

Employment agencies: on the frontline of the economic recovery



Employment agencies on the frontline

While some companies, and by extension industries, have enjoyed significant growth and success during the pandemic crisis, there are many more that have been severely damaged, if not completely destroyed.

Across the EU, unemployment in January 2021 stood at 7.3%, up from 6.6% the year before, with similar figures across the wider Europe, Middle East and Africa region and globally. Much of the damage has been stemmed by some of the largest government bailouts in history, but at some point, the money will stop. The question is whether that will happen before economies can recover enough to ensure unemployment rates do not continue to climb.

Either way, a percentage increase inside a year is a major problem for national economies. They will want citizens that can not only spend their way out of a crisis, but that can pay taxes to refill finances devastated by the pandemic – both of which requires steady employment.

But it is not as simple as creating jobs and filling them. With industries such as hospitality, travel and retail completely upended, other sectors such as online and delivery having experienced significant growth, and life increasingly unlikely to return to pre-2020 normality, many of those unemployed will need to be retrained, with all the support that demands, to make them employable in the post-COVID market.

Then there is the influx of the next generation of workers, as graduating students enter the job market for the first time.

In this disrupted space, employment agencies are on the frontline. If we are to avoid a lost generation to unemployment, if countries are to have a strong, productive workforce that can both build and sustain a growing and increasingly digital economy, and if we are to overcome the disruption of COVID-19, then employment agencies will play a vital role in enabling the new workforce which will drive future success.



Employment agencies in a digital and disrupted world

An economic recovery requires workers. Yet with an increased focus on doing things differently post pandemic, simply pushing people back into their old jobs isn't going to work.

For one thing, those roles may no longer exist – the industries hit hardest by the pandemic are going to take longer to recover, leaving many people with skills that are not required by other sectors. Then there's the new generation of school and university leavers entering the workforce for the first time that need to be accommodated – limited in experience, and with the last year of their education disrupted.

And this needs to be delivered in a climate of restricted budgets – for welfare, for the delivery of public services, for investment in new technologies and innovations.

Plus, there's the private sector factor – the rising expectations of what good looks like, driven by the experiences we all enjoy in our daily lives. What effect have the likes of LinkedIn had on job hunting and candidate expectations? This goes beyond specialist professional social networks, though. Citizens have spent the last year subsisting on a diet of Amazon, Netflix and food deliveries, all services delivered by organisations that are continually redefining the digital experience.

It all adds up to a revolution in how people train for, locate and get jobs. And employment agencies are going to be at the forefront of this change.

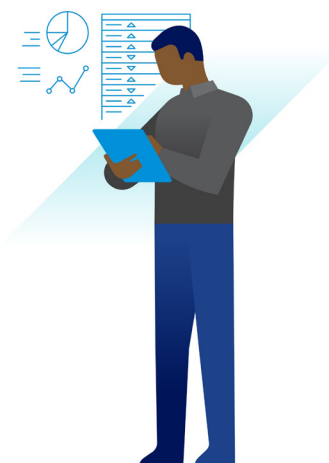
Putting the job seeker first

It all adds up to a revolution in how people train for, First, they need to put the job seeker first. The stereotypical citizen interaction with an employment agency involves form filling, mandatory face-to-face meetings and dispiriting conversations with under resourced agents treated like, and treating citizens like, machines. This model will not work, it will not scale, and it will not meet the demands of the new job market.

Putting the job seeker first means having more direct, personal contact with citizens to better understand their needs. This is a difficult climate to be finding a new role in, so being able to demonstrate empathy through true human interaction is key.

This interaction is critical as agents are going to need to be able to explain the situation and process to a vast array of citizens – from students entering the market for the first time to hospitality workers from disrupted sectors wondering how they can work anywhere else and company directors that have seen the pandemic tear down their life's work. Multiple form filling in both online and in-person is complex, time consuming and wasteful.

