



*The future of public employment services in the age of artificial intelligence: shock absorbers or architects?*

*White Paper  
for a rethinking of public employment services  
in the age of cognitive transition*

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*February 2026*

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## Preamble

This White Paper was not written as part of a project or theoretical research, but in response to a practical question: what is the real impact of artificial intelligence on our social, economic and democratic structures, as its capabilities advance and its uses become more widespread? I was inspired to ask this question after listening to an interview broadcast on the French radio station France Inter (*L'invité de 8h20, Le grand entretien, 26 February 2026*<sup>1</sup>) with Yoshua Bengio, one of the pioneers of artificial intelligence, who warned of the unchecked power of AI and the challenges it poses to contemporary societies.

Beyond the technological aspects, the discussion highlighted profound political and societal issues: the exponential pace of AI progress, the lack of robust regulatory mechanisms by governments, and the rise of tools capable of radically transforming human work, often without a clear assessment of the social consequences.

This observation led me to delve deeper into the international report on AI safety, discussed in this interview, to extract not only the general recommendations on technological governance, but also their implications for a fundamental sector of any modern democracy: work and its social organisation.

This is how the idea emerged that the issue is not solely about the technologies themselves, but about the collective regulation of their effects on individuals, career paths, labour markets and, at the heart of it all, public employment services.

The Bengio report does not directly address the issue of employment or public employment services. However, the analysis of the risks highlighted – the increased power of cognitive systems, governance often left to private actors, and the acceleration of socio-economic transformations – underscores the need for a structured, democratic and proactive institutional response.

This White Paper stems from this tension:

*How can we preserve, adapt and strengthen the remit of public employment services in the face of ongoing cognitive transformations, whilst fully assuming our societal and strategic responsibility?*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/l-invite-de-8h20-le-grand-entretien/l-invite-de-8h20-le-grand-entretien-du-jeudi-26-fevrier-2026-4058420>

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## Introduction

General-purpose artificial intelligence (GPAI) is not just another wave of automation comparable to the industrial transformations of the 1970s. It marks a break of a radically new nature: the shift from physical capital to **cognitive capital**. What is now being affected is no longer just the workshop or the shop, the automation of production activities or the dematerialisation of commerce, but our very capacity for analysis, planning and coordination.

Faced with this ‘structural transformation’, public employment services find themselves at a historic crossroads.

On reading the report “International Scientific Report on the Safety of Advanced AI – Interim Report (2024)<sup>2</sup>”, we can clearly envisage that public employment services (PES) could see their role profoundly redefined sooner than expected.

The simple aim of this White Paper is to demonstrate that, in the face of this unprecedented situation, in both the Global North and the Global South, public employment services can no longer be viewed merely as buffers against sectoral shocks. They are called upon to become the **architects of a systemic transition** and the guardians of our **cognitive sovereignty**.

Public employment services currently face a major risk of being sidelined by multinational technology companies which, through their exclusive control of artificial intelligence, could effectively privatise job placement and career guidance. To counter this power imbalance, PES must move beyond isolated responses to build transnational solidarity and strengthen their cooperation at all levels (political, strategic, technological and skills development) by drawing on strategic alliance networks such as WAPES, AASEP or the European PES Network.

To develop this analysis, I suggest we explore:

- **The transformation of the economy’s key driver**, where automated intelligence is becoming the dominant infrastructure.
- **The structural divergence between North and South**, between the polarisation of the middle classes and the erosion of outsourcing models.
- **A Manifesto for the re-founding of PES**, proposing ten strategic levers to ensure that people remain the focus, and AI the tool.

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<sup>2</sup> Yoshua Bengio et al., International Scientific Report on the Safety of Advanced AI – Interim Report (2024)

## A watershed moment: from physical capital to cognitive capital

Europe, for example, has already undergone major transformations: the decline of its extractive industries, the contraction of the steel industry and a gradual deindustrialisation following globalisation. These changes have led to unemployment, territorial restructuring and massive retraining. But they shared four characteristics: they were sector-specific, territorially concentrated, gradual and based on the substitution of physical capital. General-purpose artificial intelligence (GPAI) breaks completely with this logic. This international scientific report coordinated by Yoshua Bengio<sup>3</sup> explicitly classifies the impacts on the labour market as ‘systemic risks’<sup>4</sup>. This characterisation is not merely rhetorical. It signals that we are facing a technology capable of producing cross-cutting, interconnected effects that are potentially and exponentially rapid.

