

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Submission of Congress Youth Committee on the European Pillar of Social Rights

December 2016

'A Reinvigoration of Social Europe'

The Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) Youth Committee is seeking a Europe that is positive for young people.

This means ensuring adequate policy measures and resources across a range of areas including employment; education/training; social protection; housing; mental and general health promotion and public services.

The European Commission's initiative to develop a European Pillar of Social Rights is welcome if it is used to support the upward convergence of living, social and workplace standards. It must not be used as a smokescreen to undermine existing rights and instead should enhance the lives of citizens.

In line with recommendations from the European Trade Union Federation, the Youth Committee calls for better pay and quality jobs for young people. This should include enhanced statutory minimum wage rates where they exist and progress towards a Living Wage.

Full implementation of the European Youth Guarantee must be prioritised given that youth unemployment persists at an elevated level in many countries, including Ireland. The effectiveness of interventions can be enhanced by ensuring young people have genuinely beneficial experiences - be it on a job placement, a traineeship, an apprenticeship, a training course or other. This requires robust rules and monitoring mechanisms to root out abuse or deficiencies. It is also particularly important to promote the uptake and expansion of apprenticeships and vocational training which offer a mix of practical and class-based education, boosting the job-readiness of participants.

Young people are vulnerable to precarious work and all too often can be found trapped in a spiral of low-paid, temporary jobs. Young people must enjoy proper protections at work and not feel under pressure to take sub-standard jobs for fear that they will otherwise have little income. Young people should also have access to representation through a trade union and collective bargaining should be encouraged by state policy at all levels.

While many students wish to work while in further or higher education, this should not be used as an excuse to block the proper regulation of zero-hours contracts and other exploitative employment relationships. The state should provide sufficient grant/income support to ensure that learners face a voluntary rather than forced choice about taking up work.

The principle of equal pay for equal work should apply to young people. This means recognising the contribution of young people in the workplace as they gain skills and attain qualifications. The Congress Youth Committee rejects attempts to divide younger and older workers on this issue and reaffirms the solidarity of all workers in the common goal to be fair remunerated.

The Youth Committee is concerned about the pressure that high rents generate and the fact that the aspiration to own a home is outside the reach of many young people across Europe and in Ireland. We believe the right to housing should be strengthened in European law.

The pervasiveness of technology is in some instances changing the nature of work, for example with the emergence of 'platform' workers for online companies such as Uber and AirBnb. The Youth Committee demands legislative and other action to prevent exploitation and undercutting of established standards.

The development of a European Pillar of Rights should underpin the reinvigoration of Social Europe. Anything less risks the degeneration of the European project. The Brexit vote and the rise of harmful populism is a wake-up call about disillusionment and frustration following several difficult years. People need to believe again that Europe is a progressive force and Europe needs to deliver.

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