Agents need to understand the situation so that they can match the needs of the job seeker with that of the market and specific businesses. That means giving them the flexibility to intervene as required, and also being able to scale teams up and down as demand ebbs and flows. For instance, in traditional tourist hotspots, at the end of academic years, and in the run up to Christmas and other national holidays, market demand and supply is going to look different to other parts of the year.



Significantly growing capacity without spiralling costs

To achieve this by putting the job seeker first, employment agencies can go one of two ways. They can either employ a huge number of employees themselves, provide training and then deploy them. Or they can automate the process where possible, supplementing a more manageable growth in employee numbers.

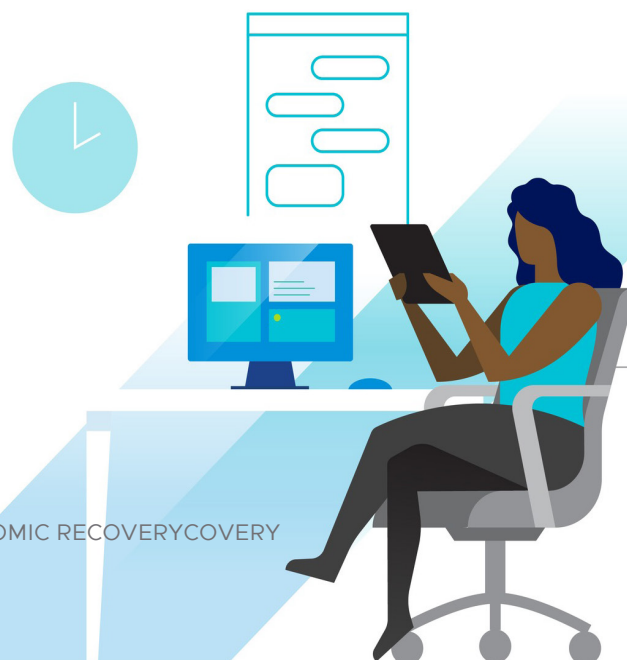
While the first option needs to happen to a degree, it lacks flexibility and is simply not cost effective in a time of budget restrictions and cost efficiencies.

By automating the appropriate parts of the process, employment agencies can free up agent's time, removing routine administrative tasks to allow them to focus more on the human intervention element. This can also be used to deliver digital self-service direct to job seekers and employers, through an omni-channel experience. To do all this will require the rapid development of a range of applications and services that can adapt to the changing needs of users as everyone gains a better understanding of what the future is going to look like. In addition, providing employees with frictionless access to the digital tools needed to do their jobs more effectively from any location has been shown to not only improve employee productivity, but to reduce errors, absenteeism and staff turnover.

To be clear, employment agencies are still going to have to boost their own staff numbers, but through automation they can ensure that the service they deliver meets both the needs of job seekers and does so within budgetary considerations.

Plus, there's the fact that increasing staff numbers brings its own challenges. There will definitely need to be a big influx of employment agency staff. How do these organisations onboard significant numbers of new employees quickly and effectively, without significant service disruption?

Again, through the use of automation. Through automation, agencies can onboard and train employees in days rather than weeks. This means working out which parts of the process can be delivered via applications (such as initial training, guides on processes and systems), and which are most effective when delivered by a colleague or manager.





Automating onboarding

It is an approach we have taken with many of our customers. For example, if we need to onboard 10,000 new employees, and we can get these employees ready with the tools they need to start supporting job seekers from day one, rather than day 15, we save 750,000 worker hours – or alternatively, we've given you 407 more employees.

If you want to see what this means for your organisation, please get in touch: employmentagencies@vmware.com

Delivering automation

Where does the automation come from?

As alluded to, via applications, provisioned by departmental IT, that meets the needs of the agencies. From an employee perspective, that means providing services that support productivity, thereby increasing capacity without increasing costs.

That will be applications that serve up citizen data, that run initial checks and suggest possible matches for roles before a human sift, that alert when job seekers have missed interviews, received feedback, secured or not be chosen for a role.

