



NEWS

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR WORKERS' QUESTIONS • NO. 3 / 2015

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EDITORIAL



Dear Friends,

“There is not enough Europe in this Union. And there is not enough union in this Union”, Jean-Claude Juncker recently told the European Parliament in the face of the European struggle to find the right answers to the current refugee crisis. In fact many member states have been turning a blind eye to reality for many years. Fear of foreigners, fear of overload, fear of a loss of prosperity, fear of the criminality associated with streams of refugees, fear of the reinforcement of far right/popu-

list movements is crippling. At the same time, though, what is staggering is the readiness of many European citizens to become involved – voluntarily giving help on the spot and in cross-border initiatives for the refugees: making their own homes available, assisting in dealings with authorities, organising language courses and activities for children. Countless men and women working for local authorities, the police, healthcare and transport etc. are currently putting in untold overtime. The task facing us jointly as Europeans – in terms of both intercultural/interreligious integration and education/training and the labour market – must not be underestimated. As Christian social workers' organisations it is our calling to help bring about participation in our society. To help Europe become Europe and a Union.

Yours,

Sigrid Schraml, Secretary-General

ILO session 2015

In a discussion with EU Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis EZA advocates closer relations between EU and ILO

In view of the impact of globalisation on the world of work in Europe, in a discussion with Valdis Dombrovskis, the European Commission Vice President responsible for Social Dialogue, Bartho Pronk, President of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA), called for closer collaboration on the European level with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The European Union ought to attach more importance to the ILO and enter into closer co-operation with it. In addition the EU should ensure that every EU member state implements ILO standards in a uniform way to prevent such phenomena as social dumping within the EU. There is currently an imbalance in the implementation of some ILO conventions.

The members of the EZA network that are affiliated to the ILO had gathered to exchange ideas at the initiative of the EZA Secretariat during the 104th session of the International Labour Conference. The key issues of this year's session were the transition from the informal to the formal economy, the application of international labour standards, the central role of small and medium-sized enterprises in sustainable economic growth and decent work for all, as well as the issues of health and safety, and social security.

Sigrid Schraml ■

Vocational training – the key to creating long-term prospects for young people

Towards more efficient vocational training

In some member states of the European Union (EU), youth unemployment soared during the economic and financial crisis. In this regard it became clear that besides an effective employment policy, more than anything education and training was vital for high-quality, sustainable jobs for young people. And, as the network of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) realised, it is primarily vocational training that creates job prospects. In many EU member states it became evident that vocational training and related systems had been neglected for a long time and reforms were urgently needed.

This alarming situation resulted in the EZA Secretariat resolving, in view of the political processes that had begun, to address this issue with education and training measures and networking. The aim of this initiative was to bring together representatives of workers' organisations, exchange positive experiences and come up with ideas to enable the political discussion of vocational training in Europe to be encouraged on the workers' side.

To this end a conference was held in Berlin in early 2012 to discuss the role of the social partners in successfully organising vocational training and creating sustainable employment. The upshot was the setting up of a working group, which has since tackled different key aspects of the organisation of vocational training systems and has been assisted by an EZA member, the Austrian Centre for Workers' Formation (ÖZA). This group of specialists has exchanged knowledge and experience of various approaches to vocational training, as well as the role of vocational training teachers and the activity of European institutions in this field.

Following this series of working group meetings, they produced a catalogue of success factors and challenges for vocational training systems.

The issue will also be of importance to the EZA in the future. A major focus of this education and training year are co-ordinated projects on "Effective vocational training as an important task for workers' organisations", involving eight seminars.

Norbert Klein ■

Preliminary results from the co-ordinated projects

Following the eight seminars in Gdansk, Amarante, Nasutów and Torremolinos, concrete conclusions were already drawn up for solutions and for the need for political action, so this already goes beyond the diagnostic results. Some of the findings for this need for political action are:

- The political decision-makers on a national and European level must be persuaded that, to have a sustainable effect, education and training policy must be of a medium-term and long-term nature, and education and training measures require thinking in and for generations. It is counterproductive when, time and again after elections, governments pass new legislation without waiting for and assessing longer-term impacts.
- Instead legislation must create the scope for a sound regional social dialogue in which a subsidiary vocational training culture can develop.
- The diversity of the various regional conditions must be used as a valuable resource and not be undermined by a policy of standardisation.
- The "dual-track vocational system" that is successful in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and has been honed over generations is certainly a good example, but it is not a model that can and should be transferred lock, stock and barrel to other countries.
- For the EU's ambitious vocational training measures for combating youth unemployment to be put into effect, they must be geared to business and company practice in order to meet the market requirements.
- The economic momentum forces constant changes in professional skills, which must not be allowed to result primarily in educational qualifications becoming more academic in general.
- The stigmatising of vocational training as a second-rate path which is still prevalent in many countries must be countered. Vocational training and professional skills must be deemed as equally important as general education. Where this is not the case, the reality is a large number of young people with university qualifications out of work and at the same time a shortage of innovatively trained skilled workers for the technological and business world.

We can already see that a large number of concrete conclusions will produce a concrete raft of demands to politicians, and give a boost to the wish for this series of EZA seminars to be continued as an important instrument of a sustainable labour market policy.

