

Protecting workers in the COVID-19 pandemic, safeguarding work and preparing for an inclusive economic and social recovery

Joint Recommendations of the sectoral social partners of the temporary agency work industry

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The outbreak and acceleration of the COVID-19 pandemic is severely impacting people, labour markets and economies around the world. As European sectoral social partners for the temporary agency work industry, the primary, common goal of UNI Europa and the World Employment Confederation-Europe and their respective national social partners is to protect the health and safety of temporary agency workers, to keep people at work in a safe environment and support businesses through these difficult times. This should be done based on close cooperation and mutual respect. The sectoral social partners recognise the importance of a constructive sectoral social dialogue and that temporary agency work contributes to improve the functioning of labour markets and fulfils specific needs for both companies and workers. The contribution of temporary work agencies to keeping the labour market fluent and functioning is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the phase of the economic recovery.

Since the outbreak of the crisis, Sectoral Social Partners of the temporary agency work industry have been active informing workers and companies on the management of health and safety risks and securing equal access to support measures for agency workers (e.g. paid sick leave, short time work). Against this background, the sectoral social partners of the temporary agency work industry have adopted today the following, joint recommendations for mitigating the immediate impact of the crisis and preparing for the recovery of the labour market and the economy:

Recommendations for actions during the COVID-19 pandemic

Recommendations and commitments addressed to the temporary agency work sector

1. Call on temporary work agencies and user undertaking¹ to provide frontline workers with adequate health and safety protection against the COVID-19 virus. This includes medical care, examinations and, where possible, a COVID-19 test paid by the employer or the user undertaking before the start of a new assignment.
2. Ensure the required access to health and safety instructions and training tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic for agency workers, before engaging in new tasks and jobs. This includes providing temporary agency workers with training in the use of IT tools. The sectoral social partners remind the agencies of their responsibility and call on temporary work agencies to monitor this.

¹ The user undertaking is the undertaking to which a temporary agency worker is hired out, i.e. the undertaking using temporary agency workers. In other words, the user undertaking is the third party for whom work is performed as part of temporary agency work.

3. Promote the adherence to governmental health and safety instruction and prevent further spread of the Covid-19 virus.
4. In accordance with point 2 above, strengthen the labour market reallocation role of temporary work agencies in the current COVID-19 pandemic, supporting workers to safely transition from sectors in decline to sectors in urgent need of workers including healthcare, logistics, education, agriculture & food production and supply.
5. Work together with all relevant actors addressing the impact of the pandemic on labour markets and economy (national governments, health and safety organisations, labour inspectors) to work jointly on containing the pandemic and protecting the temporary agency workers and the respect of their terms of employment.
6. Commit to respect and implement these recommendations

Recommendations to national policymakers

7. Focus governmental and public policy on health and safety at work on supporting companies and workers in containing the pandemic through information campaigns, online information sources and training programmes which can be implemented in cooperation with sectoral social partners. Guarantee that all temporary agency workers have access to universal healthcare.
8. Ensure that all temporary agency workers who are laid off temporarily or otherwise, maintain their income to the greatest extent as possible. When this is not possible, all workers, regardless of contract form, must have a minimum right to social protection, as also reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights.
9. Recognise the temporary agency work industry as an 'essential service' in public policy during the pandemic, securing workers and businesses have full access to agency work services. Ensure the continuity of employment, authorizing temporary work agencies to renew contracts of temporary agency workers which expire during the periods of social safety nets or the interruption of the activities of user companies.
10. Ensure that temporary work agencies have equal access to governmental programmes and measures put in place to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, including short-time working schemes.

Recommendations for the period of the economic recovery

Recommendations addressed to the temporary agency work sector

11. Take advantage of the sectoral social dialogue at national level for a discussion among sectoral social partners on developing new ways of working, learning and social protection, as social innovation can be an important driver for the economic recovery and the return to inclusive growth.
12. Engage with public authorities, user companies and sectors to create a safe and quick pathway back to work for workers including operational health and safety guidelines, processes and protocols tailored the various stages of recovery.
13. Encourage the use of solutions already put in place by sectoral social partners at national level for skilling and re-skilling to ensure that temporary agency workers have access to training/retraining.
14. Support and strengthen the sectoral social dialogue in accordance with national law and practice on all issues related to the COVID-19 containment and the support of the economic recovery.

Recommendations addressed to governments and policymakers

15. Ensure equal access to governmental programmes that support the economic recovery.
16. Recognise the role of the regulated temporary work agency sector in offering both access to the labour market as well as labour market transitions to new employment opportunities.
17. Speed up reforms to ensure effective access to skilling and social protection across diverse forms of work
18. Strengthen the cooperation between public and private employment services to enhance labour market access for all who are exposed to displacement, exclusion and transition