

## YOUTH AND TRADE UNIONS - EXCHANGE TURKEY 2010



TIE-Netherlands

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# 1. Introduction

The last decade has been characterized by a continuing trade liberalization and globalization of production. This especially affects lower income groups who face increasing flexibility in working conditions, temporary contracts without job security, relocation of production to low wage countries, imports of labor and outsourcing to employment agencies. In this situation it is important that trade unions reform themselves as active social actors able to respond adequately to these challenges and protect the interests of their members.

The group that is most affected by social and economic changes are young workers. They don't yet have a long working relationship with the employer (often they work under temporary contracts or through agencies) and are the first to be dismissed. Unemployment among young people has risen and the position of young workers in the labor market has become increasingly vulnerable. Despite the vulnerability of young workers, their participation in trade unions is low.

In 2010 TIE-Netherlands set up the project 'Capacity building of youth and the strengthening of international solidarity between youth and the independent trade union movement in Belarus, Turkey, Brazil and The Netherlands'. The project had as its main goal to contribute to the democratization and improvement of youth policy and youth participation within these independent trade unions. Specifically, the project aimed to strengthen their knowledge and skills, increasing the number of young members and leaders in the trade union, initiating the discussion on the form and direction of youth policy and specific methods to organize young workers and to build an international solidarity network.

The main activity within this project consisted of an international exchange between youth from the Dutch FNV-Bondgenoten, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), the Brazilian Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and several Turkish unions.

The exchange took place between June 21 and June 26 2010 in Seferihisar (Izmir), Turkey, and was organized by TIE-Netherlands in cooperation with the Turkish Centre for Social Research and Education (TAREM). Within the setting of the Young Workers Gathering 2010 (organized by TAREM), participants exchanged experiences with their specific trade union context, organizing young workers and increasing their participation in the trade union movement.

Presentations at a plenary meeting, discussions in small groups, and interactive games were used in order to exchange information between the young participants. Some of these were part of the Young Workers Gathering and involved larger groups while others were independent initiatives realized in smaller groups.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of the newly gained insights and 'lessons learnt', follow-up seminars will take place in each country in which experiences can be shared and the discussion will be elaborated related to the different national realities.

This publication reports on the exchange, the participants, their presentations and the topics they discussed. It also reflects on the main conclusions and the steps to be taken in order to consolidate the 'lessons learnt'.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed overview of all the activities that took place, see attachment 1.

## 2. Country Information on Youth and Trade Unions

The participants of each country presented a wide variety of information on the topic 'youth and trade unions' to the other participants. The following is a collection of presented data per country complemented with additional information prepared by TIE-Netherlands.

### 2.1 Belarus

#### *Participants*

The four Belarusian participants were: one member of the Free Metal Workers' Union (SPM); one member of the Independent Trade Union of Miners (NPG); one member of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB); and one representative of the BKDP (federation level). All belong to the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP). They work respectively in an electro-technical factory, in mining, in an engineering factory, and for the BKDP.



#### *Introduction*

The BKDP (a trade union federation with around 10,000 members) operates in a context where all citizens and organizations striving for freedom and independence face repression by the authoritarian regime. Bureaucratic rules make it difficult to establish unions, organize activities and print materials to distribute.

Despite intimidation, the regime failed to destroy the independent unions. In June 2007, the EU put restrictions on Belarus trade preferences due to violations of trade union rights. The effects of the economic crisis, the privatization of companies and the devaluation of the ruble because of the rapidly declining oil prices led to a growing resistance from the population and a call for change. People began to express their discontent and to come together to organize. Also, at workplaces (during breaks) 'forbidden topics' were discussed, including the situation in the factory and the country.

### ***Data on youth and trade unions in Belarus***

The membership is growing steadily and BKDP's legitimacy among the population of Belarus is increasing. This is partly due to the fact that the BKDP is not profiling itself as a political organization, but is purely concerned with defending the (basic) interests of workers. BKDP has been able to increase its membership, take up position in key firms in the economy (as in the potassium mines, and the largest oil refinery) and to partly stay out of range of the regime. Attracting new young members and strengthening the knowledge and skills and organization of existing young members is one of the main goals in the BKDP Strategy 2008-2012. Before, there were also alliances with political youth organizations which support BKDP in recruiting new young members among sectors and companies where the BKDP is not yet present.

BKDP has worked to empower youth and strengthening a youth structure within the BKDP. At an international summer camp, young leaders were introduced to new ways of organizing. They have exchanged experiences with colleagues from other sectors and regions and from The Netherlands. These kinds of exchanges are extremely important in a context such as Belarus, where unions are organized mainly at company level and there is little contact with others.

After the camp, the young people organized local level trainings and information events which led to an increasing number of young trade unionists, an active attitude of young members within the unions and the creation of an official youth committee in January 2010 (6 members; 1 from each union). This committee has a flexible structure and its aim for 2010 is therefore to clearly identify what the interests are of young members, and to formulate activities and policy for young people. With the official selection of this committee the youth section became an official part of the BKDP. A challenge for this year is to increase the participation of committee members in decision making processes of the unions and to increase the legitimacy of the committee under the (old) leaders.

### ***How to strengthen independent trade unions***

In Belarus, the government is the main employer. Most of the enterprises in Belarus are state-owned.

There is a harsh legal environment for trade unions, due to two main factors:

1. Registration of trade union organizations is extremely difficult
  - The minimum membership requirement is prohibitively high, and a letter from the employer confirming the address of the union is often needed.

2. The government attempts to weaken trade unions right to organize strikes and other actions
  - A strike must be announced in advance
  - The President of Belarus can cancel or suspend it
  - Permission from local authorities is needed for demonstrations or other street actions.

#### Fixed term contracts for workers:

The employer is given the right to conclude short-term contracts (1 year) with all workers. The conclusion of these contracts is at the employer's discretion. The contract cannot simply be renewed by the employer.

#### Pressure on trade union members and activists:

The crisis appeared to be an excuse for discrimination on trade union membership. Many workers are forced to take a leave or to work part-time. Young people are the vulnerable group.

#### Anti-union policies bring the loss of EU:

The decision of the EU to withdraw Belarus' benefits in 2008 was the culmination of years of monitoring violations of trade union rights and government reluctance to follow ILO recommendations.

#### Competition of trade unions:

There is competition between on the one hand the 'traditional' Federation of trade unions of Belarus (FPB), an organization with close ties to authorities and 'loyal' to the government and employer, and on the other hand the independent trade unions.

Independent trade unions need to become stronger. This implies strong membership and commitment.

#### Considering the context, the principal questions for the Belarusians are:

1. How can we overcome the fear of repression in order to successfully organize workers? This has a lot to do with the strategies of trade unions.
2. How do you convince young workers to become a trade union member in the first place and to join a specific trade union in the second place?

## 2.2 Brazil

### *Participants*

The three participants from Brazil were all members of the CUT. Two of them worked in the metallurgic industry and are part of the Metalworkers Union in the cities Juiz de Fora and São Paulo. The third participant worked for the Municipality of Curitiba and forms part of the Union of Workers in the Municipality of Curitiba (SISMUC).

