



MAGAZINE



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ECOLOGICAL CHANGE IN THE BUILDING SECTOR: WHY SUSTAINABILITY MUST BE SOCIAL

ISSUE 3/2021

Dear Colleagues and Readers,

This issue sees us taking our leave into the Christmas break. A break from the daily routine, from a crisis-ridden year, so that it can be Christmas. I'd like to share two thoughts with you at the end of the year:

In the Christian tradition, Advent is the time of preparing for a new era that will dawn. On the second Sunday in Advent, the Gospel of Luke speaks about John the Baptist. He is the voice crying in the wilderness for people to repent. He speaks of mountains and hills to be made low, valleys to be filled and winding roads to be made straight.

In this year's kick-off seminar, we made this opportune moment for going new ways our key concern. We talked about whether we in Europe manage to grasp the kairos. Can we create something new, and take the moment of the drastic crisis, ensuing from the pandemic and the pressing issue of climate protection, to create a truly sustainable and truly social societal and economic order with a humane, dignified face?

What mountains do we still have to (re)move to pave the way and enable the EU's ambitious recovery plan to succeed? What valleys, social divides and pitfalls do we have to fill up to overcome the pandemic jointly and in solidarity? I think that as trade unionists and workers' representatives we perhaps feel sometimes like John, the lone voice in the wilderness. Let's face it: if we are honest, do we not worry that, despite all the commitment to a socially just transition, we will probably not be able to proclaim "glad tidings" for every worker?

We can do what is humanly possible. In moments of powerlessness, of helplessness, of exhaustion it may help to leave it up to God in trust and comfort, to level mountains and valleys with new strength and courage. Perhaps we may even learn to walk straight on winding roads.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a confident and courageous 2022!

Sigrid Schraml
Secretary-General



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THE VOICE OF RURAL WOMEN

Visit to the new EZA member Afammer

Ciudad Real - Afammer (Confederation of Rural Family and Women's Federations and Associations) has been part of the EZA network since October 2021. The organisation has been championing women in rural regions since 1982, and supporting them with various activities. Carmen Quintanilla Barba is its founder and President. Afammer currently has 190,000 members in Spain and excellent international connections. We visited Carmen Quintanilla Barba at the Afammer head office in Ciudad Real.



INTERVIEW: Lukas Fleischmann
PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann

EZA: Welcome to the EZA network. Can you start off by explaining what Afammer is?

Carmen: Afammer was set up 39 years ago in Spain, at a very important time in the history of Spain, shortly after the adoption of the constitution that enabled us to have a life in democracy and respecting the rule of law. Although there were general women's movements, nobody had thought of women in rural areas. These women have managed to keep many villages in this country alive, and yet it was precisely there that gender inequality manifested itself. We wanted to give them a voice and to break through the invisibility of rural women.

Let's talk more about why it is so important to give women in rural areas a voice.

Carmen: The women in rural areas are the key to developing our villages. There is no future without them. But for the villages to have a future, we must achieve equality between men and women. In addition, we must provide the villages with public services and above all jobs. If women have work, they won't leave the villages. Two out of three people leaving a village in Spain are young, educated women. We want these women to stay in the villages.

What are the reasons for leaving?

Carmen: There are many. First of all, depopulation is not just a problem in Spain, it is one throughout the EU. And the reasons are similar. It could be said that this is due to the pay gap, the digital divide and the lack of jobs. There is also masculinisation emerging in the villages, which is another reason for women leaving the villages. It's a vicious circle.

EZA: What does this masculinisation mean for the villages?

Carmen: It's a question of survival. A village with only men isn't sustainable. Unfortunately, management functions in rural areas are still substantially in men's hands. This inequality is exacerbated every time a woman leaves a village. What's more, this situation can lead to violence against women. The fewer women there are in the villages, the more invisible the remaining women become and the less they make their voice heard.

"THE WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS ARE THE KEY TO DEVELOPING OUR VILLAGES. THERE IS NO FUTURE WITHOUT THEM."

