companies, which need adequately trained/skilled workforce, and employees, to remain employable and reduce their vulnerability to the risk of automation.

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<sup>3</sup> Skills that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings. Examples include: Critical and innovative thinking, Inter-personal skills (e.g. presentation and communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, etc.), Intra-personal skills (e.g. self-discipline, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-motivation, etc.) - [unevoc.unesco.org](http://unevoc.unesco.org)



Competing in an era of digital technology requires a digitally skilled workforce, not just in terms of technical skills (e.g. programming skills) but also in terms of social and transversal skills.

ECEG and industriAll Europe are dedicated to further explore the challenges and opportunities of the digital transformation. These recommendations will be complemented and updated in line with new developments, technologies and knowledge about their implications for employment. The social partners will exchange on the progress made related to these recommendations, and share best practices in the years to come.

The European Sectoral Social Partners of the chemical industry, ECEG and industriAll Europe, express their commitment to work constructively with all parties involved in the digital transformation process and, in close cooperation with their national affiliates, to contribute to a constructive sectoral debate on social and employment-related implications of digitalisation.

Lastly, we need to constantly remind ourselves that this digital transformation is not a technological but also a cultural and social transformation and that it is not happening in a vacuum, but in the context of global competition. Hence, adjustments to the future of work in the chemical industry need to be made with care and speed at the same time.

Michael Vassiliadis  
President of industriAll European  
Trade Union

Klaus-Peter Stiller  
President of the European Chemical  
Employers Group (ECEG)

Luc Triangle  
General Secretary of industriAll European  
Trade Union

Emma Argutyan  
Director General of the European  
Chemical Employers Group (ECEG)