It will also be citizen-facing applications that help build 24/7 self-service. Mobile and web-based services that allow job seekers to register, update profiles, job and training histories, search vacancies and courses and put themselves forward, as well as accessing guides on application and interview best practice.

Not only does this support the job seeker to take responsibility for their job search, it also ensures that when they do speak to a person, the agent knows (and can perhaps even see) the steps they have taken and the information they already have. The interaction can then be focused on what else needs to happen, rather than repeating information.

To deliver this IT teams need access to agile platforms which allow them to develop and deploy applications quickly. No one knows what applications or services may be required in 12 months' time because they cannot predict what market demand is going to be. That means the days of six month or even year long development cycles is gone – applications need to be conceived, deployed and iterated upon in days or weeks, not months or years, and that requires the right environments and tools to do so effectively.

IT also needs to instigate a consistent approach which breaks down silos between ongoing digitisation and data, while respecting privacy regulations and security requirements. To deliver a job seeker first approach, data captured through in-person interactions needs to be stored in the same systems as that collected through application and online engagement.

A more agile, consistent approach is also critical in delivering the different applications that citizens and employees need. For the former, there needs to be a user-friendly front-end, with a complete secure back-end collecting data. For the latter, the experience still needs to be user-friendly, but the whole service needs to fit with a work from anywhere approach. As strategic hybrid models of working replace the ad hoc remote working of 2020, employees need to be able to easily move from home to office working as they require, without significant restrictions or onerous processes.





The security implications

Yet in the move to put everything online, connecting people and devices irrespective of location, employment agencies and their IT teams run the risk of opening themselves up to cyber-attacks. The return to the office, the rise in job vacancies and the growth in unemployment will create an environment that socially engineered attacks will feed off, with both citizens and employment agency employees potential weak links. Cyber security needs to be front of mind, with clear guidance for citizens on what agencies and employers will ask for and, more importantly, what they will not. In addition, employees should receive appropriate training to limit the risk of successful phishing attacks.

IT will also need to ensure that every connected element, from front-end web applications to data centre via the network, has the appropriate security. For existing systems, this means keeping on top of updates and patches, but with an agile development platform it means new applications and services can have security integrated from the start, rather than added as an afterthought. Security needs to adopt a zero-trust model and be capable of adapting to the changing threats.

