



## Young People Need Trade Unions!

Our branch is constantly reviewing how we can engage our younger members. Working with our Youth Officer Verena Kroll we want to reach out with an invite to talk with us via a **Zoom meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025**. Details to follow!

Young people require trade unions to effectively address their distinct needs and concerns, which encompass improved compensation, job security and access to training opportunities. Additionally, they seek trade union involvement in broader social issues that impact their lives, such as climate change and gender equality, while fundamentally desiring equitable and decent pay akin to their peers in the workplace. Often employed in low-wage and unstable positions, young workers can benefit from union support in negotiating better salaries. Unions play a crucial role in helping young employees secure stable jobs, safeguarding them against unjust dismissals, and providing educational resources, training programs, and networking opportunities.

To engage young workers, unions must leverage digital strategies to offer career guidance and make labour market information accessible in a relatable manner. It is imperative to recognize that trade unions are currently facing a significant challenge; without substantial recruitment of young members, they risk diminishing as mass membership organizations within a few decades.

The pressing question remains, how can we enhance young people's involvement? Initiatives should begin at an early age, incorporating discussions about trade unions into school curricula and outreach in training institutions, colleges, and universities, even before students enter the workforce. Early education and promotion of trade union values will increase the likelihood of these principles being embraced as they transition into employment. Dedicated services and tailored support for various groups, including unemployed youth and those in precarious employment, are essential. Targeted campaigns aimed at young individuals should emphasize the importance of trade unions, inform them of their rights, highlight potential economic benefits, and provide avenues for activism.

To attract young members, unions must adopt a youth-friendly approach, engaging them in appealing events such as concerts and festivals that combine enjoyment with relevant discussions and trade union education in a relaxed atmosphere. Peer-to-peer communication is vital; young members should connect with their counterparts, as they share similar experiences and challenges. Empowering young members to campaign and reach out to their peers will cultivate activism within the

union, necessitating investment in their development. Every union member has the potential to become a trade union organizer!

Unions must also focus on reaching marginalized worker groups, recognizing that young people are not a monolithic entity but rather a diverse group with unique challenges. Identifying vulnerable and underrepresented categories of young workers is crucial for providing tailored support. Organizing efforts should include specific awareness campaigns and partnerships that align with their distinct circumstances.

Effective communication is paramount. Trade unions must ensure that existing and prospective young members receive information about union activities in a language that resonates with them. While various communication tools are available, many are not specifically designed for young audiences. Given their adeptness with digital platforms, unions must develop clear strategies to engage, recruit, organize, and promote young individuals.

Investing in the trade union's image is essential. A straightforward and clear message about the movement's values will prepare young people for membership. Campaigns targeting youth should be designed to resonate with them, utilizing communication tools such as social media, videos, podcasts, and newsletters. Providing concrete assistance, such as hotlines or chat services for job-related inquiries, will further enhance support for young workers.

To foster greater involvement, unions must remain open to young people's suggestions on a wide range of topics, not limited to youth-specific issues. Empowering young workers to participate in decision-making processes within the union is crucial. Ensuring that youth representatives have guaranteed influence in the highest decision-making bodies and establishing youth quotas for representation will facilitate their engagement. Listening to young voices regarding their challenges will inform the development of effective strategies and action plans.

Incorporating youth-related topics into the regular work of unions is vital. Opportunities for young members to contribute to policy discussions and effect change within their workplaces should be prioritized. This approach not only motivates young individuals to enhance their skills and knowledge but also fosters trust within the union structure. Broadening the scope of issues addressed by trade unions will help bridge the gap with young people. Identifying areas of interest, such as environmental concerns, migration, LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, precarious work, non-standard employment, and social justice, will create meaningful connections. Involving young members in social change dialogues, negotiations, and collective bargaining is essential. Investing in research on relevant legislation, both national and international, will provide tools to better protect young workers and enhance their visibility to authorities and the public.

Trade union membership is critical for young workers navigating a competitive labour market. Many young individuals have expressed the transformative impact of joining a union, emphasizing the importance of collective action to safeguard workers' rights and challenge exploitative practices. Recent legislative measures promise significant

advancements in workers' rights, particularly benefiting young people facing economic challenges. However, it is crucial to address mental health issues, training deficiencies, understaffing, and concerns about discrimination that young workers frequently encounter.

The new employment rights bill aims to eliminate discriminatory wage practices, tackle exploitative zero-hour contracts, and enhance key employment rights. Unions will gain new rights to organize, presenting an opportunity to recruit more young workers and confront poor employment practices. Young workers have demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, particularly during economic downturns. The rise in trade union membership among young individuals in Scotland is encouraging, highlighting the need for continued efforts to engage and empower this demographic.

As we move forward, it is essential to maintain a positive outlook and recognize the potential for young workers to unite and drive change. Their desire for stronger worker protections, fair wages, and improved working conditions underscores the vital role of trade unions in advocating for their rights. Addressing the barriers to collective representation faced by young people, including fears of discrimination and victimization, is critical. Strengthening workers' rights legislation will create a safer environment for young individuals to express their views and participate actively in the union movement.

Both young and older workers share a common goal for respect in the workplace. The fight for this fundamental right will continue, as young workers strive to reshape the labour landscape for themselves and future generations.

**Alan Irwin**, Branch Secretary

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GMB Northants Community Branch

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