EZA: How many rural women are there in Spain now?

Carmen: About six million women currently live in the villages of Spain.

EZA: How do organisations like Afammer help them?

Carmen: We've started training initiatives, for instance. We take tailored training courses into the villages geared to the women's needs: from courses on health services to sessions on setting up a rural tourism business or a furniture restoration firm. And they are all run by women. The campaign is very successful. Many women find work or join co-operatives. It's also about initiating a sociocultural change. We also offer digital courses in villages with fewer than a thousand inhabitants. For example, we created an online shop for products or services.

EZA: Training is a part of Afammer's work, but what about misogynistic crimes against or abuse of women? How does Afammer deal with these problems?

Carmen: This year, 37 women died as victims of abuse in Spain. It's a tragedy, a real social disgrace. Fourteen of these 37 women came from villages with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. They were rural women who lived in silence, because in rural areas family honour is often more important than the shame with which a family is buried by a rape. The statement of a perpetrator is often worth more than the testimonial of the abused. To fight this reality, we initiated the programme "Your pharmacy, your refuge", for instance. In many villages the pharmacy is the only health service. It is with this campaign, which we started in conjunction with the Pharmacy School in Madrid, that we intend to create safe spaces in villages. We've also produced a short film entitled "Una palabra" (A Word) in which we denounce the silence women in rural areas suffer from.

EZA: Afammer is one of EZA's new member centres. What motivated you to join the network?

Carmen: I think the EZA network is held in high regard. Afammer has always had a European and transatlantic vocation. We are not an organisation limited to Spain. The international exchange of ideas and approaches has always been of great importance to us. It's an honour to be part of EZA. And I feel that with our 190,000 members we can also make a valuable contribution to the network.

EZA: Many thanks for the interview!



**CARMEN QUINTANILLA BARBA (*1954)
FOUNDER OF AFAMMER**

Carmen Quintanilla Barba (*1954) is the founder of Afammer and was a national MP for the conservative party (Partido Popular) for the province of Ciudad Real from 2000 to 2019. She has a degree in labour relations and a diploma in social work; she is a teacher of commerce and, as a senior civil servant in the autonomous public service corps, she has mainly worked in the Spanish public employment service (INEM).



THE REALITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE

On the visit to the European YCW's international EZA seminar



**CAROLIN MOCH – EUROPEAN YCW'S
CO-ORDINATOR & SEMINAR ORGANISER**

TEXT: Lukas Fleischmann
PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann

Valladolid – Job loss, social isolation, lack of prospects: there are currently many problems for young workers in Europe. The effect the pandemic has had is like a magnifying glass for social and economic challenges. European YCW would like to point up new ways and prospects through international networking. In accordance with the strategy of “Observe”, “Judge” and “Act”, young people from Spain, Germany and Belgium exchanged ideas on their realities.

Carolyn Moch is the seminar organiser. She has been working since April 2021 as European YCW's co-ordinator and has been a go-between for national movements of Young Christian Workers. Moch says: “The actual plan was to discuss the realities of young people in the post-Covid era. We can see that does not correspond to the current situation in the many people not being able to attend because of the pandemic situation, although we managed to gather all national movements together. There are young, active people here from workers' organisations. We call these people pioneers or “Jocists” (based on the French name “Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne” or JOC).

The pioneers' voices



**SILVIA GONZÁLEZ – 23,
VALLADOLID, SPAIN**

“

I've always been with YCW, ever since I was a little girl. I would never have been who I am today without this organisation. Maybe I would have had different ideals. YCW helped me develop. I'm working as a forestry firefighter, and sometimes we have very precarious working conditions. But I know I can always ask my group for help. And then there are joint campaigns. All these things together mean that YCW has become very dear to my heart. A lot has changed for me during the pandemic. I don't know, though, if it was because of the pandemic that I was in a shaky state. But being in the lockdown and concerned solely with myself was really good for me, though. And now many things have changed. I do what is good for me and live with the people who are good for me. I really can't ask for more.

