

RIGHTS TO WORK

Denis Pennel, managing director of Ciett calls on policymakers for balanced regulation.



Last month Eurociett and the European trade union federation for private services, UNI Europa, signed a joint declaration to policymakers on temporary agency work. It called for balanced regulation that would allow the sector to make its full contribution to companies, workers and the labour market as a whole.

Our two organisations are the European social partners for the temporary agency work sector and have cooperated successfully over many years to develop initiatives specifically dedicated to agency workers. On a national level this is, for example, implemented by the setting up of bipartite sectoral funds. They cover areas such as sick benefits, maternity leave and vocational training and build on statutory provisions already in place. In the majority of markets agency workers also have access to representative bodies at national, sectoral and company level.

The recommendations we made were the result of our fourth joint project together as part of our work programme for the EU sectoral social dialogue committee. Entitled 'How temporary agency work compares to other forms of employment' the project compares temporary agency work with other forms of employment in Europe including open-ended contracts, fixed-term contracts and self-employment. Its objective was to get a clear picture of the dynamics of the most prominent types of employment that coexist in the employment market.

The research revealed that temporary agency work contributes to more efficient labour markets by reducing unemployment, facilitating transitions into work, increasing labour market participation and helping fight undeclared work. It also found that temporary agency work offers comparable rights to open-ended contracts in terms of unemployment benefit, sick benefit, maternity leave, healthcare, health and safety and pension benefits. Unfortunately, in practice agency workers may have limited access due to outdated regulation that is still based on the premise that a 'standard' job is open-ended and full-time.

Temporary agency work also performed particularly well in the area of vocational training with 77 per cent of workers having been trained in the

past 12 months. The research also noted that despite the fact that agency work represents the smallest share of regulated forms of employment, it is nevertheless highly appreciated by workers and user companies alike. Workers benefit from the freedom to choose how they work and to experience different working environments while user companies find the right skills and talent to remain competitive and adapt quickly to changes in demand.

With these points in mind, jointly with UNI Europa we made six clear recommendations to policymakers that would enable the sector to play its role in delivering efficient and well-functioning labour markets and to continue providing quality work to millions of workers each year. We are confident that their implementation would pave the way for the agency work sector to realise its potential in supporting jobs and growth.

Six recommendations

We firstly called for balanced regulation of temporary agency work at national level so that labour markets would be able to benefit fully from the intermediary function that it plays in matching supply with demand in the workplace. This would include reviewing and lifting unjustified restrictions on the sector while also upholding the protection of temporary agency workers' rights.

We also called for social protection systems to be updated and adapted in order to provide comparable access to all workers, regardless of the type of labour contract that they are employed under. This would help agency workers get the actual access to social security that they already have in theory.

Our third recommendation focused on the portability of rights built under different contracts to address decent work deficits, especially for workers with short duration contracts who may be excluded from social security coverage as they may not meet the required minimum thresholds.

The next recommendation built on the need to enhance access to social protection and working conditions of agency workers and called on policymakers to promote the initiatives of social partners. Sharing best practices within the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee as well as in other relevant platforms could encourage social partners in other countries to follow the example.

Our final two recommendations sought to set in place better systems for assessing progress: We called for policymakers to support research and dissemination of information on best practices that contribute to the enhancement of working conditions for agency workers and to satisfaction of both workers and user companies. We also requested better data collection and reporting at EU and national levels that would enable comparable analysis of different forms of employment.

Together, these six recommendations will help our industry deliver the Way to Work to millions of satisfied agency workers in the years to come. ■