



N° 2 | JULY 2022

# IYC.W BULLETIN

Young workers' information medium



## EDITORIAL

### The Gender Challenge

The IYC.W is a movement committed to young workers, which wants to respond to their needs and class aspirations and tries to represent all their diversity. Since 2016 in the framework of its campaign for Just Work with adequate Social Protection for all, the movement developed, among others, specific campaigns in the sector of precarious work (production chains, work in the maquilas/FTZ...), in the informal sector and the Social Solidarity and Economy.

Likewise, the IYC.W has intensified the debates and actions on the gender dimension, because regardless of the situation in the different sectors of society, exploitation is still more pronounced towards women as a whole, and especially towards young women workers, whom we are reaching.

In the processes of action and organization we have carried out, we have become aware of the imbalances and inequalities that exist in society with regard to the rights of men and women, although the laws contemplate them, it is almost always "wet paper".

At this point in the history of mankind, technical development and global progress in all aspects, has not been able to pass on the benefits of human development equally between men and women. Why is that?

In this issue we want to address the transversal nature of the gender dimension through an analysis of what is happening at the international level, recognizing the progress made and paying special attention to the activities and actions that the YCW movements are developing in the countries. We also collected testimonies on adult support for actions and programs in this sector.

In June 2022, the IYC.W organized a webinar on the topic and this publication also makes the link to that activity. By focusing on this dimension, we want to make what is happening visible and bring elements to the debate in the society.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Society's debt to women**
- **Young workers: actions to address structural inequalities**
- **What are we doing to promote gender justice in the different countries?**
- **Taking action every day to transform society**
- **2022: local and international activities for young women workers**
- **Social and solidarity economy: old and new generations in action**

The IYC.W Bulletin is a biannual publication published by the International Young Christian Workers (IYC.W) with the support of the International Cardijn Association (ICA). Its focus is the action and activities of young Christian workers around the globe.

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# Society's debt to women: a specific look at the reality of young women workers



Photo: @ILO Convention 189

There is a myriad of texts in the form of releases and statements referring to important dates for working women. This article summarizes the main contents of what the International YCW has published on this issue, both in terms of the major problems and the analytical vision and courses of action that the movement has adopted in recent years. Although the reality we are talking about has not changed much, as seen in other areas, the pandemic has accelerated and exacerbated the problems, especially in contexts of greater poverty. We are referring here to the greater exploitation of labor, the scarcity of resources, the overloading of domestic tasks and violence at home, among others. We will refer to pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic (if this stage can be considered complete) contexts.

## When work does not mean independence

*Nadia, from Guatemala, told us:*

*"I was born in an indigenous community in Guatemala and my parents had to migrate to the capital. I had to start working at the age of 14 to be able to go to school. I worked for two years in a textile maquila, in the laundry section where I had a production goal of 2,500 pairs of trousers that had to be checked for defects. When I started, the company had 3,200 workers; it now has only 1,800, because it has made massive layoffs."*

Millions of young women work in factories in many sectors, in stores and large shopping malls, as domestic workers, in care activities of all kinds, in the education and health sectors, in all types of social services, in rural areas and in many other areas. Like men, women suffer from exploitation at work, but they also suffer from discrimination in terms of rights, which take the form of lower wages, temporary contracts and barriers to gain access to employment due to the fact that they are women. In many cases, women receive less for the same work. The implicit or explicit message is that they are less qualified, which is false.

The ability to perform a task in the world of work does not depend on whether one is a man or a woman, but on the educational opportunities available to each person.

*Fatima, from Pakistan, explained:*

*"I applied for many jobs in different factories, but to no avail. I finally decided to work as a domestic worker for a housing company. It is easier to find a job as a domestic worker than a job in a factory. But domestic work does not pay well."*

The burden of household chores, the responsibility of raising children, the double day of work and housework, determine the situation of working class women: a situation of suffering and permanent dependence. Employment is a factor of independence when it allows one to meet one's needs; but when work occupies most of one's time and what remains must be devoted to other unpaid occupations, we can ask ourselves what kind of independence we are talking about.

## Domestic work and care: an international reality

The YCW has always paid special attention to domestic work, carried out almost exclusively by women. This historical reality has been the object of very important actions and struggles, carried out both by YCW activists and by other organized groups, in order to face situations that can often be considered as slavery.