”

“

I work as co-ordinator of YCW Wallonia and Brussels. We want to network young people from the working-class environment and make their lives better. The feature of the lives of most people we work with is existential fear. That's financial fear for starters, but also fear of climate change or social unrest, for example. We want to help them cope with it and come up with solutions, or at least strategies. We have realised that it's not much good for us to speak with politicians, because their views simply differ so much. That's why it's our strategy to start campaigns according to the needs. That means: if it's a matter of, say, solidarity with the precarious situation, we organise initiatives. For instance, we open free-of-charge shops with clothing or other things. We also organise demos. At the same time, we take care of cultural events. That means, for instance, that we organise concerts. But we do that with people affected. We're not welfare. We are an organisation that lives off its members for its members. It is incredibly important for us that we can network on a European level, because I think we are all looking in the same direction – with staffing and structural differences, of course. It's precisely that, though, that helps us scrutinise our campaigns and initiatives even better and so improve them as well.



MARTIN GUERARD – 31, MONS, BELGIUM

”



JAVIER MARTÍNEZ – 36, BURGOS, SPAIN

“

Before I joined YCW, I was actually pretty much committed on my own. I became involved in what I liked doing at the time. But I never tied myself down to an organisation. A training programme brought me into contact with YCW. In fact, I wanted that for my CV, because I'm looking for work at the moment. Yet when I got to know YCW better, I found the people delightful. I decided to stay with the organisation and become active there. Admittedly I'm no longer a young man, but I'd still like to hang in there to help young people who have similar doubts and concerns to mine. It's always about precarious work and inequality, including during the pandemic. And I reckon that is even more so now.

”

The pioneers' realities

No matter if it's Belgium, Spain or Germany: all over Europe, young people face similar challenges in, as well as after, the pandemic. The attention of decision-makers must be drawn more to these realities, says European YCW's co-ordinator Caro Moch: "People who live in a confined space, such as in a shared flat or with their parents, are subject to huge mental pressure. At the same time, public spaces for young people are limited. Young people often work in precarious employment and lose their job or are in a kind of permanent stand-by. They feel left to their own devices in training and studies, and are also under great pressure from the loss of their earnings. Moreover, the pandemic shows that people with low income have much fewer opportunities to fund the right equipment for digital learning." She says that one could also observe across the nations that social needs of young people have been consistently taken less seriously than the wishes of trade associations

or big lobby organisations. "What we see, however, is not the result of the pandemic, but part of a system in which the human being is not the focus of action", says European YCW's co-ordinator Caro Moch.

The pioneers' demands

After the conference, the participants drafted demands to politicians and society. In future, in emergencies the realities of young people and other vulnerable groups had to be taken seriously. That included the housing situation and the significance of training facilities and public spaces for mental health. In this process, the state had to equally assist young people and women particularly affected by part-time work and precarious employment. It was essential that young people also had access to working conditions with social security. It was unacceptable that young people had to struggle through poorly paid, insecure jobs until they were old enough to have a permanent job.

This article resulted from the European YCW's EZA seminar entitled: "Social security, gender equality and Covid-19: challenges and opportunities for young people", held in Valladolid, Spain, from 18 to 21 November 2021.

EZA KICK-OFF SEMINAR 2021: FOCAL TOPICS OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Europe after the Coronavirus pandemic and before the economic boom?



TEXT: Lukas Fleischmann | Sigrid Schraml | Denis Strieder
PHOTOS: ÖZA | Adobe Stock

Vienna – About 110 participants debated the digital, green and social future of Europe in the EZA kick-off seminar. Workers' representatives from 24 countries took part in the conference on 25 and 26 November, held online because of the pandemic. They considered what lessons Europe drew from the pandemic, and whether the specific moment – the "kairos" – was to be seized for a really sustainable and social transformation of economy and society. The kick-off seminar was carried out in collaboration between the EZA Secretariat and the EZA member ÖZA (Austrian Centre for Workers' Education).

