



Pensions & Investment
Research Consultants Ltd

PIRC Statement on ILO Occupational Safety Rights

Today, 10 June 2022, an agreement will be reached at the 110th session of the International Labour Organisation to incorporate Occupational Health and Safety as [the fifth ILO Fundamental Principle and Right at Work](#).

This is a crucial prompt for companies and investors to deepen their understanding of workplace safety risks, both physical and mental, and take measures to ensure adequate monitoring, mitigating and disclosure of these risks.

To mark this development, PIRC has begun a series of engagements with major companies drawing on workforce safety data, both self-reported and arising from regulatory interventions.

We are increasingly concerned that *contingent* workers – those kept off the payroll either as self-employed contractors, through recruitment agencies, or outsourced and franchised services, are a blind spot in corporate safety reporting. This group is far from statistically insignificant: it has been estimated that, on average, a fifth of the workforces of large companies in both the UK and North America are contingent.

Whilst companies in sectors that have historically relied on contingent labour, such as construction and mining, tend to report on the safety of this group, companies in newer industries relying heavily on contingent labour, namely gig economy delivery platforms, have not followed suit.

Our recent review of the annual reports of major platform employers showed that in 2020/21 no data was disclosed for the 800,000 self-employed couriers delivering food for *Deliveroo*, *Just Eat* and *Grubhub* – three of the biggest platforms operating in the UK. For *Uber Eats*, there was no data provided for either the number of couriers, or the number of safety incidents.

This is despite a mounting body of evidence showing the high-risk nature of the work: couriers are exposed to road accidents, extreme weather, and assaults. They also experience a lack of basic facilities or shelter for taking rest breaks.

Further obfuscating the issue, companies are not consistent with how they describe their contingent workforce – terms such as ‘contractors’, ‘freelancers’, ‘riders’, ‘colleagues’ and ‘associates’ are all used to denote those working for the company under self-employed contracts.

PIRC's labour specialist, **Alice Martin**, said:

“Today's announcement of the elevation of occupational safety to being internationally recognised as a fundamental right – alongside freedom of association and the abolition of child labour, forced labour, and discrimination at work – must prompt more scrutiny and action over the safety of the sizable contingent workforces, in industries old and new.

If investors are serious about making a positive real-world impact, then engaging effectively over occupational safety should become a significant part of their stewardship activity.

Our own discussions with companies on safety is part of our ongoing focus on decent work. We want to help to push working conditions, as a key determinant of health outcomes, up the responsible investment priority list.”

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