Historically, the hallmark of domestic workers was that they lived in the same house as the families or individuals they worked for, in a separate and isolated space, conditioned to be available at all hours, often without pay (they worked in exchange for room and board).

Girls and young women were taken from their families at the age of 8-10. Although there is some variation between countries, many of these characteristics persist today.



During the pandemic, caregiving became very important as society was unable to care for its sick and dying, often away from their families and with no possibility of a farewell.

Yet, for a long time, it has been women who, from an early age, have been taking on the responsibility of care within their own families and as employees in other people's homes. The care chain shows us the existence of migratory movements of women between countries and continents. While suffering discrimination because they are migrants, black or illiterate, they find themselves without contracts, without regulations protecting them, with low wages, subject to a thousand forms of exploitation that try to keep them bound hand and foot so that they do not organize, protest, or claim their rights.

The process of recognition of domestic work is very slow. Even today, many countries have not yet ratified ILO Convention 189 and domestic workers do not have the necessary tools to improve their lives by enjoying the same rights as other workers.

### Male violence

Violence against women is also a historical problem, based on the idea that women are inferior to men and owe them obedience in all respects. Young women workers are subjected to violence in the family, in the workplace, in recreational spaces, in emotional relationships and in public spaces in general. Technological advances allow, among other things, access to cell phones, which in many cases favors the control and harassment of young women by men, mainly by their partners.

### A young woman from Gabon told us:

*"My boss wanted me to be alone with him all the time so he could forcefully kiss me. He was very aggressive. It became very difficult to say no to him. I didn't say anything because I had no choice, I needed the job. He eventually fired me because I resisted him. That day I went home crying because I realized I was unemployed again."*



@Photo: freepik.com

## During the pandemic, domestic violence increased in alarming proportions.

### The struggles and contribution of the feminist movements

The persistence of feminist movements, in their multiple forms of expression, has made it possible to propose a vision of society different from that of the patriarchal system that has historically dominated us. Even today, there are political formations in different countries that oppose this feminist vision and aim at a return to the past in order to erase the progress made in terms of equality.

In recent years, all over the world, we have witnessed a multiplication and diversification of the forms of demonstration and, very importantly, a massive incorporation of young women and men in solidarity with and committed to the struggle of women to achieve true freedom in the different areas of life, equal rights and recognition as persons.

### The International YCW and its transformative role with young workers

The class option is compatible with gender equality. The processes of social, political and personal transformation that the YCW regularly develops have always involved an awareness of gender inequalities. This has led to changes in the reality of access to work, professional training, sharing of domestic tasks, positive emotional relationships and interpersonal respect. All processes involve young women workers having a positive self-image and becoming empowered in all aspects of their lives.

However, in addition to developing the implicit dimensions of educational processes in activism, specific attention is currently being given to equality claims. A commission has been set up to monitor the processes carried out in different countries and continents, and it has been able to develop a first map of actions, including:

- Demand equal labor rights for and with domestic workers, within YCW groups, through networking with other organizations and putting forward demands and proposals to international institutions.
- Campaigns against sexual harassment
- Dissemination of materials and training
- Promotion and participation in demonstrations to denounce and assert certain rights.

Long live the women's struggle!

We are including the following article, written by someone outside the Bulletin's editorial team, because we believe it may provide useful food for thought for the movement. The content and language may somewhat differ from the usual material published in the bulletin. We have asked ourselves if it will be understood well and how it can best be used by young activists or young people in initiation. We would like to suggest group readings to comment on the content. And we will welcome any criticism, which is always constructive, even if it points out gaps and shortcomings.

## When young workers' actions become transformative actions against structural inequalities



Photo: Future of work seminar in Indonesia, 2018

**By Gertraud Langwiesner**

Young workers face structural inequalities in their lives: precariousness, poverty, lack of access to employment, to quality training, to school, difficult access to health care, to basic rights (housing, water...), violence against girls and women and gender violence. The analyses of these realities are strongly present in the IYCW and affirm that we live in a deeply patriarchal, racist and capitalist society. All over the world, we can observe these realities in a transversal way.

To be able to face these structural inequalities, feminisms are powerful tools to transform the patriarchal, racist and capitalist society. The development of action plans with a feminist approach is essential for change in our society.