### *Introduction*

Like other countries in Latin America in recent decades, Brazil is characterized by a weakening of the role of the state in the protection of basic rights for the people. There has been a liberalization process leading to huge changes in the labor market. Forms of collective organization have given way to market regulation and privatization. Especially for young people there is a lack of structural protection and resources in order to study and find work at higher levels. This has led to social and economic exclusion. In the meantime there is growing competition and division between young and old workers. Companies hire younger people with flex contracts at the expense of fixed positions. Young workers are cheaper and can easily be dismissed when the demand for production (temporarily) declines.

The youngsters are in a vulnerable position, partly because there is a lack of accessible vocational education and partly because of surplus labor and high competition. Many young workers have good reason to fear losing their jobs. They do not become involved with the unions in a collective way to defend their rights and instead often enter into an individual battle with the employer. The unions are aware of this reality and have begun specific committees and secretariats to address the situation of young people. There is much misunderstanding and debate within the union. There is a certain resistance from older members towards younger workers (who are sometimes seen as competitors) to organize. There is also a lack of knowledge of their difficulties and special interests. The organizational capacity of youths can be strengthened by enhancing their knowledge of the productive processes. These productive processes are reflected in changes in working conditions and terms. It is important that young people analyze their social and cultural context and understand whether their trade union reality sufficiently corresponds to that context. International links with other younger employees is important to respond to neo-liberal policies and free trade.

Together with Brazilian trade unionists TIE-Brazil has developed the instrument of 'comparative mapping of the production process' (*mapeo comparativo*). This is a method of constructing a union at the workplace. *Mapeo comparativo* is also used to strengthen international networks of trade union officials.

### *History of the Brazilian union*

To understand the importance and impact of the Lula government in Brazil it is necessary to recall some aspects of the policy prior to 2002. The lost decade, the 1990s, neo-liberal adjustments were implemented in the country, and they left deep scars in the Brazilian society, especially for the working class.

The neo-liberal project started during the government of Collor de Mello (1900-1992). Health policy and education became precarious as investments within these sectors were withdrawn. This propelled the emergence of an increasing number of private initiatives to meet these demands. Public policies were decentralized to municipal management, which in turn did not receive extra resources to implement them. Openness to foreign investment and privatization policies put the national economy in a relationship of extreme dependency on the international economy. In the industrial sector of the country, a restructuring process took place. This resulted in a 52% decrease in number of jobs in the period 1989-1999. Consequently, a massive unemployment arose in Brazil, affecting many young people. Those workers who still relied on a formal job found themselves in precarious working conditions, earning low wages and experienced a loss of labor rights previously guaranteed. There is a flexibilization of labor, through temporary and part-time work, fixed term contracts, temporary suspension of employment, creation of *banco de horas* (a system in which overtime is not immediately paid, but compensated in the future) and a minimum wage without readjustment.

In 2002, with the government of Lula da Silva, the country began to control the attacks on workers' rights. The state started to be the main player in the organization of political and social life again. Despite the external crisis the government put the country into a new cycle of growth, which was only possible thanks to the large domestic investment. The state was the driving force behind domestic investment, resulting in policies focused on infrastructure, such as the PACs (Growth Acceleration Programs), the program 'Light for All', 'my house, my life' and so on. Moreover, acceleration of growth was combined with the implementation of a policy of income distribution and social inclusion. Examples include the *Bolsa Família* (a family stipend for poor families on the condition that their children attend school and are vaccinated) or the creation of community kitchens. Regarding the workers, a reduction in unemployment and an increase of the formal labor market took place. The creation of 11.5 million new jobs was combined with a policy of upgrading the minimum wage.

### ***Trade unionism in Brazil and the CUT***

Unionism in Brazil started with the consolidation of 'Official Unionism' in the 1940s, during the government of Getúlio Vargas. In this period, union structures were created, formalized, and linked to the state through the Ministry of Labor. It was a corporatist organization. The scene was led by the political union of the former Communist Party of Brazil, which was in terms of political practices still very much influenced by the policy of Eastern Europe and did not bring any great answers to the demands and needs of the organization of Brazilian workers.

The great strikes of metalworkers in the 1970s, during the Brazilian dictatorship, gave birth to a new movement for Brazilian trade unionism. The movement towards a construction of a new unionism in Brazil questioned the union model until that time, defending freedom and autonomy of the union, organization at the workplace, end of the control by the Ministry of Labor on unions, rights to strike, direct negotiation between employers and employees. In short, they proposed a break with the official union structure. The consolidation of these movements was the founding of the Workers Party (PT) and the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT). These two entities gathered the left and progressive sectors of Brazilian society, guided by the construction of a new project for the country, led by socialist and democratic principles.

The consolidation of these entities and dissemination of building 'new unionism' coincided with the 1990s, the neo-liberal decade. The working class suffered from the withdrawal of their rights and from the impacts of the changing world of work. The struggles of workers changed, from the policy that works from outside the company, to a policy that is based on the organization of workers in the factory.

Regarding this renewal, it is relevant to discuss Organization at the Workplace (OW), regardless of the format in which it takes place. The OW should be considered as a challenge for the Brazilian trade union movement. Firstly because it is a way in which workers are mobilized most effectively and it is the best way to discuss their immediate demands. It is also a concrete way to convince the worker to join the union, to unionize, and so in this way to seek to break with the official structures. On the other hand, it makes it possible to transform the factory into a space for politics, and to use the factory as a base to defend politics, the collective, and solidarity; important keys to break with individuality.

### ***Data on youth and trade unions in Brazil***

Only 8.33% of the board to The Sindicato de los Trabajadores Metalúrgicos de Juiz de Fora (Union of Metal Workers in Juiz de Fora, STIM-JF) and Região, are youths (aged 30-35 years).

Young people are entering the job market on average under 18 years old of age.

The sectors that employ most young people are the service sector, commerce, telemarketing, and electronics. The majority of the youth is still working informally.

### **The specific interests of young workers that the union should take a closer look at are:**

- Education: pursuing a policy of increased offer on education from the part of the government or businesses; study grants by the government or private enterprises, which should be included in collective agreements.
- Shortening of the working hours without a reduction in wages - this will increase leisure time and allow young people to experience their youth.

### **Successful ways in which unions have responded to the interests of young people and how they are recruiting young people to act:**

- STIM-JF in September initiated the discussion on youth. It has tried to organize and mobilize youths for union activities, both in general and specifically for youth, such as to show the demands of young people and the importance of debates, through the newsletter of de Metallurgical sector, the monthly journal of the union.
- Our action has been planned and implemented in partnership with the Youth of the Metallurgical Union of Metalworkers of ABC, who already have an advanced level of organization, as well as in partnership with the Metallurgical Youth Coordination EMF-SP.

Successful ways in which other youth movements and organizations in Brazil have helped the union to organize young workers and attract new groups of young people:

- STIM - JF works together with the OrganizaÇÃO Movement, which is a group of organized youths from a neighborhood in the outskirts of Juiz de Fora. They have a journal in which neighborhood issues are discussed and they manage to mobilize several young people, among them many young metalworkers.

