

## **Background screening vital for contract employees**

**Thursday, 15 October 2020** - The recently introduced [Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Amendment Bill](#) is expected to bring more protection for contract employees like domestic workers, gardeners, nannies, and au pairs, etc. With employers facing increased responsibilities and obligations in this regard, they can also take the necessary steps to feel safe and secure in knowing who they are employing.

Essentially, if parliament passes the proposed changes to the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Amendment Act (COIDA), workers will be able to receive compensation for injuries or diseases at work. It will also make provision for the payment of compensation to the families of workers who pass away because of these injuries or illnesses.

Lerato Thwane, Head of Operations, Afiswitch, says, “The formalisation of what has been a notoriously fluid process is a good thing. It will introduce greater inclusion in the job market and give contract employees the peace of mind that they will be protected in the case of ill health and work-related injuries. Another benefit of this approach is that employers can access background checks on potential workers to ensure there is no previous conviction history or related concerns.”

### ***Restructuring the environment***

During the second quarter of the year (the height of the lockdown), there were 2.2 million less people employed in the country. And while the precarious [23,3%](#) official unemployment rate reported on for Q2-20 has been adjusted to exclude discouraged work seekers (seeing the unemployment rate decrease from 30.1% recorded for Q1-20), the growing number of unemployed people still paints a dismal picture of the already strained job market in South Africa.

“The challenges of restarting the economy are manyfold. However, the pressure on employers and people looking for jobs are immense. Such desperate times can result in risks on both sides of the job market. Jobseekers could easily be exploited by unscrupulous bosses, while employers need to be able to flag any risk associated to hiring someone who has not been vetted. Falsifying qualifications and not being honest about one’s background present significant concerns,” adds Thwane.

Formalising the environment will take great strides to mitigate these issues. Another benefit is shifting the spotlight to the importance of conducting background screening. These checks should always include previous conviction enquiries, currently processed by Afiswitch on behalf of the South African Police Service.

Thwane indicates that irrespective of whether the amendments get passed, adopting preventative measures when employing workers (contract or otherwise) is vital. “Just as employees need to research

their potential employers, the reverse is also true. This due diligence becomes even more critical when it involves allowing people to work in your home, with your children or in a residential complex.”

### ***Self-managed checks***

In recent years, certain industries for contract workers have started to crack down on background checks. Agencies that manage contract domestic workers, au pairs, and tutors, for example, often at a minimum will insist that applicants provide proof of their identification, a SAPS previous conviction report, and proof of qualification(s) where applicable.

Thwane says, “For those applicants seeking an advantage in a competitive job market, we suggest conducting regular self-managed checks. The purpose of a self-managed check is to confirm your previous conviction status and to include a previous conviction enquiry result in your CV or as part of a job application.”

Thwane explains that an applicant may be under the impression that they do not have a previous conviction when they were arrested on suspicion of less serious crime and paid an admission of guilt fine. An admission of guilt fine is part of the legal system and it allows a person to admit guilt without having to appear in court not knowing what it means and how it will affect them in future.

“Conducting various self-checks on a regular basis gives the applicant confidence in knowing that the information available about them is correct and up-to-date, and that they are in the clear of any wrong doing at the time of applying for work,” suggests Thwane.

“Living in what can be considered a ‘high crime’ country has meant that over the years, we have become somewhat fixated on security; personal and that of our loved ones and homes. Knowing who people are dealing with is therefore becoming increasingly important to meeting basic safety needs and assuring peace of mind. In a highly connected world, having access to information about potential employees is becoming easier thanks to the availability of quality and biometric-based background screening services. And the changing of the contract work environment in the country will result in these services becoming more mainstream as discerning employers want to know more about who they are employing,” concludes Thwane.

### **About Afiswitch**

Afiswitch is the national provider of automated electronic previous conviction enquiries against the South African Police Service’s (SAPS) database of previously convicted and case awaiting trial fingerprints. In addition to this service, the Digital Identity Authority (DIA) Biometric Portfolio offers a holistic approach towards implementing cutting edge biometric solutions with adaptable applications to complement any business requirement.

Afiswitch focuses on delivering swift and accurate results, versatile solutions, quality service, convenience and peace of mind. Learn more at [www.afiswitch.com](http://www.afiswitch.com).