

# Youth employment



EUROPEAN CENTRE  
FOR WORKERS' QUESTIONS





With the kind support of the European Union

This text reflects the author's view only.

The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The publication was prepared and checked with care.

All contents are nevertheless provided without guarantee.

Neither the contributors nor EZA accept any liability arising from the contents of this work.

## **Publisher information**

**Publisher:** European Centre for Workers' Questions, Königswinter  
[www.eza.org](http://www.eza.org)

**Author:** Mateusz Szymański

**German-English translation by:** Shivaun Heath

**Designed by:** HellaDesign, Emmendingen, [www.helladesign.de](http://www.helladesign.de)

**Illustrated by:** © Klaus Puth, Mühlheim/Main, [www.klausputh.de](http://www.klausputh.de)

**Version of:** March 2020

# Table of contents

<b>Foreword</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Significant challenges and problems for young people in the labour market</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>There is a need in the labour market for direct activities for young workers – the most important conclusions from the seminars</b>	<b>14</b>
	3.1 Education / training	14
	3.2 Employment	16
	3.3 Transition from training to work – practical training and traineeships	21
	3.4 European mobility	22
	3.5 Social dialogue	24
	3.6 New working methods for workers' organisations, particularly trade unions	28
	3.7 Potential for organisation	31
	3.8 Technological changes	32
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>33</b>

## Foreword

Dear readers,

In most European countries, the situation of young people in the labour market continues to be characterised by instability. Although the number of unemployed young workers has fallen since the financial and economic crisis was overcome, the increase in jobs has often not been accompanied by an improvement in the quality of work.

There is concern about the late initial entry of young people into the labour market, the many precarious employment relationships, atypical employment contracts, unpaid traineeships, persistent long-term unemployment among young people, and the large number of NEETs (“Not in Education, Employment or Training”), all of which come with familiar social consequences: young people are increasingly later to leave the parental home and older by the time they start a family, they experience greater difficulty accessing housing and lower social participation.

During the 2019/2020 educational year, EZA conducted a project co-ordination on the subject of “youth employment”. It consisted of a total of five seminars that were attended primarily by young workers’ representatives – including the EZA Platform for Young Workers in Europe.

It became clear in the seminars that good education and vocational training, geared to the current requirements of the labour market, are the *conditio sine qua non* for a successful initial entry into the

labour market. Curricula should therefore be adapted to current challenges such as digitalisation, co-operation between schools and businesses should be promoted, and the image of vocational training – which is frequently and unfairly negative, even among young people – should be improved.

As this report shows, the co-operation of several actors with a variety of possibilities for action is essential to the success of this process: Workers' organisations are called upon to bring the concerns of young workers more strongly into collective bargaining and social dialogue, and can contribute to the improvement of vocational training systems. By changing their working and communication methods, they can also reach young people more effectively and motivate them to get involved in their organisations. European policymakers can prompt initiatives to improve the quality of employment and access to social security systems as part of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in doing so create general conditions – for example with a European minimum wage – that will benefit young people in particular.

From a Christian social point of view, improving the situation of young workers in Europe and affording them greater stability and planning security so that they can build lives of their own also has an ethical perspective. As the project co-ordinator Mateusz Szymański from KK NSZZ “Solidarność” writes in this report, a worker is not primarily a “human resource” or efficiency provider, but above all a human individual with dignity and specific human rights.

I would like to offer my very sincere thanks both to Mateusz Szymański and to the staff at the five member centres who contributed seminars for their dedicated and valuable work.

I hope you find the report to be an interesting and inspiring read.

*Sigrid Schraml*

*EZA Secretary-General*

# 1 Introduction

The situation of young people in the labour market has improved since the economic crisis. But it is anything but ideal. Firstly, it is becoming ever more difficult to anticipate and prepare for change. New challenges have emerged in the labour market that require a proactive response. Without one, there will be no lasting improvement in the situation of the younger generation. This report summarises seminars from a project co-ordination on the subject of “youth employment”, which were conducted within the framework of the education programme of the European Centre for Workers’ Questions (EZA) in the 2019/2020 educational year. The seminars looked for ways to adapt the labour market and education systems better to the realities of the modern world, and at the same time to ensure that they improve the quality of life of the younger generation.

The fact that there is work to be done here is demonstrated by the symbolic showing of the film about the situation of workers during the Industrial Revolution at the seminar organised by JOC Europe. It transpires that young Europeans are beginning to perceive their place in the labour market as similar to that of almost 200 years ago. They see exploitation, economic inequality, poverty (even among those in work), forms of modern slavery, discrimination in employment, and many other problems. This is an important signal that must not be ignored.