### ***Production mapping***

Mapping the production process is investigating the productive system, departing from the point of view of the workers and identifying problems for workers that are caused by the ways in which the production process is organized. This method was developed by TIE-Brazil, in cooperation with members of different trade unions. It led to significant results in the strengthening of workers power and the position of trade unions at the workplace.



The method is build on the assumption that workers have the most updated and detailed information about the production system, because they are the most important part of it. It is based on the mobilization and ‘collectivization’ of the knowledge of the workers themselves about their company, workplace and the production system.

Together, workers collect as much information as they can about the production process, including: the number of employees, the amount of working hours, salary, suppliers of material and clients, breaks, holidays and absenteeism in each section of the company. They analyze the structure of the company, consider how the production process is organized, whose interests are taken care of, and

who profits and who does not. Ways of gathering information are participatory; for example, inquiries are made among colleagues to identify where the main problems for workers are found. After gathering the information it is systematized and analyzed by the workers.

The main goal is that they understand their own role in the production process and the position of their company in the global supply chain.

Production mapping entails a collective construction of knowledge because the information is gathered by the workers themselves at their workplace and among their own colleagues. The map of the production process permits workers to better understand the production planning of the management. Workers start to understand how and why companies make particular strategic decisions (e.g. to outsource certain parts of the production process) and how the production is connected to resources in the local context (for example, by analyzing the supply of materials and the transport of products).

Production mapping gives workers a good reason to make contact with flex-workers and local suppliers, who were previously defined by them as threats or enemies. Workers can re-establish strategies and organize for planned action and gain major control over the production process. Backed by the information they gathered about their workplace they can enter into negotiations that can change their realities in an effective way. Workers, who for many years have been told that their knowledge and insights are not important, start to realize that their knowledge is most definitely effective.

### ***An example of Logistical Mapping in transport companies***

One of the Brazilian participants explained logistical mapping with an example of the method used in the factory in which he works (Mercedes Benz) and in which he participated.

The Comparative Logistical Mapping that was realized by the workers in his company included the mapping of among others:

- Work Rhythm: number of workers, working hours, monthly schedule, women at work
- Hierarchy of the company: who and where is the manager, supervisor, master, leader
- Absence: legal removal, absence, breaks
- Working days: hours per week, flexible days, additional days
- Organization of work: group work, elected spokesman, semi-autonomous groups
- Qualifications: formal education, extra training
- Social benefits: transport, food, medical arrangements
- Salary: salary of different functions
- Unionism: how many persons are unionized

Some achievements after applying the comparative mapping were among others:

- A working week of 40 hours
- Complementation of salary up to 120 days of absence for medical reasons
- Stability to the time of retirement for workers with a loss of working capacity

- 1 day union training for workers per year
- Free time for internal representation
- Permanent space for negotiations
- Temporarily hired laborers have the same rights as those with a permanent contract
- The guarantee to contract disabled persons, above the amount established by law
- Guarantee of quotas for hiring women and persons above 40 years of age

The main achievements, as experienced by the workers were:

- There is more respect for the workers in the company
- The amount of workers with a contract increased in the last seven years thanks to the mapping and the number continues to grow.

### ***The organizational structure of the CUT***

The CUT's structure starts from the organization at the workplace. Its structure includes the basic trade union organizations (unions) and the unions by sector (confederations and federations).

The Brazilian participants presented the structure of the CUT and the position of the Metalworkers' Union of the cities of Taubaté and Região in this structure.

The structure of the CUT exists at three geographical levels, in our case, this is:

- National: CUT Brasil
- State: CUT Sao Paulo
- Regional: CUT Vale do Paraiba

The union structure of the metallurgical industry exists at four levels, in our case, this is:

- General: Workers Central Brazil (CUT)
- National: National Confederation of Metallurgic workers of the CUT (CNM)
- State: Federation of Metallurgic Unions of the CUT in Sao Paulo
- City: Metallurgic Unions of Taubaté and Região

In the Metallurgic Industry, there are 21 Union Committees at Company level. In total, these cover 20.696 workers. That is 68% of the unionized workers.

On May 12, 2009 the CUT handed to President Lula a proposal for a legislation that would broaden the space for negotiations between workers and companies. The proposal aims to modernize the dialogue, which is based on legislation of the 1930s.

An example of the modernization is the negotiation of the number of portions of the PLR ('Participação nos Lucros e Resultados', a system under which a part of the company's profits is redistributed among employees, as required under a federal law).

Another important point of the proposal is that to adhere to this new form of negotiation, the company must recognize the Union Committee at Company level, a union model that has been successfully applied in unions like the metalworkers union of Taubaté, Salto, Sorocaba and ABC.

## 2.3 The Netherlands

### *Participants*

Five young people from The Netherlands participated in the exchange program. One of them was a bank employee and active union member for FNV Bondgenoten (a union of the Dutch Labor Movement Federation). The remaining four worked for FNV Bondgenoten as an organizer for migrant workers in the agricultural sector; as a union official in the retail sector (supermarket branch); as a consultant on compliance in the transport sector; and as an educator about unions at schools.

### *Introduction*

The Netherlands is not an exception in the global trend: there is a declining organization rate among young workers. The reason should be found, except in the union itself, particularly in the position of young people in the labor market. Young people are vulnerable; they are generally two to four times more likely to be unemployed than adults and it is difficult to get a job. If they find work, they often start with temporary contracts, working below their level.

The reasons why it is so hard for young people to join the union are, among others: a lack of information and contact with the union, young people do not feel attracted to the 'white, male and industrial' image of the unions, young people often work on contract basis or fast changing jobs and they think that the union in that precarious position can do little for them. It is striking that these are the reasons that are referred to also by young unionists from Turkey, Belarus and Brazil.

In The Netherlands there are trade unionists with (more positive and less positive) experiences with increasing the participation of young people in the union that could be instructive for colleagues in other countries. The discussion that comes up here is that unions are not present in places where many young people work. To ensure attracting young people, trade unions should seek a greater presence and visibility in less-traditional companies. This applies both for The Netherlands and other countries. More attention to the importance of 'security' in employment could support youngsters to become active in the unions. For unions to be successful, it is important that young people who tend to lose jobs can see what a union could offer them. So union issues need not be limited to employment and income. Young people appear to have interest in things beyond the immediate work. International solidarity is an important theme here. Furthermore, bridges exist between youths and the union must respond to trends. These are issues that are increasingly addressed by young people within the Dutch unions.

There are experiences with the establishment of independent youth organizations within the union (such as FNV Jong). Questions that were addressed by Dutch youths include: should young people have their own unique structure or are they 'locked' into their own 'playground'? Can youth-oriented specialized campaigns be conducted without a separate youth organization? Or should

unions make these campaigns ‘owned’ by the whole union? In short, how do you handle the balance between ‘the interests of workers in general’ and ‘specific interests of young workers’?

### ***Some data on trade unions and youth***

In total, approximately 1.9 million people in The Netherlands are a member of a trade union. That is approximately 25% of all workers in The Netherlands between 15 and 64 years old. The biggest organized sectors are: Railways, Harbor and Metal Industry.

