

The European Skills Agenda of the European Commission

Private employment services industry enhances and accelerates job matching; and contributes to upskilling people, paving the way for the recovery, while mitigating unemployment

The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the European Skills Agenda presented by the European Commission in 2020. The private employment services industry is willing to act as partner in the implementation of the strategy with regard to the pact for skills, actions to enhance skills intelligence and further priorities of the European Skills Agenda. Private employment services are essential labour market enablers in the European Skills Agenda, as they enhance job matching, invest in training and employability of workers and thereby pave the way for the recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.

21st September 2020

Executive Summary

- **The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the European Skills Agenda** for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience of the EU Commission.
- **The private employment services industry contributes to labour market transparency, faster and more targeted job matching and to the lifelong skilling of workers**, thus paving the way for the economic and social recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and in the new normal. Through its career management segment alone, the private employment services industry facilitates the transition of 3 million workers every year including the provision of skilling and guidance.
- **As also highlighted in the European Commission's Communication, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transition in Europe**, requiring workers to acquire new, digital and ICT skills to succeed on the labour market. The private employment services industry acts as labour market intermediary supporting both companies and workers in managing this transition.
- **The World Employment Confederation-Europe would certainly be willing to work together with the European Commission, the EU Member States, Social Partners and other actors to implement some of the key actions proposed by the European Commission under the European Skills Agenda.** Key actions proposed by the European Commission that are of interest to the private employment services industry include the pact for skills (action 1), the strengthening of skills intelligence (action 2), which explicitly refers to the private employment services industry, the proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (action 4), skills that support transitions (action 6), the focus to enhance STEM and transversal skills (action 7) and actions to foster adult learning and skills for life (action 8). The World Employment Confederation-Europe would also be willing to contribute to the action 9 on individual learning accounts, while an initiative in this field would certainly have to reflect the different, national traditions and practices linked to individual learning accounts.
- **The European Skills Agenda should be built on the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.** Actions at European level should be developed in close cooperation with national, regional and local authorities and involve social partners at the appropriate levels.
- Bipartite training funds that have been established in several European countries play an important role in organising and funding training for temporary agency workers. In France, the bipartite training fund FAF-TT offered 59,133 training courses in 2018 and 84% of participants are in employment 12 months after the training course.
- Beyond upskilling/reskilling, it is essential that individuals develop a lifelong learning attitude to secure their employability in an increasingly uncertain world of work. The private employment services industry also plays a key role there through its career management segment, notably through its labour market expertise, its knowledge of clients' potentials and skills needs and guidance and effectiveness of reskilling to future-proof labour market relevance.

1. General comments on the European Skills Agenda

- 1.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the European Skills Agenda presented by the European Commission in July 2020. With this position paper, the World Employment Confederation-Europe aims to contribute to the policy debate around the skills agenda, identify initiatives to which the private employment services industry could contribute and showcase skills and training policies of the private employment services industry. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the specific reference to the private employment services industry in the European Skills Agenda with regard to the action 2 on strengthening the skills intelligence.
- 1.2. The COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways accelerated and reinforced the needs for upskilling and reskilling of workers. This includes the need to manage the transition from strongly affected and declining sectors to sectors in high demand of labour and the accelerated digital transformation and the use of digital tools. Aspects of skills enhancement, training and the allocation role of the temporary agency work industry have been highlighted in Joint Recommendations of the World Employment Confederation-Europe and UNI-Europe on COVID-19.¹
- 1.3. Not least in the context of COVID-19, the labour market shifts require new skills to be developed such as to future-proof business existence and workers' relevance. In order to mitigate the soaring unemployment, it is critical for workers and businesses to develop the ability to continuously face changes, not at least through regular skilling refresh. Guidance and support in this transition - meaning 1. assessment, 2. mapping with aspirations and 3. targeted development / skilling are instrumental for the sustainability of a framework. Failing to support with 1./2. will result in unsustainable practices in skilling.
- 1.4. Looking at practices in European countries, there is a strong commitment to provide access to training for temporary agency workers. In 2019, the number of temporary agency workers benefiting from training amounted to 350,000 in France, 269,000 in Italy, 19,929 in the Netherlands and 105,100 in Belgium. Training is provided either based on training schemes set up at the level of the private employment services industry or through joint action with the trade unions via bipartite training funds. The private employment services industry furthermore provides access to apprenticeship schemes for young people, combining work-based and school-based learning and improving career prospects.
- 1.5. The World Employment Confederation also contributes to encouraging businesses to see the value of investing in their human capital, thus avoiding the vicious circle of firing and hiring new skilled people. This practice heavily supports the incurring switch from investing in external transitions towards internal transitions. In some of our members, we have observed inversion of practice from 2/3 of human capital investment in external and 1/3 in internal mobility towards 1/3 and 2/3 respectively.
- 1.6. Investment and development of soft skills are of essential importance, especially for young people. This includes guidance for example conducting job interviews and drafting a CV and training in the interaction and cooperation with other people. By placing working in various, different work assignments and economic sectors, the private employment services industry furthermore helps workers to enhance their transversal skills. The importance of these transversal skills are also highlighted in action 7 of the European Skills Agendas.