What does a feminist approach to actions/action plans mean?

A feminist approach to action leads us to analyze our own power, our own privileges and our own understanding of the world.

When taking a feminist approach, it is essential to focus on the rights of women and girls – taking into account the additional marginalization due to origin, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation ... – and to support women's rights.

A feminist approach considers gender as a broad spectrum, which goes beyond the binary categories of men and women.

A feminist approach also implies working to change the systems and structures that contribute to the marginalization and oppression of a certain category of the population, and by doing so, put an end to poverty and gender-based violence. This approach calls for a radical change in the power relations between sexes. This means working on the results - i.e. on the progress of women's and girls' rights and gender justice, but also on how to achieve this change.

It is therefore necessary to integrate in the process of change the way of implementing actions by applying our values, building actions with the people concerned, taking collective and participative decisions, ...

For the IYCW, it is important to reflect on how to meet the challenge of transforming structural inequalities. It is recommended to work on two levels at the same time:

- Build the capacity of young women to be leaders and to carry out transformative actions with other women, or those who define themselves as women;
- Analyze and carry out actions in a reflexive way on the practice, referring to reading grids that tackle the roots of gender and race inequalities. It is essential to build actions that target the roots, the sources of inequalities faced by young workers and young women.

- Gender mainstreaming action plans/actions should be worked on in a systemic way and oriented in such a way that they are linked to the core values of the YCW movement.

The following is a grid for understanding the gender “transformative” analysis: from gender unawareness to gender awareness, gender sensitivity and finally gender transformation.

### Gender awareness:

In actions/action plans, gender is often mainstreamed in a way that leads to recognize that young workers (girls, boys, including gender minorities) are affected differently or may have different roles, needs, vulnerabilities or capacities. It is recognized that gender power imbalances exist, but there is no proactive systemic adaptation to change or improve these situations of inequality.

### Gender sensitivity:

The actions/action plans implemented reflect the gender inequalities and also the impact or vulnerabilities they cause in the lives of people (including gender minorities) due to this gender power imbalance. Thus actions are tailored to best meet the needs of those groups of marginalized young women or women.

### Gender transformation:

The actions/action plans go beyond the recognition of gender inequalities, of the vulnerability of the public and the need to respond to specific audiences. Actions/action plans take into account and address the needs of all audiences (including gender minorities). Harmful gender roles, norms and relationships are addressed to reduce gender inequalities.

For instance, one might ask the following questions:

*“How can capacity building enable women, gender non-conforming people and marginalized groups to gain more power or have access to and control resources, opportunities and decision-making spaces?”*

*“How can women organize collectively to bring about change at different levels?”*

“How would we approach capacity building if it were designed with marginalized gender groups in mind and if it were designed together with the groups?”

This gender transformative approach requires a better understanding and recognition of gender norms and power structures at different levels:

#### At the individual level:

- “Awareness and capacities” such as knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, political awareness and commitments of people to change for equality - informal level “What needs to change in terms of awareness and capacities?”
- “Resources”, such as personal access to material resources (e.g. possession of an ID card, right to vote, right to land, access to work and basic services, ...), joint organization for change to occur - formal level. “What makes it legitimate and possible for women, men, and gender non-conforming people to experience access to resources, power, and control differently?”

#### Regarding the system of society:

- “Exclusionary norms and practices” such as the exclusionary ideas, beliefs, social norms, behaviors, and practices in society at large, and the informal relationships and groups that create and sustain them - informal level. “What needs to change in terms of cultural norms?”
- “Rules and policies” at the institutional level, such as the laws, policies, and practices of governments, businesses, and other institutions in society. “What needs to change in terms of policies, laws, or government actions?”

Some feminist movements use a similar grid of analysis, better known under the concept of “empowerment”. This concept analyzes action plans/actions in terms of “power to act” at different levels, as in the “gender transformative” approach.

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Very concretely, if actions/action plans work in several areas of change at the same time, change will occur more quickly and will be more sustainable, for example with regard to self-image and self-awareness, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors in intimate relationships, and control over one's body – these dimensions are closely linked to collective norms, values, and practices in society. But also with regard to the cultural norms of society, which prevent the full implementation of gender transformative laws at the societal systemic level.

