



Our Economic and Political Agenda for Young Workers



ITUC CSI IGB

International Trade Union Confederation

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Introduction

Our forum is happening at a time when the world seems to be in crisis. More than a 100 countries in the world are involved in some form of conflict. 97 per cent of scientists agree that if unchecked climate change is the biggest threat to the survival of our planet. There are 2.9 billion workers in the world but only 60 per cent are in formal employment. More than 50 per cent are in precarious work, the majority being young workers. Young workers are taking on part-time, temporary, short-term and zero-hours jobs not out of choice but because there are no better jobs available. The number of unemployed youth globally is predicted to rise to 71 million by 2017. We are seeing the most dramatic rise in inequalities within and between countries that we have seen since World War II. The rich are getting much richer and the poor and being made poorer and poorer. Young people feel disenfranchised and abandoned by the 'political class', as we witness the relentless spread of nationalism, populism, racism, xenophobia, misogyny and homophobia.

Young people face a very uncertain future. But we are not powerless to shape the future we want.

From the Arab Spring, to the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements in the United States, to powerful student protests in Chile, Quebec, France, and Mexico, and the young party activists in Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, to organising corporate giants such as Starbucks and McDonalds, young workers have been openly challenging the prevailing economic and political status quo.

Why This Agenda?

We want to build a different future. A future where the values of peace, democracy, solidarity and social justice become a reality. We want a politically engaged and informed youth movement. We want quality decent jobs for young people – everywhere. We want a just transition that enables young people to benefit from changes in the world of work – whether it is the gig economy, the knowledge economy or the green economy. We want the ability to make choices and decisions over our lives. We want quality education, healthcare, childcare, social care – available to everyone. We want to build the power and strength of our movement through our own activism and leadership.

Young people want an economic system that guarantees fundamental human rights, protects our planet, prioritises people above corporations, and provides for the basics for everyone to live in decency and dignity.

Our Political and Economic agenda for young workers is a call to all of us, union members, leaders, organisers, activists to use our collective strength and make this world the world we want.

Our Action agenda – What young workers want

Today, as digital platforms are promoted as the new way to earn income, some old arguments are re-emerging. The propaganda is that the 'gig' economy is exciting and empowering, allowing workers to take charge. At the same time, the 'sharing' economy implies that everyone benefits in a means of production and consumption. What is not said of course is that the gig and sharing economy means that workers are expected to give up employment contracts and social security, and can forget the notion of a regular working schedule where work, family and leisure can be balanced. Regulations are deemed no longer relevant, merely because the goods and services are delivered through the mediation of an app or web platform.

Workers providing services via companies like Uber or Upwork are left on their own to pay for their social security, taxes and training all while they have no control over pricing, working conditions, safety or their personal data. They compete against each other for an irregular and unpredictable supply of work. Those who own the platforms reap billions from this model, helped in part by cosy relationships with politicians at various levels of government.

Young workers want what workers have always wanted:

- guarantee of minimum labour protections (whatever the employment relationship)
- equality of opportunity
- safe and secure jobs
- workplaces free from discrimination and violence
- wages on which we can live and plan for the future
- gender-sensitive lifecycle social protection systems
- **a say in our workplaces through collective bargaining and social dialogue**

Organising Uber drivers in New York City – A Union by any other name...

In October 2016, Uber and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers union announced the formation of the association for New York City drivers. The Independent Drivers Guild¹, which is a joint project between Machinists Union District 15 and platform drivers, will represent the city's more than 35,000 Uber drivers. The Guild will operate as an affiliate of the union and will represent drivers in meetings with Uber, most notably when drivers appeal Uber's decisions to deactivate them.

Through the Guild, Uber drivers will be able to access discounted legal services, life and disability insurance, education courses and roadside assistance, as well as an online hub of driver assistance resources. However, Guild members won't be able to negotiate matters like wages, paid time off, health insurance, or workers' compensation. In addition, under the union's agreement with Uber, the Guild won't try to unionise its drivers or seek to have them recognised by the National Labour Relations Board as employees of the company.

The machinists' union has also agreed to help Uber lobby state lawmakers to charge all types of hired vehicles the same rates (currently New York State law imposes a 9 percent tax on black car rides). If the company and the union are successful, Uber has promised the extra money gained would go into a fund that could provide monetary benefits for drivers like paid time off.

