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Building the future of work together

Preparing for the labour markets of 2030 and a flourishing of diversity

By Denis Pennel

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Labour markets have evolved a great deal over the past decade, but what will they look like in another ten years, in 2030? And what will we need to set in place to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Recently, I was honoured to be a guest speaker at the [Labour 2030 conference](#) that examined this very question. Coordinated by the University of Porto and the Law Academy, the event brought together researchers and policy makers - including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and Eurofound, the European agency for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions - as well as people from the business world, to discuss how labour laws would need adapting to meet the realities of 2030 labour markets. In particular, it recognised that employment law would need updating to embrace emerging forms of work such as platform work in the gig economy.

Work is taking on increasingly diverse forms and proving a challenge to classify. I am convinced we must nurture this biodiversity and embrace the opportunities it presents - inclusiveness and social integration, productivity and competitiveness, work security, freedom of choice and job creation.

The diversity takes several forms - a diversity of *people* within the workforce; a diversity of *forms of work*; and a diversity of ecosystems across the different labour markets *around the world*. Let's look at each of these more closely.

The 2016 ILO World Employment and Social Outlook Report shows just 26% of the global working population has a permanent, full-time contract. In other words, diverse forms of work are the norm, not the exception. Even in the EU, 40% of people – a significant minority – have a working relationship other than permanent, full time, while in low income regions some 87% of people have no formal work contract.

I see five key trends driving this diversity and shaping the new world of work. First is the rise of the on-demand economy which is challenging traditional business models and moving towards

more customisation; secondly is globalisation which has changed the way supply chains operate and created extended companies and networks; next is new attitudes to work with people looking for greater flexibility and autonomy and more work/life balance; then comes the flat world of talent where mass education has raised the skills available and prompted them to be an open source. Finally comes digitalisation, which has enabled all the previous elements and blurred the lines between work and rest, allowing us all to work differently.

Each of these factors has resulted in a wide range of options for companies and organisations to engage workers and talent. We can classify these as ‘buy’ – where an employee works under the standard permanent, open-ended contract, ‘borrow’ – where a worker has a fixed-term contract to complete a task; ‘rent’ - where workers deliver a service or skill on a contract basis and will probably have a body of customers to whom they deliver this same service; and ‘share’ – where there is collaboration and pooling of people between organisations and sectors.

Companies are already using a wide variety of workforce solutions. A survey by Staffing Industry Analysts found that 62% of companies used both independent contractors and temporary workers, 45% used outsourced services, and 6% used online workers. Some sectors have been at the forefront of this new trend including retail, construction and IT communications but we are seeing increasing emergence too in sectors such as education, health and public administration.

However, there are still challenges ahead in managing this new world of work. Classifying new working relationships is not always clear – are people employees or self-employed? Should there be a third category? Then there is the whole issue of upholding health and safety and ensuring worker representation when people are working remotely or under different contracts. In particular the new world of work poses questions around how we manage more protean career paths and ensure that workers have access to training in order to keep their skills up-to-date.

All of this points to the need for a whole new social policy, where social and work protection is centred on the individual, rather than on the employer as has been the case for the past 100 years. Through this new, human-centred approach we will need to place the focus on the worker and ensure that they have ready access to work opportunities, a stable and predictable income, portable safety nets and access to support services such as affordable housing and childcare.

As a champion of diversity in the workplace, the private employment services sector has long recognised these needs and is already providing many of these services to its workers. They receive insurances and tools to support a predictable income, even in case of illness or inability to work; they can access training and support services to give them stability in their employment; there are many emerging schemes to help workers in securing mortgages and childcare to support their living conditions. Visit our website “[Social Innovation Stories](#)” to discover many such examples from around the world.

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