It is also very important to highlight the interrelationship between gender equality, organizational change and institutions (where the “rules of the game” are set by power dynamics within communities). At the same time, the interconnection of sex and gender with other sources of exclusion, violence and oppression – such as ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality, geography, disability and tribal affiliation – needs to be analyzed in relation to the realities of local contexts. It is necessary to analyze the context of the society at the “different levels of power”.

Actions/plans of action that are implemented to address structural inequalities in society should, as much as possible, also be carried out in collaboration with other organizations, and ideally in a network guided by feminist principles and approaches. The importance of collective action by women and young women should be recognized, and work should be done together with communities and women's rights organizations, in particular those that advocate for ethnic minorities or disenfranchised audiences.



@Photo: FTZ in Nicaragua

It is very important to establish and maintain relationships of mutual respect in collaborations in order to carry out projects/actions together.

### Some challenges for the IYCW

It is essential that the actions carried out with a gender approach be analyzed with the young people involved (young people from working class backgrounds, excluded women, migrants, young people with gender identities, ...). That analysis should bring out the changes made at different levels, on an individual and collective level, but also the changes in society, mentalities, laws...

It is necessary to be bold enough to question the relations of power and domination in a society, such as sexism, racism, capitalism... It is often a very strong confrontation of values and a questioning of the blueprint for society, but it allows advancing on the transformation of the society towards more equality.

From these analyses, it is advisable to draw learnings so as to be able to act ... and especially to train leaders, to give a place to female leaders mobilizing other young women or those who define themselves as women to carry out actions in a collective way.

Make visible the hidden and less visible realities and give a voice to the invisible ones (the excluded, the audience with no access to rights, migrants, including gender minorities ...) as stakeholders in the actions/projects.

It is important to be very attentive to some countries and/or some communities because the people, the leaders of the actions/projects are putting themselves in danger; their lives themselves are in danger. How to guarantee the safety of all the young people involved in the action plans/actions?

Collaboration with other organizations, collectives of women activists are important keys in the process of social change. It is necessary to look for alliances to increase the impact of the projects/actions for a change in society. “Alone we go faster, together we go further”.

It seems to me that movements like the IYCW need to reinvent their “radicality” in each country/continent/and at the international level in order to address the roots and causes of these structural inequalities.

**Gertraud Langwiesner** is currently a coordinator in a feminist women's organization that is a member of the Christian Labor Movement network in Belgium. She was the secretary-general of the IYCW from 1998 to 2003.

**For more information**, please see Oxfam's paper "Transforming Gender Inequalities" or click on the following link: <https://bit.ly/OxfamLibrary-Transforming-Gender>

# Acting Every Day to Transform Society

***What have we done at the various levels of the IYCW to promote gender justice over the years? What gender-related actions have we implemented in the different regions?***

First of all, it should be emphasized that no one can underestimate the extremely important role of women in society and, indeed, in all corners of the world. And yet at the same time, they remain the most vulnerable pillar of society.

As mentioned above, despite the progress and great technical evolution of society as a whole, women remain at a disadvantage compared to men! They face persistent historical inequalities.

The challenges of today's world, such as technological and digital advances, pandemics, and recent and not so recent wars, show that women continue to suffer the most:

- In households, women are the ones in charge of taking care of family members, cleaning, cooking and performing all tasks related to the maintenance of the house. These are jobs that are not socially recognized, which places women in a situation of inferiority and dependence.
- The streets are not safe places for women, who are exposed to harassment, rape and violence in general.
- In the workplace, equal pay is not respected. Progress is very slow or non-existent in most countries. It is common for women to receive lower wages than men for the same or similar work. Pregnancy and marriage are often grounds for dismissal.

These are just some of the points that we have highlighted from the analysis of the reality carried out by the IYCW, both at the national and international levels.

They are the starting point of the movement to act in favor of young women workers' rights, towards gender equality and equity.

In other words, it means fighting for the right of both women and men to quality education from early childhood to adulthood, for equal social and professional opportunities for men and women, for equal pay for equal work, and for a balanced sharing of responsibilities in the home. Equality also means that public spaces belong to everyone, without risk.

The IYCW is therefore on the move, developing actions, awareness activities and services for greater equality of opportunity for young women workers.

## **A few examples of international campaign where women are also leading:**

In recent years, the International YCW has developed actions in different sectors where young workers are active.