The Dutch Federation of Trade Unions (FNV) functions like an umbrella organization. FNV has a total of 1.4 million members. The Federation includes 17 unions, among others the FNV Catering industry; FNV Construction; FNV Women; FNV for self employed; FNV Public Sector or FNV Sport. The biggest union in the Federation is FNV Bondgenoten: it has more than 465.000 members; among whom 26.000 active members, and 700 employees.

FNV Bondgenoten includes both workers and retired people. It represents members in different sectors, such as:

- Agrarian and facilitating sector
- The service sector
- Retail trade sector
- Transport sector
- Industrial sector
- Metal and technology sector
- ICT sector

All employees in The Netherlands are covered by the collective agreements, regardless of whether they are a member of the union or not. Only in cases that an employee works for an unorganized employer and the collective agreement is not declared to be Generally Binding, does the collective agreement not apply.

In a company with at least 50 persons, workers can start a workers’ council. Any company with more than 50 employees should have a workers’ council. The workers’ council consists of workers who confer with the employer on the wishes and interests of the workers.

The most important role of FNV Bondgenoten is to negotiate for collective agreements. The second important role is to organize workers.

The biggest threat to FNV Bondgenoten is the fact that the average age is getting higher while there is a lack of commitment from the youth.

In FNV Bondgenoten, approximately 10% of its members is young (below 35 years old). The average age at which young people enter the labor market is 16 years old. The sector employing most young people is the supermarket branch.

The participants of the exchange don’t think they, as young people, are able to influence the collective agreement, because they are not organized enough yet.

### ***Tasks and services of FNV Bondgenoten***

FNV Bondgenoten represents collective and individual interests. An example of the former is to conclude a collective agreement and to be involved with drawing up a social plan. FNV Bondgenoten also represents individual interests; such as to offer information, advice and support to members about work and income.

#### Workers who become a member of FNV Bondgenoten have several benefits, such as:

- Answers to general questions about the union, membership and contribution
- Personal advice about work, wages and dismissal
- Legal advice and support on: Labor dispute, occupational disease, social security or injury

Members can influence their own working conditions by voting on the content of a collective agreement.

#### FNV negotiates with the employer about, among others:

- Wages, retirement payment
- Leave arrangements and holidays
- Educational possibilities

FNV has an influence on a social plan in case of reorganization and merging. In a social plan members can find the number of workers who will keep their job; the departure premiums; or guidance to another job.

Additionally, FNV gives free tax advice, career coaching and training, and advice for people who are temporarily unemployed. Members are given a membership card, which provides discounts in many shops. FNV has a medical insurance, for which members are given a discount. The FNV member magazine is mailed out six times a year.

### ***Young people in the retail sector***

One of the participants spoke about her work as a union official for FNV Bondgenoten in the retail sector. She conducts negotiations for collective agreements and she is responsible for organizing employees in supermarkets.

Due to increasing globalization and 'flexibilization' on the work floor, employers try to reduce costs. We see that employers try to cut on personnel costs. The supermarket sector is characterized by many young workers (around 65%) with temporary contracts (around 75%). Employers (try to) employ young people as cheaply and as flexibly as possible. We call this the increasing 'flexibility' in advantage of the manager. The employers don't offer fixed contracts and offer 'all-in salaries'. There are even examples in which older employees are bullied until they leave, just to replace them with younger workers. The young workers initially work temporarily, usually next to their studies, and rarely properly consider the consequences of their situation. These consequences are:

competition between young and old employees; undermining of job security; more and greater 'flexibility of labor'; older people work fewer hours; and, they are unable to sustain themselves.

My work consists of making youths conscious of their situation and the consequences. I think that it is necessary to:

- Raise the minimum wages for youth - Equal work, equal pay (agreements on higher minimum wages in collective agreements)
- Strive for decent work: a job that allows you to sustain yourself or that allows you to have another job on the side.
- Start earlier with talking to youths about trade union work (more education on unions)
- Focus communication more on the youth (creating youth networks; making more use of social media)
- Create more visibility in places where young people meet each other; both online and offline

Urgent questions related to this case are:

- What are your experiences with youth and trade unions?
- How can we involve more young people to the union?

### ***Marketing plan to involve the youth***

In March 2010 FNV Bondgenoten commissioned one of the Dutch participants to write a marketing plan on retaining young members. Young members often don't see the benefits or added value of a membership. The insights from prior studies are used as a guide in the marketing plan. The assumptions of the marketing plan were:

- The ignorance of the target group on the activities of FNV Bondgenoten
- Young people are less likely to join a union; they do not know what a union can do for them
- The current services of FNV Bondgenoten don't fit close enough to the wishes and needs of the target group, therefore, they don't see the benefits and added value of a membership
- Young people feel that a union is only relevant to older generations
- The individual interests of young people are less represented by the collective services of FNV Bondgenoten

It was concluded that to retain young members, FNV Bondgenoten should focus more on the individual interests of youth. It will have to provide additional services in line with the wishes and needs of the target. This can be achieved by adapting existing services to the target group. An example is the Tax Service of the FNV Bondgenoten. All members can use the Tax Service, but this is done less often by the young members. To make young people accustomed to using this service,

FNV Bondgenoten should approach them and offer to send them the necessary data by e-mail. This makes the service accessible and motivates the audience to make use of it.<sup>2</sup>

### **Organizing**

‘Organizing’ is a method developed in the United States. It implies a method in which trade unionists make people stronger and emancipated, in order to address problems at the workplace, together and as a group.

Previously the union functioned rather like a service provider; it tried to solve the individual and collective problems of members. As a consequence, members took up a dependent position towards the union officials and there was no strong group at the workplace. The bargaining position was weak and there was not much chance of success and continuity.

Now, during the global economic crisis, everyone tries to cut wherever possible. In all production chains, cuts in labor costs take place and problems are shifted from the company to the employees. Companies take orders from clients that they are not able to realize for the offered payment. They cut on salaries, while increasing work pressure and working hours. Problems that clients pose at the companies are shifted towards the employees. Then the union gets involved.

A good example of ‘organizing’ is the strike in The Netherlands in the cleaning industry. It was the longest strike in The Netherlands since 1933. In total, the strike lasted nine weeks, but 5 months of action had preceded it. Initially, employers didn’t take the employees seriously. By applying the organizing methodology, the cleaners developed into a strong group of people who wouldn’t be defeated easily. They demanded a pay increase, training opportunities and increased visibility and respect.

#### How to organize:

Before we start ‘organizing’ you have to define your specific goal for an action. We have limited manpower and have to work as effectively as possible.

We first map the sector: what are the leading companies in the sector? Then we choose to focus on a prominent company. Results in such a company can easily spread to other companies. Organizers at in the cleaning sector principally focused on Schiphol Airport and the National Railways because action there attracts national attention.

Once we select a company we map it: How many employees? When are the morning/evening/night shifts? Do employers work separately or together? What is the percentage of flex-workers? Are there many different nationalities with little interaction? Etc.