One of the priorities of EZA’s activities is to promote the employment of young people. Much space and attention are devoted to this topic within the network. This is due both to the organisation’s sympathy for the needs of the younger generation, and to an awareness of the short- and long-term consequences that may be associated with an

inadequate resolution of the problems of young people in the labour market. For this reason, EZA once again decided to conduct a project co-ordination on the subject, with the aim of creating synergy effects. This serves to ensure that an appropriate selection is made from the topics and tools used by the organisers. The participation of young people in individual events is also important.

In the 2019/2020 education programme, EZA co-ordinated the following five seminars:

### **Youth – a vulnerable category on the labour market**

Căciulata (Vâlcea), Romania, 30 May – 2 June 2019

CSDR / Departamentul Educare - Formare al CSDR (Confederația Sindicatelor Democratice din România / Departamentul Educare - Formare al Confederației Sindicatelor Democratice din România)

### **The labour market and youth as promoters of social cohesion in society**

Zagreb, Croatia, 6 – 8 June 2019

HKD Napredak (Hrvatsko kulturno društvo Napredak)

### **The reality of life and challenges facing young Europeans today**

Brussels, Belgium, 13 – 17 June 2019

JOC Europe (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne - Europe)



## **From youth for youth: recipes for fighting labour market insecurities**

Herzogenrath, Germany, 19 – 21 September 2019

NBH (Nell-Breuning-Haus) and EZA Platform for Young Workers

## **A lifecycle approach to work: fighting long-term youth unemployment through the development of skills, lifelong learning and cross-generation fairness**

Velehrad, Czech Republic, 4 – 6 October 2019

KAP (Hnutí “Křesťan a práce”)

The primary goal of this project co-ordination was to assess the extent to which education can contribute to the integration of young people into the labour market. Additionally, the main topics included an assessment of the functioning of labour markets in individual countries, European employment programmes for young people, and a better understanding of the realities of the lives of young people from different European countries. The discussions also covered questions relating to mobility, social dialogue, potential for organisation, and the values on which initiatives supporting young people should be based. One important aim was to provide platforms for meeting and exchanging views via seminars to which large numbers of young people were invited. This form of agenda facilitated the continuation of the work initiated in the preceding years.

This document consists primarily of a description of the main problems of young workers in the European Union and in the accession candidate countries. Following this, the results of the discussions are addressed by topic. This section also contains recommendations for specific topics. The document concludes with a short summary.

## 2 Significant challenges and problems for young people in the labour market

The crisis hit the younger generation harder than other age groups. The problem of rising unemployment became particularly acute. Young people became the “first out” and the “last in”. Furthermore, it became clear that the countermeasures implemented in the form of a policy of austerity only added further fuel to the fire (of youth unemployment). Measures designed to increase youth employment were based on reducing employment costs, which meant lower wages and weaker social protection. Eventually, the term “lost generation” began to be used. In addition, the labour markets were deregulated, which led to unrestricted flexibility in forms of work. Weak protection under existing collective agreements was followed by a weakening of the trade unions. Many of these measures designed to solve the problem of youth unemployment came from European Semester level. This is one of the factors that undermined young people’s confidence in the integration project.

Both unemployment and measures intended to enable young workers to fight it had consequences that we can now discern. Young people often decided to delay their entry into the labour market, or to give up entirely. Those who chose the first option decided to continue their university education, and the universities attempted to meet this growing demand by offering even poor-quality curricula to as many people as possible. This led to a situation in which employers complained that young people lacked appropriate skills. The vicious circle of employment-related problems was thus complete, and it became even more difficult for young people to gain entry into the labour market and achieve independence. In the second case, many members of the younger generation became so-called NEETs, i.e. people who are not in education, employment or training.

Currently, a gradual improvement in the labour market can be observed. This is attributable primarily to the improved economic situation in the European Union. This does not give a full picture of reality, however. A number of social and economic indicators can contribute to a better understanding of the realities of the labour market. Youth unemployment in the EU between the ages of 15 and 29 continues to be high. The EU average remains at a similar level to before the economic crisis of 2008. In some countries, the situation has even worsened. The persistent long-term unemployment of young people is particularly concerning. In the EU as a whole, an average of more than 3.5% of young people are long-term unemployed, and in countries such as Greece and Italy, they exceed 10% (almost 20% in Greece). The age at which young people are leaving the parental home is gradually increasing, with the result that, among other things, they are having children ever later. This is one of the reasons for Europe's rapid aging problem. The proportion of young people leaving education early has improved in recent years but averages more than 10% of the population aged 18-24 across the EU.