In 2019 and 2020, the International YCW launched a campaign on production chains, and more specifically on multinational companies in the clothing and fashion sector, focusing on actions in maquilas in Latin America and Asia. The campaign was reinforced by the ILO's own discussions on the topic.

(Double click here to watch the interesting documentary produced by JOC America [https://youtu.be/R\\_hGf-qroOA](https://youtu.be/R_hGf-qroOA)).



In particular, the IYCW has developed actions and presented demands regarding one of the most pervasive realities in the daily lives of young people today, i.e. work in the informal sector. In addition, processes of action have been implemented with young people in the field of the solidarity economy.

### A few examples of action at national movement:

In Peru, the YCW organizes groups of 'domestic workers'. These young domestic workers meet regularly in groups to discuss and reflect on their living and working conditions. The main problems they report are, among others: the lack of a contract or an unfair work contract; abuse and violence by the employer; isolation; no right to rest on weekends and no paid vacations. They carry out these actions in alliance with trade unions and institutions such as the Institute for the Promotion and Training of Domestic Workers (IPROFOTH).

The Paraguay YCW also organizes 'domestic workers' by providing them with a house and accommodation. They have access to this service, for example on weekends, and are therefore not obliged to stay at their employer's home. The YCW also contributes to the education of these young women with literacy courses.

The Congo YCW organizes young women workers who are confronted with a little-discussed reality, that of disability, particularly blindness. In a survey conducted by the Congolese government, women and girls are subjected to all kinds of violence on a daily basis: 83% are victims of psychological violence, 31% of sexual violence, 26% of physical violence and finally 4% of economic violence. The reality of women with disabilities is even more painful.

In Egypt, the YCW continues to organize actions in factories and communities. One of the main issues is sexual harassment of female workers. The YCW promotes awareness-raising activities and holds regular meetings in grassroots groups to discuss the issue. In the words of a young Egyptian woman, "We need to change the mindset. I am discriminated against as a 25-year-old single woman living in a country where most women get married at 18."

In Nicaragua, the movement is developing a major campaign for equal rights and the eradication of violence and harassment in the workplace through ILO Convention 190.

Together with trade unions and other organizations they state that "ratification of Convention 190, and its effective implementation in conjunction with Recommendation 206, will give all workers the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment. Whatever the form of their contractual relationship, whether they work in the formal or informal economy, or in a rural or urban setting".

As part of the campaign, they have developed a C190/R206 knowledge assessment. They have done a training day on women's rights and leadership. At the beginning of this year they have organized a National Meeting of ZZFF women workers leaders. They have strengthened alliances with trade union organizations as well as being part of the trade union round table for the ratification of Convention 190. Finally, they have made visits to decision-makers to discuss and present the demands for ratification and in the implementation of it by the government.



Photo: @YCW Nicaragua

In Indonesia, the YCW has been working for many years to create unions in the textile industry to demand higher wages, 8-hour workdays, social security and maternity leave. In some cases, the organization's starting point has been the collective dismissals of workers, which have an even greater impact and consequences on the reality of women.

Thus, the IYCW continues its mission of organizing and raising awareness among the youth, especially encouraging young women workers to fight for their rights, respect and equality.

For example, in these factories, many pregnant women are fired without any compensation. Indonesian women leaders take this seriously and, together with other workers, are organizing and fighting for their rights, even in court if necessary.





Photo: @Germany YCW

For several years, the German YCW has been carrying out actions for equal rights, equal opportunities and fair wages, regardless of gender. The movement is very active in the campaign focusing on the "Equal Pay Day", a reality highlighted by high-level institutions in Germany.

According to studies conducted by the Federal Statistical Office, "women currently receive 21% less than men for their work." The consequence of this large wage gap is that women work for free every year from January 1 to March 18, i.e. 77 days, while men are paid for their work from January 1.

## The activities have been carried out throughout the year for the IYCW to reaffirm the need of young women

Each year, we celebrate the International Women's Day with activities and events to raise awareness, denounce and educate. Here are some concrete examples:

- **Nicaragua:** Awareness week for the ratification of the 190/R206 agreement "To address violence and harassment effectively, governments must take action in a number of areas, including laws and policies related to labor and employment, equality and non-discrimination, migration, occupational safety and health, and criminal law."
- **Ghana:** Training sessions for the empowerment of young women.
- **Peru:** Webinar on Zoom and Facebook to answer the question: "How was March 8 celebrated in your area?"
- **Haiti and Philippines:** Statement and communication to their activists and members.
- **Paraguay:** Organization of demonstrations.