Then we contact the employees. We stand at the ‘gate’ in front of the company and try to get phone numbers. We call within a few days to make an appointment, preferably at home. At home is a safe environment, people are more relaxed and we can assess the overall situation of the employee: children, religion, poverty, etc. If they don’t want to meet at home, we make an appointment at, for example, a bar.

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<sup>2</sup> The results of the marketing plan were not presented at the Young Workers Gathering 2010

During our first appointment, we try to assess: What problems does this person have at his/her work? People often feel dissatisfaction but don't know exactly what causes this feeling. We try to get this out. Secondly, we try to assess: What effects do these problems have on his/her personal life? For example: people who work a lot spend less time with their family.

To build a group, you ask people which colleagues they trust and who they expect will want to join. Make appointments with these people alone or in a group. It is important to not cause problems for people involved. Only when you think the group is big enough, you proceed by convening the group and letting everyone see that they are now part of a bigger entity.

Initially, employees think they are too small to change their situation. They start to believe they can change their circumstances when they see they are in a group. Then, you ask for commitment and make them a member of the union. You explain that if they don't act they will remain in the same situation forever. Some of the people will join and with them, you proceed.

Within the group, you find the informal leaders: the ones other people listen to. You start preparing the action with them.

Start with a small collective action that is easily won (For example, during the cleaners' action it was the move pertaining to the canteens, which were dirty and old). Every victory convinces other employees to join. Step by step you build your network, keeping close contact with the leaders.

When the employer sees what is happening, he will expect a strike or an escalation. He will do anything to prevent that. Therefore it is important to prepare the group leaders for potential employer reactions.

During the cleaners' action, we started with a small move and it spread from company to company. Around 1500 strikers claimed a victory for 150.000 cleaners. Afterwards, the garbage collectors started a strike as a result. They needed to strike only one week before they got what they wanted: they insisted on a pay rise for 200.000 workers.

## **2.4 Turkey**

### ***Participants***

Turkish participants at the young workers gathering represented different unions in Turkey, most of them belonging to the DISK (Turkish Federation of Revolutionary Workers Unions).

### ***Introduction***

Trade unions in Turkey operate in an oppressive climate. The law of the dictatorial period is still in force and represents the major obstacle for people to organize. Under the influence of processes of privatization and outsourcing, there is a growing segregation and competition between formal employees (permanent contracts) and informal workers (often young temporary workers) in many Turkish companies. The trade union act, which was designed after the military coup of September 12<sup>th</sup> 1980, is still in force. The purpose of this law was to counter coalitions of resistance between different movements of civil society. The law also prohibits the formation of specific organizations and young women in trade unions.

The independent metal workers union Birlesik Metal-Ish is a union in Turkey that worked on organizing young workers and strengthening their position within the union in a most systematic manner. They established a 'young workers office' in May 2004 and adopted a Young Workers Convention on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2006. Also BMIS was closely involved in the organization of TAREM's first 'World Young Workers Gathering' in 2008. BMIS has experience with training young members and tried to involve this new generation of activists in the union structures. The main shortcoming of this work is that it focuses on trade unionists and does not involve unorganized young workers. New methods and tools are needed to enable unions to attract and retain young members. In the past (in the 1980s and 1990s) there were some initiatives led by unions to design and establish so-called 'worker houses' in the poorer districts of large cities. These sites were meant to serve as a platform that brings employees from different workplaces and companies together, by organizing training, sports and cultural activities. This strategy aimed to reach people who are isolated and often work under temporary contracts. Yet it did not continue.



There are few experiences in Turkey in attracting new young people to trade unions and the creation of partnerships with other youth organizations. Moreover, the political climate of the trade union movement in Turkey is fragmented and politicized, and there is little cooperation between unions. Exchange of 'good practices' among youths of various Turkish trade unions (based on a collective interest rather than individual initiatives) will be useful within this context. Specific contributions of international organizing experiences can contribute to the process.

### ***Some data on trade unions and youth<sup>3</sup>***

In Turkey, half the population is younger than 29. In 2008, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 was 27.5%. However, only the youngsters searching for a job were included in this data, so the real number is expected to be higher; possibly as high as 40%.

#### Youth is divided among economic sectors as follows:

- 48.3% works in service
- 26% in industries
- 20.2% in agriculture
- 5.5% in construction

Trade union membership comprises of 73% men and 27% women.

#### The rate of unionization among youth is as follows:

- 15-19 years: 5%
- 20-24 years: 21%
- 25-29 years: 31%

The main problems for youths in the labor market include: low wages, no insurance, no social security, and long working hours. 40% of the young workers work without insurance; 76% of young workers work without a contract. Among youths without an education, this number is even higher: 90% works without a contract and insurance. Only 37% of young workers is satisfied with their salary.

### ***Visions of working youth in Turkey***

Young workers define themselves through religion, age and sex; women mainly through sex and age. Definitions differ depending on age:

- 15-19: define themselves through age and football team
- 19-24: define themselves through age and religion
- 24-29: define themselves through ethnicity, political vision and financial position

Most important problems according to the working youth included in the research are: unemployment, inflation, expensive life, work security, terrorism, Kurdish problem, education system, lack of democracy.

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<sup>3</sup> The data in the following three sections are based on notes taken by one of the participants during the Young Workers Gathering 2009. These notes were taken during a presentation of TAREM on a research they executed on young workers and trade unions.

The organizations that are most trusted by the working youth are: Army (54%); Presidency (35%); Court (31%); Police (26%); Unions (9%).

With respect to the economic crisis, 70% is pessimistic about the future, only 6% is actually positive. 70% of the youth workers think that all people are equally affected by the economic crisis, while 23% think that young workers are affected more.

### ***Visions of young workers on unions***

66% of the young workers think that the main function of unions is to protect workers. However, one out of three workers says that unions are not that active in protecting and defending their rights.

#### The main reasons for not defending their rights are:

- Repression of employers (41% )
- Lack of trade union management
- Limits because of the law

#### The main reason for young workers not to become organized in trade unions are:

- I don't need to (41%)
- No opinion (34%)
- We don't have a union (8%)

#### The main obstacles for trade unions to organize youth are:

- Fear of dismissals (86%)
- Lack of knowledge on how the law protects unionized workers
- Attitude of employer

Related to the economic crisis, 53% thinks that nothing changed at the workplace, while 20% thinks that wages are paid late and 17% says that the crisis resulted in dismissals at the workplace.

The crisis negatively affected the trust young workers have in trade unions: 49% thinks that unions are not effective compared to 11% who thinks that unions are effective. Among all young workers, 7% became more confident in unions after the crisis, while 19% lost confidence in unions to some extent.

## 2.5 Russia<sup>4</sup>

### *Participants*

Four participants from Russia joined the exchange. All of them work in the metal sector and are members of the Interregional Federation of Independent Unions of Automobile Industry Workers (MPRA). They work for Nokian Tyres, Volkswagen in Kaluga and Ford in Saint Petersburg.

### *Historical context of trade unionism in Russia*

The system of the Russian trade unions was formed at the dawn of the Soviet Union. According to Lenin, in the socialist system there is no conflict of interest between workers and factory owners, which are state enterprises. Therefore, the independent trade union, which defended the interests



of workers, was not necessary. Lenin formulated the task of unions to stimulate production, to ensure the implementation of the plan, as well as to regulate the social aspects such as healthcare, retirement, vacation schedules, housing, cultural activities, etc. Trade unions were in fact a 'buffer' between the workers and the Communist Party.

