

Youth employment in Europe – a challenge for the Churches?

24th to 26th March 2014, Brussels

Conclusions

Conclusions of the participants were established in four different areas. All conclusions are here presented:

I. Proposals to the Churches

Churches are not necessarily employers but can develop employment through their members or in partnership with businesses.

1. Churches need to be more aware of the unemployment issues at all levels. Therefore it is proposed to determine a yearly European Sunday in all of Europe and in the whole CEC family to highlight the Biblical and theological significance of labour, work and employment; an Employment Sunday - possibly the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

2. Churches need to look at their employment and work practices to make sure they are ethical and value based. E.g. do we encourage people to work more hours than they should? Should we work one day a week less to employ more people?

3. Churches at central level should only use contractors who employ apprentices.

4. Churches should be aware of good practice in social economy projects in their own and other countries and how these could be used to develop employment opportunities.

5. Churches should look at the EU Youth Guarantee scheme to see whether it will be useful and lobby the national organiser to see where the Churches can be involved.

6. Churches should endeavour to provide help to all young people, who are unemployed, whether they are disabled, lack education, former offenders or educated who are unemployed through various activities such as websites, job clubs, etc.

7. Churches should lobby governments on the ethical and value issues of policies at local, national and European level through their networks.

II. Proposals towards politics

1. On the local level

1.1 Politics should implement better training on employment in schools and universities, e. g. by investing in Career services, aiming to have people leaving education with a job to go to and by improving the relationship between schools and the labour market or work experience.

1.2 Local government and churches should not sit on money and land, but actually invest it in people and job creation. Churches and local governments can match-fund (Jointly fund) projects where possible.

1.3 Extra support should be given when people who go into employment have high needs, e. g. for child care, travel or other special needs.

1.4 Young people need good access to politicians, so that politicians get a face and name to the problem.

2. On the national level

2.1 There should be incentives for employers to hire young people (e.g. in Denmark). Instruments might be:

- public support for salaries;
- tax breaks for employing young people (e.g. Germany: tax breaks for employing people with disabilities);
- Financial incentives for permanent contracts;
- higher social security contributions for temporary contracts to encourage permanent contracts.

2.2 A living wage (enough to live on, not minimum wage) should be introduced to ensure a decent life.

2.3 Public money should be used for job creation: Investments should be made in areas where there are no private investors.

2.4 The money of banks, companies and churches so far tied up in investments, savings and land should be used to create employment.

2.5 Child care should be cheap or free. This would improve the unemployment situation of those, who want to work, but cannot afford it, because the child care costs more than what they will earn.

3. On EU level

3.1 EU should make sure that every cent of the money goes to real projects, not getting lost in bureaucracy on the way.

3.2 Policies as well as benefits and support should be simplified throughout Europe.

3.3 Policies should be flexible for each country to decide how best to tackle the problem. One solution is unlikely to work across the whole of Europe.

3.4 Politics has to recognise that mobility is important and make relocation grants and language training more easily accessible. Especially poorer people should be supported to use ERASMUS programmes.

3.5 European money needs to go to job creation.

3.6 The EU should create a Young People / People friendly label for companies that employ a proportionate number of young people ethically, on permanent well paid contracts.

3.7 One currently unemployed person from each member state should join the Unit of the European Commission on youth unemployment, GD Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, to tackle youth unemployment.

3.8 The EU should propose EU-wide tax breaks for new companies.

3.9 The next European Commission should establish an EU Commissioner for Children and an EU Commissioner for Youth.

3.10 An EU-fund should be available for small companies that would like to take on extra employees but cannot afford to do so.

4. Other demands

4.1 Long term strategies need to be developed instead of quick fixes.

4.2 The setting up of own businesses should be encouraged.

4.3 Tax breaks can be incentives.

4.4 Successful big businesses can mentor new businesses – involving financial, administrative, legal and other areas.

4.5 The daily and general politics should be about people not statistics. Stories should replace numbers on all levels.

4.6 As Christians we should make it our priority to fight against injustice.

4.7 It should be made sure that people who work in the area of unemployment, understand the problem and know the people that are affected get their opinions heard at all levels.

III. Possibilities of concrete actions

Churches should reflect together on the issues of youth unemployment and cooperate in exchanging ideas. It is essential for churches to foster the feeling of the image of God in each one, to make everyone feel 1 in a million; reflect together on the value of each person.

A congregation that knows society should empower and challenge young people in a secure, safe, trustful, peaceful, spiritual and Biblical environment, and raise its voice for young people, reflecting together on the value and dignity of each person.

Regarding the issues of youth unemployment, the churches should also give support, by following these steps.

1. Personal support:

- build relationships with young people with special difficulties in life;
- keep one to one contact between the members of a congregation and young people;
- offer young people a weekly challenge/ coaching in life skills;
- offer life skills, e.g. confidence, decision making etc. training;
- create a safe space - "job club" (weekly) where young people together with their peers can look for jobs and offer free food with this;
- Women of Worth! Empower women.

2. Technical support:

- create a safe space to educate young people in practical work, e.g. office environment, certain craft, etc.
- be in contact with companies, train employers to understand young people;
- offer training in practical job application: CV writing, motivation letter writing, interviews;
- offer possibilities for professional training in churches, e.g. gardening, cookery, teaching, sewing;
- offer language training through members of the congregation;
- encourage public speaking (starting by Scripture reading).

3. Job seeking:

- provide space for job market on the church website/ FB page;
- create networks for finding jobs, by using the potential in the congregation;
- open a church job centre.

4. Job creation:

- offer paid traineeships in various church projects;
- offer mini-jobs in church context, offer summer jobs (e.g. guided tour of the church);
- think of enterprises/ jobs that can be created by churches;
- churches funding social work projects (match funding);
- providing recycling jobs/ liaising with companies;
- build networks with other social services;
- work with Rotary Clubs (and others).

IV. Benefit of European networking on the issue

1. The network will make possible the establishment of concrete European projects with partners, using EU-Funds, but also other financial resources, like foundations.
2. A European network can secure the flow of information about EU policy.
3. The network will share information, experience, know-how, good practice and competences.
4. The network highlights the fact that one is not alone and makes the partner more powerful and visible.