What is affected is no longer the mine, the workshop or the shop, but the capacity for analysis, writing, planning and coordination: cognitive capital.

## What the ‘Bengio’ report brings that is radically new

This report differs in part from other publications on the subject of AI in that it precisely describes three defining effects that distinguish this new transformation currently underway from most of those our working society has undergone since the beginning of the 20th century.

### **Cognitive transversality**

Contemporary systems can produce complex texts, assist with programming, solve scientific problems and analyse vast document corpora<sup>5</sup>. The frontier of automation therefore no longer extends merely to routine tasks, but touches the very heart of skilled intermediate professions and their expertise. This represents a qualitative expansion of the scope of what can be automated.

### **A sovereignty divide**

The report identifies a global divide structured by access to high-performance computing, data and capital<sup>6</sup>. This goes far beyond the digital divide, representing a shift towards a strategic infrastructure divide: countries with computing capabilities control the production of models, and thus the capacity for automatable cognition. This transforms the issue of employment into a question of sovereignty.

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<sup>3</sup> Yoshua Bengio, a Canadian computer scientist born in 1964, is a professor at the University of Montreal and one of the world’s pioneers in deep learning. Winner of the 2018 Turing Award alongside Geoffrey Hinton and Yann LeCun, he is also the founder of MILA (Quebec Institute for Artificial Intelligence) and co-chair of LoiZéro, an organisation dedicated to the safety and ethics of AI. His recent work and statements highlight the risks associated with the loss of control over AI systems and call for stronger international regulation

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, section 4.3.1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., section 2.2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., section 4.3.2.

## Radical uncertainty

Unlike previous industrial transitions, the report highlights the lack of consensus on the future pace of progress<sup>7</sup> of this evolution. This temporal uncertainty profoundly alters the nature of public governance: action must be taken without certainty regarding the pace, with a real risk of falling behind the curve.

## Towards an economy of cognitive transition

We are currently witnessing a profound shift in the way the economy functions. To understand what is at stake with general artificial intelligence (GPAI), it is useful to look at how major transformations of the past have unfolded.

Here I offer a simple three-dimensional observation:

- the shift in the economy’s “key driver”
- The strong trend towards concentration
- The necessary transformation of institutions

### a. The shift in the economy’s “key factor”

Each major economic period is characterised by a dominant factor.

Period	Main driver of wealth creation	Key player
<b>Industrial Revolution</b>	Machines and factories (physical capital)	Industry
<b>Globalisation</b>	Financial flows and supply chains	Multinational corporations
<b>Current transition (GPAI)</b>	Automated analytical capabilities (cognitive capital)	Major digital infrastructures

Today, it is no longer just factories or financial capital that shape the economy, but the ability to process, analyse and utilise information (data) on a large scale.

Artificial intelligence transforms knowledge and reasoning into a technical infrastructure.

In other words: what is becoming strategic is no longer simply production, nor simply financing, but mastering automated intelligence and, above all, the automation of intelligence.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Executive Summary.

## b. A strong trend towards concentration

This new “cognitive capital” has specific characteristics:

- it requires very costly infrastructure (computing centres, data centres, etc.);
- it relies on massive volumes of data;
- it benefits greatly from economies of scale (the bigger you are, the more efficient you become).

**The result: a minority of players concentrate the majority of these capabilities.**

This creates:

- technological dependence for other countries and their institutions;
- greater concentration of economic power;
- a risk of asymmetry between those who produce the models and those who use them.

AI thus becomes comparable to strategic infrastructure, such as energy or financial networks. Data now constitutes a key resource underpinning economic power<sup>8</sup>.

## c. The necessary transformation of institutions

Historically, every major economic transformation has forced institutions to evolve.

- Industrialisation led to the creation of labour law and social protection.
- Globalisation transformed industrial policies and the mechanisms supporting transitions.

Today, if artificial intelligence is changing the way skills are used and valued, then the institutions regulating the labour market must also adapt.

Public employment services, which were designed to support industrial or sectoral transitions, now face a broader transformation: **a cognitive transition**.

This means that their role is shifting from supporting sectors in decline or under pressure towards the strategic management of rapid, cross-cutting transformations.

