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WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: a challenge for the future

In one of its recent studies, the International Labour Office, ILO explains that youth unemployment has been marked by an unprecedented growth in the last decade. Conscious of the phenomenon, WCL affiliated organisations have put in place programmes to fight against youth unemployment and marginalisation.

TELE-FLASH is a monthly information bulletin containing brief trade union messages, edited by the information department of the WCL.

Responsible editor: Willy Thys
Information officer: Mathieu Debroux.

WCL
Trierstraat 33
B-1040 Brussels
Phone: 02/285.47.00
Fax: 02/230.87.22
E-mail: info@cmt-wcl.org
Internet: www.cmt-wcl.org

The ILO Department for Employment Strategy has been tasked to undertake a study on "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004". As we informed you in a previous Teleflash edition, the findings are hardly encouraging. In 2003, the youth represented 47% of the 186 million unemployed, even though they account for merely 25% of the working age population (between 15 and 64 years). Among the 550 million poor workers living below the poverty line, a large majority are young people who often find themselves in the informal economy. ILO Director General Juan Somavia supports every effort to fight against this phenomenon, as well as against vulnerability and exclusion. "*This would be a notable contribution to the global economy*". Affiliated organisations of the World Confederation of Labour obviously did not expect to carry out programmes and training to ensure the youth a place in the labour world in decent and dignified conditions. A little inexhaustible tour of our organisations working on the subject.

A FULL-FLEDGED DEPARTMENT

For our affiliated organisation in Belgium, *Confederation des Syndicats Chrétiens* (CSC), the youth are an essential part of the future of trade unionism. "CSC Youth" is an officially recognised "youth organisation". It brings together young employed and unemployed workers and students affiliated to CSC, and informs them about their rights and responsibilities, among others. Another aspect of their concrete action is undoubtedly capacity building, which allows the youth to acquire skills to become real actors in the society. Campaigns have also been initiated. Following recent directives from the Ministry of Employment for example, a mechanism has been put in place to penalise the unemployed, especially the youth who do not actively look for work. For CSC, it is well understood among other things, that what is unavailable are jobs (relocation of companies, closures and lay-offs) and not the unemployed. The trade union organisation has published a report on "Decontamination of the unemployed" for the attention of its members, which meticulously takes up the concept of this new form of supervising the worker.
For more information contact: www.acv-csc.be

Christelijk National Vakverbond (CNV), our affiliated organisation in the Netherlands has also created its "youth" department. CNV "youth" is a trade union that acts to defend the collective interests of the youth. It is a service and affiliation organisation that also supplies individual services to the youth. Another of its activities is to assist in the training of its young trade union members.

EASTERN EUROPE MOVEMENT

Eastern Europe is not lagging behind with regard to the youth. The evidence, among others, is the creation of a "youth" section

within the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia (CATUS), our affiliated organisation in Serbia. This section was established at the end of June 2004. Even if it is too early to judge the outcome, they can congratulate themselves on this initiative. According to CATUS, the youth very often face two major problems. First, the difficulties that they have to face in society, for example, looking for employment, their lack of experience, job offers that do not meet expectations etc.... Then the other obstacle to overcome, CATUS explains to us, is found within the trade union itself, namely the tendency not to appoint the youth in the trade union structure, even though it is gradually beginning to change.

Added to this is the lack of information available to the youth with regard to the use of the trade union movement and the aim of the workers' organisation. To respond to these problems, the "youth" section of CATUS is currently carrying out an information campaign that will really monitor training seminars in order to help the youth of Serbia confront these issues. It is along this same line of thought that the Lithuanian Labour Federation (LDF), our affiliated organisation in Lithuania, established its "youth" organisation in 2003. This is a regional structure and all the regions of Lithuania are represented in it. Youth training and education have an important place in its work. *We are working on a project which will help the youth to solve the problem of unemployment*", declared Ramune Bieagloviene, Head of the LDF "Youth" organisation. We will follow the outcome of these efforts with interest.

