

Summary of the interview with ILO DG

On youth unemployment

Despite the Call for Action from the 2012 Resolution on Youth Employment of the 101st session of the International Labour Conference, it is fair to point to the lack of progress in resolving the global youth employment crisis. Despite the highest political commitment from the 185 member countries of the ILO, the numbers are no better today than they were two years ago.

The political priority is absolutely clear and yet we have not been able to translate this political will into concrete results. While the measures identified in the Call for Action were the right ones – Macroeconomic and employment policies; labour market policies; Education and Skills training; Self-employment and entrepreneurship; Youth rights at work – results are lagging.

While economic growth is not strong enough to absorb new entrants to the labour market, more and more countries are undertaking targeted measure for young people. This includes youth guarantees in Europe; entrepreneurship especially in the emerging world; apprenticeships which are a critical way of addressing the skills mismatch; and rights at work because young workers are workers like everybody else.

On the ILO's reform process and the link to youth

First, the overall aim of the reform process is to give the ILO more visibility and influence in the world of work.

Then, for young people, it means we are developing greater knowledge on the types of schemes that actually work. People want to know "what works". The reform helps respond this question and helps the ILO better understand the schemes that work so that we can deliver technical support to our constituents.

Third, we simply established youth employment as a key priority. The ILO has to prioritize. So I want to gather together a critical mass of resources, of expertise and of political will to respond to this crisis of youth unemployment.

On the most difficult decision made

The most difficult decision was to stand as a candidate for the position of Director General. Next was to set an agenda; a commitment to reform, which became a roadmap for following actions. This road map then makes it easy to make decisions that may be controversial at times but that we know are right.

On the biggest challenge of the ILO today

Jobs and employment aside, inequality is the biggest challenge. The increasing inequality in our societies is most disturbing. This is a danger to social cohesion and it acts as a break on growth because people cannot spend thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. This cycle needs to be broken.

On the economic crisis

The financial sector meltdown, created by excess and poor regulation, is at the origin of the crisis. That problem has not been repaired yet. According to the chairman of the financial stability board, the job is half done.

Very quickly, that financial crisis became a global social and labour crisis. There is an unemployment gap of 76 Million today, which is the difference between the numbers today and the number of jobs that would have existed had the crisis not happened.

Despite growth picking up, the crisis is definitely not over. The worrying thing is, it shows signs of getting deeper.

On the ILO and young people

The ILO faces the same challenges as Governments, international organizations, political and public institutions. Young people are disillusioned as politicians are not bringing answers to the problems they have. Young people are not joining traditional political parties and nor are they joining trade unions. They are looking for something new, something credible.

The ILO faces the same challenges. To show our worth, we must communicate better with a language people understand. We have the mandate and the role that young people will react to: We are about social justice, fairness, equality of work, defending people's rights, the green economy, sustainable economy. This will make young people join in.

On the G20 leaders communiqué from Brisbane

It is a good communique. The very first line says "the highest priority is to promote growth for quality jobs for our people". As to the question "is it just a piece of paper with no results?":

Firstly, all countries in the communique have signed up to National growth and employment strategies which will be monitored by the G20. So they are being held accountable. That's new in the G20 and might give us some hope that the words will be converted into action.

Secondly, for two years since its creation in 2008 the G20 acted to stem the hemorrhage of the financial crisis; and it saved a lot of jobs at first. Then, the sovereign debt and the Euro crisis kicked in, and we went from stimulus to austerity almost overnight. Then, somehow the G20 lost the plot in respect of jobs. It has to recover that plot now and it can do, with the declaration from Brisbane and with the upcoming G20 Presidency of Turkey. We talked to the Prime Minister of Turkey. He was receptive and made it very clear: jobs and good jobs are right at the top of the Turkish agenda. So the prospects are good, but we need that action.