Thus, the current transition is not just about occupations: it concerns the way in which intelligence itself is becoming an economic infrastructure. And when the infrastructure changes, institutions must evolve.

It is within this context that the question of the future role of public employment services arises.

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2021), *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives*. The report analyses data as an essential infrastructure for development and highlights the governance and equity challenges associated with its concentration.

## Different trajectories between countries of the North and countries of the South

The cognitive transition brought about by AI will not have uniform effects across regions. It will take place within already differentiated economic structures and will amplify certain vulnerabilities specific to each area.

### a. In Northern countries: tension within the middle classes

In developed economies, the shock will not necessarily be dramatic, but it could be silent and profound.

The primary risk is that of **increased polarisation within the administrative and service-sector middle classes**: Polarisation means that the middle of the social pyramid narrows, leaving only two extremes:

- **The top of the ladder**: those who steer AI, make the final decisions and manage complex strategy.
- **The bottom of the ladder**: manual service jobs that cannot be automated (healthcare, logistics, skilled trades).

Intermediate professions, the ‘white-collar’ workers (lawyers, accountants, managers, analysts, administrative executives), perform precisely the tasks that GPAI is beginning to structure and replicate: analysis, synthesis, drafting, and the production of recommendations.

This exposure of skilled jobs to cognitive automation is now documented on an international scale<sup>9</sup>

This is not a sudden disappearance, but a **gradual transformation of certain roles**:

- through the partial automation of standardised tasks;
- the reconfiguration of responsibilities;
- the increasing demand for strategic skills.

The shift could also affect the very heart of the public sector: government departments, long perceived as relatively sheltered from technological shocks, could see certain functions internalised, streamlined or restructured as a result of cognitive automation.

In other words, the transformation will not only affect private companies; it could also affect most public institutions themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> OECD (2023), *OECD Employment Outlook 2023: Artificial Intelligence and the Labour Market*. The OECD highlights that highly skilled occupations are increasingly affected by the automation of non-routine cognitive tasks.

## b. In the Global South: a weakening of models of global integration

In many countries of the Global South, the dynamics are quite different: the integration of many countries into the global economy has often taken place through the development of outsourced services: call centres, customer support, administrative processing, document management, accounting or basic legal services.

These activities were based on a clear comparative advantage: a skilled, even highly skilled, workforce at a competitive cost. However, if the tasks involved in these activities become automatable, this comparative advantage erodes.

The competitor is no longer another low-cost country but artificial intelligence...

The report highlights that the automation of a wide range of service tasks is technically feasible<sup>10</sup>

This prospect directly affects economies based on outsourcing, a view shared by the International Labour Organisation<sup>11</sup>.

Added to this is a second risk: that of **increased dependence on foreign platforms** that control the models, infrastructure and technological standards.

Finally, a third danger looms: marginalisation within the new cognitive value chains. If the design, training and architecture of the systems remain concentrated elsewhere, countries of the Global South could be confined to peripheral functions, without strategic control over the cognitive infrastructure.

## c. The observation of a structural divergence

Thus, whilst countries in the North are facing an internal restructuring of their middle classes and administrations, countries in the South face the risk of an external weakening of their position in the global economy.

In both cases, it is not just jobs that are at stake, but development models.

## The cognitive transition in the history of major transformations

To understand the scope of general-purpose artificial intelligence (GPAI), it is useful to situate it within the succession of major economic transformations of the last decades. All have profoundly affected employment. But none has operated in exactly the same way.

The changes of the second half of the 20th century were initially sector-specific. The decline of the mining industry (1950s–1980s) and the steel industry crisis (1970s–1990s) affected specific

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., section 4.3.1

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization (2023), *Generative AI and Jobs: A Global Analysis*. The ILO highlights that administrative, support and document processing tasks are among those most at risk from generative AI systems.

regions over long periods of time. Public employment services then acted as a regional buffer, supporting massive but localised retraining programmes.

The globalisation of manufacturing (1980s–2010s) shifted industrial value chains. It weakened the working classes in the countries of the North, whilst opening up opportunities for productive integration for many countries of the South.

The rise of platforms and e-commerce (2000s–2020s) subsequently transformed global distribution and logistics. Here again, the transformation was profound but concentrated within specific sectors.

