

Social Justice in the Digital Era: AI's Impact on Work and Society

A conference in Collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee, the ILO, and the Global Coalition for Social Justice

Attended in person by Ms Nicole Clobes, Consultant at WAPES and Mr Tiago Fagundes, Intern at WAPES on Monday, 3 February 2025, 14:30 – 17:30 CET at European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels

Key topics covered

1. Leveraging AI to contribute to decent work and a socially just society.
2. Using AI to promote inclusive labour markets and gender equality.

Presenters

Moderator: Ms Shada Islam, Managing Director at [New Horizons Project](#) Geopolitical Strategy Advice and Analysis

Opening Remarks

- **Mrs Cinzia Del Rio**, President of the [Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship of the European Economic and Social Committee](#);
- **Mr Oliver Röpke**: President of the [European Economic and Social Committee](#);
- **Mr Gilbert F. Hougbo**: Director-General of the [International Labour Organization](#)

First Panel Discussion and presenters on the question: How can AI be leveraged to contribute to decent work and a socially just society in the EU and beyond?

- **Mr Jeremias ADAMS-PRASSL**: Professor of Law and Associate Dean (Research), [Faculty of Law, University of Oxford](#);
- **Ms Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk**: [Minister for Family, Labour and Social Policy of Poland](#);
- **Ms Yolanda Diaz**: Second Vice President of the Government of Spain and [Minister of Labour and Social Economy](#);
- **Ms Niki Kerameus**: [Minister of Labour and Social Security of Greece](#);
- **Mr Yiannis Panayiotou**: [Minister of Labour and Social Insurance of Cyprus](#);
- **Ms Olta Manjani**: Deputy Minister of [Economy, Culture, and Innovation of Albania](#);
- **Ms Estela Aranha**: Special Adviser to Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
- **Ms Esther Lynch**: General Secretary of the [European Trade Union Confederation \(ETUC\)](#)
- **Ms Anna Kwiatkiewicz**: Senior Adviser in Social Affairs of [BusinessEurope](#)

Second Panel Discussion and presenters on the question: How can AI be used to promote inclusive labour markets and gender equality?

- **Mr Stefano Scarpetta**: Director for [Employment, Labour and Social Affairs](#) at the [OECD](#)

- **Ms Maria do Rosário Palma Ramalho:** Minister of [Labour, Solidarity and Social Security of Portugal](#)
- **Ms Anousheh Karvar:** Delegate of the French government to the ILO and to the [G7-G20 Labour & Employment](#)
- **Ms Li Andersson:** Chair of the [Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament](#)
- **Mr Mario Nava:** Director-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG EMPL of the [European Commission](#)
- **Ms Heather Roy:** President of the [Social Platform](#)
- **Ms Isabel Yglesias:** Member of the Employers' group of the EESC
- **Ms Franca Salis-Madinier:** Vice-President of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) and of the Workers' group of the EESC, Rapporteur of the EESC opinion on Pro-worker AI: levers for harnessing the potential and mitigating the risks of AI in connection with employment and labour market policies
- **Mr Giovanni Marcantonio:** Member of the [Civil Society Organisations' group of the EESC](#), Co-rapporteur of the EESC opinion "AI for public services, organisation of work, more equal and inclusive societies"

Key insights

Do humans have the skills to adapt to a rapid technological change? There is a need to use technology for the benefit of all, to embrace it and not hinder its progress but with a human centred approach. Entities like the G7, G20 and ILO have already discussed AI for sustainable development.

The panellists, first and foremost, see the AI revolution as something positive, that this notion of AI fearmongering must come to an end, although many workers, are afraid that AI will steal their jobs, there are some that don't believe in the mass replacement. AI can be trained but it must be trained by human hand to aid, not replace.

The notion of social dialogue has been discussed, to bring the syndicates, the employees, the employers, the governments and the tech industry to discuss on a human approach to the use of AI, to ensure that it is used ethically, that it won't prey on the work force and guarantee the withstanding of human rights and worker rights and that no one is left behind.

The need of reskilling and upskilling the population of EU was brought up, a need to keep up with the rapid technological advancement, with the implementation of several programs and end goals. AI can prove useful on this as a teacher, which can drastically improve the work quality of trainees. AI has proven to be helpful in the workforce, enhancing the quality of work and the speed of which it is delivered.

