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Building the future of work together

Private Employment Services are a bridge to the new world of work

by Denis Pennel

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The Covid-19 pandemic has provoked a profound societal reorganisation affecting the way we work and live. From one day to the next, workers across the world ceased their daily activities.

Those who could were asked to work from home, others were laid-off.

Although essential workers soon found their way back to their workplace, it has now been two years since homeworking fully began.

We can trace many of the questions that dominate current discussions on the labour market and worker rights, such as a four-day week and hybrid work, back to this monumental shift.

More than anything, it has seen many workers re-evaluate the role that work plays in their lives and question whether a more flexible approach or a reduced working hours may suit them better.

Thanks to the tremendous efforts of our scientists and governments progressively reducing Covid-19 restrictions, workers are once again returning to the office regularly.

The very possibility of that choice existing demonstrates how profoundly our relationship with work has changed.

The forced surge in remote working across the globe – which **peaked** with a 46% increase in remote working in Europe during the early stages of the pandemic – has brought about a revolution in our relationship with work.

Flexible work is now here to stay and the available talent landscape has fundamentally shifted with studies **showing** that over 20 per cent of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week as effectively as they could if they were working from an office.

This means that the talent pool available to companies has exponentially increased, but it also means that workers can now easily apply for a wide array of opportunities and identify those which best match their needs.

Yet, workers do not want flexibility at all costs. They value the protection and safeguarding of their rights. Recognising the importance of this, the EU recently proposed measures that would regulate platform work and ensure the chances for workers to fall through the cracks are minimised. With over 41% of employees **currently** considering leaving their employers and 69% of employers **reporting** difficulties in hiring, global talent shortages and an increasingly stark mismatch between employers and jobseekers expectations have, in no small part, led to what has been dubbed the Great Resignation.

This has only added to the churn in our economy and resulted in significant labour shortages in many sectors that are reopening after the pandemic.

It is critically important that skill shortages are addressed and the process of matching workers and employers is made as easy and efficient as possible. While this is undoubtedly a challenge, it also presents an opportunity to re-humanise the labour market and address the driving factors of what should have been called the Great Mismatch rather than the Great Resignation.

Private employment services offer innovative and dynamic solutions to problems affecting the workforce and the labour market through their expertise and the tools they can deploy - including digital solutions such as blockchain and artificial intelligence.

During the pandemic, the industry was a crucial asset in addressing glaring gaps in the workforce by placing workers operating in essential sectors such as healthcare and the construction industry.

Studies have **shown** that during periods with tight employment markets, such as the one we are currently experiencing, employers de-emphasise degrees and focus instead on the demonstrated skills and competencies.

This is a perfect opportunity for workers making use of private employment agencies' training and reskilling programmes to transition into new roles and industries. With their key insights on the labour market, employment agencies can help identify many underlying trends and challenges that need to be overcome.

In France and Belgium, half a million agency workers **received** some form of training in 2020. Globally, these figures **peaked** in the USA and Japan with approximately 84% and 100% of agency workers trained in 2020: over 18 million people!

The career management segment of the private employment services sector has also been in high demand during the pandemic. Career management services providers offered vital support to companies who needed to restructure and workers who needed guidance to land new opportunities during periods of transformation and uncertainty.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted every person across the globe and changed society forever.

In many regions, it has reinforced the desire for more flexibility and a better consideration for work-life balance. In others, it has exacerbated dangerous realities and highlighted the inherent vulnerabilities of many workers.

With estimates that over 60% of all workers worldwide are working in the informal economy – which means they may be unable to avail of their full rights – private employment agencies can provide the

necessary layer of protection from those at risk of forced and bonded labour. By acting responsibly and upholding ethical standards, they provide a safe pathway to employment.

The very nature of the private employment sector has helped ensure it quickly adapted to the new realities brought about by the pandemic and the industry's flexibility and expertise has helped workers and employers identify workable solutions in a changed economic landscape.

Flexibility. Responsibility. Opportunity. Those are three elements that the private employment services industry has to offer to workers, businesses and society as a whole. The #WorkingForYou campaign we ran during the first half of this year has demonstrated, using examples from WEC members across the world, that our industry is a central player in addressing the challenges of today's labour market.

Denis Pennel
Managing Director, World Employment Confederation
 @PennelDenis