¹ <https://drivingguild.org/>

We will lobby for:

- investment in social infrastructure² as well as physical infrastructure that creates decent jobs for young women and men, helps break down gender barriers and supports our social protection systems
- a just transition to green jobs and away from a carbon-dependent economy. There are no jobs on a dead planet!
- measures to transition from informal to formal employment³
- fair school-to-work transitions that include quality apprenticeships and a path to regular employment
- vocational training programmes that match labour market needs
- life-long learning paths and access to career guidance
- due diligence and joint liability for lead firms and subcontractors in global supply chains⁴

Promoting green jobs and livelihoods in rural areas – SEWA India Case Study

SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) in India has developed a striking capacity to organise disadvantaged women to achieve economic, political and social empowerment, and to help them realize the importance of collective action and bargaining in improving their individual and collective well-being. This has been a particularly useful strategy in rural areas, where self-employed women are isolated and unaware of their rights and economic potentials. Innovative structures such as federations and networks have fostered women’s leadership and self-reliance at various levels.

One of the main organising priorities of SEWA is the promotion of “green” jobs and livelihoods in rural areas. With the support of a loan from the Indian ICICI bank, SEWA is implementing the Haryali Green Energy Initiative, which aims to provide affordable access to sustainable energy across India, equipping 200,000 rural households with solar energy-powered lighting and clean cooking stoves. SEWA has argued for decades that access to energy is vital in emancipating communities, and especially women, who are otherwise marginalized both economically and politically.

High Quality Apprenticeships for Youth – German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) Case Study

The dual system of vocational training in Germany is an important driver for the German economy and for young people entering the labour market. In December 2014, the “Alliance for Vocational Education and Training” – an alliance of employers, trade unions and government representatives – was set up to improve and strengthen dual training by increasing the number of apprenticeship places offered and smoothing the transition from school into training.

The German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) has also sought to ensure that opportunities to start an apprenticeship are extended to those young people who belong to disadvantaged groups (with a weak social background, 2nd and 3rd generation of migrants, young people with disabilities, etc.). Particular attention has been given to the promotion of “trainability” of school leavers with low numeracy and/or literacy skills by helping them to make better informed career choices.

The DGB argues that good working conditions are key to getting more young people interested in doing an apprenticeship and securing a large enough skilled workforce for the future. With this in mind, the DGB’s youth section publishes a regular report on apprenticeship conditions. The DGB and its member unions use the results of the report to support their workplace campaigns and to advocate for better working conditions for apprenticeships during the meetings of the alliance and as part of the current revisions of the vocational training act.

² A new ITUC study shows that investment into the care economy of 2% of GDP in just 7 countries would create over 21 million jobs and help countries overcome the twin challenges of ageing populations and economic stagnation. See the report: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/investing-in-the-care-economy-a>

³ In 2015, the ILO adopted a labour standard that provides policies and measures that can facilitate the transitions from the informal to the formal economy. See more here: http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/104/media-centre/news/WCMS_375615/lang-en/index.htm

⁴ See the ITUC Supply Chains frontline: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/supply-chains>

Fair wages for young workers

Over the past three decades, the share of national income that goes to workers' wages has steadily fallen. Within OECD countries the labour share of income has fallen from over 66% in the early 1990s down to 62% in the 2000s. Young workers have been particularly badly hit. Young women workers, disabled young workers and young workers from racialized groups even more so.

Even where minimum wages exist, laws sometimes allow discrimination against young workers with lower minimum wages applying to those below the age of 18 or 21 for example. Young people are also more likely to face exploitation in the workplace through cash in hand arrangements, unpaid internships, underpayment, bullying and harassment.

“ **The law treats me like an adult – it just makes sense that my employer should too. I get paid 30 per cent less for doing the same job as everyone else.** ”

18-year old worker in retail, Australia

For young people who live in low income households or who need to balance work with other responsibilities (such as caring for family members), being paid “junior” rates instead of “adult” rates can have a massive impact on their ability to put food on the table or access healthcare and education. This can put young people at an increased risk of poverty.