At the international level, during the pandemic, unable to meet for a face-to-face exchange, the gender commission organized several virtual sessions to share realities and real-life situations. It organized three exchanges according to language groups: one in English, one in French and one in Spanish.

During this exchange, the delegates discovered common points among all their national movements. "We all work for the empowerment of young women," the English-speaking delegates concluded. A common belief expressed in French was: "Our value is to accept people as they are." Similarly, there were recommendations to strengthen our actions in each language group:

- Value the small changes that occur in everyone involved in our processes;
- Have clear objectives in mind for each process;

- Reflect on what is happening in our movement because we want to take initiatives that will lead us to live out the new society from our own actions and attitudes;
- Use the IYCW gender tools in our training;
- Check in our countries whether the governments have ratified the ILO convention on gender-based violence.

Young workers want to stay in touch and continue to exchange. The French speakers immediately created a group on the social networks, while others decided to invite other national movements to their activities. As Errol, the Filipino coordinator of ASPAC, said, "I learned a lot from the debate. I would really like to continue, learn more and also participate in the meetings of other national movements."

In recent years, the IYCW has developed tools to help member movements discover the importance of gender and the need to implement these tools and take action to address all the stereotypes, discriminations and violence that women face around the world every day.

The tools have been sent to national movements and some have already been used in training and capacity building sessions with activists and leaders.

#### Ghana and Egypt explained:

"In our training, when we asked what the word 'woman' stood for, we were told 'conceited, moody, incomprehensible, the joy of the house, domestic worker, crazy, obedient, emotional, energetic, enduring'."

"And the participants said that the word 'man' meant 'humiliation at work, weariness, unhappiness, machismo, logic, responsibility, money and work, money discharger'"

Furthermore, on June 20, through its gender commission and its international team, the International YCW organized a webinar on "the transformative approach of the IYCW in the struggle for gender equality". More than 40 leaders, mostly young women workers from 30 different countries, took part in the event.

During the webinar, participants were able to discuss a number of elements related to gender inequalities and the specificities of young women workers' struggles. In particular, avenues for action were shared and discussed, and our reflection focused on the following questions: "What do we need to change in terms of awareness and capacity, in the society and within the movement?" - "What do we need to change in terms of cultural norms?" - "What do we need to change in terms of policies, laws, or government actions?" The webinar discussions will prove to be essential and crucial as they will contribute to the development of the IYCW strategic action plan for the next 4 years, which will be finalized at the World Council in Peru.

In short, through organizing them, training them and building their capacities, the IYCW continues to empower young workers in the different regions to make their voices heard, to fight for their rights and to defend their own lives.

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Poster: @IYCW Webinar, June 2022



# Collaboration between old and new generations of IYCW activists



Photo: @Venezuela YCW

## YCW action process in the field of social and solidarity economy

The collaboration between old and new generations of YCW activists is bearing fruit in terms of struggle and social organization, through actions carried out by, for and with young people in different fields.

This is the case with the social and solidarity economy, which is germinating and developing on different continents. These are economic projects that, in addition to meeting basic needs, place the human being at the center of their ultimate goal, basing their actions on the values of cooperation, mutualism and solidarity and combining social, economic and environmental objectives.

In June, the International YCW participated, once again, in Geneva, in the International Conference of the ILO - International Labour Organization<sup>[1]</sup>, which promotes the debate between representatives of workers, employers, governments and civil society organizations, with the aim of developing strategies and possible standards to strengthen these experiences in the world.

*[1] Agenda of the 110th Session (2022) of the International Labour Conference (ILC), an item related to "Decent Work and the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)"*

In order to contribute to these debates and to make our work known, we have collected testimonies about some experiences, thanks to the collaboration of former and current activists and young people in initiation in different countries. The inclusion of this article in this issue of the IYCW/ICA Bulletin is an invitation to debate at the grassroots within the movement and with our action networks, but it also aims to draw attention to the specificity of the contribution and demands of young workers in these processes.

