

Global Union Research Network – GURN

www.gurn.info

Newsletter 8
Geneva, January 2006

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I Questionnaire on the Global Union Research Network (GURN)

The questionnaire on the GURN was sent out on 9 September 2005 via the GURN listserv and could also be downloaded via the GURN website. About 10% of the GURN listserv participants kindly filled in the questionnaire. We would like to thank all those of you who participated – your views are very important to us.

Please find a graphical representation of the questionnaire in the appendix – we just briefly comment on some key messages here.

In the section on general information it was noticeable that relatively few people (12 %) find the GURN through the internet. On the one hand, it is great that the direct trade union communication has worked so well and that 88% of GURN participants have learnt about the GURN through trade union circulars, colleagues or by being contacted by GURN directly. On the other hand it would be good to make the GURN even more accessible and easy to find on the internet. For this maybe you could consider with your web coordinator to create a link to the GURN from your union or university webpage to the GURN (see for example the link from the Global Unions webpage: <http://www.global-unions.org/>).

A wide variety of topics was suggested on what we should concentrate on in the future and we will carefully consider these valuable suggestions. Some people also suggested that we should rather deepen the topics we already work on rather than expand our activities.

As to what would make you use the GURN pages more often, more than a third of you answered that we need to update the pages more regularly and almost another third stated that it would also be important to have a better structure and layout. We will consult with our partner organisations on how we can ensure more updates and we are working in Geneva on how we can improve the structure and layout of the GURN pages.

Also, as promised, innocent hands carried out a raffle amongst all those who filled in the questionnaire. We would like to congratulate the following three lucky winners who will receive a copy of the Kaufman book on Industrial Relations as announced:

Karlsson Gösta from SIF in Sweden
Pavel Janicko from the CMKOS in the Czech Republic
Dieter Eich from the national training center of the DGB in Germany.

II Presentation of the Working Lives Research Institute

Introduction

As part of the new series on participant organizations of the GURN, a presentation of the Working Lives Research Institute in the UK will follow.



The *Working Lives Research Institute* is a newly formed unit that examines the world of work. The aim is to build an exciting and dynamic group of researchers and teachers who study work and employment. Growing from a very small base in 2002 with just a handful of staff *Working Lives* now comprises of over 40 people including sociologists, geographers, historians, economists, lawyers, cultural studies and industrial relations scholars. Our research looks at activist and non- activist workers, and while trade union issues are important this is not the sole focus of interest. The unit is home to the Centre for Trade Union Studies and has close links with the TUC Collections based at London Metropolitan University.

Working Lives currently has twenty five active projects ranging from those concerned with age discrimination, the experience of black and ethnic minority workers, unorganised workers, work identity and meaning, deindustrialisation, racial and sexual discrimination through to ones on industrial relations in small firms. Working against Racism in the Trade Unions is a research partnership made up of teams working closely with the trade unions in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Italy and the UK as well as the ETUC and the TUC. It has been funded by the European Union's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities to conduct research into the role of the trade unions both in challenging racism and xenophobia in the workplace, and in tolerating these attitudes.

The institute has gradually built up a body of work and research using visual methods and researchers are actively working with photographers, filmmakers and artists to expand the cultural understanding of the workplace.



Tim Strangleman and Bridget Henderson, for example, have been working with photographer David McCairley to produce a visual record of the final months of production at the now closed Guinness brewery at Park Royal in West London. Sonia McKay is working with others on a film reflecting the experience of migrant workers and Chris Wall is producing a documentary on the women who built London's Waterloo Bridge in the 1940s.

The institute has played host to a number of international visiting scholars, conferences and workshops. We have a number of doctoral students and run an MA in Labour and Trade Union Studies. We are proud of our extensive links with trade unions and the labour movement in the UK and EU. We also have networks with academics in Europe, North America and Australasia. Our research is funded by a variety of bodies including Research Councils, the European Union, Government Departments and Trade Unions. Details of all our projects, news and contact details can be found on our extensive website:

www.workinglives.org

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III Report on the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong (by Esther Busser)

