



## **ETUC Declaration on “EY2012: European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity”**

Adopted at the Executive meeting of 7-8 December 2011

---

On 6 December 2010, EPSCO adopted the proposal to declare 2012 the « European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity ». The ETUC and its affiliates subscribe to this initiative and plan to play a full part in it – as it did in 2010 for the European Year Against Poverty and Exclusion ....

Reconciling the different needs of younger and older people, and aligning them with those of society overall is a considerable challenge for policy makers and the trade union movement in particular.

The ETUC together with its pensioners’ organisation FERPA sees the problems raised by the pace of demographic development as an opportunity for the younger and older generations to get to know each other better and to meet in a different manner based on mutual respect.

**Active ageing and intergenerational solidarity: for the ETUC these are multifaceted concepts which are not incompatible.**

All too often these terms are perceived or presented in a reductive way.

When we think of « active ageing » we think primarily of the place and role of older people in society, their living conditions and the way to “grow old well” or even of their continuation in the “labour market”.

And so when the idea of « intergenerational solidarity » is evoked, we think often and firstly of social transfers between generations and especially, in the framework of financing of contribution-based pensions – or “Social Security” pensions – the financing of old-age pensions by those still active in the job market and particularly by young people ....

These kinds of approach are certainly important; but for the ETUC they alone would not cover the complexity of the approach.

**A priority: act at a high level on employment of older and younger workers**

Allowing workers to both

- remain in a quality job until the « legal » minimum age of retirement rights (which must take into account hardship and length of career)

- and to grow old in good conditions

demands first of all action at a high level, i.e. primarily on employment policies applied in Member states and inside companies.

It is not enough simply to « decree » that one must work longer in order to make it a reality. It is still necessary that on the one hand the jobs exist, and on the other that the employers have the wish and the will to either keep their older workers, or to hire some.

- The ETUC reiterates its conviction that : a pertinent response cannot be reduced to simply proposing to raise the legal pension age. ETUC rejects firmly any recommendation aimed at introducing an automatic mechanism to raise the legal pension age or any other uniform solution that would apply to all Member States. (october 2010 resolution)
- What is the situation today ?
- There is a general degradation of employment everywhere, provoked by the crisis and the consequences of budgetary austerity plans, by an increased precarity of employment, a reduction in social services, leading to a slowdown in demand and domestic consumption, also by delocalization of jobs, in the name of a greater search for company profits, by profiting from and thereby encouraging social and/or fiscal dumping between the different countries.

This degradation of employment, the increase in precarity and growing inequality affect not only older workers – even if they are the first to be hit – but also young workers.

Thus, as recalled by Eurostat statistics (Eurostat press release 96/2011) :

- If more than half the population between the ages of 55 and 64 is no longer active on the job market (exactly : 46.3% are still active)
- Only 35% of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 are active on the job market. And when they are employed it is usually in precarious jobs, if not work experience, paid or unpaid.

At the same time, the willingness of employers to keep their older workers, including taking the necessary measures to keep and/or to hire them, is very limited.

A study carried out by the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands proves particularly instructive. Thus we can see that

- only 20 to 40% of employers are ready to encourage their workers to work until the legal retirement age ;
- Less than 20% of them are ready to recruit older workers ;
- Only 30% of them would be ready to introduce flexible working time for older workers ;
- Only 25% would be ready to adopt ergonomic measures to suit them ;

- 20% would be ready to put in place adapted training or to develop partial retirement measures and/or reduced working time before retirement ;
- And even fewer are willing to envisage pre-retirement measures (15%) or exceptional leave (12%) or to reduce both working time and salary (7%)

### **Conditions of active ageing : quality of work, quality of life**

Keeping older workers in the company, but also “active ageing”, are also a result primarily

- of the development and application of lifelong learning, allowing workers to adapt to new activities, new technologies, to the point of enabling them to change jobs;
- of the improvement of working and health and safety conditions in the workplace;
- of taking into account difficulty and/or working lifespan with the possibility of early retirement ...

« Active ageing » therefore means primarily improvement of living conditions. But it is also means mobilizing and perpetual action in favour of working conditions and decent salaries.

Active ageing also means guaranteeing retired persons and particularly women – who, in the course of their working life have earned on average 15% to 20% less than men and make up the largest proportion of “poor pensioners” – a decent pension, i.e. one that allows them to live with dignity, to have access to goods and services – including healthcare – and to take their place in society and not live “on benefits”.

