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Shaping the new world of work – The impacts of digitalisation and robotisation

Panel 5: Future of jobs in the digital network economy

Participants:

- Dalia Marin, Ludwig Maximilian University

- Craig Holmes, Pembroke College Oxford

- Tobias Kämpf, IFS

- Ann Branch, European Commission, DG EMPL

Discussant: Maria Helena André, ACTRAV

Moderator: Bela Galgoczi, ETUI

Reporter: Matthew Jones, ETUI (trainee)

Main points

- Need to humanise the digital economy
- Ensuring the necessary skills are available
- Reshape the social model to adapt to the new economy

According to Tobias Kämpf, it is inevitable that there will be massive changes in economy and society, with new business models that will change mature markets. For example, could we see the European automobile industry being subcontracted by Google and Apple in the future? There will be new production models and value chains, and new concepts of work organisation and corporations. These changes will clearly have an impact on employment.

But the essence of the digital transformation, what is really new, is the internet as a digital information space that interconnects people. The future of knowledge work goes down two route: digital assembly lines and digital control, and a new humanisation of the digital work world. We have to try to shape this transformation in order to humanise. Two possible routes of achieving this were suggested: working out how to add humanity to a solely technical debate, in other words, how to create a digital world shaped by people. Another of the solutions offered was that we need to make use of the new opportunities available for interaction between humans.

So to shape ongoing structural changes, prevent erosion of regulatory system of work, we have to start a new initiative for a humanisation of work

Dalia Marin talked about how brilliant robots can change the world that we live in. She mentioned the possibility of a revival of manufacturing in rich countries. With wages no longer necessary to do low-skilled manufacturing, it would no longer be important to produce in a low wage country. Brilliant robots could also be involved in capital based technology – potentially replacing journalists, financial analysts, lawyers and doctors. But it could lead simply to more productivity rather than

replacement. There is also the polarisation hypothesis that IT will replace routine jobs in the middle income distribution. This also demands a rethinking of education – is the push for higher education the wrong way to go if there is a lesser demand for academic degrees? In this context the tension is between capital and labour rather than skilled and non-skilled.

Craig Homes explained the need for skills forecasts, both for robots and people. A lot of people work in jobs below their skill level, so the skill supply is very important. Therefore one of the big challenges is ensuring that the right skills are available. ICT skills will naturally be very important. There will also be changing job content, which will require adaptation of skills. It is worth noting that some skills, such as creativity, are perhaps less teachable.

Ann Branch explained that we need to help reskill accompanying that process through social protection, and adapting to the pace of changes. Therefore, a part of adapting to the new digital economy is reviewing the European social pillar. Identifying the skills needed and putting strategies in place to ensure that they are available is essential. Working in partnership is the way to make sure that no one gets left behind.