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Building the future of work together

Building new safety nets for a diverse world of work

By Denis Pennel

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How, where and when we work is changing rapidly. However, our social systems are lagging behind this reality and are increasingly mismatched with the world of work. Be it self-employed or temporary workers, those deviating from the traditional pattern of full-time, permanent employment, are at risk of missing out on social protection. Different forms of employment face different issues and social security is just one dimension of a broader social policy challenge. Whatever form of work they choose, all workers deserve some stability and predictability. For future labour markets to be truly inclusive and sustainable, we will need to create new safety nets.

The need to reinvigorate the social contract is a central recommendation of a recent report by the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Global Commission on the Future of Work. Released in January 2019, [Work for a brighter future](#) concludes the ILO's *Future of Work* initiative launched to mark the organisation's centenary celebrations.

The report proposes a *human-centred agenda for the future of work*: one that strengthens the social contract by placing people and the work they do at the centre of economic and social policy and business practice.

The agenda consists of three pillars: **increasing investment in people's capabilities**, by enabling lifelong learning and supporting people through transitions; **increasing investment in the institutions of work** by strengthening and revitalising regulation and contracts to ensure fundamental workers' rights such as an adequate living wage, safety and health and collective bargaining; and **increasing investment in decent and sustainable work**, with investments in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

At the World Employment Confederation, we share this call for a new social policy based on a worker-centred model, not an employer-centred one. In our view, such a new model should be built around four key principles:

Stable and predictable incomes – including unemployment benefits, universal health insurance, disability benefits, pension funds and parental leave;

Labour stability – including easy access to work, job transitions, skills maintenance and career coaching;

Supportive living conditions – including access to affordable housing, transportation, connectivity, childcare and work/life balance;

Portable safety nets – including individual social accounts, portable rights, peer to peer communities and labour market intermediaries.

These will become crucial as the situations in which work is performed become increasingly diverse. Notably, the ILO report identifies the rise of digitally mediated work in the platform economy as a challenge and proposes the establishment of an international governance system to require platforms and their clients to respect certain minimum rights and protections. While we also argue for a minimum level of quality to be set for all workers, regardless of their contract, we are not convinced that creating a one-size-fits-all solution is the right way forward at this stage. Instead, we need to step back and assess the variety of online talent platforms and what they are offering.

The ILO calls on governments, employers and worker's organisations to assume their responsibility and work together to create a just and equitable future for work. The private employment industry has already taken important steps in this respect - especially in building new safety nets for its workers. It has ensured that rights belong to the individual and are portable across different jobs and forms of work. It offers services to support people in navigating the new world of work across a whole range of employment and social situations - including information and advice, career guidance, training, pension funds, childcare and mediation.

Our industry has introduced a host of initiatives around the globe to support people in accessing all types of work – from funds to support temporary agency workers in accessing mortgages and credit; to programmes supporting veterans as they transition from military life to civilian work; and projects that help women occupied in child-rearing to get back to work. Through these initiatives, the private employment sector has demonstrated that diverse forms of work and security can go hand in hand.

Driving social innovation is a key priority for the World Employment Confederation and there is still much more to be done. We can no longer employ 20th century solutions in solving 21st century labour market challenges and our sector is proud to be working alongside institutions such as the ILO, G20, OECD and the EU to dialogue and promote best practice. We stand ready to take further responsibilities in building a future of work that we all want.

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