Russian trade unions were part of the structure of companies and received special tasks, such as to monitor compliance with the safety of workers at the workplace. Trade union contributions were made directly to the company and used for the maintenance of trade union premises, the

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<sup>4</sup> The Youth exchange took place before and simultaneously with a training event for Russian, Turkish and Dutch metal workers in Gönen, Turkey. Therefore, we had the opportunity to invite some Russian participants to be present on Wednesday-Friday afternoon. Although Russia is not a project country, the contributions of the Russian youth are included in this publication as well.

organization of various cultural events, or trips. On the part of the union, no conflict or provocation against the administration was expected.

Changes in trade union structures took place with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Communist Party was dissolved and her property was confiscated, but the Soviet trade unions were disbanded and did not lose any property. As a result, the former Soviet federation of trade unions (FNPR) still exists and owns a lot of property.

Developments in expanding sectors of the Russian economy are often not accompanied by the improvement of working conditions on the work floor or an increase of the employees' salary. The trade unions that belong to the FNPR are organized in a hierarchical way. Every trade union action on the work floor must first be approved by the middle management and the top of the trade union. The old power structures and decision-making processes are still very strong. Because of this, these trade unions do not have the flexibility to react to rapid changes in production methods and working conditions. The FNPR trade unions aim mainly to provide services instead of to strengthen the organization of the employees. They organize cheap holidays and social security provisions for their members, but they do not address the existing (and unequal) power relations within the companies.

Recently, a considerable number of new independent trade unions were founded, of which, however, only a small few have been able to maintain their positions. They form a small but actual opposing power against the rich and powerful factory owners. The MPRA is the umbrella organization that brings together newly created unions in mainly multinational car companies. Many of the employees of these companies and members of these unions are young.

### ***Youth and trade unions***

Unfortunately, the information disseminated by the media, doesn't include any information on the trade union movement, workers' organizations, or the struggle for the rights of workers. This can be explained by a simple opposition of the exploiting class to the fact that workers have become organized, educated, that they are conscious of their rights and able to defend themselves and other workers. Any information on independent trade unions, either isn't published, or is published incorrectly, with changes deliberately made. Thus, knowledge of young people about trade unions, to put it mildly, is lacking and often incorrect.

In this situation, information about the unions comes to young people by word-of-mouth. Typically, sources of this information are senior colleagues, who worked in Soviet enterprises, or media picture unions, who are fighting for the rights of workers, as extremist organizations.

As young workers are under pressure at work, their rights are violated, they have low wages in enterprises and a low level of social protection. Young workers are forced to fight for their rights and defend their interests themselves. Due to misinformation spread by the media regarding the trade unions, young workers have a wrong idea of the work of trade unions, of their goals and objectives. That is the main cause for suspicion, and sometimes a negative attitude towards trade unions.

Youths are primarily active people, full of strength and energy. These qualities manifest themselves actively in trade union struggles. Young workers are often more prepared to take part in strikes, demonstrations and other actions undertaken by labor unions.

In addition to being active and energetic, there are a number of reasons which convince us of the need to actively involve young workers in union struggles: youths are better adapted to work with modern technological tools used for information exchange, training and documentation, etc. Younger workers are more flexible in learning and are able to look at a problem from different angles and are less susceptible to biases and prejudices.

### 3. Discussions between Countries

Several interesting and important issues were discussed among participants. Usually these groups consisted of participants from two countries only and they dealt with a specific topic in which both countries were particularly interested. In addition, an event was organized by Dutch and Turkish participants, and an interactive exercise was set up for all participants. Below is a brief summary of the main topics participants discussed during the exchange in Turkey.

#### *Brazil - Russia*

Two Brazilian and the Russian participants, all working in the metal sector, discussed their experiences with organizing at the company level, specifically in the automobile sector. Moreover, the participants elaborated on the importance of the participation of some Russian Ford workers at the 'International Committee of the Workers at Ford', which was established in Taubaté, São Paulo, Brazil (2006), and was attended by workers from Venezuela, Mexico, USA, Russia and Brazil.

This meeting demonstrated the different situations encountered in their countries and how the workers were organized. The Brazilian experiences made the Russian workers question the actions of their local union (in 2006 still part of FNPR), which did not advocate the interests of workers. Russian Ford workers decided to organize themselves and create their own union so they could actually represent the workers. Shortly after the union was created, several other employees of other companies decided to join this new union.



### ***Brazil - Turkey (1)***

The Brazilians explained to the Turkish participants how the organization of trade unions functions in Brazil, and in short, how the production mapping was realized at the workplace. The Turkish workers, of whom the majority was working in Danone, shared their problems at the workplace with the Brazilian activists. The Brazilians inquired about the need to form a worldwide Committee of Danone workers, since the company is located in several countries, including Brazil, and if possible, the Brazilians offered to make contact with the Brazilian Danone workers for a global mobilization.

### ***Brazil- Turkey (2)***

Brazilian and Turkish women at the same time discussed the issues of female workers' situation in both countries. The Brazilian participant is also a member of the women's collective of the Brazilian trade union in her city and defends female workers' rights.

The Turkish participants shared with her the data of a research on how society sees women's work.

Many respondents, among them also women, said that women shouldn't work outside the home because she has the responsibility for the household and the children. Also religion in Turkey influences the negative idea towards the public exposure of women.

Young women in Turkey are also the first to be dismissed during the financial crisis, and their wages are lower than those of men. Brazil witnesses similar developments. The feminist movement in Turkey is new and only recently started to disseminate information on international treaties on protection of women and to approach the Global Women's Demonstration. Despite the repression and the strong power of patriarchy Turkish women struggle every day for changes, for basic rights (like to choose their own spouse), to work outside the home, and to study.

The Brazilian participant published an article based on this discussion, which was published in Portuguese on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2010 on the TIE-Brazil and TIE-Netherlands websites (<http://www.tie-netherlands.nl/node/1936>)

### ***Brazil- Belarus***

Belarusian participants asked Brazilians to elaborate on the situation in their country.

They first discussed the general political and economic situation in Brazil in which unions have to operate. Brazilians explained that during the right wing government of Fernando Cardoso, people were acting as individuals and not as a collective. However, since 2002, with the government of Lula, the situation has changed. Social movements took the opportunity to participate in negotiations and to influence decision making. Lula is able to act as a mediator between the very poor and the rich people in Brazil.

The current political system opens more opportunities for trade unions as well. Trade unions have representatives in all the companies. They work directly at workplace level, resulting in better possibilities to negotiate and knowledge about what happens. Trade union activism in Brazil depends on the motivation of people to become a member. The establishment of positions within the companies helps to stimulate increasing membership. Now 85% of the working population is a

member of the CUT. People see the importance of being organized and collectively working towards goals.