From 13-18 December 2005 the 6th WTO Ministerial took place in Hong Kong, and although expectations were not high, a number of decisions were taken there that will have generally far-reaching consequences. Many efforts were made to put together a developing package for developing countries, however, the real value of this package can be questioned. The package consists of the adoption of the 5 LDC proposals on special and differential treatment, including duty free and quota free market access for LDCs to developed countries, but only covering 97% of tariff lines, therefore providing enough leeway for developed countries to protect the most sensitive products. The aid for trade package was also criticized in that there is likely to be little “new” aid money but rather a reallocation of existing funds. The end date for the elimination of export subsidies in cotton (2006) is positive, however, much more problematic for developing countries is the domestic support in cotton, for which no end date has been set. And finally, the end date for the elimination of export subsidies in Agriculture of 2013 is disappointing. The main concerns arise however with regard to decisions on Services and NAMA (Non Agricultural Market Access). In Services the Annex C was adopted which clears the road for negotiations at a plurilateral level, which are likely to cover a number of important services sectors such as Legal Services, Business Services, Postal and Courier, Telecommunications, Audiovisual, Construction and Related Engineering, Distribution, Education, Energy, Environmental, Financial, Health (insurance), Tourism, Maritime Transport, Air Transport, Other Transport, and Logistics. On NAMA, a Swiss formula was adopted that will lead to steep tariff cuts. Coefficients and flexibilities still have to be decided upon and could mitigate the negative impacts somewhat, nevertheless, this was a bad decision and will have serious consequences on employment and working conditions worldwide. A promise from the European Commission to try and include reference to the ILO where mention was made of UN agencies (para. 54) bore no fruit, if indeed it was ever put forward to other WTO members. All in all few, but very disappointing results, which largely failed to address the developmental concerns of countries, and without any reference to the issues of decent work and the impacts on employment, and therefore the question remains whether this round is going to deliver on sustainable development or whether trade continues to benefit a few at the expense of many. Deadlines for modalities in Agriculture and NAMA are set for the end of April, with a General Council meeting set just after that in May. The coming months are going to be crucial with many important decisions expected to be made.

IV Conference Announcements

1. GURN

The GURN will organise together with the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) an international research workshop on "The Impact of Global Production Systems on Trade Union Strategies". This will take place from May 10-11, 2006 in the Hague, Netherlands. On May 12, there will be a general consultation meeting on the GURN. A call for papers and conference announcements will be sent out in the coming weeks.

2. Global Labour University

The annual conference of the Global Labour University will centre around "Global Challenges for Labour". It will take place April 5-6, 2006 in Kassel, Germany. The programme for this conference will be circulated later on.

Just as a reminder, the closing date for the Master Programme applications is March 1, 2006. Further information at <http://www.ilo.org/lpg>.

V New Publications

1. *Development NGOs and Labour Unions*, edited by Alan Leather

The deputy General Secretary of Public Service International, Alan Leather edited this book in conjunction with Deborah Eade. The book illustrates alliances and tensions between labour unions and NGOs, experiences of union based NGOs, workers in the informal and maquila economy and workplace codes of conducts. One of the next newsletter will contain a review on this book. In the meanwhile, see:

<http://www.kpbooks.com/details.asp?title=Development+NGOs+and+Labor+Unions>

2. *The coming demographic shift* by Public Service International

Many countries are beginning to experience a great demographic shift that will have profound effects, as huge numbers of working age people all near their retirement age over a quite brief time. A new PSI publication presents a series of steps to deal with this looming social phenomenon. It also covers the implications of the increasing participation of women in the paid workforce, the impacts of HIV-AIDS in many countries, and increasing migration. The document is available in English, French, Spanish and Japanese. See www.world-psi.org (this excerpt is taken from the PSI Newsletter, December 2005).

3. *The Derailers' Guide to the WTO* by Public Service International

The Derailer's Guide to the WTO is produced by Focus on the Global South and is now available on the PSI website. It is a valuable guide to both what the WTO is and how it works as well as giving a thorough overview of all of the main issues in the current Doha Round of negotiations. Some of the issues and approaches may not be relevant to all PSI affiliates but this certainly helps to put each of the issues into context so that, even if you are interested only in services, you can see where these fit into the jigsaw and the agenda. See www.world-psi.org/derailers (this excerpt is taken from the PSI Newsletter, December 2005).