And for young women workers, who may have the same education, qualifications and skills as their male colleagues, the persistent gender wage gap (up to 70 per cent in some countries), makes no sense at all.

We will organise around:

- non-discriminatory minimum living wages
- collectively bargained wages that give us a fair share from our labour – regardless of age
- an end to the gender pay gap and other discriminatory pay practices
- no “baby penalty” in wages, job opportunities, career prospects and pensions

RESPECT fast food workers campaign – SENTRO Philippines Case Study

In the Philippines, the majority of workers in the fast food industry work on zero-hours contracts. They face very exploitative working conditions including forced unpaid overtime work (so-called wage theft), exposure to OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) risks – with burns being the most common type of work-related injuries – and increased pressure from management to perform under tight schedules. Many are buried in debt. Workers usually feel insecure and disempowered to speak out against these abuses.

In response, SENTRO established the Respect Fast Food Workers Alliance (RESPECT) to organise workers in the fast food industry to fight for a living wage and secure jobs for fast food workers and win union recognition. SENTRO's aim is to set up a trade union for the entire fast food industry.

SENTRO is also combining its fast food workers' campaign with its broader youth campaign on organising young people in schools and communities to fight against precarious employment among young workers and for the adoption of new laws to protect young workers.

RESPECT has been actively organising McDonald's⁵ workers and has joined the global campaign supported by a number of IUF⁶ affiliates and other unions around the world. The alliance currently has 100 members in the cities of Marikina and Quezon but plans to strengthen its membership throughout Philippines by 2018.

⁵ McDonald's, the world's largest fast food industry, pioneered the widespread use and abuse of contractual labour in the multibillion-dollar fast food industry. See more: <http://www.sentro.org/?tag=respect-fast-food-workers-alliance>

⁶ The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations

Youth and social protection

Social protection matters to young people. Young women and men make up a significant number of the working poor; are unemployed or are employed in the informal sector. Young women and men in poor households are often deprived of access to resources to complete their education and find decent jobs. When disasters hit, they are also affected by setbacks including disruption in income-generating activities, and are increasingly exposed to illness. Young mothers also face similar challenges as older mothers in child-rearing and securing basic services for their children.

80 per cent of the global population currently has no access to social protection.⁷ For young people this means no maternity protection or help with childcare, no unemployment protection, no insurance for work-related injuries; and the prospect of retiring in poverty. Investing in social protection systems and public services would allow young workers a degree of basic protection in the globalised economy, provide decent public sector jobs, and address social problems that impact young workers.

“ Young people experience high rates of HIV/AIDS infections, addiction to alcohol and drugs, mental distress, and reproductive health risks. Treatment for these conditions can be costly, and disclosure by a worker could lead to discrimination by employers. We need to include young workers in discussions about preventing workplace stigma and developing workplace systems that help young workers with health problems. ”

Through organising, lobbying and social dialogue, we can defend and expand existing social protection systems⁸ and create new ones where these are absent or inadequate, responding to the realities of the modern workplace and modern workforce.

⁷ See: <http://www.world-psi.org/en/social-protection-floors-more-information-0>

⁸ The International Labour Organizations (ILO)'s 2012 Social Protection Floors Recommendation calls for national floors of social protection accessible to all in need. See: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/socialprotectionfloor_madesimple.pdf

Winning Better Public Pensions – Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Case Study

Today, fewer than 40 per cent of Canadian workers have access to a pension plan at work – that's 11 million Canadians who are left to save for retirement on their own. Saving for retirement is difficult, especially for younger workers in an economy where post-secondary tuition costs are high, and good secure jobs are hard to come by.

After eight years of campaigning, Canada's unions are celebrating the first expansion of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) in fifty years⁹. Unions mobilised both younger and older activists, educated their members and the public, and spoke with one voice about why the expansion of the CPP is so important. Over time, they built public opinion and won wide support; from the Canadian Federation of Students to seniors' groups. The labour movement made CPP expansion an election issue in the 2015 Federal Election, and helped change the federal government. The efforts of Canadian unions mean that public pension benefits will be vastly improved for future generations.