Furthermore, they discussed the attitude of youth in Brazil vis-à-vis unions. Brazilians argued that young people had a rather neoliberal education, so they tend to think that they can achieve their goals through individualism. However, nowadays youth increasingly gets aware of the importance of unions. Trade unions are trying to touch every social aspect of the lives of youth in Brazil.

Finally, the Belarusians were curious to know how Brazilians managed to organize themselves during dictatorship. Brazilians responded that the military dictatorship in Brazil ended in 1985. Lula was an important person at the time and represented many people. If they would kill him, he would become a martyr. Apart from the trade unions that were related to the state, there were autonomous movements created by the workers, which were able to organize strikes independently from the state unions. These started to discuss a new union movement in Brazil.

### ***Turkey - Netherlands***

Dutch participants discussed with Turkish members of the union Tez-Koop Is sendikasi, among whom the representative of employees in supermarkets, about the differences between the Turkish and the Dutch system regarding unions and labor rights, with a special focus on the supermarket sector. In both countries, the supermarket sector includes mostly young workers.

Participants first discussed the differences in forming a union at the workplace. In Turkey, more than 50% of the workers need to be committed to becoming a union member in order to set up a union in the company. Then, membership is enclosed in the labor contract. Many companies are against this arrangement. Therefore, the required number of committed employees needs to be obtained first, before membership is applied for. Companies often increase the number of employees, just so that it becomes more difficult to obtain commitment from more than 50%. Employees are often fired because they are union members.

As union structures and laws differ a lot between the two countries, also the advantages for workers to become a member of the union are different. In The Netherlands every branch has a collective agreement, which applies to all employees in the sector. In Turkey, on the contrary, the collective agreement applies only to the employees who are member of a union. In Turkey, a workweek of 40 hours and no dismissal without valid reason applies to union members only, while in The Netherlands this applies to all workers. In Turkey, unions provide their members with financial support, such as rent or healthcare. In The Netherlands, this type of financial support is provided by state institutions. In both countries judicial support is provided to its members, but while in The Netherlands this is used in cases of conflicts with the employer, in Turkey members can also ask for support from the union for private issues, such as divorce. While Turkish union members enjoy more direct benefits as a result of their membership, in The Netherlands members enjoy the same labor rights as non-members. The Dutch union thinks employees should become members because of conviction. This explains why union membership of youths in both countries differs and as a result so too do the strategies to include more youth.

## ***Belarus - Turkey***

Belarusians and Turkish participants discussed differences in structures and arrangements regarding trade unions in both countries.

Belarusians elaborated on the functioning of the independent trade unions in Belarus. They showed the Charter and the collective agreement to their Turkish colleagues.

The Turkish participants elaborated on the way workers have to organize in order to form a union (as is mentioned above, see exchange Netherlands-Turkey). They added the information that in case a company has two unions, the collective agreement is signed with the union with the largest membership and the second union can submit proposals to be included in the collective agreement. The conditions in the agreement apply to the members of both unions.



## ***Solidarity action for dismissed UPS workers***

In April 2010, UPS workers in Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara signed up for union membership. Since then, UPS and its subcontractors dismissed several of these workers. In June, during the Young Workers Gathering, more than 70 members had been dismissed. Members of TÜMTİS arrived at the Young Workers Gathering in Seferihisar and asked for solidarity. At the camp, the participants collected support letters in all languages present, which were collected in a box. On June 24, two buses full of participants from all countries drove to the UPS office in Izmir to express their support to the fired workers. The box with support letters was ‘symbolically’ offered to UPS and asked to be delivered to the UPS head-office in the US.

Additionally, information was shared between Turkish and Dutch participants about the situation of the dismissed workers, in order to set up actions in The Netherlands, and give media attention to the subject. In The Netherlands, the participants together with other activists of FNV Bondgenoten have been giving continuity to the solidarity action through local actions and happenings.

### ***Interactive discussion among all participants***

Besides the small exchanges, some interactive exercises were realized in order to stimulate discussion between all countries, centered on a fixed set of issues. The most interesting opinions and visions were expressed during the 'statements game', in which participants were asked to take their position vis-à-vis well defined statements and to explain their position when they were asked to. Through the use of a ball, the exercise encouraged the participation of all participants. Some of the most interesting statements, arguments and opinions are highlighted here.

#### Statement 1: Young people are not interested in trade unions

The participants were almost equally divided on this statement. However, when it came to explaining their positions, most of them shared the same opinion: youths lack the right information on unions. A Russian participant argued that youths are definitely interested in unions, but that they often lack information in order to join. A Belarusian participant added that, in their case, as the independent trade union is not able to provide sufficient information among workers, and as newly employed workers are obliged to subscribe to the state unions, they become disillusioned about joining trade unions. Also the Dutch agreed that lack of information among youths is the main reason for them not to be interested.

#### Statement 2: New media is only good for information - but not as a tool to 'organize' young workers at the workplace

Also this statement was ground for an active discussion. The great majority of the participants were in favor of new media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as these are means through which people all over the world can be reached and inspired. This way, they can join actions or express support in a different way. Besides, as was the argument of a Brazilian participant, when the mainstream media are in the hands of rightwing parties, the new media can be used to broadcast important news items about unions. Only three people maintained their position against the use of new media as a way to organize young workers. Their main argument was that face-to-face contact is necessary in order to gain confidence and to encourage people to organize. Media is not able to make this personal connection. Generally, other people agreed that direct contact is more effective for organizing, but kept saying that new media opens important opportunities for union activism as well.

#### Statement 3: Only young people can organize other youth

The majority of the participants disagreed with the statement. The strongest position was from a Russian participant, who argued that trade unions need experienced people to organize youth, which are usually older people. Yet, many agreed that, with a few exceptions, it is better that young people themselves organize other youth. A Brazilian participant explained that, in the case of Brazil, a cultural gap exists between the leaders of different generations, due to the different political setting in which they grew up. Youths would therefore be better able than older workers to organize other youth. A last interesting comment came from Belarus. It was argued that the youth is usually defined as persons between 18 and 35 years old. That means that an enormous age

difference can exist between young leaders and young workers. According to her, 'young' leaders are often older than 35 years, and do not necessarily represent youths of 18 years old.

Statement 4: leaders need experience and training to be good leaders

This statement was proposed by one of the participants and developed from the discussion around Statement 3. Again, while some highlighted the importance of experience, which mostly elder leaders have, others think that youngsters are rather enthusiastic and open to new ideas. Youth furthermore should get the chance because they represent the future. However, a great part of the participants kept agreeing with the statement that leaders need training and experience in order to work effectively. A compromise was proposed by one of the Dutch participants who argued that young people are perfectly fit to be good leaders, but it is very useful to have a network, the right contacts and the right information in order to work effectively.



## 4. Conclusions

### Similar trends and challenges

The four countries that participated in the exchange operate within different national contexts regarding youth and trade unions, which were elaborated on by the participants. However, a number of similar trends and challenges could be identified. The most important of these are mentioned below.