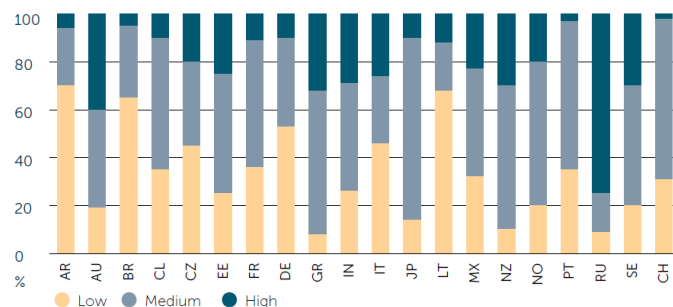
2. Working together under a pact for skills

- 2.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the Commission proposal for a pact for skills. The approach of bringing all relevant stakeholders together is certainly the right approach and the pact could be a valuable platform to foster public-private partnerships. At the same time, there are already numerous partnerships, networks and platforms that have been established at national, European and even international

¹ The World Employment Confederation-Europe/UNI-Europa Joint Recommendations are available online on the World Employment Confederation-Europe [website](#)

level. The pact for skills should clearly identify the main areas and gaps in cooperation it wants to focus on. The World Employment Confederation-Europe would certainly be interested in working together with other stakeholders under the Pact for Skills, as our industry already does for example in the Digital Skills Alliance and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Global Apprenticeship network.

- 2.2. The private employment services industry has significant experience of developing partnerships for skills and training, cooperating with universities and schools to invest in the skills and employability particularly of young people. Advancing the work in a Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition would certainly be a needed and welcomed initiative, as many job profiles require more digital skills, changes in the labour market that have been accelerated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Linked to the pact for skills, the World Employment Confederation-Europe would like to highlight that the private employment services industry and particularly its temporary agency work services provide training and work assignments to workers in many different economic sectors, including health, construction, automotive and transport and tourism. Through its career management segment, the World Employment Confederation further provides just-in-time skilling as part of millions of workers in transition.
- 2.3. The private employment services industry works together with stakeholders and partners to improve the labour market prospects of older workers. In Spain, approximately one million professionals aged over 50 are unemployed, according to latest data from the Spanish Office of National Statistics (2018 Q1). Because of digitalisation, changes to the economic and social paradigms as well as the effects of a lengthy and serious financial crisis, this group of workers has been increasingly disconnected from the labour market. SAVIA is a digital hub to improve employability and generate work opportunities for professionals aged over 50. Randstad Spain acts as the employment partner in the project, providing more than 4500 job vacancies each day as well as knowledge of the labour market from its studies and analysis centre.
- 2.4. Data from World Employment Confederation member countries shows that agency work assignments requires a broad range of skill sets, from low over medium to high-skilled workers as illustrated in the diagram, which shows the skills required for agency work assignments.