Young workers stand to benefit the most in the proposed gradual expansion, which will most impact retirement benefits for workers who will retire in the future. Public pensions are the best way for young people to save for their retirement for three reasons: (1) the CPP is a system of deferred earnings where the cost is equally shared by the worker and their employer; (2) the CPP is safe and assessed to be a sound plan for at least 75 years, meaning that it will be there for generations to come; and (3) the CPP is fully portable – meaning that young people can switch between many jobs in their lifetimes and always have coverage. In an era of precarity, this is crucial for young workers to be able to save.

⁹ <http://canadianlabour.ca/news/news-archive/canadian-unions-celebrate-announcement-universal-cpp-expansion>

Our vision

Our vision is for a movement made up of active union members, progressive allies, students, and community and youth groups that is politically informed and engaged. Today information flows quickly and rapidly around the world, and young people are more interconnected than at any time in history. This provides both opportunities and threats and we must learn to use social media and information technology to our best advantage. Simple initiatives that help to educate young people, such as café conversations, door step conversations, informal mentoring, new member orientations, can go a long way to creating the active and well-informed movement that we want.

“ I've been organising young people for 9 years. I have listened to their stories, I have heard them, seen them, lived with them. They don't want flexible jobs; we don't want that. What we want are secure jobs, decent jobs. We want guaranteed jobs, fair internships, green jobs. We want an industrial policy that is tailored to our education system and the needs of the economy. Youth employment is not just about us, young people. It is about all of us. It all concerns us. So come on, let us get our acts together to make secure and decent jobs for the youth a reality. ”

Young organiser, Philippines

There are many channels by which trade unions can incorporate young workers into their strategic agendas, including through public policy advocacy, specific organising, political, and union campaigns and programmes. The labour movement at all levels should pursue a programme of inclusion of young workers, through the creation of infrastructure to foster young worker inclusion and leadership. To build a strong labour movement for decades to come, trade unions must demonstrate relevance and importance to young workers by fighting for their rights at work, prioritising young worker issues, advocating for strong public policies, and including their voices in internal decision making.

The global labour movement must invest in leadership development for young workers to build a new generation of trade union leaders and widen the pathways to collective action for all workers. By empowering young workers within the movement, unions will allow young workers to build from the ground up, and recognise the agency of young workers to take on issues important to them and forge partnerships within and outside traditional unions structures.

Youth committees serve an important role in shaping a trade union's decision-making processing and providing inputs. A growing number of national trade union centres have realised the importance of creating a platform for young workers to share and develop ideas, strategies, policies, programmes and visions and have established young worker networks, committees, and departments that take on young workers' issues and promote leadership development.

We know that we need to find new ways of organising young workers, reaching out to sectors where unions haven't traditionally organised in the past; and always educating students and young workers of their labour and social rights. Our organising agenda will be inclusive – reaching out to women, black workers, migrants, disabled workers and LGBTI workers. Our strategy will embrace the potential of new technology and social platforms for reaching workers.

Policies of direct affiliation appear to particularly appeal to young workers who may move from job to job, or may not be classified as an “employee.” For example, in 1999, the FNV opened membership to self-employed workers. In total, FNV counts a total of 25,000 self-employed workers among its members. As part of their membership package, self-employed workers can arrange health or disability insurance at more attractive rates than they could do individually.¹⁰ CTA in Argentina created a policy of direct affiliation, which allowed workers to join the confederation and have a voice within it.

¹⁰ Trade union strategies to recruit new groups of workers – The Netherlands, European Industrial Relations Observatory Online: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/trade-union-strategies-to-recruit-new-groups-of-workers>

Expanded and targeted union apprenticeship programmes – A US case study

Apprenticeships, or work-based learning, are a form of school-to-work transition that also often facilitates a young worker's entry into a union. In the US, through union apprenticeship programmes, young workers gain life-changing skills to do high-quality work and get solid jobs – often in new industries with cutting-edge green technology. Unions in the US have made an intentional effort to target under-served communities, schools, and populations (such as women, minorities, and migrants) in these programmes.

As young trade union members we will:

- self-organise to create spaces for young workers within our organisations
- self-organise to recruit more young people into the trade unions
- seek mentoring partnerships with experienced union members
- enhance our leadership skills through peer-learning
- get involved in setting collective bargaining agendas
- get involved in political programming
- build campaigns that address the specific issues of young workers
- strengthen connections between young workers from national to regional to global level