Poor-quality employment is increasing rapidly. Many analyses ignore this aspect and only show successes relating to the creation of new jobs. This distorts the objective picture. It is no coincidence that phenomena such as in-work poverty and the "precarariat" have emerged in the labour market. Young people are frequently offered poorly paid and unstable work, and in particular various kinds of atypical contracts characterised by their short term. They are also offered traineeships and apprenticeships that are often unpaid or very poorly paid and of extremely doubtful quality. The situation forces them to accept these because they are expected to have a good CV. In order to get off to a better start in their dream career, they are faced initially with inferior employment, which affects their future employment and income prospects.

In general, the changes that we are witnessing in the labour market have the effect of increasing inequality. A small group of “winners” receives more and more, while a majority of “losers” has to fight for a decent existence. Unfortunately, this struggle often takes the form of a competition. This is illustrated perfectly by the operating patterns of digital platforms, where there is a kind of auction aimed at carrying out the specified order better and more cheaply. This disrupts social harmony and causes tensions and frustrations. Young workers who feel a sense of injustice want change. Some politicians offer simple and radical solutions that may look like real alternatives but in practice lead to an escalation of conflicts and divisions. This is observable in present-day Europe and calls into question the future integration of young people into the labour market.

The above-mentioned problems are driven by processes such as the digitalisation of the economy. This concept covers a number of phenomena associated with very rapidly advancing technological change. We must also be mindful of ever-increasing globalisation, which is likewise accelerating thanks to the use of modern information and communication technologies. In parallel to this, the situation of young people is influenced by the need to take measures to reduce climate change to the point that these have an impact on people. This is linked primarily to changes in the structure of the economy. It appears that energy consumption, mining and other sectors that are heavily dependent on fossil fuels will undergo adaptation processes and may even disappear completely. This requires solutions that do not leave anyone without support. The demographic problems that are observable in Europe should not be forgotten either. The increasing ageing of the population is endangering the sustainability of social security systems. And this implies a very serious decision about how we can open wide the borders of the EU to people from other regions of the world, particularly to people from other cultures.

### **3 There is a need in the labour market for direct activities for young workers – the most important conclusions from the seminars**

The seminars offered the opportunity to learn more about selected problems experienced by young people in the labour market, taking into consideration the local context. Furthermore, many solutions were proposed that can potentially contribute to making the labour market more welcoming to the younger generation. The most important conclusions on individual topics that emerged during the seminars are presented below.

#### **3.1 Education / training**

Education and training were at the heart of all the seminars. The diagnosis made in Căciulata revealed a common problem: negative attitudes to vocational college education among the younger generation. Most young people believe vocational training to be an inferior form of education. Even in countries like Austria, where the dual education system serves as a template, the quality of teaching is declining. Young people appear to be orientating themselves exclusively towards university degrees. Initial education at schools and universities is not always goal-focused and does not correlate with demand from the labour market or its dynamics. (Representatives from Romania, Austria, Bulgaria, Ireland, Portugal, Poland, Spain and Moldova took part in the seminar.)

Furthermore, the case of Romania showed how irresponsible reforms of the education system can be. Fundamental organisational changes are carried out in a short space of time without proper analysis. It transpires that political goals take precedence over the welfare of students and the desired educational outcomes of a given country.

In Velehrad, much attention was devoted to the skills of young people, with a reference to the previous year's seminar, in which Industry 4.0 was discussed. The seminar underlined how important it is that competencies are developed early in life, and that the school system plays a particularly important role in this regard. It emerged that in some countries, the school systems are unfortunately not adapting to changes in the labour market. There are also new challenges for curricula and teaching systems. It makes sense to supplement them and expand them to cover areas such as the checking of fake news, the participation of employees, adaptation to the labour market, and others. Not only would the skills of young people thus be adapted to meet current challenges, but they would also be better prepared for future changes.

Innovation should apply to educational models, too. They should be available to all. One example is the "assisted education" model presented in Velehrad, which is aimed at people from difficult circumstances who display passivity or various kinds of limitations that impede their participation in mainstream education. The advantage of this system is the variety of stakeholders. In addition to the students, the system also includes public administration, employers, public employment services, and of course teaching staff. This model has shown itself to be effective and has been met with great interest. However, the limited financial resources have proved insufficient to increase the scope of such programmes.

In addition, employers' representatives spoke of the limited availability of qualified staff. Great importance was therefore attached to cooperation between schools and businesses. It should furthermore be ensured that young apprentices are given the opportunity to complete traineeships in companies and then to remain in them. This has shown itself to have positive effects for both the business and the young employee.

As already highlighted, lifelong learning (LLL) is gaining in importance. It seems that it should become a fundamental component of all initiatives aimed at adapting to the challenges of the economy. Solutions that promote participation in LLL should be available to workers throughout their career. Access to these programmes must be universal and equal. In order to make this fully possible, solutions must be developed that combine work and continuing education in such a way that a balance is preserved between work and family life. Training time should be remunerated.