3. Skills for a job: Aligning policies to deliver results

- 3.1. The comprehensive approach to up- and reskilling, starting with reliable skills intelligence to deliver training is certainly a key pillar of European and national skills strategies, especially in the post COVID-19 context.
- 3.2. Upskilling and reskilling policies need to focus both on the “hard” and the “soft” skills. Of course, workers need to acquire and develop skills that are specifically linked to their professions and dual learning programmes, university studies and vocational training programmes provide the relevant framework for this. For the private employment services industry, which provides services and work assignment across many different sectors and industries and ranging from highly qualified specialists to low skilled workers, the training and development of soft skills is equally important.
- 3.3. Soft skills can range from forms of interaction in the professional context. Soft skills, which are also developed through work experience in the private employment services industry, include typically: leadership, communication, strategic thinking, emotional intelligence. The private employment services industry has developed specific tools and instruments for job seekers and young people to develop their skills. The Belgian World Employment Confederation-Europe member Federgon and its bipartite training fund has for example

implement a project supporting young people in testing and developing their soft skills. Testyourselfie is an interactive website and mobile app targeting young people and first-time labour market entrants helping them to test and develop their soft skills.²

- 3.4. The private employment services in Europe upskills and reskills around 1.6 million temporary agency workers in Europe each year. Training provision is mostly organised based on company-based training schemes in the private employment services industry and bipartite training funds, which have been set up in several European countries. Furthermore, the private employment services sector contributes to dual learning and apprenticeships, with the formal training of the apprenticeship schemes being organised at the private employment services companies, whereas the work-based learning takes place during assignments at the user companies. Against this background, the private employment services industry has been actively contributing to the European Alliance for apprenticeships.
- 3.5. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the focus on developing and deepening skills intelligence and the focus in that action on the participation of social partners, as well as public and private employment services. The private employment services industry has indeed considerable knowledge and experience in the area of skills intelligence, including profiling and skill testing tools, online tests and skills development and training programmes. Also, the bipartite training funds can play an important role in the area of developing and deepening skills intelligence. In this area there are also different examples of how the career management industry assesses the impact of disruption on jobs and what are the new paths for specific roles (and therefore what are realistic next steps for people becoming obsolete within their roles). Lee Hecht Harrison for instance leverages AI-algorithm to understand the impact for businesses and workers on turnover and anticipate the mobilisation of staff as they need to be reallocated / transitioned.
- 3.6. The World Employment Confederation-Europe would therefore welcome to work together with the European Commission, the EU Member States, social partners and other to develop skills intelligence at European level in the context of the skills for jobs policy.

4. Developing tools that empower people to build skills throughout life

- 4.1. The private employment services industry plays an important role in empowering people to build skills throughout their professional career. The majority of agency workers in Europe is young and often, working through the private employment services industry is the first step for young people to acquire professional experience. For these young agency workers, training and skills enhancement in parallel to first professional experience is essential to progress in their professional career. Apprenticeships and dual learning in the private employment services industry, such as the specific apprenticeship schemes in France and the Netherlands are particularly important for the young people. The European Alliance for apprenticeships is a needed and welcomed framework to exchange information and best-practices on apprenticeships and dual learning.
- 4.2. Skills enhancement and training is equally important throughout the professional career, especially for those who change jobs or who lose their job due to economic restructuring or a changing demand for skills. Career management services of the private employment services are key players for developing skills, facilitate career transitions and provide career guidance. This is particularly important in the context of major processes of economic restructuring, which are likely to characterise European economies in the coming period. Anticipating these processes is the core of their activities.
- 4.3. Agency work is by nature a form of work that entails some discontinuity of work. To mitigate this disruption, agency workers need to be guaranteed better economic stability for them and their families in order to build a life project. The bipartite fund Ebitemp was set up in Italy through a contractual agreement between the trade union organizations (FeLSA-CISL, NIDIL-CGIL and UILTemp) and the associations of the agencies for temporary agency

