

January 31, 2023



Building the future of work together

Leveraging hybrid working to drive greater diversity and inclusion in the workplace

by Denis Pennel

Tag: #hybridwork #flexibleworking #labourmarket

As people settle into a new year of work the issue of how and where they work is increasingly on the agenda. During more than two years of Covid-19 restrictions, home-working and hybrid arrangements became the norm and we have proven that they can be highly successful. As is so often the case, necessity was the mother of invention.

The question now is how we best integrate these more flexible working models into our labour markets and balance remote working with presence in the office. One of the more enduring legacies of the pandemic has been a renewed focus on accommodating more flexible workforce solutions and this is significant because flexibility is also the key to making our workplaces more equitable, diverse and inclusive.

Today's global workforce has never been more diverse. It encompasses young people, women, older workers, migrants, different ethnicities, disabled people, LGBTQ and many more. Clearly with people's differing priorities and needs, it is not feasible to offer just one type of work model. Instead, we need a range of different labour contracts and approaches that offer workers greater freedom to choose where, when and how they work.

In our post-Covid world, workers' desire for flexibility has moved from being a 'nice to have' to a 'must have'. The LinkedIn Global Talent Trends Report 2022 records 63% of workers citing work-life balance as a top priority when choosing a new job. Furthermore, the rapid growth in remote jobs has served to expand opportunities for workers and employers across many countries and research suggests that the share of jobs that are already remote stands at 16% globally.¹

Flexibility is enabling many demographic groups to take advantage of work opportunities that would otherwise have been closed to them. Women, for example, are 24% more likely to apply for remote

¹ LinkedIn

roles than men due to the flexibility that they offer in juggling family/work responsibilities; while younger people, and particularly Gen Z, are often looking for flexibility in the work that they do in order to accommodate side hustles. Flexibility is also crucial in integrating older workers and those with disabilities into the workforce.


Today, flexibility is also becoming a key value proposition for employers and a way for them to expand their pool of talent. Offering diverse forms of work and contractual arrangements is essential in responding to workers' growing need for flexibility and also expands the opportunities open to organisations.

So where is this trend for greater flexibility going and how can we leverage it to promote diversity and stamp out inequalities in the workplace? One area where I believe that flexibility can make an important difference is in addressing the challenges surrounding young people entering the workforce. Young people were disproportionately affected by the Covid pandemic and its fallout. They lost out on traineeships and mentoring as well as on work opportunities. Global youth unemployment is now over 15% - three times higher than adult unemployment². This impacts young people's self-confidence and mental health as well as their long-term job prospects and must be addressed urgently. Employers and HR services professionals need to go the extra mile in helping the next generation to find their way in navigating our disrupted employment landscape. Private employment services offer young people an important steppingstone into the labour market. They are able to smooth what can be an intimidating experience and provide holistic support that will set them up for success. Importantly, the sector also provides training in the hard and soft skills that they need to land a job. The chronic labour shortages that we are currently experiencing around the world are largely a function of a mismatch between supply and demand. By skilling unemployed youth, we can work to bridge the gap while also setting people on the path to career success.

Young people are over-represented in the agency work sector compared with the overall employed population and students make up over 20% of all agency workers. Many graduates and school leavers are not certain of which career path they want to follow and by working through agencies they can try their hand at different roles and sectors and discover where their passions lie. Our industry's career guidance, coaching and training services can play a key role in meeting the needs and aspirations of individual workers – transitioning them into different roles and sectors and accelerating their future progress.

When it comes to integrating young people into the labour market at this difficult moment, the new trend for hybrid working and the flexibility and inclusivity that it brings, may also be vital components in ensuring that we avoid a lost generation.

More than ever, staffing companies are a partner of choice to enable flexibility, for both workers and businesses. Ultimately, promoting diverse forms of work is increasing labour market diversity. Our sector has a proven track record in supporting minorities and vulnerable groups to enter the workforce, therefore facilitating more diverse and inclusive workplaces. We now have a unique opportunity to leverage that further!

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² Lieve Verboven, Director, ILO Office for EU and Benelux, WEC Conference 2022