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Building the future of work together

What's next for the new European Commission?

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The EU's challenge in the field of employment and social policies is to make Europe the best place to work. The private employment industry believes that we don't need new rules or directives but rather more mutual learning... and a touch of social innovation.

The European Parliament elections are just a few weeks behind us and the higher turnout observed proves that citizens have an increased interest in the European project. People care about freedom, peace and stability of course, but in a rapidly changing world of work, they are also concerned about their well-being, fulfilling career paths and professional opportunities.

Six months ago, the World Employment Confederation-Europe, issued a Vision Paper "Making Europe the best place to work!" providing ideas on how to reform labour markets and promote inclusive growth based on social innovation. At the time, Europe was experiencing a period of economic growth and job creation in many European countries. While EU gross domestic product is still forecast to grow 1.4% in this year, clouds are gathering and the economic outlook is slightly less optimistic compared with previous years. Such an outlook accelerates the need for economic and labour market reforms, to create more adaptable, inclusive and competitive labour markets.

First and foremost, making Europe the best place to work requires actions and commitments by EU Member States, national governments and social partners. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for achieving inclusive, dynamic and socially innovative labour markets in Europe. But there are some general ingredients that are essential. These include allowing for a diversity of labour contracts, fostering labour market intermediation by lifting unjustified restrictions on agency work and strengthening the services sector as a driver of job creation. Investing in skills and people's employability to give them hope and trust in finding new career opportunities are also key. Some of these elements are also reflected in the Europe 2020 recommendations which the European Commission recently put forward to EU Member States.

So, what should the next European Commission do to make Europe the best place to work? A key element would be to foster social innovation, meaning creating new ways of working and learning while also providing social protection to the benefit of workers, companies and society at

large. In the field of employment and social policies, often this does not mean new EU rules or directives - a lot can be achieved by fostering the exchange of best practice and mutual learning.

Five areas for action at EU level are particularly relevant for the next five years **First, EU Member States should be encouraged to reform their social protection systems.** Often, social protection is still based on open-ended, full-time contracts, while today's labour markets are characterised by a diversity of labour contracts and forms of work. Creating new safety nets for diverse forms of work that ensure the portability and transferability of social protection entitlements, should be promoted. The recently adopted Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed sets the right framework for these reforms. The new European Commission should support EU Member States in implementing this reform, focusing on mutual learning.

Secondly, the next European Commission should place strong focus on creating dynamic and adaptable labour markets. This means progressing on the EU Better Regulation agenda, ensuring that new initiatives do not impose new and unjustified burdens on companies, and also fostering and encouraging labour market reforms at national level. In this context it will be key to create a level-playing field between diverse forms of work, which often means lifting unjustified restrictions linked to labour contacts and the provision of agency work services.

One of the greatest achievements of the European integration process is the European Single Market for services. But the single market is far from complete. The next European Commission should take stock and strengthen the Single Market, also taking account of digitalisation and new ways of working and providing services.

Fourthly, in the area of skills and employability, there is an urgent need for action, supporting workers and young people in acquiring the qualifications needed in the labour market. The EU can support national actions in this area by designing well-targeted programmes and providing funding. The ERASMUS and ERASMUS+ programmes are excellent examples in this field. Supporting workers in acquiring new skills and fostering apprenticeships could also be framed by an EU skills agenda for the changing world of work.

And finally, what's about EU labour law and social rights for workers? The outgoing Commission has achieved remarkable progress in this field. The revision of the Posting of Workers Directive and the Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions are certainly among the most important new rules in the field of employment and social affairs affecting the private employment industry. For the coming years, focus should be laid on the implementation and enforcement of these rules. In addition, significant progress can be achieved on the much-debated topic of online talent platforms, by focusing on the correct classification of labour suppliers, as well as through the application and enforcement of existing EU law.

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