

## Shaping the Future of Youth

### by the industriAll Europe Youth Working Group

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### What is the industriAll Europe Youth Working Group?

The industriAll Europe Youth Working Group represents young workers from the metals, chemicals, aerospace, automotive, mining, energy, ICT, mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, pharmaceuticals and TFLF industries. The full group meets once per year to discuss all subjects relating to the specific situation of young workers in our sectors. At the 2016 industriAll Europe Congress, the Youth Working Group was officially recognised by all affiliated member organisations as a permanent statutory body with the right to submit motions to the highest decision-making body, the Executive Committee. Within the framework of the EC Agenda 2020, the main focus of the group is on fighting the staggeringly high levels of youth unemployment in Europe. IndustriAll Europe's Youth Working Group members therefore set out the following paper on the quality of youth employment so as to ensure that certain policy areas be shaped in such a way that they ultimately improve, rather than harm, the prospects of young workers to find decent work and to exert control over their own lives.

### Why did we draft this paper?

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, youth unemployment rates in some European Member States have shot up to 50%<sup>1</sup> among young workers and increased precarious working conditions to the point where they have now become commonplace. At European level, it was reflected by the Member States' acknowledgement of the 'labour market mismatches, due to inadequate skills, limited geographical mobility or inadequate wage conditions'. The EC implemented the Youth Guarantee, A Quality Framework for Traineeships, and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Together, these formed the EC's Youth' Employment Package, an attempt to decrease youth unemployment rates in Europe and which frames the work of industriAll European Trade Union's Youth Working Group.

Structural labour market reforms to reduce mismatch and youth unemployment rates are, however, not enough; more effective actions are needed. The vision of our young industrial workers is clear, and we have identified the four policy areas which have particularly affected the reality and quality of employment for young people in Europe: 1- Digitalisation & Innovation, 2- Flexibility, 3- Internships/Apprenticeships, 4- Mobility. Yet, despite these challenging and difficult times, industriAll Europe's Youth Working Group has also identified opportunities. As a highly skilled labour force who are an asset to the global supply chain economy, young European industrial workers are committed to remaining the backbone of European industry. Nonetheless, we have been tagged as the generation of 'working poor'<sup>2</sup> and we will have to fight for our fundamental labour and social rights to be respected.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat data January 2013 – Greece, Spain.

<sup>2</sup> Youth earning wages under the poverty threshold thus not allowing a decent living.

## Our views

### 1. Digitalisation & Innovation

The digital evolution has had a radical impact on the labour market and is an ongoing challenge for industrial jobs. It has generated new business models and new jobs. But at the same time, it is also facilitating the outsourcing of jobs or parts of industrial jobs to countries with lower labour costs, leading to social dumping. Automatisations can improve working conditions but it can also make jobs disappear completely, especially low skilled labour. We need to assess the impact of digitalisation on the number and types of job opportunities available and to identify information on new forms of employment as well as their effect on work and private life, including family life and the skill sets required to fulfil these opportunities. We need to have an educational system that encourages lifelong learning (LLL) so workers stay up-to-date with technological change. That means that vocational education and training (VET) opportunities have to be regularly updated as well, so that workers can ensure they do know how to handle the latest systems and methods used in industry and are able to adapt to changes in industry.

Innovation, R&D, investment and technological progress are key to our European industries in order to avoid outsourcing of jobs to countries with lower labour costs. Young workers need to have the skills and mindset to work in such an environment. But not at all costs. The digital evolution has also produced an increase in atypical and flexible forms of employment. There is a need for modernisation of social and employment legislation to stay abreast of such changes and to encourage social partners to update collective bargaining agreements accordingly, so that existing working conditions in the workplace can also be maintained and improved in the digital world of work.

### 2. Flexibility

Do you live to work, or work to live? Entering the labour market has become considerably harder for young workers during recent years. These days, it is a common belief that every young worker is willing to be flexible. We do not agree, they often simply do not have a choice. The need for flexibility amongst young workers has become increasingly normal and is often a feature necessary to set a young worker apart from a more established colleague. Flexibility requirements occur in contracts in many shapes and forms, working conditions or job descriptions. The industriAll Europe Youth Working Group believes that the following should always be upheld, regardless:

- Flexibility has to have benefits for both parties.
- There are limits to flexibility. After the economic crisis, we now find ourselves in a new situation where the 'crisis mode' has become the new standard. Instead regular working conditions with collectively agreed conditions need to be reinforced, especially in order to protect newcomers to the labour market.
- Work-life balance has to be improved. Increasing numbers of burn-outs and other work-related mental health problems caused by constant accessibility and the erosion of traditional working time arrangements have reached worrisome heights.
- Flexible contracts at the same company need to be automatically converted at a certain time in order to facilitate planning of one's own life.

### 3. Internships/Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships or internships cannot solve the problems of youth unemployment, but they can bridge the gap between school and the labour market. Vocational education and training (VET) needs programmes which match the needs of the labour market, contribute to the development of professional qualifications and which are not simply a source of temporary and cheap labour. It is the understanding of the industriAll Europe Youth Working Group that the main aims with regard to intern- and apprenticeships are to:

- offer an insight into a given workplace in an industrial setting
- provide a first step in terms of gaining experience in one's chosen profession
- provide an informal (internship) or more formal (apprenticeship), finite process of education which ends with the award of qualification certification
- ensure quality and the provision of guidance to the trainees alongside a legally defined framework which extends to interns/apprentices

Furthermore, it is the understanding of the industriAll Europe Youth Working Group that the main aims with regard to intern- and apprenticeships are NOT:

- to use them as a way of delaying the awarding of a young person a regular contract
- to use interns/apprentices as a source of free or cheap labour
- to use them as a path that leads to precarious contracts and working conditions, but to prepare the trainees for regular working life

### 4. Mobility

Mobility should be a choice and not a necessity for finding work! Freedom of movement is one of the biggest accomplishments of the European Union. However, social cohesion amongst Europe's Member States must be advanced before accepting that there will be winners and losers in the competition for skilled workers. Many skilled young people are forced to take their search for work outside of their native country or even EU altogether, devastating their home communities and families and leaving a skills vacuum behind. Living and working conditions and the possibility to find decent work should be comparable throughout Europe and neither divergence between the North and South or East and West. Every EU citizen should have the possibility to find a decent job in his or her home country.

## Implementation

- Upon request, every year industriAll Europe will organise a delegation to the European Parliament to meet and discuss our views with an MEP member of the EMPL Committee.  
*Next delegation to take place at the end of November / beginning of December 2017.*
- Every year, industriAll Europe's Youth Working Group will meet once in Brussels on the occasion of the 'Youth Network' in order to exchange practices, discuss common priorities, and decide on the yearly work planning. *Next network meeting to be held in the first week of April 2018.*
- Every year, industriAll Europe's Youth Working Group members will plan at least one thematic youth seminar in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- All year long, industriAll Europe encourages its members to hold regional meetings in order to form common views and bring these to the annual Youth Network.
- Upon request, industriAll Europe can organise limited Select Working Parties (SWP) without interpretation in Brussels.