² The Testyourselfie can be accessed via the following website: <https://www.testyourselfie.eu/#/language>

work (Assolavoro and Assosomm). It is a non-profit organization, benefitting both workers and agencies. It provides a platform for the management of industrial relations within the agency work sector. It safeguards and protects agency workers through income support interventions and other services defined by the national collective bargaining agreements. 14 types of benefits are currently provided to workers and their families, in areas like social protection in case of accidents, childcare, education, health insurance, loans, mobility, etc. Ebitemp is financed by contributions charged to agencies for temporary work and had an annual budget of 8 million € in 2017. The World Employment Confederation-Europe believes that that training rights should stay with the individual, even as they move from one job or assignment to the next. In the agency work industry, such a system is already in place via the bipartite funds. Against this background, the World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the Commission's plans to explore how this principle could be applied to all working people. A number of practical questions will need to be solved, for example how to ensure people follow relevant training that will indeed enhance employability, and how to ensure that employers that already contribute financially to worker trainings will not be faced with increased costs and administrative burden.

- 4.4. The World Employment Confederation-Europe would welcome to work with the European Commission and national stakeholders to continue develop tools that empower people to build skills throughout life and contribute to the action 10 on a European approach to micro-credentials.

5. Setting ambitious objectives

- 5.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe fully support the aim outlined by the European Commission in chapter 4 on setting ambitious skills objectives, such as the objective that 120 million adults in the EU should participate in learning every year, corresponding to 50% of the adult population. The World Employment Confederation-Europe also supports the objective that 230 million adults should have at least basic digital skills by 2025, which would cover 70 percent of the adult population in the EU.
- 5.2. The World Employment Confederation-Europe is convinced that setting up ambitious objectives in the area of vocational education, skills development and training requires a joint commitment of public authorities at various levels (EU level, national level as well as regional and local level), social partners at European and national level, education and training providers, as well as public and private employment services. The private employment services industry plays its role by upskilling more than 854,000 agency workers in Europe, many of these being young and/or first-time labour market entrants. Furthermore, up to 750,000 workers are benefiting from upskilling by Career Management industry
- 5.3. As Sectoral Social Partners for temporary agency work, the World Employment Confederation-Europe and UNI-Europa are currently conducting a joint project on "Social Innovation in the temporary agency work industry". The project, which aims at compiling a compendium of social innovation practices in Europe, focuses on three main areas, namely Social Innovation in training, working conditions and social protection. For all three dimensions, a special focus is laid on the role of social partners and social dialogue in fostering social innovation. A first set of Social Innovation case studies has been compiled by the World Employment Confederation in 2019/2020 and published on [the "Social Innovation stories" website](#).

6. Making it happen: Unlock investment

- 6.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the focus in the European Skills Agenda on making it happen and unlocking investment. In the current economic context, in which the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the deepest recession in Europe, it is essential to provide financial incentives and support to foster the investment in skills and employability.

- 6.2. Unlocking investment in skills and employability should build on different levels and funding channels, including skills and investment programmes as foreseen in the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework, EU Skills policies and instruments at national and regional level of the EU Member States and investment in skills and training made available by the private sector, including the private employment services. Often, providing a European and/or national scheme for training and skills enhancement policies can help to unlock private investment.
- 6.3. In this context it is essential to include career guidance in the mix of funding as this is the sustainability element which increases the return on each Euro invested. Career guidance can be effectively provided by private actors, such as the private employment services industry and its career management services.
- 6.4. A key requirement for making this work smoothly is to provide for lead, more transparent and less burdensome access to finance for training. As seen with the COVID-responses, simplicity is key for businesses to access it!! Especially the legal and administrative obligations under the European Social Fund and the national programmes should be reviewed to ease the access to funding especially for small and medium-sized companies.

About the World Employment Confederation-Europe

The World Employment Confederation-Europe is the voice of the employment industry at European level, representing labour market enablers. The World Employment Confederation-Europe includes in its membership national federations from all across Europe, as well as several of the largest international workforce solutions companies. It is therefore fully representative of the industry, both in size and diversity.



The World Employment Confederation-Europe brings a unique access to and engagement with European policymakers (EU Commission, European Parliament, and Council) and stakeholders. The World Employment Confederation-Europe strives for a recognition of the economic and social role played by the industry in enabling work, adaptation, security and prosperity in our societies. Its members provide access to the labour market and meaningful work to almost 11 million of people in Europe.