The cognitive transition brought about by GPAI marks a different stage. It is not limited to a single sector; it affects functions present in all sectors: analysis, writing, planning, coordination and customer relations. It impacts not only production, but the very organisation of work.

This distinctive feature becomes clearer when viewed in summary:

Transformation	Indicative period	Nature of the shock	Main impact in the North	Main impact in the South	Institutions most affected
<b>Decline of the mining industry</b>	1950s–1980s	Sectoral, regional	Redevelopment of mining areas, localised unemployment	Indirect impact	Regions, social policies
<b>Steel industry crisis</b>	1970s–1990s	Industrial sector	Factory closures, restructuring	Partial industrialisation elsewhere	Industrial regions
<b>Globalisation of manufacturing</b>	1980s–2010s	Global sectoral	Partial deindustrialisation	Industrial integration	Manufacturing industry
<b>Transformation of trade (platforms)</b>	2000s–2020s	Digital, logistics	Transformation of the retail sector	Wider access but greater dependence	Retail, logistics
<b>Cognitive transition (GPAI)</b>	2020s–?	Cross-cutting, cognitive	Tertiary polarisation, administrative transformation	Erosion of the BPO model, technological dependency	Intermediary institutions

Two major differences emerge:

- Firstly, previous transformations shifted sectors; the cognitive transition cuts across all sectors. It concerns not only production or distribution, but the analytical and decision-making functions that structure the entire economy.
- Secondly, manufacturing globalisation had redistributed jobs from the North to the South. The cognitive transition could produce a new divergence: internal pressure on the tertiary middle classes in developed countries, and external weakening of service-based integration models in the countries of the South.

Thus, the current transformation does not merely call into question productive sectors. It challenges the institutions that organise the intermediation and regulation of labour.

It is in this respect that it differs from the major transformations of the second half of the 20th century: it affects not only employment, but the very structures that govern it.

## From sectoral transformations to the institutional question

Whilst major industrial shifts have forced public employment services to support sectoral or regional restructuring, the cognitive transition places them in an unprecedented situation. It is no longer simply a matter of managing the social consequences of a shift in activities, but of anticipating a transformation of the very functions that structure the labour market: skills analysis, matching, guidance, and career planning.

In other words, the issue is no longer solely one of jobs lost or created. It has become one of the architecture of the labour market.

When artificial intelligence is capable of producing assessments, suggesting career paths or structuring complex information, it enters directly into the sphere of activity of intermediary institutions. Public employment services are no longer merely shock absorbers for economic shocks; they themselves become key players in the ongoing transformation.

This is why the cognitive transition cannot be analysed as a mere technological evolution. It raises a fundamental institutional question: how should public employment services evolve when intermediate cognitive functions—those that underpin advice, guidance and support—become partially automatable?

The answer to this question will largely determine their future role, in both the Global North and the Global South.

## Towards a strategic overhaul of public employment services

The cognitive transition is not merely a new technological environment for public employment services. It alters the very conditions under which they carry out their mission.

Historically, public employment services were designed to fulfil three main functions: matching labour supply and demand, supporting sectoral transitions, and managing frictional or cyclical unemployment. Their role has gradually expanded with the rise of active labour market policies, but their core business has remained the organisation of the match between skills and opportunities.

However, the GPAI introduces a more profound transformation.

### a. The partial automation of intermediation

The functions of CV analysis, identifying transferable skills, mapping career paths, and suggesting career trajectories can now be partially automated. What was once the exclusive domain of human judgement—structuring a career path, identifying similarities between roles, proposing alternatives—can now be assisted, or even generated, by artificial intelligence systems.

This does not mean the disappearance of the advisor's role. But it shifts its centre of gravity.

Mediation is becoming hybrid: it combines algorithmic calculation with human judgement.

The question is no longer whether public employment services should use these tools, but how they can integrate them without losing their ability to make judgements and their social responsibility.

### b. From sectoral buffer to architect of systemic transitions

In previous industrial crises, PES intervened downstream: they supported retraining following factory closures or restructuring.

In the cognitive transition, they may be called upon to intervene upstream:

- identifying sectors exposed to cognitive automation;
- anticipate changes in skill requirements;
- guide training policies;
- contribute to the impact assessment of technological roll-outs.

They would no longer be merely administrators of the flow of jobseekers, but strategic players in economic transformation.