Helmut F. Skala, Co-ordinator ■

Position: Vocational training in Portugal – a way towards youth employment

Vocational education in Portugal has undergone numerous changes since it was introduced in 1989. At that time it was offered only in vocational schools specifically set up for the purpose. The changes have related to the legal framework and general acceptance of this form of education and training.

There is an evident change, albeit a slow one, in mentality towards vocational training being socially accepted. This has resulted in a significant rise in the number of vocational school students in the last decade.

In the act currently in force (11/15), the Ministry of Education and Science stipulates that 50% of pupils should attend vocational schools. This figure has almost been achieved. It is to rise to 200,000 vocational school students in 2020.

This is an ambitious but achievable target. Whether it is achieved depends on the interaction between various factors closely connected with political guidelines to be introduced in the next legislative period.

As an educationalist I declare that I advocate vocational education. All those – myself included – who are able to put aside their preconceptions realise that vocational schools represent added value for economic growth and the sustainable development of a country in general and of Portugal in particular.

Nobody can dispute that the number of employees that have completed vocational training is considerable.

In Portugal nearly 70% of vocational school students find a job within six months of completing their training. Although the number fell slightly during the crisis years, that will no doubt change if and when Portugal maintains its rising economic growth rate and increasing employment figures.

However, the path that vocational training has taken is not linear and has come up against structural obstacles.

The business structure in Portugal, which is made up primarily of small and medium-sized enterprises, presents the schools with the problem of having enough training places in companies for all the vocational school students.

Another structural difficulty is the demographic shift. Especially in districts and regions with a low population density, the

vocational schools have major problems finding enough students to be able to offer any training at all.

That is why we in FIDESTRA champion an education and training policy which, particularly in vocational education, caters for local and regional realities and needs.

The quality of vocational education in Portugal is high and subject to stringent rules. Its aim is to prepare young people for entry into an increasingly demanding labour market.

The employer will not classify the training of vocational school students as being of value until it represents added value for the company on the strength of its quality and performance.

The quality and performance of vocational training are therefore the biggest asset for the consolidation and success of vocational schools. That is why they must adapt perfectly to local and regional conditions, meet the area's requirements and demonstrate their potential.

It is my belief that only if two preconditions are met can we succeed in maintaining high-quality vocational training, reaching the target of 200,000 vocational school students in 2020, and demonstrating to potential employers what young trainees have to offer:

1. Respected vocational schools are set up and maintained.
2. All those involved in education and training in a region are brought together to form a school network designed by the local stakeholders that is perfectly in tune with the local needs and potential.

This is a first step towards overcoming the preconceptions to which vocational training is still exposed and which is why it is often the second choice for our youngsters.

Maria Reina Martín ■



Maria Reina Martín, a qualified geographer, has been Executive Secretary of the Portuguese EZA member centre FIDESTRA (Associação para a Formação, Investigação e Desenvolvimento Social dos Trabalhadores, Association for Worker Training, Research and Social Development, since 2007. Whilst working as a teacher she was Regional Director for Education in the Alentejo region, Regional MP for Education, President of the General Council of the Montemor-o-Novo Secondary School, and Vice-President of the Trade Union of Teachers with a University Degree. She is also the Vice-President of FTDC (Federação dos Trabalhadores Democrata Cristãos, Federation of Christian Democrat Workers).

Newcomer in the EZA network: St. Antony's Centre for Church and Industry (candidate for membership)

Established in 1979 by its present Director Kevin Flanagan in North West England. The Centre is founded on the principles of catholic social thinking as it relates to economic life.

Training

The Centre is a City & Guilds accredited learning centre delivering through its qualified staff a range of ICT and functional skills qualifications to hundreds of people each year.

The staff support outreach training in community and workplace venues across the North West. In partnership with the GMB (General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union) North West & Irish Region trade union and its 68,000 members it has a network of seven Adult Community Training Centres (ACT Centres). These are addressing economic exclusion due to low or no skills. 25 % of the UK workforce have functional difficulty with Maths and English. The training is funded through regional training contracts. The Centre has operated European Social Funded programmes for over 15 years.

The Reach Out Project (www.gmbreachout.org.uk) has a network of Union Learning Representatives, trained to identify the learning needs of their work colleagues and to provide advice on appropriate training and qualifications.

Faith work

The Centre manages Greater Manchester Industrial Mission (www.gmim.org.uk) an ecumenical charity providing Chaplaincy services to workers in four Town Centres and a Christian Community Cohesion Project working alongside other faith groups in addressing interfaith relations.

The Director chairs the national Caritas Social Action Network Directors Forum (www.csan.org.uk) representing 42 organisations that support Catholic social thinking and its application to welfare and social issues. The Director is also national President of the 200,000 strong Commercial Services Section of the GMB Trade Union that has over 639,000 members in the UK. The Union has an office in Brussels.

St. Antony's Centre is unique in the UK addressing at its core the issues of Social Justice in economic and community life in partnership with unions, employees and employers. It seeks to strengthen social dialogue by empowering people to be active participants in the social and economic arena and to forge partnerships and projects to enable dialogue to take place and enrich people's lives and futures.

Location

The Manchester Centre houses the Trafford Park Heritage Exhibition relat-

ing to the industrial and social history of the Trafford Park Industrial Estate from 1901 to 2015.

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