4. *International Framework Agreements (in French)* (published by the International Institute for Labour Studies)

L'Institut International d'Etudes Sociales a publié en novembre 2005 le document de travail "Les accords-cadres internationaux (ACI) et la négociation collective

internationale à l'ère de la mondialisation" de Professeur Reynald Bourque.¹ Ce document examine les changements qui ont eu lieu dans le mouvement syndical international au niveau de ses structures, son action et ses stratégies en réponse aux changements économiques et politiques qui sont intervenus dans les deux dernières décennies et à l'importance croissante des entreprises multinationales. La réflexion de l'auteur se focalise notamment sur l'émergence d'accords-cadres internationaux (ACI) en tant que nouveaux instruments de l'action syndicale au plan international. Le document contient ainsi un examen des ACI qui ont été conclus entre les Fédérations syndicales internationales (FSI) et des entreprises multinationales à partir des années 90. Un tel examen a été effectué sur la base de l'étude de vingt-huit ACI ainsi que d'entretiens réalisés avec des représentants de la Confédération internationale des syndicats libres (CISL) et des représentants des FSI impliquées dans la négociation des accords examinés.

Le document aborde trois questions fondamentales: le contenu des ACI et leurs procédures de suivi, les conditions qui en ont favorisé la négociation et l'adoption, et leur effectivité. Sur la base de cette analyse, l'auteur s'interroge sur la mesure dans laquelle les ACI peuvent être considérés comme une prémisse d'une véritable négociation collective au plan international et souligne les difficultés et les perspectives de son développement.

Les personnes intéressées peuvent demander cette publication à l'adresse suivante: Publications de l'Institut international d'études sociales, case postale 6, CH-1211 Genève 22 (Suisse) ou à inst@ilo.org.

Le Document de travail est également disponible sur le site web de l'Institut international d'études sociales :

<http://www.ilo.org/public/french/bureau/inst/download/dp16105.pdf>

5. *Merchants of labour* (published by the International Institute for Labour Studies)

More workers are crossing national borders to look for jobs than ever before. Many migrants seek overseas employment with the help of agents or intermediaries. These "merchants of labour" include relatives who finance a migrant's trip, provide housing and arrange for a job abroad; public employment services; and private recruitment agencies. They also comprise an insalubrious underworld of smugglers and traffickers. The agents who recruit and deploy migrant workers are at the heart of the evolving migration infrastructure, i.e. the network of business and personal ties that is creating a global labour market. This book highlights best practices in the activities and regulation of these merchants of labour as well as innovative strategies to protect migrant workers, underlining the contribution of ILO standards. It covers a broad range of national and regional experiences and puts "merchants of labour" in the wider context of changing employment relationships in globalizing labour markets.

If you want to download this publication, please click the following link:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/download/merchants.pdf>

¹ Reynald Bourque est Directeur et Professeur titulaire à l'École de relations industrielles de l'Université de Montréal (Canada) ainsi que Chercheur associé au Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la mondialisation et le travail (CRIMT).

6. Labour rights in crisis: Measuring the achievement of fundamental human rights in the world of work by W. R. Böhning

This book is about gaps: the gap in the indicator field as far as fundamental labour rights are concerned, and the gap as the author defines it when countries do not measure up to full adherence in law and full implementation in practice of these rights. Adherence starts with ratification of ILO core Conventions or reporting under the auspices of the 1998 Declaration in case of non-ratification. But implementation is the crux of the matter and the most difficult to represent in indicator form. Roger Böhning assumes that the comments of the ILO Committee of Experts reflect realities on the ground – don't read on if you don't believe that and throw away the book! His argument is that "direct requests" indicate small gaps and "observations" sizeable gaps, which shrink when the Committee of Experts expresses "satisfaction".

There is no room for going into technicalities here. Suffice it to say that gaps call into question – are a percentage of – the value of ratification. The same yardstick is applied to all, starting in 1985 and ending in 2004 with 159 countries. Due to the working habits of the Committee of Experts, time lags temporarily advantage extensive recent ratifiers such as Gambia, which ratified seven core Conventions in 2000 and the eighth in 2001; but the author assures us that these time lags will disappear within a few years.

What do the indicators show? They show that core rights gaps have grown rather than diminished over time, even in the case of what Roger Böhning calls long-standing ratifiers, i.e. countries that had committed themselves to core standards before 1985. The evolution is worst in the two areas of freedom of association and collective bargaining on the one hand and discrimination on the other. Regionally, Europe performs better than other regions, though not satisfactorily, and the Americas perform worst.

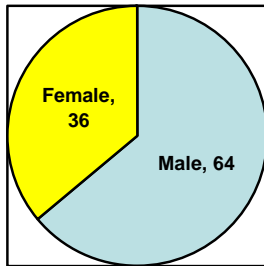
What may be the reasons for fundamental labour rights being in crisis? The author gingerly points the finger at the contemporary form of globalisation that puts employers on a pedestal and treats workers as less important than during the period of the cold war. The side-lining of workers has evidently affected even their most political and basic rights. Sound analytical constructs that would establish general links are still lacking. But the cross-national quantitatively-based evidence is in the book.