In his opening address, ÖZA President Norbert Schnedl referred to the erosion of solidarity in society. Boosted by the pandemic and social media, increasingly radical views were being spread, which would be a threat to developed democracies, that we all have to oppose vigorously. In his welcoming address, the Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Linhart issued an appeal to work jointly, on the basis of shared Christian-social values, on solutions for the challenges of the pandemic. He called for stronger cohesion in the crisis. Being vaccinated was a sign of solidarity.

“WHAT WE NEED IS A FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOBALISED WORLD BEYOND PURE GEOPOLITICS INTO A GEO-SOCIETY THAT RETHINKS ITS FUTURE AND DEVELOPS THE SOCIAL MARKET ECONOMY INTO THE ECO-SOCIAL MARKET ECONOMY.”

Field reports: the impact of the pandemic

Traditionally, members of the EZA network report during the kick-off seminar on experiences from their respective countries. Joseph Thouvenel from CFTC (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) described the situation in France. More than 300,000 jobs have been lost in the crisis. In addition, inflation has caused workers to face considerable challenges shared unequally by men and women. At the same time, a trend is being observed in France of urban exodus caused by remote work. Americo Monteiro Olivera (EBCA) described the situation in Portugal. State aid had reached only official employment. The problem in Portugal was that workers in the informal sector had no social security. Caroline Moch, co-ordinator of the European YCW (Young Christian Workers), sees the pandemic as a wake-up call for a change in the economic system. The current system did not allow a good life for everyone. The concerns of young people in particular were being severely neglected. The Coronavirus pandemic had to be followed by a pandemic of solidarity.

The longing for the “new normal after the pandemic”

Friday began with critical thoughts from Professor Paul Zulehner and two business representatives. The focus was on the question of the “new normal” after the pandemic and whether the pre-Covid situation could be referred to as “normal” in the first place. The theologian Zulehner presented an intercontinental study on the pandemic. He described the new social question exacerbated by the pandemic: in the 19th century the political answer to the social question was the workers’ movement. “Who today defends the losers in our economic system?”, Zulehner asked. In the

study presented, 35% of those questioned said: “The pandemic will lead to a lasting crisis of neoliberal capitalism.” 47% even find that desirable. In this scenario, Zulehner said: “What is required is political heft, when in difficult moments you are acting in accordance with important principles and thinking of the long-term common good.” Zulehner called for the term “essential” to be not only applied to systems, but also extended to people.

A digital and green EU – how will the transition work out socially just?

Tim Joris Kaiser from the Representation of the European Commission in Austria presented aims and mechanisms of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, with which the EU would like to promote the digital and green transition of the EU economy with € 750 billion as part of the Next Generation EU scheme. The recovery plan was generally welcomed in the discussion, although at the same time considerable doubts were raised as to whether the implementation by 2026 was realistic, given the shortage of labour and bottlenecks of materials. Professor Levermann from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research presented the latest research findings to reinforce that a transition to a sustainable economy was in the best interest of the economy and society. He warned that increasing extreme weather events like floods, heatwaves or hurricanes were reciprocally enhancing and globally caused much more economic damage than previously assumed. With a new economic model, the researchers from Potsdam studied shocks occurring along supply chains. Because of dependence and the interconnection of world trade, it was particularly national economies with high income that were strongly affected. Levermann concluded his presentation by saying: “What if the shockwaves occurring leave us no time to recover in the meantime from their economic impact?”.

