

To all UNI Europa affiliates
To the UNI Europa Executive Committee members (titular and substitute members)

UNI Europa – Time for Growth

Dear Colleagues,

We have now collected the feedback from the Europa Grow Organisers Forum and I wanted to share with you our findings which underline the importance of our organising strategy.

The Breaking Through mission from Nagasaki via Toulouse to Cape Town made an important turning point in Brussels with the inaugural organising conference, the Europa GROW (**Get Recognition Organise Workers**) Forum, organised by UNI Europa and UNI SCORE (**S**trategic **C**ampaigns, **O**rganising, **R**esearch and **E**ducation). The ground breaking meeting brought together more than seventy organisers and strategists from UNI Europa's affiliated unions working in 18 countries representing the whole of the European continent from north to south and east to west. The organising meeting comes at a strategically important point with a predicted massive shift in jobs towards services. Nine out of ten new jobs are expected to be in the services sector in the next decade and this presents massive potential to grow our unions. This new workforce is demanding a new deal at work. UNI Europa and our affiliates have a massive responsibility to convince, conquer and grow.

The organisers came to deepen their understanding of key strategies for union growth and to learn from the best practices on the continent. After two days of presentations and workshops, participants expressed an urgency to maximise the benefits of collaboration in the future. The forum focused on the key areas of strategic research, systematic recruitment, organising as part of bargaining campaigns, and the change to organise processes. There was a special session on meeting the challenge of organising in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the third UNI Europa conference in Toulouse organising was identified as one of the key priorities. Oliver Röthig said "Organising is an important issue for *all* unions whether they have high or low density. Here we have heard different experiences. It is clear that you need to have a strategic approach and you need to have the full commitment at all levels of the union, from the union leadership to the shop steward or delegate. We have to take our work to the grass roots."

Christy Hoffman, Deputy General Secretary of UNI Global Union said "Despite our geographic differences, there is an emerging consensus on some key themes among the organisers and presenters here at Europa Grow. First, our unions need to change in order to organise more effectively. Second, we need to engage the workers more directly, and listen to their issues. And third, we can use our relationships with employers to negotiate

some of the organising rights that will make union growth easier. Whether from Sweden, or Italy or Ireland, all of the presentations pointed in this direction.” Christy Hoffman added, “When we look to central and eastern Europe we see our sectors dominated by western multinationals. We have to put more pressure on these companies through the UNI model of global agreements. We’ve won with Carrefour in Columbia and we can win with Carrefour in Romania and elsewhere.”

There was also agreement at the forum that organising involves not only bringing in new members but also building an activist base on the job in order to maintain and engage the membership.

The aim of the forum was to carefully examine practices in use by certain affiliates in order to see whether there are lessons which could be applied elsewhere.

Jack Clarke, Head of Organising Research at UNITE, UK underlined the necessity of having a carefully thought out strategy. “You have to employ a critical comprehensive approach to organising. It’s imperative that research is fully connected to an organising plan. Research should not exist in a vacuum.”

Karin Jungerhem from Handels, Sweden described a comprehensive program to lift the union’s density within Ikea stores from 50% to 70%. Its program included meetings and trainings with all new workers and personal phone calls with non-members.

Joe Cunningham from SIPTU, Ireland reported in detail on the steps his union had taken to restructure in order to be better positioned to win members and build strength across sectors.

Doctor Oliver Dilcher of ver.di, Germany explained the centrality of ensuring that workers “own” the bargaining process. He pointed out that union officials often do not listen to what the workers really want and impose their own ideas about bargaining demands. His sector uses a Facebook diary to keep 20,000 activists informed and involved on a campaign between industrial actions.

Mari Martens from FNV Bondgenoten, Netherlands detailed how they had built “a new union close to the people” and won members through issue and collective bargaining campaigns. He has 16 organisers on his team. His campaign illustrated how important it was to inject an element of fun into the strategy. Mari Martens also underlined that success should be celebrated, “With victories the workers gain strength”, and the media engaged effectively – picking New Years Day, a traditionally quiet news day – had done wonders for coverage of the Dutch Cleaners’ protest action. One key lesson from the cleaners’ campaign is the importance of putting workers as spokespersons in the media.

Neither did Europa Grow shy away from the hard facts. Europe is at the historical core of the union movement and unions worldwide want Europe to fight the decline in union density. If Europe declines in union density this has an impact everywhere. The unions face a new challenge as the Eurozone debt crisis has brought austerity policies which are all targeted to weaken the bargaining power of unions. Unions are fighting back and reaching out to working people.

Neil Anderson, the head of UNI Score said, “We need to bring the findings of the meeting to a practical use. UNI Europa together with UNI Score can act as a catalyst, not only in Western European countries but in Central and Eastern Europe where trade unions and industrial relations need to be strengthened. We must put our Organising Fund to work. Let’s build our campaigns, get active on the ground to show that we can grow in the toughest of economic circumstances. The price of failure is high. We will not give comfort

to our adversaries. We will work with commitment and creativity to rebuild in the East and grow in the West.”

The participants were ambitious to build on this first exchange and strongly recommended the forum become a permanent and integral part of the life of UNI Europa. Participants urged UNI Europa to make this a priority at the next Executive meeting to bring organising together and to build a web of contacts, best practices and campaigns.

The conclusions of the inaugural Europa Grow meeting were based on the frank and inspiring presentations of our affiliate organisers. The discussions were both provocative and informative and the message was clear: this work is central to contemporary European and global union work and requires direct engagement with workers. With a groundswell of worker support the unions will succeed in turning back the anti-union tide.

Below is the list of presentations which can all be accessed on our website at:

http://place.uniglobalunion.org/LotusQuickr/meeting/PageLibraryC1257959005C5025.nsf/h_Toc/50B7257D07334417C125799E003B91BB/?OpenDocument&Form=h_PageUI

Username: union

Password: action

PRESENTATIONS

Overview: Declining union density and bargaining coverage in Europe and changing the way we organise.

Oliver Roethig – Regional Secretary UNI Europa

The Global Perspective

Christy Hoffman – Deputy General Secretary UNI Global

Building power through strategic research, sector analysis and targeting

Jack Clarke - UNITE UK

Changing to Organise

Joe Cunningham - SIPTU Ireland

Nina Kulberg/Anna Jormin – Unionen

Building power through systematic recruitment and induction

Angelo diCristo – Fabi Italy

Karin Jungerhem – Handels

Growth through collective bargaining campaigns and issue campaigns

Mari Matens - FNV Bondgenoten

Oliver Dilcher - Ver.di

Developing strategies to support multi-sectoral campaigns and organising for growth in Central and Eastern Europe.

Olga Vinogradova – UNI SCORE Policy Officer

Vasilica Gogescu – FSCOMERT Romania

Marko Palada – HST Croatia

See the Europa Grow tweets at #UNIEuropaOrganisersForum

On behalf of UNI Europa and UNI SCORE, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this highly successful inaugural organising meeting. Our joint efforts will ensure that European trade unions organise to win and are in a position to represent the thousands of workers who will join our sector in the coming decade.

Best regards,

Oliver Röthig
Regional Secretary