

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIONS TO INCLUDE YOUTH CONCERNS DURING COVID-19

Youth

BACKGROUND

As the spread of COVID-19 continues worldwide, more and more young workers are taking up work in the frontlines as statistics show that young people are better equipped to face the virus with very low risk of hospitalization and only 0.2% of mortality rate. As older workers are asked to isolate due to their age range and/or pre-existing conditions, more young workers are temporarily taking up the work as essential workers, but their precariousness is still maintained.

Many of these young workers are in the frontlines, in supermarkets, delivering mail, in call centers and in hospitals working without proper protective equipment, exposing themselves and their families to the spread of the pandemic.

For other young workers, as companies shut down activities, they are the first ones out of work¹. Young workers make up the largest amount of workers those sectors that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. In Uganda, they represent 77% of the workers in the tourism and in the US, 19.3 million workers are in industries such as retail, food services and tourism.

ILO predicts that as many as 25 million people could become unemployed and already the US has seen more than 10 million workers filing for unemployment in the last week.

This situation mixed with an uncertain future is causing a wave of mental health issues that is also gravely affecting our young workers across the world.

To ensure that young workers concerns, and needs are adequately considered, UNI recommends that unions take into consideration the following recommendations:

Information

- Engage and represent young people in discussions, meetings and decision-making to address the crisis
- Communicate frequently and clearly and provide proper information on the adoption
- Have a contact point for young workers so they can have someone to ask questions or raise concerns to
- Provide support for young workers to protect their mental health and provide them with psychological and moral support (hotlines, group calls/chats, etc.), ensuring them that their needs are being listened to and looked after

¹ An Axios-Harris survey conducted in the US through March 30 showed that [31 percent of respondents ages 18 to 34](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z3b9yj/almost-a-third-of-young-people-have-lost-their-jobs-thanks-to-coronavirus-covid19-pandemic) had either been laid off or put on temporary leave because of the outbreak, compared with 22 percent of those 35 to 49 and 15 percent of those 50 to 64.
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z3b9yj/almost-a-third-of-young-people-have-lost-their-jobs-thanks-to-coronavirus-covid19-pandemic

- Guidance and guidelines on remote working and expectations on their work, taking into account particularly challenging situations such as looking after young families
- Find ways to reach out to young workers to stay in contact with them and informed about the union and what the union does

Provision

- Provide immediate support to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly young, and name youth workers and recognize young workers as key workers
- Engage and represent young people in discussions, meetings and decision-making to address the crisis
- Have a union emergency response team to help with information, guidance and secure the needs of young workers

Action

With employers

- Guarantee the payment of the wages of young workers as many of them do not have any access to social security
- Negotiate strong collective agreements that eliminate precarious forms of employment that affect young workers such as zero-hour contracts and second-tier contracts
- Negotiate strong collective agreements that ensure that all workers have access to social security benefits, including unemployment insurance
- Negotiate with employers training options for young workers
- Negotiate access to tools such as internet and/or portable computers for workers who have been asked to work from home and who do not own such equipment
- Inclusion of agreements with expanded access to paid sick leave for workers who are unwell and paid leave for workers who need to take leave for childcare or elderly care.
- Ensure that companies and employers are providing support for young workers to protect their mental health and provide them with psychological and moral support (hotlines, group calls/chats, etc)

For unions

- Develop better strategies especially designed to organise and engage more young workers in union work
- Provide information, training and guidelines for young workers on teleworking, establishing working routines, organizational skills
- Young workers can help unions develop and install better technological tools to help transmit information and reach out union members with proper information about the pandemic and the measures that are being adopted to protect workers.
- Provide online training opportunities/webinars for young workers to become union representatives or to learn about union work
- Begin to analyse the impact of the pandemic and how this is going to affect young workers and the workplace (increase of teleworking, increase of precarious work, lower wages, etc.)