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Building the future of work together

Social Justice: What it Means for the Private Employment Services Industry

by Michael Freytag

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With climate change, demographic changes, technological development and - more generally - globalisation, the world of work is changing at an unprecedented pace and scale. While these changes have brought significant new opportunities, they have also led to inequality and risks of exclusion, threatening social cohesion, economic growth and human progress.

As a result, the notion of “social justice” has become increasingly prominent in employment and labour market debates at global level. It has been an important theme on the agenda of the International Labour Organisation during 2023, with the call for a Global Coalition for Social Justice and a proposal for a Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

The private employment services industry, represented by the World Employment Confederation, fully supports this initiative as it aligns with its vision to enable better labour market outcomes for all. As the ILO’s Governing Body decided to establish the Global Coalition for Social Justice in November 2023, [let’s dive into the concept of social justice and see how the private employment services industry can contribute to advancing it.](#)

The ILO identifies four critical dimensions in pursuing social justice: fundamental principles and rights at work, full and freely chosen employment, social and labour protection, and social dialogue and tripartism. The private employment services industry plays a crucial role in advancing social justice in line with each of those four dimensions:

Ensuring fundamental principles and rights at work

An essential element of ensuring fundamental principles and rights at work is based on the labour contracts offered to agency workers. These must be clear regarding the rights, working conditions and social protection provided. The World Employment Confederation advocates for offering a diverse range of labour contracts and work arrangements to workers, including fixed-term contracts, part-time contracts and open-ended contracts. This should be done in full accordance with national legislation as well as international and regional standards such as the ILO Convention 181 on private employment agencies and the EU Directive on temporary agency work.

Enabling access to full, productive and freely chosen employment

Providing work for over 70 million individuals annually, the private employment services industry opens pathways to employment. On average, 34% of agency workers were unemployed or inactive prior to their first assignment. Often, agency work also helps certain groups of workers who may struggle more to access labour markets. Young and elderly workers, for instance, find more opportunities thanks to agency work, contributing to better work-life balance. High satisfaction rates among agency workers underscore the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Ensuring social and labour protection

The industry actively supports and advocates for social and labour protection. Rigorous regulation ensures appropriate working conditions and social protection for agency workers. Initiatives, such as transferable and portable rights, further enhance social and labour protection, with 90% of countries providing full statutory access to unemployment and sickness benefits.

Promoting social dialogue and tripartism

Committed to promoting social dialogue, the industry engages with trade unions at various levels, fostering collaboration on issues including wages, occupational health and safety, and industry quality. In 79% of countries covered by WEC members, social dialogue exists between the agency work sector and trade unions. In 35% of cases, mainly in Europe, they engage in sectoral collective bargaining. At a global level, the World Employment Confederation actively collaborates with international organisations such as the ILO and OECD, emphasising the importance of multilateralism.

As the world grapples with unprecedented challenges, the private employment services industry emerges as a critical player in advancing social justice. By championing social innovation, diverse forms of work, and robust social benefits, the industry aligns with global ambitions for a more just and equitable society. As the setting-up of the Global Coalition for Social Justice progresses, we hope to play a role in it and shape a future where social justice is not just an ideal but a tangible reality for all.

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