

Decent work and education: A win-win combination

In 2003, Argentina became one of the first countries to incorporate the concept of Decent Work to its national development agenda. Since then, a number of government programmes have put into practice different aspects of the Decent Work Agenda. In 2004, Argentina and the ILO teamed up to launch the Building a Future with Decent Work project, which aims to promote and develop the dignity of work in each person. As ILO News explains, this is a road that begins in the primary years at school.

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BUENOS AIRES (ILO News) – Matías looks up from the stage and smiles nervously. Looking back at him are his classmates and other students, as well as teachers, headmasters and government experts. And, as if that wasn't enough to intimidate a 13-year-old boy, the Ministers of Labour and Education of Argentina have just walked into the hall.

But Matías keeps his cool and, paper in hand, begins his speech with enthusiasm and eloquence. "We want equal opportunities, rather than some children being able to go to school while others are denied the same privilege", he says.

Beside him, 15-year-old Maira waits nervously. When her turn comes, she adds: "We want our parents to have decent jobs, so that children do not have to work".

Next up is a 20-year-old, also called Matías, who asks that "schools be made aware of the situation of children that work. To this end, we are putting forward a proposal for a tutor-support system. School cannot be a place where one size fits all. We need schools that cater for everyone".

Their proposals are part of the conclusions of the day organized around "Thinking about Decent Work in Schools" by the Ministries of Labour and Education of Argentina. More than 600 students from 15 secondary schools in the suburbs of Buenos Aires took part in the initiative, along with teachers, headmasters and teams from both ministries.

The premise was simple: participants had to think about the link between school and work and, more precisely, between school and the work that students want to do. The top national authorities for education and labour were there to listen to their ideas.

"Contrary to those that think that schools become "distracted" by addressing subjects such as sexual education, organ donation, or decent work, we believe that when schools provide teaching about sexual education and decent work they are doing exactly what they should be doing", Minister of Education, Alberto Sileoni, pointed out.

The Labour Minister, Carlos Tomada, picked up on the students' call for equal opportunities. "The creation of that equality is a process that began in 2003. In addition to the 5 million jobs created since then, the project 'Building a Future with Decent Work' is essential to this effort, since we not only need to create jobs, but we also need to create a culture of and an emphasis on decent work in new generations".

The project 'Building a Future with Decent Work', referred to by Minister Tomada, was launched in 2004 by the national Ministries of Labour and Education and the ILO Country Office for Argentina. The objective was, and continues to be, to promote and instil the value of decent work in individuals.

"Despite its limited resources, provided partly by the ILO but mainly by the State of Argentina, the project 'Building a Future with Decent Work' has had a strong social impact. Its success is no doubt due to the significance of its objective and the commitment of the parties involved", says Marcelo Castro Fox, Director of the ILO Country Office for Argentina.

The project's achievements include training 1000 teachers on the course 'Explora Trabajo Decente' (Explore Decent Work); offering all middle-school social sciences teachers in Argentina the opportunity to participate in the project Trabajarte, run by 21 teacher training centres; incorporating the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the concept of Decent Work into the middle-school curriculum through a Resolution of the Federal Education Council; running a regional experience-sharing workshop, where the leaders and promoters of the project in the region countries – Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay – discussed the direction that the programme had taken in each country.

The impact of this project can also be gauged by the satisfaction that Matías felt on hearing his own words being taken up in the speech delivered by the Minister of Education:

"Young people want schools that cater for everyone. One concept that struck me, and which I am going to start using myself, is that schools cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach," he said. "School should be a place for everyone. In other words, we should not just have to fit in as best we can, but rather it should be the best school for everyone".

“Young people greatly value the opportunity of being able to come here and meet the authorities face to face”, said one of the teachers that accompanied the students. At the end of the day, Matías and the other students felt that they had been able to speak openly and that they had been listened to

The ‘Thinking about Decent Work in School’ day was much more than just another day of talks and meetings. It provided another example of how Argentina has made Decent Work an integral part of its economic and social development.