## Response to food needs, Barquisimeto, Venezuela

In Venezuela, against the backdrop of the crises that the country has been going through lately, a large number of young people and teenagers find themselves unemployed and facing recurring problems, especially that of feeding their families. The YCW base group located in the Carorita community, in Barquisimeto, analyzed the needs of the youth and formulated various proposals to respond to their problems. The young people decided to act and look for sound and cheap alternatives.



They chose to develop a socio-productive action with the breeding of rabbits and other animals for their own consumption, as part of an initiative to support their families. They conducted a fundraising campaign that allowed them to buy rabbits and animal feed. They started breeding rabbits and their largest pen produces rabbits for human consumption and for sale to other farms and businesses. The municipality now recognizes them as small producers.

Norelsys, currently an educator, was an activist and national coordinator of the Venezuela YCW from 1998 to 2005. In 2020, she began collaborating as an adult with the national movement and the Carorita group. About her role with the youth team, Norelsys explains that “my role at the beginning was to accompany them because the pandemic was adding to the difficulties that the country was already experiencing and it was difficult for them to get together to take stock of the process. With two other adults, we visited their pens several times, encouraged them to gather their facts of life and review their experience of these pens, to value the small achievements that were not very visible to them, and to look at the prospects.”

It is also “important for them to feel accompanied and to be part of a movement, because in the region where they live, the internet connection is almost non-existent and digital channels were the means of communication for other YCW members in the country during the pandemic. Then, as the health measures eased and the mobility situation in the city improved, Carorita became a meeting point for young people from other communities who had participated in the YCW in previous experiences, such as the action at the technical school a few years ago.”

According to the young collaborator, “it is a new and enriching experience, in which we, YCW former members, have a lifelong commitment to the movement, which allowed us to transform our lives and become the activists that we will never stop being.”

Marcos Rondón, a former activist of the Venezuela YCW and former continental coordinator of the YCW in the Americas, has been accompanying an experience of informal association of young carters in the 'Las Pulgas' market of Maracaibo for five years.



Photo: @Peru YCW



According to Marcos, “this action is strongly weakened by three factors in the Venezuelan context: an economic and social crisis resulting from the economic sanctions against the country, the Covid-19 pandemic that has imposed a lockdown and closure of the market, and the migration to the neighboring country, Colombia. These and other reasons related to the reality of Venezuela and the YCW prompted the movement to conduct an investigation in 2020 and 2021 with the support of former activists. My role was to contribute to the development of the survey, to transmit it to some young people in contact and to collect it. Then, with the activists, a space for respondents was prepared and developed in my city, allowing an initiation to the movement.”

### **From the informal economy to the collaborative economy, Congo**

In the heart of Central Africa, in the Congo, a social and solidarity economy initiative is taking its first steps. Many young people work in the plantations, workshops, stores and services. They are migrants, apprentices, contract and temporary workers. Many also work in the informal economy or are still studying. It is very difficult to find a job.

Seeking solutions to this problem through training and the See-Judge-Act method, the YCW is proposing an organized and participatory response to young people: a cooperative.

The movement has noted that in today's world, digitalization is everywhere. That is why they want to provide training to young people in the field of information technology, in order to develop their computer skills, which will help them enter the labor market. Given the impact of gender-based inequalities, especially in vulnerable communities where young women participate, the organization of a cooperative must have these young women as a priority.

At the invitation of the Panafrican coordination, Freddy, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was an extension worker in the Congo YCW, where he was a fulltimer from 2001 to 2006. Based on his experience, he said that “former members have passed on their knowledge and their fighting spirit. I must also contribute so that the movement will live on from generation to generation. The world is evolving, and the realities of young people are more and more dreadful.”

For Freddy, the collaboration of adults in a youth movement must be well defined, limited and always respectful of their own aspirations: “I do not take the place of young people or make decisions for them. I am like the salt that is added to the sauce so that the work is guided by the principles of the movement and the interests of the young people.”



Photo: @JCongo YCW

### **Identify solidarity niche markets based on traditional activities, Peru**

In Peru, where the next IYCW International Council and training sessions will be held, the movement already has a long history of debate and experience of action in this sector. The Peruvian YCW entered the world of the social and solidarity economy[2], initially with little information, a need for training and above all many questions; subsequently, social projects aimed at training, raising awareness and promoting the social and solidarity economy took shape.