### c. A North–South divergence

This overhaul will take different forms depending on the context.

In Northern countries, the priority will be to support the transformation of the tertiary-sector middle classes and administrative functions. PES will need to manage increasingly complex career paths, involving skilled retraining and greater horizontal mobility.

In Southern countries, the challenge is twofold: to preserve pathways to integration into the global economy and to avoid excessive dependence on foreign infrastructure. PES can play a strategic role here by directing skills policies towards sectors less susceptible to automation and by supporting upskilling.

#### d. A new responsibility

If the cognitive transition affects analytical, coordination and decision-making functions, then it strikes at the very heart of intermediation services.

Public employment services cannot remain on the sidelines of this transformation. They must become:

- permanent observatories of changes in the world of work;
- guarantors of the responsible use of AI tools;
- mediators between algorithmic intelligence and human trajectories;
- agents of social cohesion in a context of heightened uncertainty.

In other words, GPAI does not merely challenge the organisation of work. It calls for a rethinking of the public sector's role in supporting the workforce.

#### e. Governing the cognitive transition

The cognitive transition brought about by general-purpose artificial intelligence is neither a mere technological modernisation nor a further wave of automation. It strikes at the very heart of the analytical, coordination and decision-making functions that underpin contemporary economies.

Industrial transformations of the past have displaced sectors; the current transition cuts across all sectors. They have affected regions; this one affects cognitive functions. They required adjustment policies; this one requires institutional transformation.

Public employment services thus find themselves at a turning point. If they remain mere managers of labour market flows, they risk being marginalised by private algorithmic infrastructures.

If they position themselves as strategic actors in the cognitive transition, they can become pillars of social cohesion and economic sovereignty.

The transformations analysed can be summarised as a shift from a historical model of a buffer to an emerging model of an architect of the cognitive transition:

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Historical Model (Shock Absorber)</b>	<b>New Model (Architect)</b>
<b>Nature of the impact</b>	Sector-specific and localised (agriculture, mining, steel industry, commerce, etc.)	Widespread and systemic (cognitive functions)
<b>Main target</b>	Routine tasks and physical capital	Expertise, analysis and cognitive capital
<b>Timeframe</b>	Reactive (following job loss)	Proactive and preventative

<b>Role of the advisor</b>	Intermediary with varying degrees of transformative influence	Career path engineer and AI mediator
<b>Decision-making tool</b>	Exclusively human judgement	Hybridisation (Algorithmic calculation + Human judgement)
<b>Political issue</b>	Social protection and retraining	Cognitive sovereignty and social cohesion

This shift is not a marginal adjustment; it constitutes an institutional overhaul. The question is no longer: how to manage the consequences of the transformation, but: how to govern its conditions?

# Manifesto for a re-founding of public employment services in the era of cognitive transition

General-purpose artificial intelligence is not a technical evolution; it is an infrastructural transformation. It is changing the way the economy produces, makes decisions, coordinates and directs. It strikes at the heart of intermediate cognitive functions. It affects the administrative middle classes, service value chains and models of international integration.

Faced with this, public employment services have two options: to make marginal adjustments to their tools or to overhaul their mission.

This manifesto embraces the second path with 10 recommendations:

## **1. No longer merely managing unemployment**

Public employment services have historically been designed to manage the social consequences of economic transformations: mass redundancies, sectoral crises, cyclical unemployment. Their legitimacy has been built around managing disruptions, primarily through a remedial approach.

However, the cognitive transition is altering the very nature of labour market imbalances. It produces not only visible shocks, but also gradual, diffuse and sometimes silent reconfigurations of skills and roles.

In this context, a strictly reactive approach is no longer sufficient.

Public employment services can no longer be merely managers of unemployment. They must become institutions that are fully involved in labour governance.

This implies an explicit broadening of their remit:

- to incorporate the anticipation of technological change into their remit;
- contributing to the assessment of the effects of innovation on employment and skills;
- participating in the regulation of sectoral and regional transitions.

It is no longer simply a matter of managing the consequences of change, but of shaping the conditions for it.

## **2. Rejecting algorithmic dependence**

The integration of artificial intelligence tools into public employment services can improve analysis and operational efficiency. But total dependence on private, opaque or uncontrolled systems undermines their strategic capacity.

A public service that does not understand the tools it uses, or that cannot discuss their parameters, gradually loses its ability to make informed decisions.