Appendix

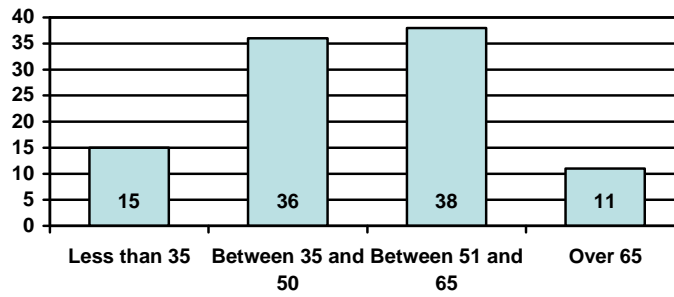
Outcomes of the Questionnaire on the GURN All figures are provided in percentages.

I. Information about you

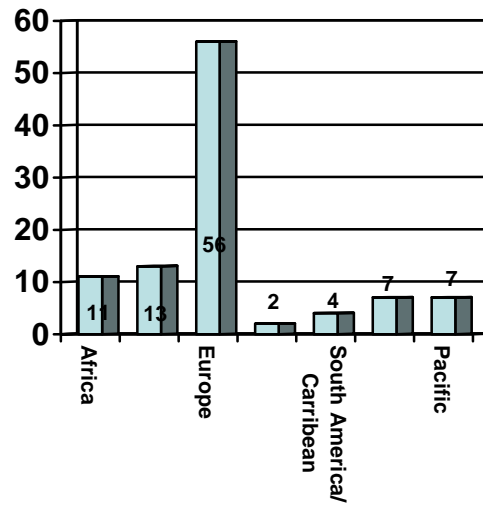
1. Sex:



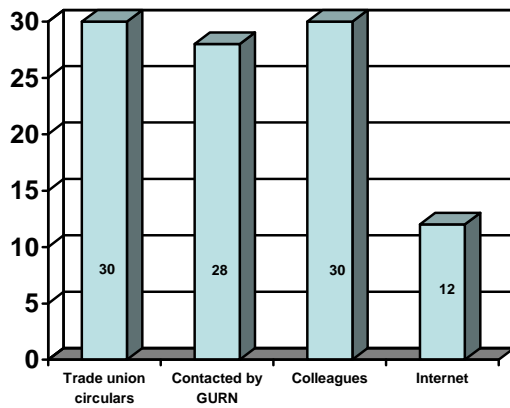
2. Age:



3. Region where you are based:



4. How did you find out about the GURN? (Please tick one or several boxes)

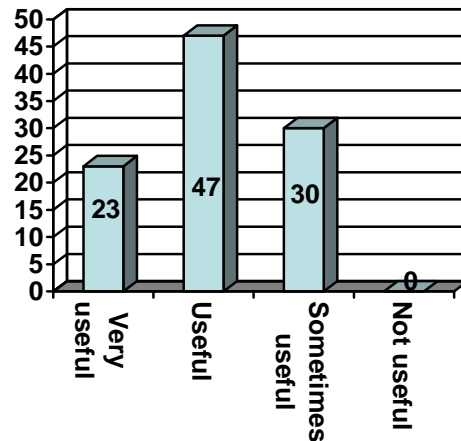


Others:

- ILO-ACTRAV
- ICFTU
- Labour related conference in England

II. General questions on the GURN

5. To what extent do you find the GURN useful in your work?



Comments:

- High level and trustable information
- Good to know about the different sources of information on workers and labour globally
- Not enough information from local level

6. Which other topics should the GURN deal with in addition to the current ones?

The current ones are:

- Bilateral and Regional Trade Agreements
- Corporate Governance
- OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises
- Migration
- Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs)
- Economic Alternatives and Poverty Eradication
- Global Trade Union Strategies (Union Renewal)

The following topics were suggested (in addition to the above):

4 people:

- Social security

3 people:

- Organizing: (1: informal economy)
- Gender (1: Gender Mainstreaming)
- Trade union development (1: especially regarding a diverse workforce)
- Sustainable development
- Privatization (2 persons: Commercialization of public services)

2 people:

- Code of Conducts
- CSR
- TU and NGOs
- International Labour Standards (1 on limits and limitations for trade unions, 1 on the importance of International Labour Standards)
- Social movements on labour
- Employment (especially Youth (1 person) and active employment policy (1 person))
- Informal Sector (especially occupational health and safety)
- Trade union at local level
- Globalization (1 person focusing on nation states, 1 person on pressure for welfare models)
- Atypical contract forms (1: How to address micro and macro unionization)