Faced with the truly alarming figures of youth unemployment, work processes are being developed in different cities, such as Pawana Anak Nauta (production of ceramics), Chiclayo (commercialization of products from handicraft weaving) and Lima (production through hydroponic culture techniques and commercialization network).

The indigenous community of Pawana Anak Nauta has been making traditional ceramics for several decades. However, in their analysis, the youth of the YCW identified a loss of traditions, culture and customs in the community, especially among the new generations. That is why they started this process, with the perspective of transformation and revaluation of medicine, Quechua and traditional ceramics.

[2] *Economía Social y Solidaria en la JOC Perú* (jocperuvidayaccion.blogspot.com)

Through this work, the young people are promoting innovation based on a popular tradition, adding value to the product and generating income for the people involved in the process.

With the support of other organizations, including WSM, the Peruvian YCW organized a virtual training course on project design, including aspects related to fair trade, market research, economic management, among others. This course was open to communities and outsiders.

“In the project we set different objectives, such as improving the finishing, introducing new painting techniques and making ceramics to decorate tables. This process has been important because it has strengthened us in different areas and, above all, it has given us the opportunity to grow,” said one of the young workers responsible for this action.

According to Filipe, current national coordinator of the Peruvian YCW, in some communities there are former activists and adult collaborators who, based on their experience, contribute relentlessly to the strengthening of actions when the YCW asks them to.

From his point of view, “like the Peruvian YCW, many adults are also learning about the solidarity economy and are building alternative employment opportunities together.”

## **The social and solidarity economy and the important presence of young women**

The basic principles of the social and solidarity economy are perfectly in line with the needs and aspirations of women workers and represent a learning challenge for young women.

Putting the person at the center, a business culture with a participatory management vocation, the defense and implementation of the principles of solidarity and responsibility, the use of surpluses to objectives of general interest, sustainability and environmental protection, are all concepts that are gradually being developed in the experiences carried out in many countries and on different continents.

The presence of women in the economy is obvious. It is obvious that we must make visible all the unpaid or poorly paid tasks that this half of the population performs in the areas of health, education, in the domestic and community sphere in general. And of course in the traditionally male professions, where their presence has been consolidated, in industrial, commercial and digital environments and in public services in general.



*Photo @Peru YCW*



Countless social movements, associations, specific women's and/or feminist organizations, as well as the academic world, highlight the close relationship between reality, women's forms of organization and the social and solidarity economy.

Both in quantitative (real numbers) and qualitative (political participation) terms, the impact of women in the social and solidarity economy is undeniably high. Whether in production, marketing or management, they actively participate in the existing alternatives.

In some of her studies, Sophie Charlier[3], professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, analyzes the existence of links between the participation of women in a solidarity economy organization and the possibility of increasing their 'empoderamiento' (empowerment).

[3] CHARLIER, S., (2005), *L'économie solidaire au féminin, quel apport spécifique pour l'empoderamiento des femmes*, Institut d'études du développement, Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve

In the YCW, the assumption of responsibilities by young women is evident in each of the experiences mentioned above. Norelsys and Marcos underlined it: the leadership, the effective and committed participation of young women workers in the processes of action are proof of this.

In the aforementioned actions, we first emphasized the presence and then the leadership, because young women workers are those who take the initiative, dedicate their time, motivation and energy, and move forward the activities of production, management and commercialization of products.

These are processes through which they empower themselves and those around them.

You can follow these examples of lifelong struggle and activism on the IYCW website, in the section dedicated to the ICA.



## JOCI-IYCW

**IYCW** is a movement of education through action based on the experiences young workers live. The starting point of YCW is personal and collective situations that the young workers live in everyday life and the values that are contradictory to their beliefs and aspirations that exist in the society.

The YCW opts for the education of young workers. This is the specific and primary task of the YCW if it is to reach the the objective of liberation of the mass of people.

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## ICA - AIC

**The International Cardijn Association (ICA)** is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to serve the present and future generations of young workers throughout the world.

The ICA provides financial support to the projects implemented by young workers in order to improve their capacities to take responsibility and change their living and working conditions. By doing so, those young people can find the place they deserve in society and the dignity inherent in all human beings.

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