The issue is therefore not to reject AI, but to control the conditions of its use.

Public employment services must:

- develop in-house expertise in data analysis and understanding algorithmic systems;
- demand transparency, explainability and auditability of the tools used;
- maintain public control over data relating to skills and career pathways.

Skills data constitutes a strategic infrastructure. Losing control of it would amount to delegating part of the regulation of the labour market to private actors.

Cognitive sovereignty is not a slogan. It is a prerequisite for institutional legitimacy and democratic accountability.

### **3. Making anticipation an institutional obligation**

Public employment services have long acted in the wake of disruptions: after a site closure, after job loss, after a sectoral crisis. The cognitive transition requires a shift in the timing of public action.

It is no longer enough to support individuals once the disruption has occurred. We must identify vulnerabilities before they result in massive job losses or long-term downgrading.

This requires:

- early identification of occupations at risk of cognitive automation;
- organising preventive retraining before career trajectories deteriorate;
- alerting public decision-makers to emerging imbalances.

Anticipation can no longer be a peripheral or experimental activity. It must become an institutional obligation embedded at the heart of the mandate of public employment services.

Forecasting trends in occupations and skills is already a central tool of public policy<sup>12</sup>

In a context of accelerating technological change, the response time is generally too slow. Structured forecasting is becoming a prerequisite for social stability.

### **4. Transforming the role of the advisor**

The rise of artificial intelligence tools is profoundly transforming the role of intermediation. When skills analysis, the identification of similarities between occupations, or the suggestion of career

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<sup>12</sup> France Stratégie (2019), *Employment and Occupations by 2030*. The report highlights the importance of foresight in anticipating sectoral transformations and guiding training policies.

paths can be supported by algorithmic systems, the role of the advisor can no longer be limited to applying standardised procedures.

The adviser can no longer be a mere administrative operator connecting people. They must become a professional capable of interpreting, contextualising and, if necessary, challenging the recommendations produced by automated systems.

It is now their responsibility to:

- interpret algorithmic recommendations whilst taking individual circumstances into account;
- to act as a career path engineer, building coherent career paths in an unstable environment;
- to act as a mediator between artificial intelligence—a decision-support tool—and the human project, which can never be reduced to statistical optimisation.

The algorithm may suggest a match; it cannot grasp the biographical, social or symbolic dimensions of a career choice.

This transformation does not marginalise the advisor. On the contrary, it represents an increase in responsibility. It requires a higher level of competence, greater autonomy in analysis and a strengthened capacity for decision-making.

In other words, the advisor is no longer merely an executor of procedures, but a strategic actor in social cohesion within a labour market supported by artificial intelligence.

## **5. Assuming an ethical and political role**

The integration of artificial intelligence systems into employment policies is not neutral. It influences the way in which skills are assessed, career paths are guided and priorities are defined. Depending on its parameters, it can reinforce existing inequalities or create new ones.

Public employment services cannot limit themselves to a purely technical use of these tools. They must take responsibility for the normative implications.

Setting red lines is not a matter of ideological stance, but of institutional responsibility.

This entails, in particular:

- rejecting any automated decision-making without effective human supervision;
- excluding the use of algorithms that cannot be explained or audited;
- preventing mechanisms that produce indirect or invisible discrimination.

The issue is not limited to legal compliance. It concerns trust in public action.

In an environment where decisions can be influenced by opaque systems, public employment services must act as guarantors of justice, fairness and transparency in the use of artificial intelligence.

Their legitimacy rests on this ability to reconcile technological innovation with democratic accountability

## **6. Moving from intermediation to regulation**

Traditional intermediation, that is, matching labour supply and demand, relies primarily on information gathering and matching. It involves identifying matches between declared skills and expressed needs. This function, based on data processing and statistical optimisation, can now be largely automated.

What cannot be automated, however, is the systemic regulation of the labour market. Regulation is not merely about optimising individual transactions. It involves maintaining collective balances: anticipating skills shortages, preventing sectoral imbalances, limiting regional divides, and avoiding dynamics of social polarisation. In other words, intermediation seeks immediate efficiency; regulation aims for the sustainability of the system.

In a context of cognitive transition, this regulatory function becomes central. Public employment services must contribute to:

- to the forward-looking assessment of the impacts of innovation on employment;
- to the strategic direction of training policies;
- to the territorial coherence of transformations;
- to the early identification of structural vulnerabilities.

