

Final draft resolution: Employment and quality services

(Draft resolution 4)

Strategic Objective 3: Jobs with social security and justice for all

To raise employment standards in the services sector.

UNI Global Union's Strategy for action from Nagasaki to Cape Town sets 5 strategic objectives aimed at growing and strengthening affiliated unions and UNI Global Union to improve the lives of service workers.

- 1 Global and regional companies
- 2 Organising and capacity development
- 3 Jobs with Justice
- 4 Political and regional influence
- 5 UNI as innovative and inclusive organisation

These strategic priorities and their related goals form the basis for the work of UNI Europa Commerce inspired by the UNI Commerce strategic plan.

Social dumping

UNI Europa Commerce regrets that the cross-border movement of capital in commerce is based on social dumping. Certain retailers establishing in differing national retail markets are adapting their company form and business models to benefit from differing treatments of labour across the Union. This might mean that retailers with good labour relations in their domestic EU countries when expanding into Member States with less effective and well enforced labour rules appear to regularly adopt the questionable practices of the incumbents in those Member States in order to be competitive in the short-term in those markets.

This observation is applies both inside and outside the E.U.

Today, certain multinational commerce companies deplore "protectionist policies" or "economic nationalism". Foreign investment is a necessity and a good basis for growth so long as a series of principles and fundamental rights are respected in the host country. In commerce, regrettably, the E.U. enlargement to 12 new members states does not consistently lead to a win-win situation. Jobs have been created at the expenses of workers terms and conditions. Far too many of the jobs created in the retail sector are underpaid and within unacceptable working time frames.

The European Union has signed a series of free trade agreements with key partners like India. The commerce companies are now gearing up to invest in many countries where they previously had no access. These foreign investments can be a chance to enhance employment and declared work and to support the emergence of social security and

pensions systems. But this is unlikely to happen unless a real and constructive partnership is developed with trade unions in the country of destination and those in Europe. These unions should be democratic and independent. Situations like in Spain where commerce companies have set up their own “in house” union are unacceptable and must be denounced and tackled.

UNI Europa Commerce will work to ensure a minimum level-playing field of working conditions in Europe in the commerce sector. In order to reach this goal, global framework agreements will be negotiated with multinational companies and the implementation of European social dialogue with EuroCommerce will be improved.

Quality services, quality of employment

Sustainable commerce business and jobs are based on the quality of services delivered. Too often, retail jobs are considered as second class ones, but retail workers should be treated as professionals who deserve decent working conditions and vocational training/life long learning.

The commerce sector could better participate in economic growth. It could be considered to some extent as an access to the widest choice of quality products at competitive price. Commerce should also be regarded as a services industry that can improve growth by raising the quality of services provided to customers. The commerce workers ensure this role.

It is difficult to improve customer service quality when the workforce turnover is high. Employment stability is necessary to develop workers competences and skills. Too often, retail companies hire workers on a fix term basis and part-time, whether directly or via temporary work agency. In addition they ask for multitasking that goes against the necessary specialization for better services.

In relation to the financial and economic crisis many thousands of these precarious workers have lost their jobs “in silence”. The majority of these workers are young workers.

After having played in favour of major business concentration, several multinational companies have decided to divest the so-called “mature” European market. In fact, the lack of rules to govern competition in commerce and to foster a sustainable development of the sector has driven to a series of closure of companies or establishments. The SMEs in retail are particularly severely affected by the economic crisis. Europe has no industrial policy for commerce apart from the internal market “laissez-faire” approach that is flourishing thanks to social dumping.

New technologies, employment and education

The retail sector is undergoing a deep restructuring of its working patterns essentially because of new technologies that have a massive impact on workers. Without rejecting new technologies per se, UNI Europa Commerce argues that change must be anticipated so that the potential negative social consequences can be avoided as much as possible.

Investing in new technologies implies investing in workers. In addition to public educational frames and legal obligations, collective agreements have a key role to play in maintaining and raising the quality services necessary to attract customers.

Self-scanning, self-checkout and RFID applications are maturing and becoming more and more economically viable. Intelligent shopping caddies, automated price display screens

on shelves, more efficient point-of-sales stations, intelligent scales, and others are spreading rapidly in richer countries.

