

WORKING WORLD

*Denis Pennel, managing
director of Ciett
reviews the Ciett World
Employment Conference.*



Modernise labour market regulation to stimulate economic growth. This was the message conveyed by employment specialists from around the world as they gathered in Rome at the end of May for the annual Ciett World Employment Conference. They urged governments to introduce labour market reforms swiftly in order to kick-start their economies and underlined the importance of agile and adaptable labour markets in stimulating economic growth and job creation. They also called for the removal of old-fashioned rigidity and unjustified restrictions on legitimate flexible forms of labour.

The volatility characterising today's economies is set to continue and a diversity of employment types would contribute to growth and competitiveness. There was general consensus of the need to abandon the preoccupation with specific types of contracts and instead focus on how we can enhance the position of workers while also supporting the needs of employers. ILO statistics show that just 42 per cent of the world's waged workers (in total less than 20 per cent of the working population) has a full-time open-ended contract. All other workers are in 'non-standard' forms of employment.

The two-day conference brought together some 200 global work and employment specialists from Europe, Asia-Pac, Africa and North and South America. Delegates included ILO, policy makers, industry representatives and academics and we were privileged to hear from some eminent speakers including members of the European Parliament and OECD.

A triple win

Entitled 'A triple win: mobility, inclusion and competitiveness' the Conference discussed these three key elements of well-functioning labour markets and the role the employment and recruitment industry could play in the new reality of work. Debate centred on the benefits of the triangular relationship between the worker, the client company and the agency and the societal benefits generated by private employment services in terms of worker satisfaction and user company success.

Ciett President Annemarie Muntz underlined the contribution the employment and recruitment industry can make by bringing the 60 per cent of people without a formal decent employment contract into quality work. She outlined Ciett's three strategic priorities for the future: Alignment of its messaging on the world of work;

broadening of its membership base, both geographically and in terms of HR services covered; and compliance with quality standards and the updated Ciett code of conduct.

The north/south divide

OECD Director for Employment, Stefano Scarpetta, identified seismic shifts ahead for global labour markets, with an emerging North/South divide as the northern hemisphere with its developed economies but aging populations seeks to reconcile itself with a southern hemisphere often characterised by emerging markets and young, dynamic population growth. He also spoke of a looming employment gap with labour markets experiencing spare capacity alongside skills gaps and suggested that private employment services have the capacity to help narrow the gap by providing labour market data and matching supply with demand on a worldwide scale.

Seeking effective solutions

Peter Hartz spoke of the series of measures, known as the Hartz-reforms, introduced in the 1990s/early 2000s to fix the ill-functioning German labour market. A member of the Commission that spearheaded the reforms, he emphasised the importance of fluidity and vocational training and provided a clear message and direction for today's policymakers in countries facing serious labour market challenges, including high youth unemployment.

Greater co-operation between public and private employment services was discussed in a panel debate with representatives of the public employment services and Thérèse Rein of Welfare to Work provider, Ingeus. PPP remains underdeveloped in many countries and the panel considered the core elements of successful cooperation along with current examples of PPP in action. Targeting specific groups of unemployed workers and a balanced approach to recruitment were seen as facilitating a coordinated approach to PPP.

Looking to the future

It was highly appropriate that this year's conference was held in Italy, and hosted by Ciett's Italian member Assalavoro. The ongoing labour market reforms in Italy serve as a model not just for Europe, but for governments around the world. They have introduced significantly greater flexibility into the Italian labour market which has in turn improved its functioning and paved the way to support continued economic growth.

The reforms stand as an international model of what can be achieved by governments determined to set in place employment legislation fit for the twenty-first century and the changing world of work. Next year our conference travels to New Delhi in India where we will be looking to learn and share best practice in the country that is home to the world's fastest growing workforce. ■