

## Towards more dynamic, inclusive and resilient labour markets in Europe

### *Lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic and recommendations for sustaining the economic and social recovery*

#### *Lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic*

In April 2020, the World Employment Confederation-Europe and UNI-Europa, EU sectoral social partners for temporary agency work, issued joint recommendations in the context of the Covid-19 crisis and for an economic and social recovery.<sup>1</sup> The temporary agency work sector and the social partners at European level are strongly committed to continue protecting temporary agency workers, through information on health and safety measures, protocols, training measures and the use of protective equipment. The World Employment Confederation-Europe and Uni-Europa underline that the joint recommendations on protecting people during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 still remain appropriate and should be followed-up at the national level.

Already in the first phase of the pandemic, a strong focus was laid on health and safety at work and on measure to protect workers and contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The recommendations linked to the health and safety of workers adopted in April 2020 remain relevant and essential in 2022. Vaccination policies and health and safety protocols have been put in place and are essential to protect workers and ensuring the continuity of work. The World Employment Confederation has played an important role in providing guidance to the temporary agency work industry during the pandemic in the context of the Safely Back to Work Alliance. In the course of 2021, new measures were adopted across the world to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic; most notably, the release of vaccines.

The World Employment Confederation therefore updated the guidelines it had adopted in March 2021 to take those developments into consideration. Those guidelines relate to occupational health & safety protocols to be applied to agency workers when it comes to vaccination, testing, basic protective measures, public health interventions and tracing. The overall objective remains to ensure that the same equal standards and practices are applied to agency work personnel as to user companies' personnel.

Regarding vaccination, while campaigns have ramped up since summer of 2021 in many of the countries where WEC members operate in, WEC members will not enforce a mandatory vaccination policy except where required by law or regulation. WEC members do encourage the vaccination of agency workers and at the same time respect the choice and fundamental rights to physical integrity of agency workers to get vaccinated or not, in line with local requirements and regulations.<sup>2</sup>

About 2 years since the Covid-19 has hit European labour markets, there are currently clear signs for an economic and social recovery due to the progress in vaccination and the established sanitary rules. The appropriately regulated temporary agency work industry has played a key role in keeping workers in employment, managing transitions, mitigating labour market risks and enhancing labour market resilience.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also fostered new ways of working and has accelerated existing, long-term labour market trends, such as the diversification of forms of work, the importance of skills and training in addressing skills

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<sup>1</sup> Protecting workers in the Covid-19 pandemic, safeguarding work and preparing for an inclusive economic and social recovery. Text is available on the European Commission sectoral [website](#) and on the website of the [World Employment Confederation-Europe](#) and [UNI-Europa](#)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the safely back to work alliance, please consult: ['Safely back to work in the new normal' Alliance - World Employment Confederation \(weceurope.org\)](#)

shortages, which have been accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic, digitalisation, new attitudes of work and the volatility of labour markets.

To sustain the economic and social recovery and based on a human-centred approach that puts people at the centre of national and European recovery and resilience plans, the World Employment Confederation-Europe and UNI-Europa have adopted in February 2022 the following joint recommendations, which are addressed mainly to EU policymakers and national governments, while being equally relevant for the temporary agency work industry and the sectoral social partners of the temporary agency work sector.

### *Towards more dynamic labour markets and appropriately regulated work mobility in Europe*

- **Create an enabling environment for labour market transitions and use the reallocation role of temporary work agencies in the current phase of the Covid-19 pandemic**
  - a. Focus on job-to-job transitions for people at risk of becoming unemployed, while also fostering the digital and green transition by supporting workers to move to sectors and professions that are increasingly in demand. Appropriately regulated work mobility within the European Union can be a key driver in tackling skills shortages and mismatches if these are coupled with adequate protection for mobile temporary agency workers.
  - b. Recognise that an enabling environment for labour market transitions must be based on valuing diverse forms of work, ensuring appropriate enabling temporary agency work regulation and tailored labour market policies, which are in line with the 2021 European Commission EASE Recommendation on effective, active support to employment.<sup>3</sup>
  - c. Promote joint activities enabling the job placement, prevention, and containment of the spreading of the Covid-19 virus in particular for specific categories of workers disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Ensure social protection and adequate social rights for all through social purpose and social innovation**
  - a. Continue to provide adequate income support through short-time working schemes and other government programmes to temporary agency workers where needed, taking account that these should be primarily temporary instruments, which should be phased out as economies recover from the economic consequences of the lockdown measures .
  - b. Ensure that all workers, regardless of their labour contract, have a minimum right to social protection, as also reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>4</sup>

### *Towards more inclusive labour markets in Europe*

- **Focus labour market and employment policies on managing and mitigating labour market risks**
  - a. Strengthen labour market resilience, by capitalising on the role of temporary agency work in contributing to quality job creation and by cooperation with public employment services in supporting unemployed people and workers that continue to be at risk of losing their jobs.

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<sup>3</sup> The EASE Recommendation is available on the European Commission [website](#).

<sup>4</sup> See also principle 12 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Text is available on the European Commission [website](#).

- b. Continue to put a strong focus on protecting temporary agency work against health and safety risks through adequate equipment, training, medical care, and Covid-19 testing. Ensure access to health and safety instructions tailored to the continuing risks of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Ensure access to training and skills policies at European, national and local level that put the people at the centre**
  - a. Strengthen non-formal and informal learning and the recognition of prior learning. Value the role played by bi-partite training funds established in the temporary agency work industry in offering training, learning opportunities, as well as counselling services and financial support, to temporary agency workers, while acknowledging that bipartite training funds need to be based on a constructive social partnership, collective labour agreements and that these are strongly connected to the specific labour market context in those countries where sectoral, bipartite training funds exist.
  - b. Associate the sector of temporary agency work to initiatives of the European Skills Agenda<sup>5</sup> to foster labour market matching, skills intelligence and training, as well as to the National Recovery and Resilience Plans set up under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and ensure equal access to government schemes that address the impact of the pandemic.

### *Towards more resilient labour markets in Europe*

- **Recognise and promote the role of sectoral social dialogue in fostering resilient labour markets and in supporting workers and companies in a volatile economic and labour market environment.**
  - a. Preserve and fully recognise the autonomy of EU sectoral social dialogue in the context of the current review of the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue. Refrain from policies that would limit sectoral social partners' freedom to reach appropriate solutions to current labour market challenges through joint actions and initiatives.
  - b. Continue to provide the required support for EU sectoral social dialogue meetings, with regard to online and on-site meetings, interpretation services and joint projects.
- **Foster the dialogue and exchange on the application and enforcement of the existing European and national law.**
  - a. Associate the EU sectoral social partners to any potential analysis or study to review the Directive on temporary agency work and the protection of agency workers in the context of the cross-border provision of services.
  - b. Take account, promote and share good practices established at national level that focus on compliance and enforcement.

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<sup>5</sup> More information on the European Skills Agenda is available on the European Commission [website](#).

Based on their 2021 – 2023 EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Work Programme for temporary agency work, the World Employment Confederation-Europe and UNI-Europa will continue to jointly monitor and assess the impact of Covid-19 and related policies on health and safety, workers, companies, and the labour market in general, while being committed to work towards more dynamic, inclusive and resilient labour markets in Europe, to guarantee a minimum level of effective protection to temporary agency workers and to contribute to the development of the temporary agency work sector as a flexible option for employers and workers.

Brussels, 1 February 2022



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