

Agency work offers effective opportunities for reconciling private and professional life

EUROCIETT CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMISSION SECOND STAGE CONSULTATION ON THE RECONCILIATION OF PROFESSIONAL, PRIVATE AND FAMILY LIFE

As the official social partner for the temporary agency work sector, Eurociett welcomes the European debate on the reconciliation of professional, private and family life as an opportunity to explain how agency work, as a regulated form of flexible labour, can provide effective solutions to reach an improved work-life balance.

The Eurociett submission to the second stage consultation focuses exclusively on those questions directly related to the agency work industry.

Agency work contributes effectively to an improved work-life balance

Employment opportunities provided by private employment agencies contribute in various ways to the reconciliation of private and professional life. The most important dimensions are the following:

- **Private employment agencies provide flexible contractual arrangements, which are well-regulated.** Private employment agencies offer flexible and secure contractual arrangements to workers, which meet the demands for increased flexibility to reach a better work-life balance. Agency work can be based on different, established forms of labour contracts, as for example open-ended contracts with the agency, fixed-term contracts or part-time contracts. Being comprehensively regulated by national labour law and providing work security to agency workers, private employment agencies offer tailor-made employment solutions and provide employment opportunities to workers whenever they intend to work.
- **Private employment agencies offer employment solutions at each stage of workers' professional life.** As professional labour market intermediaries, private employment agencies help to reconcile professional and private life at each stage of the working life:
 - **Private employment agencies help young people**, who are in particular need of flexible forms of employment to reconcile family and professional life. Recent statistics illustrate that young people are strongly represented among the temporary agency workers in many EU Member States, especially in Italy, Belgium, the UK and the Netherlands, with a share of young workers (< 25) of between 20 and almost 60 percent. The over-representation of young workers in temporary agency work has a particularly long tradition in the Netherlands, where young workers represent between 50 and 60 percent of the agency workers for about 10 years.

- **Temporary agency work provided by private employment agencies is a work opportunity frequently chosen by students.** An increasing number of students need to work parallel to their studies in order to afford their study and living costs. Temporary agency work offers for students an essential entry point to the labour market and provides work opportunities, which can be easily combined with their academic studies. At the same, work provided to students by private employment agencies helps them acquiring professional experience and therefore facilitates the transition from education to work, once they have completed their studies.
- **Flexible work solutions offered by private employment agencies match the demands of older people.** Older workers are frequently looking for part-time work or flexible working solutions, particularly to reduce the average working hours and to reach a better work-life balance. At the same time, a growing number of pensioners intend to remain connected to the working-life on a part-time basis in order to maintain contacts to colleagues and to gain some additional income. Agency work offers both for older workers and for pensioners flexible working arrangements that correspond directly to their needs and facilitate reaching an improved work-life balance for older people. Recent research illustrates that temporary agency work is particularly used in the UK and the Netherlands to combine professional life with aspirations to work in a flexible way.

As for students, young parents and pensioners, agency work offers also improved work opportunities for experienced employees and laid-off workers. ***In sum, private employment agencies offer enhanced employment opportunities at each stage of the working life.***

	Student	1 st time entrants	Experienced workers	Laid-off workers	Pensioners
Role of temporary agency work	Providing temporary work to finance education while studying	Providing temporary assignments leading to a permanent contract	Providing new job opportunities to evolve and improve life conditions	Facilitating transitions from one job to another through outplacement services	Providing extra financial revenues and improving work-life balance

- **Private employment agencies contribute significantly to matching demand and supply in the labour market.** As professional labour market intermediary and through their network of 30,000 branches, the agency work industry significantly contributes to matching demand and supply in the labour market, thus providing more work opportunities to more people. Private employment agencies offer professional services to companies, providing qualified workforce to them that matches exactly their needs and demands and offer quality services to workers, in helping them to find work whenever they intend to work and precisely according to their skills and qualification. In doing so, agency work contributes to a smooth and efficient functioning of the labour market.
- **Private employment agencies facilitate the creation of jobs that otherwise would not exist.** Private employment agencies employ more than 7 million workers in the EU on an annual basis, which corresponds to a daily average of three million workers employed by through agencies or 1.7 percent of the EU working population. By doing so, private employment agencies help creating jobs that would not exist otherwise. Private employment agencies are responsible for genuine employment creation, as 17 percent of the work done through agencies would not have been carried out if this

option would not have been available to companies. 38% of the companies would have used other forms of flexibility, which do not contribute to employment creation, such as overtime.