## **3.2 Employment**

The comment made above, that the quality of employment is declining in many European countries, is confirmed by the debates that took place during individual seminars. Young participants often spoke about the need to guarantee work stability. This enables them to fashion the future and accommodate their plans and activities. This natural need is currently more and more difficult to meet. The popular idea of "flexicurity" is often criticised, as labour markets have become much more flexible but there has not been any accompanying improvement in the quality of social security to provide a "safety buffer". The debates raised the issue of low unemployment benefit, which has ultimately created an economic necessity to engage in



some form of employment, even if it is of very low quality and incompatible with skills and qualifications.

Confirmation of the above is found in the words of an expert in labour economics who spoke about this problem during the seminar in Croatia and gave an example of the options and situation of young people there. It transpires that young people are often active in the labour market while they are students, which leads them to take on flexible work with very little security. It is significant that these are jobs of low quality that negatively impact their further career and have implications for their integration into the labour market. She also said that social problems arising from the difficulties experienced by young people in the labour market have a negative influence on the economic performance of their countries. She gave an example relating to social security systems. It transpires that only 18% of young people in Croatia have insurance. The debate cannot, therefore, be limited to fighting unemployment, but must also address the question of employment quality.

This is not simply a theory used by workers' organisations to defend the status quo but is also supported by statements made by participants in the seminar organised by JOC Europe. In many statements rooted in personal experience they spoke of the growth of precarious employment, fear of the future, difficulties in long-term planning, limited access to housing, low wages, discrimination, lack of respect from employers, unpaid traineeships, increasingly common fixed-term employment and the weakening of social safety shields. Most young people are forced to confront these problems, irrespective of their level of education. The seminar was attended by young workers' representatives from Belgium, Spain and Germany, and although their contexts were different, their problems were very similar.

The belief that young people value complete freedom and flexibility is misleading and stems from a lack of understanding. Many statements by representatives of the younger generation demand greater freedom in work organisation, but this does not mean that they expect no commitment whatsoever to their employer or basis of social security. Young people continue to value employment contracts, wage stability and the right to adequate social security. In one of the statements from the seminar organised by JOC Europe in Brussels, the above was described as “controlled flexibility”, which the employee can control in co-operation with the employer. Understood correctly, flexibility should, therefore, guarantee social protection and employment rights as well as decent employment conditions supporting the development of young people.

One of the conclusions of the debates was that a convergence can be observed in Europe in relation to work quality and social security. The problem is that it is a downward convergence. There is, unfortunately, much evidence that the member states are striving to gain competitive advantages over other member states and other regions of the world by lowering basic labour standards and wages. One should therefore endeavour to create universal minimum standards that constitute an obstacle to the “race to the bottom”. One example would be the initiative to introduce a European minimum wage. This, however, would require close co-operation on a supranational level and greater solidarity, particularly on the part of the countries with highly developed bargaining systems, which fear that a minimum wage determined at EU level could threaten their achievements in this area.

The preservation of the old and the introduction of suitable new employment protection seem to be a precondition for the growth of innovation in the European economy. The first step might be to recommend an adequate level of unemployment protection. In many

Central and Eastern European countries, the level of unemployment protection is low and the barriers to accessing it high.

It is impossible here not to mention the announcements made by the new European Commission on the approximation of social standards in the European Union. This is the purpose that initiatives aimed at implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights are intended to serve. The EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, visited individual member states and spoke there with representatives of governments and social partners about the European Commission's roadmap for building a strong social Europe for a just transition. The EU Commissioner has emphasised repeatedly that the vision of the new European Commission consists in seeking solutions that combine the needs of the economy with the demand to guarantee all citizens of the European Union a decent standard of living. He points out that this is particularly important in an era of economic change in which there is a risk that the situation of vulnerable people in the labour market may deteriorate even further. The European Commission initiatives that will be part of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights are intended to prevent this. It seems that initiatives aimed at improving the quality of employment and access to social security systems should take priority.

Let us consider an example of the way in which workers are deprived of a basic social security net. In many countries, so-called "solo self-employment" is widespread and transfers economic risks from the employer to the worker. In very many cases, the situation of such a worker is extremely unstable and unpredictable. These people only have limited access to trade unions and collective bargaining. This self-employment is becoming ever more prevalent due to policies aimed at supporting businesses. Governments must establish clear regulations for the use of this form of social co-operation and tighten

the rules that protect these workers from abuse. Regulations must be introduced that verify the legality of the use of self-employment instead of employment contracts.