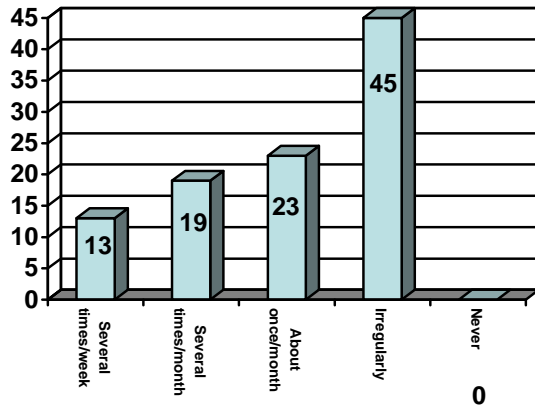
1 person each:

- Ageing (especially comparing advanced and emerging economies)
- International trade union solidarity
- Decent work
- International capital movements
- Third world dept
- Occupational health impact of globalization (especially women in the informal economy)
- Primary and secondary international industrial action
- Legislation and Company Agreements
- Financial and monetary policies and labour market policies
- Wages
- Unity and Trade Union Pluralism
- Cross border alliances
- Health Sector Reforms
- Framework Agreements
- MDGs
- Social movements on health
- China
- Migration
- Collective Bargaining
- Global Supply Chains and corporate strategies
- Wages
- Trade unions and technological innovation
- Regional economic blocks such as EU and NAFTA
- IFIs
- Decent work
- Analysis of policy outcomes, especially on decent work and on union responses (e.g. on ageing, pension, health care reforms, labour market reforms or globalization) in national, regional, and

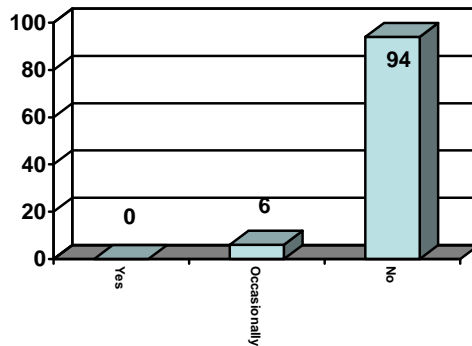
international fora and industrial relations research on progress of social dialogue or obstacles to it. Info on current research and meetings to deal with these issues is also useful

III. GURN Web <http://www.gurn.info>

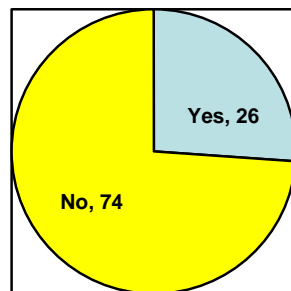
7. How often do you consult the GURN web pages?



8. Do you have difficulties accessing the information on the GURN web pages?



9. Does the GURN web pages include enough information?



10. Which additional information would you like to have included on the web pages?

Comments:

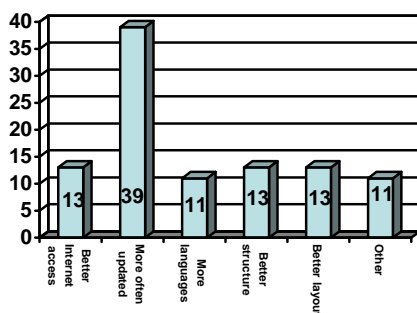
2 people:

New full text articles

1 person each:

- Book announcements
- More on public sector
- Experiences and research work by each participating organisation and researcher
- Inclusion of work not just of research institutes but also of contracted researchers
- Statistical information about migration and in particular union affiliation of migrants
- Regional trade union situation
- Links with other institutions and networks in related matters
- Scholarly information on trade union development in different countries (especially on Latin America in English)

11. What would make you use the GURN web pages more often (Please tick one or several boxes)?



Comments:

3 people:

Lack of time

1 person each:

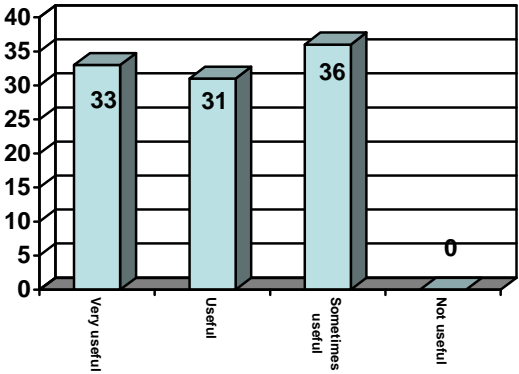
- Topics on public sector
- Remembering to visit the site
- More on outputs from GUFs

12. Do you know about research institutes you would like to add to the list on the GURN web page <http://www.gurn.info/contact/index.html>:

Several organisations were suggested, these will be added to the GURN list directly.

