

Key Issues and Priorities Brief: Diverse Forms of Work

This Issue Brief provides input for the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work. This is part of three briefs which describes the most important labour market topics for social partners & policy-makers to address in the 21st century.

An inclusive future of work allows people to work in a way that suits their preference and individual situation. People willing to work, add value and contribute should not be impaired to do so. Labour rules empower workers to manifest and leverage their skills, wishes and dreams on the labour market. As no one worker is standard, neither is their job. In fact, the labour market needs all the non-standard workers it can get!

Especially now that business environment is become more innovative and dynamic. Digitalisation and globalization allow for opportunity, innovation and competition from all over the world. This keeps businesses sharp and quickly creates a great diversity of products and services that are in better tune with the need of consumers. Businesses can scale up easily and disrupt from any time and any place. For business to adapt to this environment it needs a workforce that is as flexible and skilful as they need to be.

Including diverse workforces and workplaces

The world of work will become more diverse. A more diverse workforce wants to work in more diverse way. More diverse business will provide new products and services in new and diverse ways. To deal with this change, labour rules need to accommodate and facilitate this more diverse labour market. The ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work (FoW-Commission) can inspire by leading policy-makers and social partners to a world of work that embraces diversity of people, businesses and work itself.

1. Stop framing people as *standard vs. non-standard*

People are not 'standard' versus 'non-standard'. Yet, the ILO and other policy-makers has chosen to frame workers as such. For the FoW-Commission's report to resonate with 21st century workers and business, the diversity of people and their diverse backgrounds and expectations from a working life should be embraced. Labour market leaders, and the ILO in particular, should not squeeze workers into standard versus non-standard.

2. Promote diverse forms of work

Creating a regulatory framework creates a legal and formal way to accommodate workers and businesses need for flexibility. To support workers and businesses find each other on the labour market, the FoW-Commission has the opportunity to stimulate and inspire social partners and governments to implement labour market reform to create appropriate regulatory frameworks that allow diverse forms of decent work.

3. Innovate existing and developing safety nets

Safety nets and social protection schemes that rely on full-time standardized human production are not sustainable in a world where standardized human

manufacturing has significantly decreased. For social protection floors to remain inclusive they should be detached and independent from any sector, job, or contractual employment relation. For the sake of sustainability the FoW-commission has a clear chance and responsibility to stimulate the development of individual accounts and portability of rights and/or benefits across different jobs and life-phases.

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4. Create a level playing field

Inequality and unfair competition between forms of work should be avoided in terms of labour costs, taxes and contributions. As labour is no commodity, labour rules should not widen the gaps between different forms of work by directly or indirectly incentivizing one form of decent work over another. Rather they can create benefits that are not depended on a particular job, contract or sector, but are accessible when they're needed over the course of one's career. Obviously, labour rules only work when rules are appropriate and clear,

workers and entrepreneurship are clearly classified, and rule of law and proportionate enforcement are in place.

5. Recognize that labour demand has structurally changed

Labour rules, the FoW-Commission and/or human resource management will not change the structural development that businesses have to be agile and flexible to survive in a more unpredictable, just-in-time', global and digital market place. This impacts the way labour is demanded. First of all labour demand is more specialised, task-based and temporary. Secondly, given its complexity, it involves ever more often a professional labour market specialist who's able to match and organise labour supply and demand. Ignoring or fighting this development is rowing against the stream and will alienate policy-makers from the reality of workers and businesses.

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6. Embrace diverse representations

Diverse forms of work means diverse workers and diverse employers. Social dialogue will only remain relevant if it is between representatives who actually represent the interested parties involved. Especially in triangular relation such as

temporary agency work, the representative from the agency worker and the representative of the employment agency who are best suited to negotiate the labour conditions of agency-workers.

7. Use what you have: implement ILO Convention No. 181

No need to re-invent the wheel on diverse forms of work. Already in 1996 the global social partners showed that unanimous tripartite agreement was possible on a proper regulatory environment for diverse forms of work. ILO Convention No. 181 provides the instrument for national regulation on employment and recruitment agencies and balance the interests of workers and businesses. More importantly agency-work improves the labour market inclusion of groups of vulnerable jobseekers with a traditional distance to the labour market, and provides a stepping stone to sustainable labour market participation. Ratifying and implementing this ILO instrument is an important first step in futureproofing national labour markets.

8. Diversify Active Labour Market Policies

Labour markets stand to benefit greatly when dedicated professionals with a passion for labour markets get together and think solutions on getting people to jobs. It should not matter whether they're in a public or private capacity.

Active labour market policies by public employment services will remain important to improve employability amongst displaced and vulnerable workers. For them to operate optimally and make the best use of scarce public resources synergies can be and have been found with private initiatives and employment professionals. Private employment agencies contribute massively in getting unemployed and vulnerable jobseekers to a new job. Embracing labour market diversity therefore does not only mean creating a legal framework for diverse forms of work. It also means setting labour market policies to support and facilitate jobseekers finding their way back to the labour market through diverse forms of work and make use of the full breadth of the labour market!

The FoW-Commission has the opportunity to inspire and stimulate partnership between public and private labour market professionals to improve inclusivity, participation and functioning of the labour market.