Why is this of such great importance? Because young people fear that they will be left behind if they stay in a difficult situation for a long time. Precarious work of low quality thus appears to be a trap from which it is difficult to escape. The importance of labour inspectorates is worth highlighting in this context. The role of these institutions is extremely significant. Their function is to protect employees from violations of employment regulations. Unfortunately, these are institutions that in many countries have only limited powers and insufficient resources to monitor employers properly. The efforts undertaken at a European level should nevertheless be implemented. The establishment of a European labour authority to co-ordinate labour inspection seems to be the right path.

In addition, the participants agreed that European programmes designed to improve youth employment are valuable and continue to play an important role. It was stressed, however, that the proper use of available resources is of great importance. In this connection, the member states should not limit their own contributions to these programmes themselves. Experience shows that, in most cases, countries do not supplement European funds with funds of their own, which reduces the effectiveness of individual instruments. This is perfectly illustrated by the Youth Guarantee. With respect to the current debates on the EU budget, it should be stressed that the guarantees should be continued. However, the monitoring of the results of the programme should be intensified. It should also be stressed that the opportunities offered within the framework of the Guarantee are of the highest quality and lead young people into the most promising sectors. The principle that an offer be made within four months of

registration must be implemented in order to build confidence in the state and the support system. A simplification of the process is likewise important.

It is not only European programmes that have an important role to play. In the view of the seminar participants, the role of the public employment services that support young people in entering the labour market remains very important in a broader sense. Perhaps these should consider changing the way that they work, so that they also support those who are affected by loss of employment as a result of changes in the labour market, or who wish to change their qualifications pre-emptively, and not only those who have already become unemployed.

### **3.3 Transition from training to work – practical training and traineeships**

During the seminar discussions attended by young workers' representatives, particularly in Brussels, there was frequent talk about unpaid or poorly paid traineeships, and apprenticeships of low quality. The current state of this extremely important phase in the transition from training to work cannot be accepted, and in particular cannot replace the normal (ground)work that takes place in many cases. The practice serves neither young people nor the market, because unethical companies gain competitive advantages in the market by using almost free or unpaid labour, and threaten the existence of those companies that respect the work of young people.

Within social dialogue, the EU institutions and member states should strive to ensure the implementation of the Council Recommendations

on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (2018), the Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (2014) and the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2012). Initiatives promoting awareness of the rights of trainees and apprentices deserve support.

Ultimately, however, the frameworks mentioned above should be binding. They do not presently establish any universally applicable standards, meaning that the rights of apprentices and trainees receive varying degrees of protection. Legislative solutions must be ambitious and genuinely improve the situation of young people in the labour market. The current soft instruments, particularly the Council Recommendation of 2014, are far from sufficient.

### **3.4 European mobility**

A further problem that was mentioned in the seminar discussions was emigration and the risk of a “brain drain” in Central and Eastern Europe. Many statements express concern regarding the possible consequences of the mass emigration of young, mostly educated people. This has reached a mass scale in many countries. In Romania, for example, more than 3 million people have left the country. Overall, it is estimated that mobility within the EU involves almost 4% of the population. In a country such as Bulgaria, however, it is over 13% of the population. A total of 15% of the population have left Lithuania since the country joined the EU. This is typical for Central and Eastern European countries. Their citizens suffer as a result of low wages, poor social protection, a lack of state support in the form of access to public services, and limited opportunities. Dissatisfaction leads to the decision to leave. Emigration is thus not always a voluntary choice.

It is not the case, however, that the participants in individual seminars regard mobility as something harmful. They are in agreement that mobility, particularly that of young people, is an important element in achieving the goals of growth and employment in the EU, and can also promote the transfer of knowledge, innovation and competence development, which is of great importance in an age of technological change. Attention was paid in this connection to the usefulness of European instruments aimed at supporting cross-border mobility, which provides a great number of opportunities. The Erasmus programme was given a positive assessment. It is expected that it be continued, though the point was made that Erasmus+ (after the name change) must be an inclusive programme. Its design should support the participation of less wealthy people, thus safeguarding the principle of equality of opportunity.

Although programmes for greater mobility are viewed positively, it was said several times that conditions should be created to enable workers to return to individual emigration countries. The need for wage increases and greater employment stability is often pointed out. Experience shows that an adequate level of public services can also have a positive impact on the decision to return. Members of Lithuanian trade unions spoke about this. Without these instruments, mobility understood positively becomes migration with potentially negative consequences. These relate to the stability of the financial systems of individual countries, and particularly the stability of pension systems. A further problem is that of ageing societies. What we are dealing with here is a delayed time bomb. Migration also leads to increased differences in income between individual regions of the European Union and the accession candidate countries. It should be stressed, however, that the curbing of integration and the restriction of freedom of movement within the European Union were not discussed in the seminars.