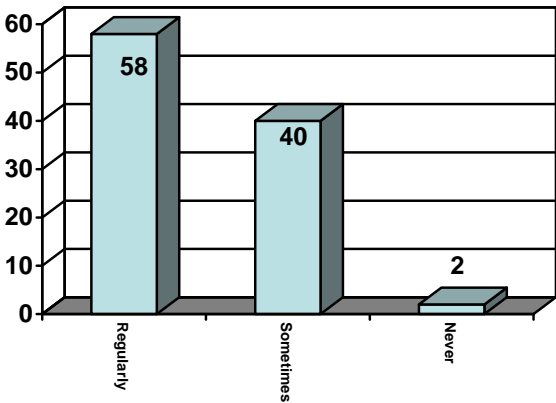
IV. Listserv

13. To what extent do you find the information disseminated via the listserv useful to your work?

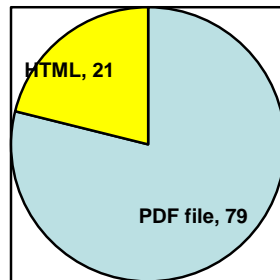


V. GURN Newsletter

14. Do you read the newsletter?



15. What is your preferred format for the newsletter?



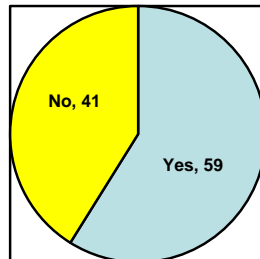
16. What else would you like to read in the newsletter?

Comments:

- Current activities of the international trade union organisations
- Gender
- Social Security
- Health aspects and social security
- Employment policy development
- Local Experiences and Migration
- It's good enough as it is
- I like the length of the newsletter and the ability to follow up the topics through links

VI. On-line debates

17. Would you like to participate in on-line discussions via GURN?



18. Which issues would you like to discuss?

- Union Renewal
- Collective bargaining and organizing
- Global supply chains and comparative strategies
- Framework agreements
- Unionism and Globalization
- Future of labour

- Unconditional basic income
- Cooperation between trade unions and social movements
- Technical innovations for workers and trade unions
- Public sector issues
- Economic policies and labour market policies
- Development strategies
- How to unionise casual workers
- Social change and non-traditional labour relations actors
- GATS and movement of real persons
- Trade issues and public service issues
- More linkages with national research
- Institutions dealing with labour
- Market policies and industrial relations and welfare reforms
- Migrant workers and development
- Poverty reduction strategies and migration policy
- New approaches to international labour/ more critical evaluation to existing approaches
- Employment policies/ Global trade investment and development policies
- Labour education: How to make the wealth of data on trade etc. accessible to rank and file members

19. Do you have any general comments/ suggestions/ ideas on the GURN?

3 people:

Keep focus on existing topics and expand on those rather than adding on new topics (1 person suggested to focus specifically on economic alternatives and poverty reduction and global trade union strategies)

1 person each:

- “GURN listings need to be much more comprehensive to be useful”
- “It adds to the transnational possibilities for the labour movement and research”
- “Include mission statement (if existent) as part of listserv functions”
- “Clearer criteria on what is publicised via the GURN network”
- “Offer to host a GURN workshop in New York City on key question”
- “Thank you very much for your work”
- “Contact with other trade union researchers and institutions is important“
- “More Linkages to national research institutes dealing with labour market policies and industrial relations and welfare reforms”
- “It’s a excellent idea and I’m pleased to see that it is continuously developing”
- “My impression with the GURN is it was really timely and necessary for the trade union to actively engage in having networks amongst themselves globally and with the academia and

the GUFs as well. The GURN should also consider the writings and contributions of the trade unions even if they are not academically structured, as actual experiences at the shop floor are most important for us to know.“

- “Thank you for all the good work. I look forward to participating more actively in the near future perhaps in discussions via voice over the internet (e.g. skype) (at the moment this is not possible due to bad internet connection)”