In certain countries, companies use new technologies as an excuse to fire older workers whose wages are higher.

When new technologies are developed in a company, employers must meet their responsibilities towards their employees and ensure that training and relocation of new tasks is guaranteed. When an internal relocation is not possible, the training should be providing enough qualifications in order to be “transferable” i.e. to prepare for another job in another sector.

In many cases redeployment of the workforce becomes a necessity and a barrier. In the frame of social dialogue, employers should consult workers and support them to adapt to new working environments. The financial investment in people is a key element of success in moving towards the new era of commerce. In case of workforce redeployment, employers have a specific responsibility in financing the training of workers so that changes are introduced to the benefit of all.

Commerce, and retail in particular, provides an important entry point into the labour force for women who represent the majority of workers in many countries. Unfortunately they occupy essentially part time positions. The introduction of labour-saving technologies has traditionally affected women in commerce more than their male colleagues, particularly as the consequent work reorganization usually impacts on less qualified work functions with a high proportion of female employees.

Social dialogue and collective agreements on vocational training have proved their capacity to provide solutions benefiting both companies and workers.

Better coordination of programs and funding between basic education level, professional and technical training and life long learning should be targeted by education bodies. In order to ensure workers mobility inside and outside the commerce sector, these learning programs should ensure that workers skills and diplomas can be recognized within general educational frameworks and by other sectors in Europe.

UNI Europa Commerce, together with EuroCommerce has gathered the experiences from various European countries regarding the existing sectoral observatories, skills councils and similar bodies.

These bodies aim to anticipate the evolutions of vocational qualifications in order to optimize the matching between skills and professional profiles. Such bodies are intended to put tools at the disposal of companies to implement adequate training policies and to raise awareness among companies and employees of the need for training.

It is necessary to bring together representatives of such bodies in order to share knowledge regarding the evolution of companies and workers needs, the evolution of skills and jobs, the assessment of practices, tools and methodologies of anticipation.

Workers in the commerce sector may not necessarily have had the benefit of higher education, but they have an indisputable “know-how” that should be recognised. Workforce diversity is an advantage for businesses looking to innovate. Too often the best skilled workers are the first -if not the only ones- to benefit from training programs. This

should be changed. UNI Europa Commerce will defend access to training and education as a right for all workers, and primarily those less qualified and regardless of background.

Ways need to be found to encourage smaller businesses to increase access to lifelong learning. Funding should be targeted to cover the costs of learning provision and wages and to enable small businesses to fund workplace cover for those employees absent on training programmes.

Building a more “skilled Europe” requires a partnership involving all levels: EU, national governments, business, unions, education and training providers and individuals.

Social cohesion

Commerce has a key role in geographically remote areas that suffer from a lack of economic activity. Sustainable forms of retail that are not necessarily oriented on profit making are reappearing. There are lots of positive experiences in Europe that show how innovative solutions can serve the interests of all.

In addition, especially in periods of crisis, business solutions such as “white products” or company own-brand products can help the low-income households to access certain consumer goods. The utilization of local producers is also a positive choice regarding local economic development and the fight against rural exodus.

UNI Europa Commerce believes that public authorities, together with community stakeholders, should support them. UNI Europa Commerce will itself devote more work to (real) commerce cooperatives in Europe as from 2011 and urge the Commission to also devote resources to foster this kind of entrepreneurship.

ACTIONS

UNI Europa Commerce and its Affiliates will :

- Put more efforts into ensuring access to education and vocational training to every commerce worker. Since a precondition to this objective is stable employment, UNI Europa Commerce will fight against the use of precarious labour contracts.
- Deepen its work with EuroCommerce and also with bodies in charge of education and vocational training at national and European level in order to promote the best solutions to improve access to education including by workers in SMEs.
- Initiate necessary steps to improve the quality of services in Commerce, including cooperation with consumer organisations
- Promote the development of non-profit commerce initiatives by working with (real) cooperatives and other types of organisations at local, national and European level
- Cooperate with trade unions outside Europe and from other sectors to ensure that foreign investment respect fundamental rights and decent working conditions
- Through their work in EWCs and global union alliances hold multinational retailers accountable as regards their global and local labour policies