Already today, their legitimacy no longer lies solely in their ability to place individuals, but in their ability to stabilise a changing labour market.

## **7. Reinventing North–South cooperation**

The cognitive transition is not unfolding on neutral ground. It is taking place against a backdrop of pre-existing asymmetries in access to digital infrastructure, computing power and data.

Without coordination, it risks exacerbating global divides: a concentration of automated cognitive capabilities in certain countries, and technological dependence in others.

Public employment services cannot ignore this geopolitical dimension.

Acting in isolation would only reinforce a culture of dependency. Acting collectively opens up the possibility of pooling resources.

This involves building:

- alliances of expertise between public institutions;

- mechanisms for sharing tools and expertise;
- mechanisms for cognitive solidarity to reduce asymmetries.

The divide linked to artificial intelligence is not inevitable. It becomes inevitable only if public institutions refuse to cooperate.

North–South cooperation is no longer a peripheral issue; it is becoming a prerequisite for shared sovereignty.

## **8. Becoming strategic institutions for social cohesion**

The cognitive transition may exacerbate polarising dynamics: a concentration of opportunities in the most highly skilled segments, the weakening of intermediate career paths, and regional tensions.

In this context, public employment services are not merely technical operators. They occupy a strategic position within the social architecture.

They must position themselves as:

- intelligent shock absorbers, capable of absorbing shocks without stifling dynamics;
- trajectory stabilisers, supporting mobility and limiting long-term downgrading;
- architects of a sustainable labour market, reconciling innovation and cohesion.

Social cohesion is not a side effect of growth. It results from the active regulation of transitions. In this sense, public employment services play a direct role in democratic stability.

## **9. Rethinking the timeframe of public action**

The major industrial transformations of the past unfolded over several decades. They gave institutions time to gradually adjust their systems.

Cognitive transformations, on the other hand, can accelerate over a matter of years, or even months, driven by technological progress and economies of scale.

This acceleration alters the timeframe of public action.

Public employment services must learn to operate in a climate of constant uncertainty, where career paths are reshaped more rapidly than traditional administrative cycles.

This implies:

- systems for continuous monitoring;
- more flexible adaptation mechanisms;
- the ability to rapidly revise strategic priorities.

The challenge is not to predict with certainty, but to reduce the gap between economic transformation and institutional response.

## **10. Claiming a role in AI governance**

Decisions regarding the development and use of artificial intelligence cannot be left solely to technology companies or market forces.

AI influences the organisation of work, the valuation of skills and the structuring of economic opportunities. It therefore falls squarely within the sphere of public policy.

Public employment services must play an active role in this governance.

This entails:

- being involved in national debates on the regulation of AI;
- making their voices heard in international forums;
- contributing to key decisions regarding norms, standards and frameworks for use.

Otherwise, they will simply have to adapt their systems to decisions taken elsewhere.

Claiming a place in AI governance does not mean indefinitely expanding their remit; it means recognising that the regulation of work and the regulation of technology are now closely linked.

## **Conclusions**

**This white paper and its manifesto are neither a rejection of technological progress nor a stance of mistrust towards innovation.** They are a call for institutional responsibility at a time of historic change.

The cognitive transition is not merely a matter of productivity or administrative modernisation. It involves a choice of social model. It raises questions about the role of work, the structuring of skills and the distribution of power in the digital economy.

Public employment services today face a major risk of marginalisation.

If intermediation, guidance and the analysis of career paths are gradually taken over by private infrastructures controlled by a handful of technology multinationals, a silent privatisation of labour regulation is taking place.

**Faced with the risk of this power imbalance, isolation is not an option.**

Public employment services must move beyond fragmented responses and strengthen their cooperation at all levels: political, strategic, technological and in terms of skills development. They must rely on structural alliances and cooperation, such as those fostered by the WAPES

networks, the AASEP or the European PES Network, to build a collective capacity for regulation and preserve shared cognitive sovereignty.

The alternative is clear:

- to be relegated to the status of technical operators dependent on infrastructure they do not control,
- or becoming the architects of a new balance between technological innovation, social cohesion and public sovereignty.

**This choice is neither technical nor administrative: it is institutional, strategic and profoundly political.**

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