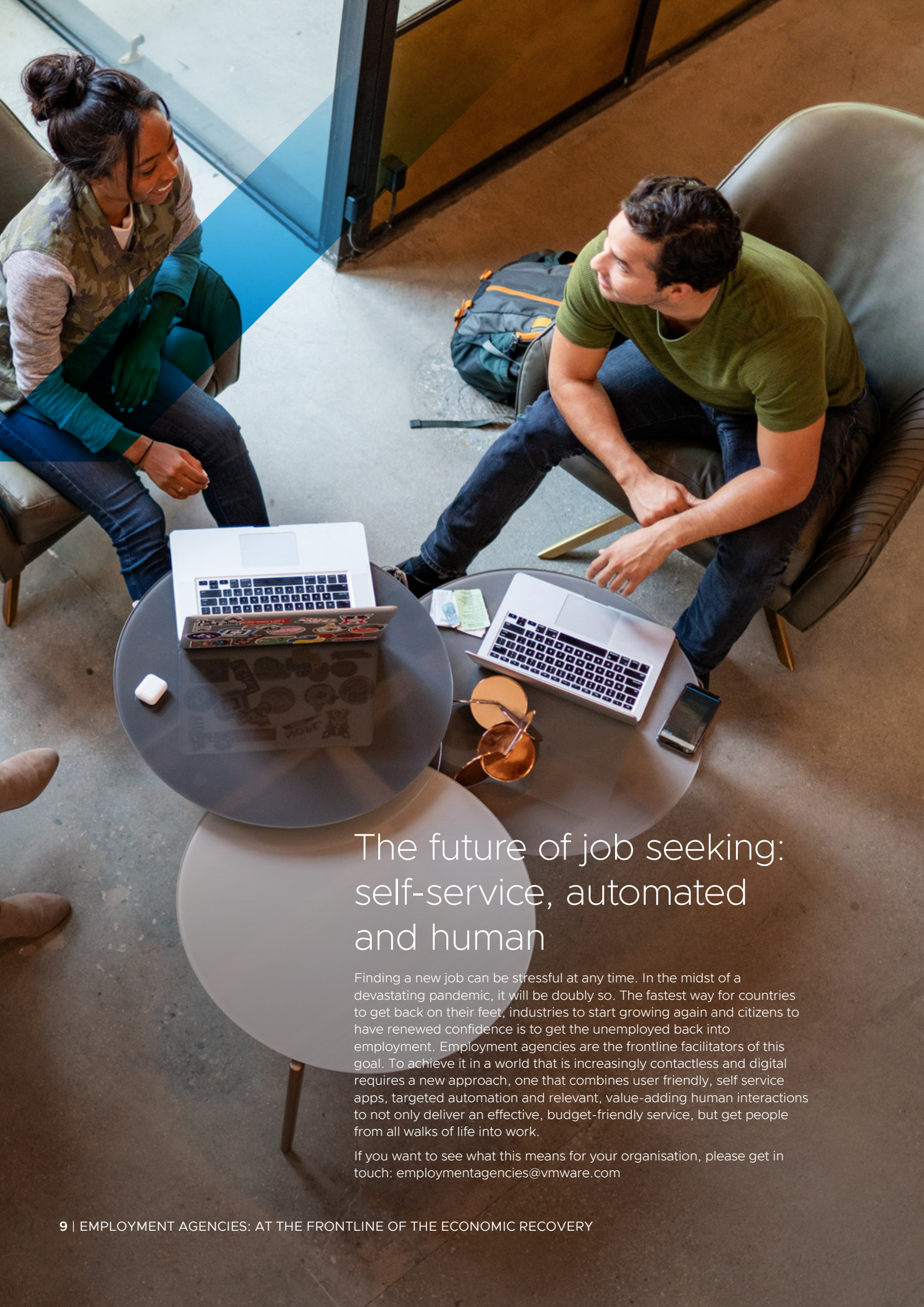
Delivering a physical engagement

With a post-pandemic unemployment boom to cope with, expecting people to travel, many on public transport, to centralised municipal buildings which will still need to implement strict social distancing measures is unfeasible.

At the same time, many retail units stand empty in central locations. Some employment agencies are exploring the option of delivering pop out employment offices – providing advice and benefit services, using up available space and helping to reinvigorate population centres.

To be successful, these need to be as functional and well equipped as any central office, while remaining secure and, critically, not requiring on site IT expertise. This is all enabled by SASE, SDWAN and Edge Compute remotely managed from the cloud.

Applications, provisioned by an agile platform and delivered to any device, with data accesses as required, will be critical to delivering this level of experience – a physical engagement, digitally enabled. z



The future of job seeking: self-service, automated and human

Finding a new job can be stressful at any time. In the midst of a devastating pandemic, it will be doubly so. The fastest way for countries to get back on their feet, industries to start growing again and citizens to have renewed confidence is to get the unemployed back into employment. Employment agencies are the frontline facilitators of this goal. To achieve it in a world that is increasingly contactless and digital requires a new approach, one that combines user friendly, self service apps, targeted automation and relevant, value-adding human interactions to not only deliver an effective, budget-friendly service, but get people from all walks of life into work.

If you want to see what this means for your organisation, please get in touch: employmentagencies@vmware.com

Have VMware as your partner

Want to see how VMware's support might be the key to delivering excellent value for job seekers?

Get in touch today:
employmentagencies@vmware.com

Contact us to set up an in-depth session with one of our representatives.



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