For countries that have experienced mass emigration, the challenge associated with the above consists in filling the gaps in the labour market. This is perfectly illustrated by the situation in Poland, a country from which more than 2 million people have emigrated and to which some 1 million Ukrainian citizens have migrated in recent years. The government has also created incentives for the citizens of Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh to come to Poland. In countries that have never before experienced so much immigration, this causes all kinds of fears and tensions. Firstly, concerns regarding social dumping. This is why it is so important for immigrants to be treated in exactly the same way as local workers in employment.

Mobility was also discussed on a national level. The problem of domestic disparities came up in the discussions. This is attributable to the concentration of resources in large urban centres. The problem, which was observed in Bulgaria and Slovakia among other places, disrupts the process of sustainable development. This also requires a solution, as it can lead to situations in which people outside the cities are excluded and their opportunities significantly reduced.

### **3.5 Social dialogue**

The education reforms implemented so far are an example of the way in which political decisions can change in rhythm with subsequent elections. The seminar participants pointed out that political decisions frequently mean reforms aimed at a radical change of course as compared to their predecessors. Activities of this kind usually create the illusion of a reform because they do not involve anything other than organisational changes. Such reforms are not well prepared. There are no analyses to demonstrate objectively what would be most appropriate within a given system.



Given the instability and unpredictability of the dynamically developing environment, such changes do not make it easier for citizens to adapt. Nor do they allow for long-term planning. What is necessary, then, in order to improve the quality of decisions and thus the quality of life of EU citizens? Firstly, the use of democratic mechanisms with the aid of social dialogue. Social dialogue offers a mandate for the implementation of measures agreed on the one hand, while being inclusive and independent of current politics on the other. In addition, trade unions and employers' associations have the knowledge and instruments necessary to participate in the decision-making processes of states and supranational structures.

The unique role of collective bargaining and social dialogue should be highlighted. They seem to be an excellent instrument for adapting entire sectors of the economy to new economic conditions. This is due to the fact that social dialogue implies the consent of and consideration of the interests of both parties in the work relationship – employee and employer. The point, however, is that the bargaining should not concentrate only on pay and other social questions. Traditional “bread and butter” problems should no longer be the sole interest of the parties. Topics such as the improvement of employees' skills, access to life-long learning, and university education are of great importance in the new, knowledge-based economy. Trade unions and employers must also recognise new topics that are important to young people, such as the “right to the separation of professional and private life”, for instance.

The discussions show that trade unions require a new agenda. Examples of frameworks that can be used in the development of new strategies are the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. Both documents are examples of an international understanding of the need for co-ordination

and convergence as well as an awareness of the challenges and the need to protect the most vulnerable people. The implementation of these and other similar political directives requires the involvement of many groups, above all those that represent workers and young people. The Agenda 2030, in particular, underlines the need to involve young people, who are considered “agents for change”. It is no coincidence that the Agenda has identified goals that are devoted directly to the improvement of the position of the younger generation.

The lack of social dialogue leads to tensions and impedes reforms. Reforms to the pension systems in Poland and Croatia aimed at raising the retirement age are good examples of how not to introduce such important reforms. The introduction of solutions in such significant matters must be preceded by long discussions and a plan that takes into account the needs of all parties involved. It cannot not be a technocratic decision that is not discussed with the public well in advance. One positive example might be the employment promotion system in Italy, which has proved positive and received support in its development thanks to the involvement of social partners.

As part of social dialogue, a framework for youth policy could be developed. A comprehensive approach to the problems of young people is important. It would therefore be wise to develop youth strategies in co-operation with representatives of the younger generation. Austria, Bulgaria, Romania and Italy are examples of countries that have been successful. A properly defined youth policy implies the commitment and action of the government with the goal of providing young people with good living conditions and equal opportunities. Such a policy encompasses standards of various kinds as well as operating methods and target groups, stakeholder groups, scope and budgeting. This youth policy is characterised in particular by its complexity. The strategy's aim initially is to create conditions that guarantee

access to education and enable young people to develop knowledge, skills and competencies. This, in turn, helps young people to participate in democratic life and facilitates their integration into society, particularly so that they can play an active role in civil society and the labour market.

A good youth strategy comprises the provision of information not only on existing opportunities, participation, integration, autonomy and solidarity, but also on science, leisure and employment. The strategy assumes the involvement of a broad range of groups working for the welfare of young people. It is a kind of reflection on how countries perceive the younger generation. Some of them are very detailed, while others are narrowly defined. What is important is that a good strategy is regularly updated.