In the first place, new forms of organizing outside the traditional business approach are important to involve young people. Young people organize themselves in alternative ways, next to their class basis (workers) they build a collective movement on the basis of their identity and age. For example, in Belarus, Brazil, Turkey and The Netherlands links are established by young trade unionists with members of political youth movements or students unions, who are not directly involved in strengthening the position of young people in companies, but support the ideals of the trade unions. They could support trade unions in organizing young workers at places where the union is not represented yet. Young people use new ways of organizing not only within the companies but with a broader scope through local associations (sports clubs, tea houses) and by cooperating with political youth groups who have a role in organizing workers. However, there is no consistent strategy of trade unions to build or institutionalize these initiatives.

Secondly, unions maintain the structure and strategies that were effective when economies were nationally organized and they had a clear position as a negotiation partner in the economic constitution. With the increasing globalization and spread of labor flexibility, new strategies are needed for organizing groups working outside the formal sector (youth among others). Changes that are needed to meet the new challenges, however, are slow and often encounter resistance from the older generation of leaders who have been in position for long time. They realize that changes of the union culture and putting new items on the agenda that are important for young workers are needed. Some of them see union reforms and modernization as a threat to the status quo and thus their position. Both within the labor market and unions there is discrimination based on age; youth are often in the margins of the organization that is run by a hierarchical structure and within which they have little influence.

Finally, the daily union struggle requires immediate reaction to closures, redundancies etc. Therefore, trade unionists often lack the time and the ability to distance themselves from the daily practice and set their minds on strategic thinking about specific challenges for young workers and trade unionists. Moreover, there is a lack of places for cooperation/exchanges between young people from different unions (often with different political colors). This is particularly the case in Turkey and Brazil, where civil society is politicized and people with different political views (but the same collective interests) do not sufficiently cooperate. In Belarus, exchange is important mainly because the unions have a strong presence at company level but contact between members of different sectors at national level hardly takes place.

## Practical arrangements

The exchange program in Turkey was set up in order to give space to young union activists to share information and ideas with each other and learn from each other.

With respect to the practical aspects it appeared from the evaluation that most of the participants were of the opinion that the small groups functioned as a more efficient setting for discussion and information sharing than the plenary sessions. In the small groups, participants from just two countries came together and discussed the specific themes they were interested in. The plenary sessions on the contrary were rather useful to get general information, but there was less time for detailed insights and profound questioning.

## Lessons learnt

Participants have been able to gather information in their field of interest, i.e. the aspects of unionism that mostly applies or appeals to them. Their knowledge in this field of interest has been broadened and they can now view their specific situation in the perspective of an international context.

Besides, all participants have been able to gather information on youth and trade unions. The most important information has been collected in this report. Here a few of the most interesting conclusions are summarized, which can be used for inspiration and for further activities in the respective countries.

### On the role of young people in the workers movement:

- Young women often face double vulnerability: in several countries they are more likely to be dismissed during the financial crisis, and their wages are lower than those of men.
- Young people can be leaders and organize other youth, but a network, the right contacts and the right information is useful in order to work effectively and to compete with elder leaders.

### On the relation between youth and trade unions:

- Young workers often lack (the right) information to become active in independent trade unions. They think that unions are not useful to them or even have negative ideas about unions. Information provision should be more effective and more directed at youth.
- New forms of media are useful to inform young people about union struggles and mobilize broad support, especially in countries where mainstream media is anti-union. However, it should not replace face-to-face contact at the workplace, since that is an important way to build trust and to convince youths to become active in a union.
- Strategies to include more youths in trade unions differ between countries as they depend on what trade unions offer their members. Unions should clearly emphasize the advantages to youths for becoming a member.

### On effective strategies to organize the youth and improve their position:

- Production mapping, a method developed in Brazil through which people build up power at the workplace and organize, is proven to be an effectively method to organize youth (such as in multinationals) and other groups that are difficult to organize.
- The method of 'organizing', developed in the US, is an effective strategy to organize flexible workers, who are often young workers or other vulnerable groups. It empowers the workers to address problems at the workplace together.
- For young people working in multinationals, the formation of International Workers Committee of companies working in several countries can be a way to strengthen their position.
- Trade union organization is most effective at the workplace. At the workplace the workers live their daily problems, and mobilizing themselves around these immediate interests can help to make concrete steps to improve their lives. Moreover, the fact that they are the ones achieving changes, not the union 'doing this for them', is empowering and can lead to an increase of the organizational level.

### **Follow-up steps**

#### Network:

After the Young Workers Gathering 2010, the website [www.youngunionactivists.wordpress.com](http://www.youngunionactivists.wordpress.com) was initiated. On this website, participants from the 6 countries can stay in touch, read the information they presented during the Gathering and share new information with each other on important developments, initiatives, happenings or protests. This website will give continuity to the established contacts and encourage international support among young union activists around the world.

Besides the website, several forums, Facebook pages and other networks have been set up with which participants keep each other informed about urgent actions and news regarding labor rights and unions.

#### Follow-up seminars:

In each participating country, two follow-up seminars will be organized in the fall of 2010. In these seminars, participants will share the most important lessons learned with a broader group of people in their respective countries. The seminars give continuity to the outcomes of the gathering.

## Appendix 1: Overview of Program and Activities

### *Monday 21 June:*

- The Belarusian, Dutch and Brazilian participants arrived at the place of gathering in Seferihisar

### *Tuesday 22 June:*

- The Belarusian, Dutch and Brazilian participants were introduced to the program, and presented themselves to each other.
- The participants joined on a touristic trip to Seferihisar.

### *Wednesday 23 June:*

- The Russian and some of the Turkish participants arrived.
- All participants got introduced to each other through an interactive exercise
- In a plenary session a guest speaker elaborated on the history of the Turkish working class
- Participants from Brazil and The Netherlands presented the context related to youth and trade unions in their respective countries at the plenary.
- Dutch participants discussed with Turkish participants from trade union Tümtis
- Belarusian participants discussed with Brazilian participants
- Dutch, Brazilian and Belarusian participants showed videos of labor conditions and trade union actions in their respective countries at the plenary.

### *Thursday 24 June:*

- Participants from Belarus and Turkey presented the context related to youth and trade unions in their respective countries at the plenary.
- All participants participated in the interactive game in which statements were discussed.
- Brazilian participants discussed with Russian participants
- All participants joined the solidarity action for the sacked workers at UPS organized by the Turkish trade union Tümtis.

### *Friday 25 June:*

- In the plenary session, participants from Netherlands, Russia, Belorussia, and Brazil presented relevant topic related to youth and trade unions.
- Russian participants left the gathering to join another exchange in Turkey
- Turkish female union activists from different unions discussed with the female Brazilian participant.
- Dutch participants discussed with Turkish participants from trade union Tez-Koop Is sendikasi
- Brazilian participants discussed with Turkish participants

*Saturday 26 June:*

- Belarusian participants left the gathering to go home
- In the plenary session Turkish, Dutch and Brazilian participants presented on the economic crisis and trade unions in their respective countries.
- Participants from Brazil and The Netherlands evaluated the gathering with TIE-Netherlands and TAREM.
- Participants from Brazil and The Netherlands discussed with TIE-Netherlands the most important follow-up steps.

*Sunday 27 June:*

- Brazilian, Dutch and Turkish participants leave the gathering and return home