AI can be used maliciously to target certain individuals and discriminate them heavily, even in the job applications, where an applicant can lose a possible position due to discrimination. Not to mention that it currently is a juggernaut on pollution, data centres utilize vast amounts of energy to train AI, leaving out a great carbon footprint.

Europe is currently lagging behind major powerhouses when it comes to AI development and countries find themselves not independent to big corporations that hold the overwhelming majority of our data.

There is an imperative need to manage the algorithms, to not let the population be controlled by them, to not let them run amok and do what they please.

Challenges discussed

First and foremost, we should make careful approach when dealing with AI, there is a fearmongering of AI overtaking jobs, 60% of white collar workers fear about AI overtaking their positions, with the potential of overtaking millions of jobs, abusing the unions and pregnant women for example, making it imperative to regulate and apply digital laws. These laws have to respect and go by human rights, they have to live by: transparency, worker rights, job protection, liveable wages, owner rights, data protection and much more.

However, the existence of 5 multinational colossi that hold a firm grasp on our data, use it to hinder the procedure of said laws.

Ms. Estella Aranha proposed to start working on sovereignty of AI, to not be dependant of the technocratic giants. Ms. Yolanda Diaz also appealed Europe to be the vanguard of a social digital contract.

AI also poses a threat on polluting, since large scale-AI models consume significant amounts of energy, the data centres that power AI often utilise fossil fuels, leaving out a great carbon footprint, this being the one of the main points that make AI not sustainable in the current days.

There is also an imperative need to reskill and upskill the EU population. 55% of EU population hold, at least, basic digital skills although the EU aims to reach 80% by the end of 2030, and the fact that only 13% of organisations within the EU use AI, with a large amount struggling to keeping up with the technological advance.

Europe, in the area of AI development, is lagging behind the USA and China. 73% of the AI we use today has been developed by the USA and Nvidia, the company that manufactures the chips used in large AI models, is also based in the US, while China, with its new AI model, [DeepSeek](#), is also advancing swiftly in this field.

The USA puts billions into their AI projects while EU has only invested 20 billion € on AI as a whole. Innovation is mandatory for independence in this field. Not to mention there is a current inequality in the world that doesn't make AI accessible to all countries and firms. AI, although being an efficient tool, can be discriminatory when filtering applicants for job positions. It can discriminate applicants based on their ethnicity, disabilities, and even gender, there exists several biases. AI doesn't tell the whole tale, like the busy mother, which can result in indirect discrimination.

AI shouldn't discriminate, if it happens, the discriminated must be compensated and there has to be a form of accountability, whether it's the entity utilizing the AI or the ones who made it. The AI must be properly trained when it comes to scanning CVs for example to avoid said discrimination.

Generative AI can be socially discriminatory, targeting certain groups as unsuccessful and others as successful, for example, it learns through speech and prompt patterns, since the AI is a reflection of human thoughts and it is imperative to put a stop to this discrimination. There

exists a business consisting of big groups using workers, that receive less than two dollars per day, so they can use AI to generate sexist remarks and offensive imagery.

AI although benefits the high to intermediate skilled employees, it doesn't help and actually threatens the lower skilled bracket and women as well, since they receive less training concerning AI and the majority of clerical positions are occupied by women. There is a need to train the AI for the gender and educational gap, more women in STEM fields so this algorithm can be better trained.

Opportunities Identified

Although AI can have its downsides, such as discrimination on job applications, pollution, job threatening and more, it also has its upsides and the panellists were overall positive on the emerging of AI, as long it has a human centred approach, benefiting all.

AI can be used for occupation matching and hiring is currently becoming popular, even public services are using it to match profiles and if the model can be trained properly, it can speed up the hiring process, without discrimination, and job matching so the work consultants can tailor a better service according to the needs of the applicant. One example is the use of chatbots, which can deliver a more precise answer.

This needs to be paired with a meticulous analysis of the labour market and close dialogue with private entities, AI can help us give a look at the demography of today and aid with the analysis of the labour market as well.

For example, Ms Maria Ramalho mentions that Portugal already applied laws that ensure that a fair and indiscriminatory job selection process using AI and other digital tools follows through and that other countries should follow the example.

Another example, Ms Olta Manjani states that 95% of Albania's services are offered online and that they have close partnerships with the private sector when it comes to vocational schools for young people and unemployed people, various programs on tech related fields, whether its coding, cybersecurity, data or basic digital skills. These offers of basic digital skills can be fruitful to teach people on how to find a job online, making the whole process faster.