The above-mentioned youth strategy could resemble a fragment of the “new social contract” spoken about by the global trade union structures. At the UN General Assembly in April 2019, the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow, said: “We need a new social contract with a floor of a Universal Labour Guarantee. This was a central recommendation of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work and is the only measure that can ensure all workers are able to realise the promise of decent work and have access to justice. This means rights are respected, jobs are decent with minimum living wages and collective bargaining, workers have some control over working time, social protection coverage is universal, due diligence and accountability drive business operations, women’s equality is realised and social dialogue ensures Just Transition measures for climate technology and displaced people.”

### **3.6 New working methods for workers' organisations, particularly trade unions**

Participation in decision-making processes requires changes on the part of the organisations that represent and support the workers themselves. In new circumstances, well-trodden paths of action no longer always seem appropriate. There is a need to understand the new problems that we observe in the labour market, and also to be open to the voice of the younger generation, which differs from older generations.

Working methods must become more flexible. More dynamism and proactivity are required. Movements supported by young people today are usually loose, but therefore quick-reacting structures. The trade unions must take this path, and this is possible even without great effort. Communications methods likewise need to be improved. There are many examples of successful initiatives. Conditions must be created in which experience and knowledge can be exchanged. The potential of the younger generation must not be ignored. There are many indications that this potential is becoming active and seeking change. Young union members are often overlooked in internal debate. This is a mistake, because it is clear that the expectations and priorities of young people are changing. Trade unions need to take account of this in their work. It would be unwise for these organisations not to use this opportunity. This was stressed repeatedly by young participants in the Zagreb and Căciulata seminars.

The youth structures of workers' organisations were a topic of discussion at the seminar in Zagreb. In their contributions, the participants spoke about insufficient resources and services, meaning that the voice of the younger generation is not heard clearly enough within

the structures of the organisation. It also emerged that young members are not taken seriously, which is often the responsibility of leaders who treat young people paternalistically. This is a rejection of an idea that everyone supports – the idea of solidarity between generations. This idea is mentioned in the European social partners' European framework agreement on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, which is an example of a search for solutions that contribute to mutual understanding and co-operation. Workers' organisations should move in this direction.

The change should pertain not only to the organisation of internal debate and to changes to the agenda, but should encompass working methods, too. Optimum use must be made of the organisations' resources. These include social and organisational capital as well as unique knowledge and tools. One of the co-ordinators of the School to Work flagship project within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region explained how this can be carried out effectively. The project envisages establishing networks of organisations, like knowledge platforms, that focus on work in specific areas (e.g. young NEETs). The key to success is the search for working methods that maximise the use of the knowledge that individual organisations have acquired in other EU-financed projects. It therefore builds on what already exists and does not always start from scratch. In this way, a real synergy effect is achieved. This kind of work is difficult, however, and requires a lot of commitment from the participants in this kind of network. Even a short workshop session at the youth conference in Herzogenrath demonstrated that well-planned work releases the potential of the participants. The fact that the creation of alliances and co-operation networks brings forth good results was also discussed in the Czech Republic, where an example from the European alliance for a free Sunday initiated by the Polish trade union NSZZ "Solidarność" was presented.

By listening to the voice of young seminar participants, one can also identify other preconditions for the success of workers' organisations. It was stated that the message should be made more attractive to the recipients. The need to "reach out" to people was also pointed out. In this way, the specific problems of each individual can be considered. This is why the working method of JOC seems so innovative, despite its simplicity. The method used, See – Judge – Act, is based on the collecting of individual testimonies, which enable all participants to learn and understand the problems, challenges and decisions of the meeting participants. In difficult environments, the method of small steps is also recommended. It is difficult to achieve one-time large reforms that meet the current expectations of workers. The recommendation is to increase awareness of participation in something positive, rather than just offering material goods. Workers' organisations need a "new narrative" that can capture the interest of those who are just starting their careers.

As the case of Google has illustrated, it is important to strengthen the solidarity of young employees and mobilise them to act. Protests seem to be impossible in a company like Google. The company is considered one of the best employers in the world, but it transpires that the problem of discrimination has become a motivating factor for becoming proactive. This is a signal to the organisations that represent the interests of workers to rethink their strategies and search for areas in which to build solidarity among the younger generation. As was said in Romania, however, it often emerges that trade unions defend young workers when they need legitimacy and are focused on defending their interests. The potential of young people is therefore often wasted.

### 3.7 Potential for organisation

In order to enable social dialogue and a change in working methods, initiatives are required that will strengthen the potential of organisations that represent the interests of the working world. This is in the vital interests of the EU member states and the community itself. Numerous analyses show that trade unions contribute to a fairer distribution of wealth and equality of opportunity. This, in turn, is the foundation of all sustainable development measures. Collective bargaining and collective agreements are effective instruments with which to eliminate inequalities. Their widespread use leaves no room for exploitation and pressure for the sake of competition over wages. It seems that we are entering a phase in which serious reflections and debates are needed on this topic.