Digital transformation and minimum wage

Helga Hons, an Austrian trade unionist, described challenges for labour law caused by the digital transformation. The fact that work can be done from many places means that the trend is moving away from collective labour law to individual contracts. This had advantages for people wanting to learn new things who could adapt well to the circumstances. It was fatal, though, for people overstrained by the change or whose work was easily replaceable by artificial intelligence. Jörg Tagger from the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment underlined the EU’s numerous initiatives that accompany the Recovery Fund to strengthen the social dimension and social dialogue. The Commission, he said, had actively and intensively tackled the problematic situation of workers. The actual implementation also depended directly on the social partners’ commitment. Dennis Radtke, MEP and co-ordinator of the EPP in the Employment Committee, passionately defended the initiative of the European minimum wage. The clear majority (37 in favour, seven against, seven abstentions) in the European Parliament was a success. At the beginning of the debate, nobody would have believed that so much could be achieved. In addition, the MEP from the Ruhr area demanded strict regulation of the gig economy. There was a desperate need to clarify the status of cycle couriers and

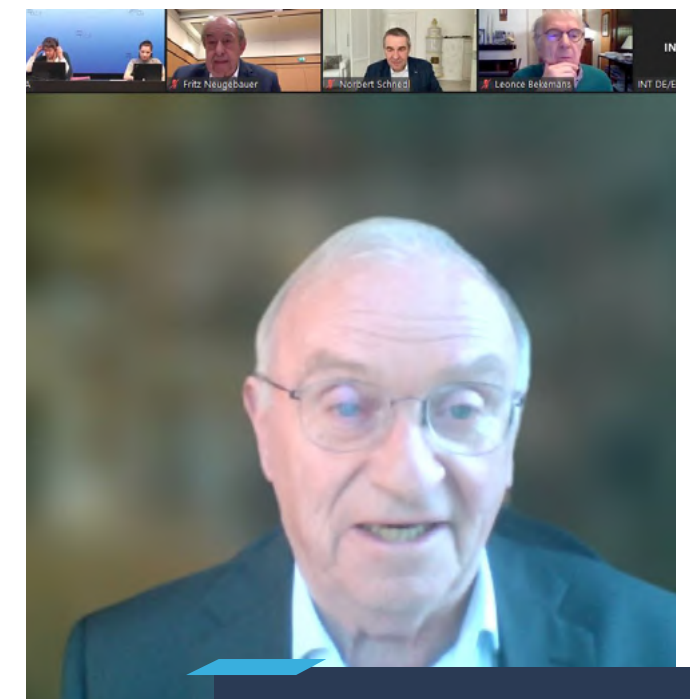
“Uber” drivers. It was absolutely essential for the reversal of the burden of proof to be achieved. It was unacceptable for gig economy workers to have to prove that they were not self-employed. Radtke welcomed the Recovery Plan and Green Deal, as well as making it clear at the same time: “We must ensure that the money from the social climate fund also goes to the right people!”.

Conclusion and EZA’s demands

“The EU must be stronger as a community. The member states alone cannot create any global solutions.” This introductory statement by EZA Co-President Piergiorgio Sciacqua was followed up by the President, Luc van den Brande, in his closing words. “What we need is a further development of the globalised world beyond pure geopolitics into a geo-society that rethinks its future and develops the social market economy into the eco-social market economy. The pandemic must be a wake-up call for us and encourage us to reflect on our society’s major responsibilities and to act. The values of EU democracy such as the rule of law and human dignity are of primary importance in this. As Christian-social workers’ organisations, it is up to us to be the source of inspiration for others and the voice of the losers and vulnerable groups of society!”



SIGRID SCHRAML & ANDREAS GJECAJ
CONTROL CENTER VIENNA



EZA PRESIDENT LUC VAN DEN BRANDE

"IT'S GOING TO TAKE A STRONG POLITICAL WILL TO MAKE THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR SUSTAINABLE!"

The world needs sustainable buildings as part of tackling the climate crisis. Laetitia Baldan points out why environmental and social transition must go hand in hand.



INTERVIEW: Lukas Fleischmann

PHOTOS: Lukas Fleischmann | Adobe Stock

EZA: Reconciling ecological change in the construction sector and improving workers' rights at the same time seems to be rather a challenge. How do you think all these things go together?

