



THE ADECCO GROUP

A photograph of a man with a beard and a white shirt with a tie, looking at a smartphone. He is standing on a construction site with wooden scaffolding in the background. The image has a teal overlay.

Work and security in the age of platforms

The Adecco Group position paper

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Introduction

The 'gig' economy is changing how we think about the future of work. It has raised questions about the role of freelancers or the self-employed, and the (perceived) displacement of salaried workers in favour of freelancers. It has also raised the need for necessary reform of social benefits and protection to better reflect the new labour market.

This is not a new discussion, as freelancers have been around for a long time. But both of these topics have been linked and have received a new impetus from the rise of the platform economy, which offers new opportunities for freelancers and which, in some cases, further complicates the distinction between freelancing and employment.

This paper sets out the basic principles that the Adecco Group adheres to with regard to these issues.

Executive summary



Governments, employers and social partners should (re)-design any out-dated regulations or policies to ensure that various work opportunities, including freelancing, are secure and sustainable for workers and businesses alike.



If/when there is a de facto employment relationship between a platform and a worker, it should be classified as such, and workers should receive the appropriate benefits and security. If the worker is not employed but working as freelancer, all relevant rights and obligations should apply, including taxation, certification, accountability, etc.



We are committed to providing freelancers with fair remuneration and the benefits they need, in some cases going beyond the legal minimum.



One-size-fit-all solutions for platform work are not the answer.



The Adecco Group believes that situations could arise where vulnerable workers, including vulnerable freelancers, should be offered additional protection by government.



The build-up of social protection should be individual, portable and transferable.

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Our view on the world of work

The future of social benefits

Social protection is traditionally offered via or bound to specific employers or sectors.

A job for life is no longer the reality for many. People increasingly move between employers, sectors, and even forms of work at various stages in their lives, such as full time open-ended, part-time, temporary, agency work, (on or offline) freelancing to name a few. Some even hold various sources of income simultaneously.

This means an increasing number of workers face difficulties to effectively use the rights they have built up over the years, if any.

To solve this, **governments, employers and social partners should evaluate any out-dated regulations or policies to ensure that various work opportunities, including freelancing, are secure and sustainable for workers and businesses alike.** Reforms should make work rewarding for all, regardless of the form of work.

Employers and social partners should jointly work to achieve a gradual shift towards the **individual, portable and transferable build-up of social protection** - with respect for national specificities and preferences. Where there is a national system of building up social rights, workers should not lose these as they move between forms of work or economic sectors.

Freelancing and social protection

Working independently offers a lot of flexibility and freedom to workers.

In principle, freelancers have the freedom (but also bear the responsibility) to organise their own safety nets. In some countries, schemes are in place for the self-employed, but generally these are less comprehensive and favourable than those for salaried workers. On the other hand, the self-employed often enjoy more favourable tax regimes that support them in organising safety nets.

There is increasing evidence that a certain group of freelancers are underinsured. In case of even moderate setbacks in their business, this could lead them into a poverty trap. This might especially happen:

- In lower paid professions;
- Where self-employment was a negative choice (e.g. as the only alternative to unemployment);

While the specific situation will depend on the national context, **the Adecco Group believes that situations could arise where vulnerable workers, including vulnerable freelancers, should be offered additional protection by government.** This could vary from guidance or support services to mitigate risks to specific obligatory social insurances for (certain groups of) freelancers; for example, below a certain rate threshold, or those with only a limited number of clients.

The Adecco Group stands for decent work. We look to marry both the interests of our clients, providing tailored workforce solutions, and our candidates and associates, honoring workers' rights. This also means that both as a service provider and as an employer, **we are committed to providing freelancers with fair remuneration and the benefits they need, in some cases going beyond the legal minimum.**

Online platform classification of workers

Diverse platforms offer diverse forms of work. In that sense, working for a platform is not fundamentally different from working in the offline world, where one can also be either self-employed, an agency worker, or directly employed by the client. **One-size-fit-all solutions for platform work, as proposed by some labour unions, are not the answer.**

It is important to assess the daily practice of a platform when determining the form of work. Some platforms might claim that they offer a service to freelancers, but several court cases have shown that this claim might not always hold up under scrutiny. **If/when there is a de facto employment relationship, it should be classified as such, and workers should receive the appropriate benefits and security.** Otherwise it is to the detriment of workers who do not receive the freedom of freelancing nor the benefits of employment, while it also constitutes unfair competition to providers of agency work and other decent forms of work.

If the worker is not employed but working as freelancer, all relevant rights and obligations should apply, including taxation, certification, accountability, etc.



Relevant definitions

- **Online platform:** there is a large diversity of platforms. We identify three main categories:
 1. Service platform: Provide a single service by independent contractors. Independent contractors are highly dependent on the platform (often close to employment).
 2. Crowd sourcing platform: micro projects delivered by lots of people.
 3. Workforce or talent platform: On demand services, business partner to manage a worker's accounting and give them the expertise (legal - social) that they do not have. Even among these talent platforms, online platforms are incredibly diverse:
 - a. Some clearly cater for the self-employed, mostly to match supply & demand (including the Adecco Group's YOSS)
 - b. Some clearly cater for employees of the platform who are effectively agency workers (including the Adecco Group's Adia)
 - c. But there's also a large grey area in between.
- **Freelancer/self-employed/iPro:** A freelancer is an entrepreneur. While national practices differ, key elements to define self-employment include the freedom to organise their own work when and how they see fit, to set their own pricing, but also the responsibility to organise their own social security and benefits. Self-employed people can be low or high skilled, in any type of job from manual work (plumber) to creative industries (designer).
- **Agency workers** are employed by an (on- or offline) agency, and work under the supervision of the client in a triangular relationship. This often happens on-site at the client, but could also take place remotely. The client's supervision is key to setting agency workers apart from freelancers working via an (on- or offline) intermediary or payroll service.
- **Social protection/benefits:** For the purpose of this paper, benefits or protection are considered to be the rights that workers build up during their working life: protection against loss of income/unemployment, disability and old age pensions, and rights to (re-)training.

About Us

The Adecco Group is the world's leading HR solutions partner. We provide more than 700,000 people with permanent and flexible employment every day. With more than 34,000 employees in 60 countries, we transform the world of work one job at a time. Our colleagues serve more than 100,000 organisations with the talent, HR services and cutting-edge technology they need to succeed in an ever-changing global economy. As a Fortune Global 500 company, we lead by example, creating shared value that meets social needs while driving business innovation. Our culture of inclusivity, fairness and teamwork empowers individuals and organisations, fuels economies, and builds better societies. These values resonate with our employees, who voted us number 2 on the Great Place to Work® - World's Best Workplaces 2017 list. We make the future work for everyone.

The Adecco Group is a proud member of the [World Employment Confederation](#), [BusinessEurope](#) and the [International Organisation of Employers](#). We contribute to the debate on the Future of Work via the [ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work](#), [Business at OECD](#), and the [B20 process](#).

We would love to hear what you think about work and security in the age of platforms! Please reach out to us via Group.PublicAffairs@adecgroup.com.