It is important that the European budgetary framework makes available sufficient resources for measures to achieve this goal. On a national level, too, it is necessary to strengthen awareness of both the indispensability of trade unions and the need to support them. Positive opinions and assessments are being given on this matter, too. The potential of organisations involved in social dialogue is reflected in the impact of social dialogue. If social dialogue is to be a significant component in decision-making processes, including in education, the organisations involved must receive appropriate support in this regard. This applies particularly to investments in knowledge. We remember the statement by EZA President Luc Van den Brande, who spoke in Zagreb about the fact that investments in the potential of the organisation should focus on human rather than material resources.

### 3.8 Technological changes

Workers' organisations are paying close attention to the effects of technological change, the impact of which on the world of work is indisputable and increasingly visible. They see numerous problems resulting from transformation processes. It transpires, however, that they are not adopting a defensive stance, but are looking for positive factors. For example, the participants in the seminar in Romania believed that the digital economy would be a factor in the reduction of global economic inequalities. This also affects the productivity of employees similarly. They expect new technologies to increase the number of jobs available. However, they also expect protection from threats in connection with the use of artificial intelligence, particularly in the area of the protection of employees' personal data.

Digital platforms are of particular interest. On the one hand, they propose an innovative business model. On the other hand, they evade responsibility for workers' questions. It must therefore be ensured that platforms guarantee decent employment conditions and social protection, accept their status as employers, and take on responsibility for the situation of people who use their services as service providers. Such initiatives will ensure that the transition to a digital economy is inclusive. In addition, workers in the digital economy must be guaranteed the right to organise and to conduct collective bargaining.



## 4 Conclusions

In its declaration<sup>1</sup>, which makes reference to the challenges of modernity, the ILO calls for the development of a strategy that puts its focus on people. For the organisations that belong to EZA, in which Christian social teachings and the concept of the dignity of every human being play such an important role, this is a special message. It seems to be of great significance for the future, therefore, to develop a strategy for trade unions and other workers' organisations that represent the interests of workers in the labour market with regard to human beings and their problems in such a way that human dignity becomes the axis of all of its measures.

Many discussions highlighted the values on which further initiatives can build. Much was said about this in Velehrad. The debate about competencies and their application in professional life must be based on ethical principles. This applies to all actors in social and economic life. Above all, however, it relates to companies that often forget that a person is not just a particular "human resource" or efficiency provider, but above all a human individual with dignity and specific human rights. It is people, then, that must take precedence over capital, and not the other way around. The values on which a just social and economic system can be built were also discussed during the meeting of the JOC members. Solidarity, equality and freedom were mentioned. And it is in this way that it will be possible gradually to change the current neoliberal paradigm in which there is no value other than profit. One of the statements by the participants in the JOC Europe seminar – "These days you can use Wi-Fi for free, but you can't get free food" – perfectly reflects the paradoxes and shortcomings of this system.

---

1 Declaration for the Future of Work marking 100 years of the ILO ("ILO Centenary Declaration"), Geneva, 21 June 2019.

There is no doubt that such seminars must be organised in the future, too. The participants in the Brussels meeting expressed vehement support for this. In their opinion, the great value of the seminar was that it gave them the feeling that their problems in the labour market are not isolated, but that this is an experience that young people share. Building support and exchanging experiences have proved to be factors that give rise to much hope in the possibility of an improvement to the situation, particularly if young people co-operate closely and seek new methods of collective influence so as to achieve implementation on a European level.

One might ask where the money for all of this is to come from. Education, good social protection, public services – these cost money. The situation is particularly complicated now that Great Britain has left the European Union. The EU budget will suffer, and the member states will suffer as a result, especially those that are most dependent on the support of EU cohesion. Fair taxation is the key to success. Funds can be mobilised within the framework of fiscal tightening, particularly in relation to transnational companies. Unfortunately, there are many indications that the EU member states are not currently willing to improve the situation. One proposal that should be given serious consideration is the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base and the monitoring of countries that are so-called “tax havens”. In addition, it must be ensured that tax systems are progressive and thus burden richer people more heavily. This is not the case everywhere.

In conclusion, it can be said that these numerous problems and challenges might easily cause discouragement and result in a passive attitude that leads us to expect the worst. This would certainly be unwarranted and would ultimately lead to individual organisations potentially disintegrating. There are a number of options and factors

that will enable us to effect true change in the world around us. On the basis of just a few seminars, this report was able to document a whole array of recommendations, the implementation of which does not seem unattainable. It is clear that there is great potential in the workers' organisations themselves and in their representatives. With the support of those responsible for political decision making and the involvement of young people it is possible to improve the quality of life in the European Union and in the accession candidate countries.