### **To develop intergenerational solidarity : act equally with and for young people**

Building a unified society means building a society where everyone has their place, in which no-one feels excluded, whatever his or her situation : for example, the elderly, the handicapped, ethnic minorities or ... young people !

The ETUC and its affiliate did not wait for the launch of 2012 to unite their efforts in order to care about the situation of young people entering the labour market and to alert policy makers and employers equally to the problem.

Thus, for example, as far back as 1999, FERPA developed a project entitled : « Solidarities between older and younger people », in which it concerned itself as much with the early exclusion of older workers from the labour market as with the insecuritisation of young people on the same labour market.

Equally, in April 2007, the ETUC organised for its members, with the support of the European Commission, two decentralized seminars in Warsaw and Paris on the theme

“Demography and the labour market: a challenge for trade unions”. The objective of these seminars was to create the conditions for the young and the not-so-young to find their place and thereby contribute to the economic and social development of our societies, as well as to their own insertion and social well-being. This, in a perspective of intergenerational solidarity.

Intergenerational solidarity must be the base for the development of each action. In this respect, the trade union movement has always represented the “ideal” arena to pursue the goals of solidarity by and between the different generations.

It is within this spirit of struggle against all forms of discrimination, particularly related to age, that in the framework of the social dialogue, the social partners concluded on 25 march a European Framework Agreement “For an inclusive labour market”.

If progress has been made, particularly thanks to mobilization in this area of workers’ organizations affiliated to the ETUC, it must be acknowledged that there is still a lot to be done, particularly to allow younger workers to enter the labour market as well as allowing older workers who wish to remain in it.

Acting with and for young people today means, for example :

- Fighting against precariousness;
- Avoiding early departure from the education system without qualifications;
- Allowing them to do jobs which are in line with their training, implying that this training should take into account, including in the medium term, the needs of the labour market ...
- But it also means continuing to fight to defend quality Social Security retirement systems based on a unified and perennial financing, in a way that guarantees quality pensions for generations to come.

### **The commitment of the ETUC and its affiliates during 2012 and beyond**

The mobilisation of the ETUC will certainly not stop at the end of 2012, as it did not begin with the start of it.

But, independently of national initiatives which can be taken and applied during this year, the ETUC has already undertaken a specific initiative.

In fact, it has submitted a project entitled : « The year 2012 : For better intergenerational solidarity and for active ageing – overcoming the obstacles to keeping older workers in employment and facilitating access to younger workers” . Through this project, the ETUC in cooperation with FERPA and its Youth Committee plans to benefit from the dynamic offered by the institution of this year 2012, consecrated to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, to launch in a concerted way a new mobilization on this theme.

In the course of this project, apart from sharing and exchanging good practices applied in different Member states to improve access and/or remaining in employment of all

without discrimination, a **trade union plan of action** will be presented, discussed and published for the attention of organizations and trade union representatives.

It will be angled on three priorities, adopted by the Executive Committee and will confirm them;

These priorities are threefold :

- **Youth employment**, acting principally upon quality of training and jobs proposed ;
- **Active ageing**, mobilizing primarily on working conditions and health and safety in the workplace, whilst allowing employees to retire earlier after long careers or arduous professions
- **The quality of pensions**, guaranteed by Social Security systems and by perennial financing, based on intra and inter-generational solidarity and sufficient to allow all pensioners and particularly women to live in dignity without recourse to benefits.

### **The ambition of the ETUC and its affiliates**

In these periods of crisis and benefiting from the synergies which will be born during this year 2012, the ETUC and its affiliates will mobilize in order to realize synthesis between active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, thorough participation in the labour market. They intend to benefit from te “European Year 2012 for Active Ageing and for Intergenerational Solidarity” to promote, as much for the youngest as for the oldest, equal opportunities in the areas of participation and continuation on the labour market, by awareness raising and mobilization of actors in the field who are the social partners and paying particular attention to women whatever their age. In other words, to reflect on the ways and means to be put in place in each country, to realize this objective, insisting on the aspects of employment and training, be it basic education or lifelong learning. For both are essential factors in order to integrate the labour market, but also to remain in it, particularly by enabling people to confront its evolution.