Laetitia: Well, it is a challenging task due to the many viewpoints we have to consider. Firstly, there's a labour shortage in the construction sector. The low wages and enormous workload simply don't make it very attractive for workers, especially for younger workers or women. But at the same time, we see that we need this sector more than ever. We can put that into statistics: 11 to 14 percent of all the money from the EU's recovery plan is earmarked directly for construction and especially for refurbishing buildings. In order to achieve that, the workforce needs to grow and workers must acquire new skillsets and digital abilities.

EZA: Can you be more specific here?

Laetitia: 75 percent of the buildings in the EU are considered energetically inefficient. That is a huge number. Digital tools are needed to refurbish the buildings and consequently make them more sustainable. We're talking about facility management, for example. So, workers need new digital skills. And the sector needs a young workforce with a high digital affinity. But it's hard to get young talent into this sector when wages are low and working conditions precarious.

EZA: Can you give me an example?

Laetitia: The heat pump industry is a good example. The European Climate Foundation pointed out that workers are currently not up to date with regard to recent technological developments. There aren't enough qualified workers. As a result, installations of heat pumps remain on a marginal level compared to systems using fossil fuels. That means that we have the technology, but not the people to install it. The lack of skills and the labour shortage are putting the brakes on ecological transition.

EZA: What suggestions would you make to change that?

Laetitia: Firstly, increase the wages. Then construction sector workers need to be given more free time, in other words, days of rest, proper and sustainable workdays, and a decent end to their working lives. We also need strong social dialogue – not just on a company and national level but at the European level as well. Problems in the construction sector

“I WANT TO BE OPTIMISTIC, BUT I THINK IT’LL TAKE A LONG TIME. THE WORLD REVOLVES AROUND MONEY AND THERE’S A LOT OF IT, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR.”

are not a Belgian phenomenon. But all these aspects will only be possible if there is strong political will to address this problem.

EZA: You organised an EZA-seminar which was all about ecological change in the construction sector. Why is a European view on this subject necessary

Laetitia: The legislative framework initiated by the European Commission is very important. But at the end of the day, national legislative measures have greater scope. When we share our national ideas, concepts and experiences, this can be mutually inspiring. We've had best-practice examples from all over Europe.

EZA: Apart from the European or national perspective, it is also important to consider the viewpoints of those who'll be actually doing sustainable construction in future: the workers. How do you reach out to them?

Laetitia: That is of course one of the most important things we do as trade unions. We represent the interests of these people. However, it is not always an easy task. Workers on construction sites come from different countries, speak different languages and work in different locations. It's challenging to get in contact with them. Their precarious working conditions mean that ecological sustainability isn't usually at the top of their list.

EZA: Is there a correlation between better and more sustainable working conditions and ecological transition?

Laetitia: There is a need for such a correlation. We as workers' organisations highlight that we want a green transition, but it should be a just transition at the same time. And I believe that in the long run, the one will not work without the other. When we improve workers' rights and conditions on construction sites, we will improve the sustainability of the construction sector.

EZA: Where have you seen this to be already working?

Laetitia: One good example is the Oosterweel Link in Antwerp which is a major European infrastructure project. There have been some significant improvements concerning the working conditions with regard to health and safety as well as the workload. Groups consisting of employers' and workers' representatives meet regularly to discuss the project's progress. The discussions also look at the use of sustainable materials. And even residents join in to make a contribution from their own perspective.

EZA: How confident are you that the construction sector can become climate-neutral?

Laetitia: I want to be optimistic, but I think it'll take a long time. The world revolves around money and there's a lot of it, especially in the construction sector. But it isn't distributed fairly. Increasing wages to improve working conditions and attract new talent would be a step in the right direction.

LAETITIA BALDAN DELGADO WORKS FOR THE BELGIAN TRADE-UNION ACV-CSC BIE



Laetitia Baldan Delgado works for the Belgian Trade-Union ACV-CSC BIE (Building, Industry & Energy). She represents the international department for woodworkers and building workers. In October 2021, ACV-CSC BIE organised a seminar in Brussels on ecological transition in the construction sector.



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