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Building the future of work together

The power of advocacy: sound knowledge to deliver policies fit for the future of work

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A positive and supportive legal and regulatory environment is essential for the private employment services industry to grow and operate on a level-playing field. Establishing relationships with key decision-makers to provide them with a sound knowledge of the sector and how it operates and shaping the policy agenda is an essential mission for our industry association.

The World Employment Confederation-Europe is recognised as a key employers' federation in Europe, specialised in the world of work. We are well placed to reach out to EU stakeholders and ensure they are equipped with accurate facts and information on our industry and how it can help them meet vital policy goals. Advocacy is an essential service that we offer our members and, as 2019 marks a turnover year for the European Union institutions, we lay even greater focus on reaching out to a new set of parliamentarians and officials.

Strong focus is placed on explaining our strategic approach. With 2020 just around the corner Europe needs a new employment strategy to address the challenges ahead and our latest position paper details the world of work that we envisage into 2030 and beyond. Incoming Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen has outlined policy objectives that include unemployment benefit, individual learning accounts and minimum wages. We are keen to explain to her what our industry has been doing to support this approach and how we can continue to deliver dynamic labour markets in the years ahead.

We believe Europe needs a holistic, integrated labour market agenda that will serve employees across the continent. The labour market landscape has changed enormously, and we need policies that reflect these new realities and create inclusive and diverse labour markets able to seize untapped potential and meet the needs of workers and business.

Aging demographics in Europe will mean that by 2050 we will be 35 million people short. Hence the rise in technology is a necessity and will leave people free to undertake other tasks. We will need to keep people in the workforce for longer – up to retirement age and beyond - and also to encourage more women into the labour market. The private employment sector can play a role in driving this inclusiveness and bringing more people into the workplace. One way is by focusing on

skills training to ensure that workers have the skills they need to carry out the jobs that are available.

Both our national federation and corporate members gain a great deal from our advocacy outreach. Speaking with one voice gives us extra clout and presents a consolidated industry position. The meetings, events and special “Advocacy Days” where colleagues from across our membership meet European stakeholders and share concrete experiences from their national context have helped correct myths and misconceptions about our industry. They bring added value for the institutions with whom we engage too: we offer strong, in-depth market knowledge and tangible case studies - indeed the European Commission has complimented us on our structured and organised approach and recognises the value that we bring.

Our advocacy work also supports our thought leadership initiatives, such as our Social Innovation agenda. As the number of flexible contracts in the workplace grow so we need new solutions for promoting ongoing learning and providing social protections that are portable and belong to the worker, not the job. Our next event, a lunch debate with EU stakeholders in October, will focus on the urgent need to reform social protection systems, many of which date back to the 1960’s and 70’s and no longer reflect today’s labour market realities.

We have some great best practice examples from our sector to share with policymakers – including the ‘Prospect Statement’ in the Netherlands which provides flexible workers with access to mortgages to buy their own home; and the Belgian ‘Test your Selfie’ tool which allows job seekers to check their skills sets and see where they need further training. Access to skilling, reskilling and upskilling needs to be made easier and we can demonstrate how training funds are used to deliver this in markets such as Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands – sometimes bipartite and sometimes alone. We are looking forward to supporting flexible workers in order to enhance their employability.

Our work through the EU sectoral social dialogue also provides a way to inform policymaking and guide future decisions. Together with UNI Europa, the organisation representing the trade unions in our sector, we are currently undertaking research into which social innovations are benefitting everyone. This will be ready in 2020 and we will publish key findings and recommendations and present them to the EU institutions.

The growing gig economy and the need for greater flexibility, has been unsettling for some - and particularly the populist and green parties. In some European markets this has resulted in adverse regulation being adopted and implemented over the past ten years. People are naturally suspicious of new things and with the employment landscape changing so quickly they can feel vulnerable and confused. Agency work is the most visible form of flexible work and so a focus for this disquiet.

Through the continuous process of education and putting our messages across clearly and carefully we are working to turn fear into confidence. The World Employment Confederation-Europe will continue its dialogue with EU stakeholders and ensure that policymakers know where to turn for sound knowledge and advice on how to deliver employment policies fit for the future of work.

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