



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 November 2022

English only

Commission for Social Development

Sixty-first session

6–15 February 2023

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Statement submitted by International Relations Students' Association of McGill, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

This statement is presented by the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University. We are a student-led organization that has held consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2006. Our mandate is to work towards increasing youth representation in policymaking and to bring youth-centered policies to the forefront of conversations in international politics.

As we approach the 61st Commission for Social Development, we want to emphasize the unique perspective that youth possess on this year's priority theme: creating full and productive employment and decent work for all. Gainful employment is a pressing and necessary precondition to overcoming societal inequalities, accelerating recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and achieving the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Worldwide, the labour force participation of young people (individuals ages 15–24) is in decline. According to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) report "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020", the number of youths engaged in the labour force has decreased by 12.5% between 1999 and 2019. We might regard this statistic as a positive one, reflecting how improved access to secondary and tertiary education has reduced the number of youths participating in the workforce. However, according to the same report, 1 in 5 youths are currently not in employment, education, or training. This is a major population whose potential contributions to the workforce continue to go unrealized. Young people face numerous structural barriers to entering the workforce, and such obstacles necessitate structural solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also severely undermined the ability of young people to participate in the workforce. As stated in the ILO report "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022", individuals between the ages 15 and 24 experienced a much higher percentage loss in employment than adults aged 25 and above. Lockdowns and confinements represented additional challenges to young people and recent graduates seeking jobs. As firms sought to stay afloat during the crisis, young people who were newly recruited or in entry-level positions found themselves suddenly laid off. The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the education of students worldwide. Young people who suffered a dramatic decline in the quality of their schooling during the pandemic may struggle to acquire gainful employment later in life.

Young people in our generation are confronting unprecedented struggles with regards to seeking and securing employment. However, we firmly believe that young people are also the best suited to identifying solutions to these challenges. Our first-hand experience with online education, our familiarity with technology in the digital age, our underrepresented perspectives, and our lived experiences uniquely situate us to provide insight and critical analyses on how government and non-governmental organizations can address employment inequality.

Our statement discusses three major areas within the priority theme of CSocD61. We first address the concept of dignified employment; jobs which realize the basic needs of individuals. Next, we discuss the importance of ensuring safe working environments as a right for every employed individual. Finally, we conclude by contending with the issue of guaranteeing adequate pay for every working person. Social development will be stunted if young people are not adequately employed. It is in the interest of all to ensure young people are active and involved in the economy.

Dignified Employment

More than a means to an end, employment is a structure around which individuals form their entire lives. Apart from adequate compensation, we urge policymakers to consider the other ways in which employment is a channel through which individual and societal needs can be met. Increasingly, family-friendly workplace policies are proving to be good for families, firms, and the economy. The implementation of paid parental leave, breastfeeding breaks, and grants for quality childcare has proven beneficial for employers and employees alike. A 2019 report by UNICEF “Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the Workplace of the Future Employees” relays that employers report better employee retention, a reduction in absenteeism, and lower recruitment costs when they implement family-friendly policies.

Children and youths especially benefit, with parents being able to devote more time to early childhood development – a major indicator of a child’s future skills, abilities, and productivity. In the context of states with weaker social security nets, quality employment can also help people meet basic health and wellness needs. Health insurance, mental health support, and dental care are all benefits which employers can offer workers to improve their quality of life. Supporting an employee’s family and health can generate positive incomes for all parties. The rise of the ‘gig economy’ is also pertinent in discussions of dignified employment. Young people find themselves entering a workforce with increasing job insecurity, abundant informal employment, and accelerated job automation. The aforementioned 2020 ILO brief on youth employment reports that in 2016, three in four youths were informally employed. Young graduates also tend to be underemployed, securing jobs which they are overqualified for. This puts them at a disadvantage for progressing in their career and achieving their full potential.

Thus, we call upon CSocD partners to:

- Invest in or make mandatory the establishment of family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave, breastfeeding breaks, childcare grants, and so on
- Invest in or make mandatory the establishment of employment benefits particularly in health
- Develop public employment services which can help match job-seekers to potential employers
- Implement policies which provide social protections for young people while they secure jobs or make the transition from school to the workforce
- Update educational and vocational curricula which will help students and young people follow labour market trends
- Invest in sectors which will generate high-skilled jobs, with opportunities for training and career growth

Safe Working Environments

Over time, the world has become more aware of the importance of having a strong, safe and healthy working environment, one that includes significant participation by governments, employers, workers, and actors, to protect working environments as well as the safety and health of workers. Nonetheless, according to a 2022 report by the UN, nearly 3 million people die due to exposure to common risk factors in their workplace every year. Work-related diseases were responsible for 81% of all of the work-related deaths in 2016, with more than 700,000 deaths caused due

to long working hours. Workplace related deaths are estimated to surpass the average annual deaths from road accidents, war, violence, and HIV/AIDS.

The International Labour organization defines a safe working environment as the discipline dealing with the prevention of work-related injuries, diseases, and the protection and promotion of health workers. This occupational safety and health should be put at the forefront to ensure that there is an improvement of working conditions and environments for efficient outcomes. This should focus on key areas of occupational safety and health such as improved labour laws, mental health policies, diversity and inclusion within the workplace, and prevention of assault in the workplace. To further strengthen this, Sustainable Development Goal 8.8 which is Protect Labour Rights and Promote Safe Working Environments emphasizes on protecting these rights for all workers including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment. Additionally, in 2019, UN experts urged the ILO to urgently recognize and adopt safe and healthy working conditions as one of its fundamental principles and rights at work. We acknowledge that the ILO took this into account and at the occasion of the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2022, safety and health was added to Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

To further reinforce this, we call upon CSocD partners to:

- Encourage labour laws that promote treatment and time-off for ill-workers
- Promote the manufacturing of ethically sourced products e.g. using sustainable materials and locally-made products
- Enforce mental health policies in the workplace to ensure that workers are satisfied mentally and have access to therapists is needed
- Workers are provided with racism training as part of diversity and inclusion initiatives at workplaces
- Strongly prohibit assault in the workplace and have strict laws against this to hold attackers accountable
- Promote fair pay policies and procedures in place to prevent exploitation.

Adequate Pay

Working poverty is a global reality where a job does not always provide a way out of poverty for individuals and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased the vulnerability of low-paid workers while making clear the repercussions of economic fragility on human capital development. This created an urgency on the provision of living wages, proving it an essential aspect of decent work. A large number of companies have already committed to paying a living wage to their employees, and some of them are even actively working with their suppliers to achieve living wages in supply chains. With a great deal of progress made on this, more needs to be done to ensure that we are not leaving some groups behind which includes migrant workers, racialized groups, children, and women. According to statistics by UN Women, women only make \$0.77 for every dollar that a man makes which results in a lifetime of income inequality between men and women leading to women retiring into poverty.

Furthermore, a few industries have a surge in child labour which concerns millions of children in less economically developed countries producing structural impacts on the enjoyment of their human rights. Racialized communities are also negatively affected by this where black workers still earn less than their white counterparts in some parts of the world suggesting that some communities will inherently earn more than other communities based on their skin colour rather than

merits. This creates an opportunity gap and this gap is further increased for black women who are seeking employment. Therefore, the United Nations and its partners must focus on key areas to improve the social development of communities and future generations.

Thus, we call upon CSocD partners to:

- Encourage government bodies to adjust minimum wage to inflation
 - Strictly prohibit the economic exploitation of young workers as this limits their opportunities and limits their reward on work
 - Providing fair compensation for labour uniform for women, migrants, and people of colour
 - End child labour in all its forms
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