

May 28, 2021



Building the future of work together

How the HR Services sector will support workers post pandemic

by Denis Pennel

Tag: #HRservices #workers #covid-19

As the world emerges tentatively into a post-Covid new normal it faces a volatile external landscape. This poses some significant challenges for labour markets. It also presents the HR Services industry with a unique opportunity to radically enhance its role, reputation and impact.

Our industry stepped-up its activity to support workers during the Covid-19 crisis, placing thousands of people in key-worker roles each day. Now it is ready to rise to the next challenge and support them in navigating and succeeding amid a more flexible and fast-moving world of work.

While many of the pressing challenges facing the world of work pre-date the pandemic, the crisis has served to intensify them and accelerate the need for practical solutions.

World Employment Confederation (WEC) members offer a range of services that can support workers in this new normal. Top of the list is supporting the transition to new economies. The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report estimates that by 2025, 85 million jobs will be displaced and 97 million added. Many sectors - including aviation, hospitality and retail – have been hit hard by the Covid crisis and are unlikely to recover to the same levels. Others – such as online customer service, light manufacturing, food distribution, logistics and care -are now in high-demand and have an urgent need for staff. Private employment services have a pivotal role to play in supporting workers through this ‘jobs reset’.

Reskilling and upskilling will be critical in driving a sustainable recovery and enabling people to transition into high-in-demand sectors – both as full-time and temporary employees. Our sector will play a major role in the great re-skilling agenda that will underpin the transition to new post-pandemic economies and HR Services companies will support individuals in accessing new sectors.

A significant number of agency workers already receive training. Our WEC data shows that over 50% of agency workers in Japan, Mexico and USA receive training and the proportion is also high in India (49%), Italy (34%) and Brazil (33%).

Offering diverse working models and career management will also facilitate the transition. Different ways of working and types of contracts allow workers greater control over their working conditions while career guidance and collaborating with public employment services can help build bridges back into work for the unemployed.

The HR Services sector is well known for its innovative approaches and the new normal will provide an opportunity for us to enhance both the impact and reputation of our industry in driving social purpose and innovation.

Providing fulfilling work and progression opportunities can address the disenfranchised members of our society – the youth, women, migrants and other disadvantaged groups. The private employment services sector is already offering easier labour market access to these groups, which are also amongst those hit most hard by the economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. In some regions, such as Asia and Latin American, offering decent and sustainable forms of work also contributes to reducing informal work and improving social conditions.


Reviewing social protection mechanisms will be another priority here. Increased transitions and flexibility in ways of working also need to be reconciled with some form of security. During the Covid-19 crisis, our sector was at the forefront of calling for government support to be extended to temporary and contract staff and we are committed to developing and implementing new safety nets to protect workers regardless of their employment contract. The [WEC 2020 Social Impact Report](#) analyses social protection levels across different labour arrangements. It finds on the whole that statutory coverage for agency workers is similar to those with open-ended contracts – but discrepancies still exist, especially with regards to eligibility criteria. Creating new labour contractual arrangements to reconcile flexibility and security will continue to be part of our social innovation mission.

Helping people to manage change is in our DNA. We offer people decent and fulfilling work opportunities, ensure employability and provide safety nets that protect people, regardless of their employment contract. We also reduce informal work by offering decent and sustainable forms of work.

As the world of work reinvents itself so the HR Services sector is committed to pushing the boundaries further, taking a lead in ensuring that social protection measures reflect the full diversity of working arrangements that labour markets will need in the post-pandemic era.

Denis Pennel

Managing Director, World Employment Confederation

 [@PennelDenis](#)