A DIFFICULT DIAGNOSIS IN COLOMBIA

In its report "*Diagnostico Juventud Colombiana*" the *Central General de Trabajadores*, (CGT), our affiliated organisation in Colombia, made an apt observation of the current situation of the Colombian youth. The CGT made a series of proposals and prepared an action plan to try and improve their condition and the vision that they currently have of the movement, explaining that the problem of youth employment not only for developing countries but also industrialised countries, is the failure to be certain of a challenge. The percentage of the young men and women who are unemployed or forced to work in precarious conditions is just increasing. In Colombia, continues the trade union organisation, the fact that the youth are the most affected by unemployment, that majority of them come from poor families and that their working conditions are difficult create a vicious cycle of poverty which is passed on from one generation to another. If one takes the example of agriculture, a very important sector in Colombia, the working conditions are not encouraging enough: low remuneration in addition to few job opportunities, young farmers receive very short-term contracts, sometimes by day, and which offers little guarantee and stability. There is no clear agricultural policy, which does not make it very attractive.... The list is endless and does not only pertain to the agricultural sector. This is why CGT is putting in every effort to train, assist and inform the youth. ***For more information visit: http/www.cgtdco.org***

NUMEROUS OBSTACLES IN BANGLADESH

Whilst it is estimated that the majority of the work force in Bangladesh are between 15 and 30 years, job prospects are not very encouraging for the youth. According to the *Bangladesh Sanjikta Sramic Federation* (BSSF), majority of young workers have to face many obstacles, namely lack of employment, poverty and illiteracy, low wages, an unhealthy working environment, insecurity at work, gender-based discrimination in wages, few opportunities for technical training or yet still the absence of social security for majority of the workers. We might as well add that housing is a major difficulty. As a matter of fact, employers do not necessarily offer housing opportunities, and the salaries of the young workers are so low that they are unable to house themselves decently. BSYF is a department of BSSF specially created for the organisation of young workers, especially at Dhaka, the capital of the country (nearly 15 million inhabitants!). BSYF established contacts with many groups of young workers, majority of whom were not organised. Many training programmes and seminars were organised in order to better prepare the youth for the labour world, especially through capacity building. One can easily measure the magnitude of the task since one knows that majority of the Bangladeshi population are less than 25 years!

EMPLOYMENT NETWORK IN AFRICA

Africa is undeniably one of the poorest continent in the world. Half of the population, about 300 million people, live below the poverty line. Unemployment within the formal sector is also increasing and rarely provides stable employment. In addition, youth unemployment is almost 80% of total unemployment in some countries. "*In most of the communities in Africa, poverty is more the result of not obtaining adequate income from work, than the result of unemployment. This is particularly true in the informal economy, the agricultural sector and rural economies*" explains ILO. As a matter of fact, majority of workers carry out their activities in the informal sector. The few employment opportunities in the formal sector therefore force the educated and qualified youth to move to countries of the North that offer them better future prospects. The ILO, which together with the United Nations and the World Bank is a member of the Youth Employment Network, believes that creation of employment for the youth is one unavoidable means of achieving the Millennium

Development Goals. "*The youth population of Africa is so numerous that the fight against unemployment and poverty of the whole of the population is necessarily through the creation of youth employment".* The aim of this network is to assist countries to prepare action plans based on the United Nations resolution on the promotion of youth employment. Once again, the task will not be easy…

As we have seen, employment, and especially youth employment has gone through very difficult times. This reality is a real challenge for the trade union movement. WCL organisations do not retreat from the magnitude of the task but double up initiatives so that future generations can benefit from decent and dignified jobs.

THE FUTURE OF THE YOUTH IN DECENT EMPLOYMENT: A SINE QUA NON CONDITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For WCL, the future of the youth in decent employment is a sine qua non condition of sustainable development. Therefore the promotion of education and training of the youth for this decent employment is one of its priorities. The action plan for the 2001-2005 period prepared during its 2001 Congress at Bucharest takes account of this concern by pledging that "*WCL will endeavour to promote the work of national and regional organisations in order to quantitatively and qualitatively increase youth participation in the life of trade union organisations and in different activities of the workers' movement".*