AI is often mentioned as the replacer of human beings, but according to the panellists, it has the capacity to create millions of jobs even if AI will wipe several of current day jobs, Europe needs to invest in the reskilling and upskilling of the European population to keep up with the modern times, using programs and even AI to teach.

People are 3 times more likely to be employed after 12 months of participating in this programs. AI teaching can lead to better performance and better quality of work and also affect every corner of the labour market. AI can also speed up and aid in the mundane, repetitive tasks, helping with the offering of a product/service more quickly while not ruining the its quality.

Audience engagement

Mario Nava: "AI shouldn't be seen only in the competitive lens, it can increase the way we work, inclusiveness. The right thing to do is discuss it with the stakeholders and other social actors."

“How can we pay in investment in skills, where does the money come from?”

Li Andersson: “EU funding will be used for private companies, industry, etc... The skills agenda will be mostly left to national governments. You need a combination coming from companies and the policy makers to open up opportunities.”

Heather Roy: “Digital inclusion should be a priority to be used for further investment, to make someone a better employee.”

Stefano Scarpetta: “AI can be an instrument to be a better, less costly trainer and one of the reason companies didn’t hire some workers is due to lack of skills in AI”

Conclusions and next steps

Oliver Röpke:” Safeguard social rights, social dialogue, trade unions work with businesses and governments to prioritise decent work, business fails innovation due to ethical reasons and to enhance the inclusivity of women, ethnicities. AI should be a tool for inclusion, not exclusion, opportunity, not replacement. Collective and multilateral action is much needed.”

Importance for WAPES members

Considering this information, the job market will most likely change drastically, some jobs will vanish although new ones will be created, it was also seen how AI can help entities such as PES to meet their goals.

With the help of AI, the PES can analyse the labour market and the demography to better understand and tailor their services to the target public, either in the form of training in the area of digital skills; the use of chatbots to get a more precise answer and arrange the meetings more quickly, several PES are currently utilizing these methods to better aid them in the work force or curriculum matching through the use of AI, but the members must tread carefully when utilizing this tool.

AI should always be supervised by humans to ensure it operates with no biases and doesn’t act autonomously. The PES should integrate AI technology into their operations, while maintaining strong data protection to ensure that it aids in the members’ decision-making while safeguarding the individuals’ privacy and rights.

Information on the presenters and their profiles can be found here:

Shada Islam: [Shada Islam - New Horizons Project](#)

Cinzia del Rio: [Members Page - DEL RIO, Cinzia - Details](#)

Oliver Röpke: [Curriculum Vitae - Oliver Röpke - President of the Workers' Group of the EESC](#)

Gilbert F. Hougbo: [Biography of Gilbert F. Hougbo , 11th ILO Director-General | International Labour Organization](#)

Jeremias Adams-Prassl: [Jeremias Adams-Prassl | Faculty of Law](#)

Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk: [Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk - Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy - Gov.pl website](#)

Yolanda Diaz: [Minister's Biography. Ministry of Labour and Social Economy](#)

Niki Kerameus: [Niki Kerameus - Minister of Labour and Social Security - Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs](#)

Yiannis Panayiotou: [MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL INSURANCE | Προεδρία της Κυπριακής Δημοκρατίας |](#)

Olta Manjani: [Olta Manjani - Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation](#)

Estela Aranha: [Estela Aranha - Democracy in Check Institute](#)

Esther Lynch: [Esther Lynch](#)

Anna Kwiatkiewicz: [Anna Kwiatkiewicz | BusinessEurope](#)

Stefano Scarpetta: [Stefano Scarpetta | OECD](#)

Maria do Rosário Palma Ramalho: [Maria do Rosário Palma Ramalho - Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security - Labour, Solidarity and Social Security](#)

Anousheh Karvar: [Anousheh Karvar | 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour](#)

Li Andersson: [Li Andersson](#)

Mario Nava: [Mario Nava - European Commission](#)

Heather Roy: [Heather Roy – Social Platform](#)

Isabel Yglesias: [Ms Isabel YGLESIAS JULIÀ - EU Whoiswho - Publications Office of the EU](#)

Franca Salis-Madinier: [Members Page - SALIS-MADINIER, Franca - Details](#)

Giovanni Marcantonio: [Members Page - MARCANTONIO, Giovanni - Details](#)