The contribution of agency work to an improved work-life balance is increasingly recognised

Recently, the contribution of private employment agencies to an improved work-life balance has also been recognised by policy makers and stakeholders:

- In the European Commission's Communication on Flexicurity, published in July 2007, it has been explicitly acknowledged that transitions in the labour market, as the transition from unemployment to work, from education to work and from household to work should be facilitated. As a professional labour market intermediary, agency work substantially helps in facilitating these transitions, which has also been further illustrated in the Eurociett / Uni-Europa joint declaration on Flexicurity signed in February 2007.¹
- Similarly, the European Employment Task Force chaired by Wim Kok in 2003, which provided political input in the revision of the EU Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, stressed the importance of flexible working time arrangements in reaching an improved work-life balance.² Work opportunities offered by private employment agencies allow for flexible working time arrangements, including particularly part time work, which corresponds to the needs of workers in reconciling professional and private life.

Ways to exchange of good practices on reconciliation in Europe

At present, there is still a substantial need to improve policies and approaches for reconciling professional and family in the EU Member States. Whereas the main responsibility for these aspects of social policy remain at national level, the European Union can contribute to the development of new policies and innovative approaches. The most important ways to achieve this objective are:

- **To involve more proactively private employment agencies** as labour market intermediaries that offer flexible forms of employment in the debate on reconciling professional and family life and corresponding policies at national level.
- **To promote reforms of national labour law that allow for more flexible forms of employment**, as these flexible forms of employment (temporary agency work, part-time work, fixed-term contracts, etc.) offer an essential pathway to reconcile professional and family life.
- **To collect, publish and disseminate positive experience of pilot projects and best-practice examples** implemented in EU Member States and to facilitate the information exchange by organising conferences and online-forums that offer a platform for exchanging best-practices.
- **To involve social partners, particularly at sectoral level, proactively in the design and implementation of policies orientated towards the reconciliation of professional and family life.** Eurociett is committed to contribute actively to this debate at EU level, as private employment agencies offer an essential channel to reach a better work-life balance.

¹ Eurociett / Uni-Europa Joint Declaration in the context of the "Flexicurity Debate" as launched and defined by the European Commission. February 2007, Text is available online: www.eurociett.eu

² Cf. European Employment Task Force: Jobs, Jobs, Jobs, Creating more employment in Europe, p. 30. Report is available online: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/pdf/etf_en.pdf

Approaches to develop flexible forms of employment

Flexible working arrangements as provided by private employment agencies are an essential instrument contributing to the reconciliation of private and professional life, they meet the needs and demands of families and young parent. At the same time, private employment agencies face a significant number of unjustified restrictions and discriminatory measures, particularly with regard to their temporary agency work activities. Therefore, Eurociett advocates the following approaches to further develop flexible forms of employment in Europe:

- ***Creating a level-playing field for private employment agencies*** and their temporary agency work activities, in which the agency work industry is not discriminated against, but fully recognised as labour market intermediary providing well-regulated, but flexible forms of employment that help reconciling professional and family life. Work through private employment agencies should be fully recognised as a well-protected, accepted and regulated way to reconcile professional and family life.
- ***Reviewing and lifting unjustified restrictions faced by temporary agency work with regard to the flexibility of contractual arrangements***, in order to allow for greater flexibility to the benefits of both companies and workers. With regard to the objective of reconciling professional and private life, it is essential to lift unjustified restrictions on temporary and part-time contracts for agency workers, to eliminate maximum lengths of assignments for temporary agency workers and to review restrictions on the limitations to temporary contract renewals. Lifting existing unjustified restrictions would allow more people to take advantage of private employment agencies as a way to reconcile professional and private life.
- ***Recognising agency work as an essential (re-) entry channel to the labour market and take advantage of the stepping-stone function of agency work***, for example for returning women and young parents, as it offers the opportunity to gain professional experience, to develop skills and as it provides access to training, which contributes to improve the employability of workers, while offering flexible working arrangements that provide a better work-life balance.

About Eurociett

Eurociett is the European organisation of Ciett, the International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies. Eurociett is the authoritative voice representing the interests of agency work businesses in Europe and is the Social Partner for the temporary agency work sector. It is recognised as such by the European institutions (especially the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council), by other stakeholders (e.g. BusinessEurope, UNI-Europa) as well as national governments.

Eurociett brings together 25 national federations of private employment agencies and 6 of the largest staffing companies worldwide (Adecco, Kelly Services, Manpower, Randstad, USG People, Vedior). Eurociett members consist of private companies operating in the following HR activities: temporary agency work, permanent recruitment, interim management, executive search, outplacement and training. Across the European Union, they gather 30,000 branches, employ 210,000 permanent staff and more than 3 million agency workers on a daily average.

The Eurociett mission is to seek greater recognition for the contribution that private employment agencies make to labour markets, especially in relation with 3 key aspects: employment creation; access to and integration in the labour market of diverse categories of workers (disabled, first-time entrants, long-term unemployed, women returners, etc.); economic growth and public budget contribution.