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

Panel 11: Work Intensification

Participants:

- Agnes Parent-Thirion, Eurofound
- Amélie Mauroux, Dares
- Rebecca Selberg, Lund University

Discussant: Ricardo Gutiérrez, European Federation of Journalists

Moderator: Gérard Valenduc, UCLouvain et Université de Namur

Reporters: Marianne Detroyer, ETUI and Laurent Vogel, ETUI

Quantitative and qualitative approaches of the work intensification in Europe...

Quantitative surveys

Since more than 20 years, at the European level, the trend of work intensification (EWCS surveys) is increasing. The perception of workers with regard to emotional demands, direct demands and their pace of work (e.g. working at high speed, have not enough time to get the job well-done...) deteriorates. Agnès Parent-Thirion (Eurofound, EU) explained that the so-called "new technologies" (digitalisation" and "robotics) is not the only driver or factor of the work intensification!

From her point of view, work intensification is not a fatality. There must be ways to tackle with it and also by the way of a high level of workers 'participation, there must be rooms of manoeuvre.

According to the Working Conditions Survey published by the French Ministry of Labour (DARES), Amélie Mauroux shows us that work pressure in terms of pace at work increased between 2005 and 2013. More specifically, data show an extension of work intensification in parallel with the dissemination and use of ICT tools. When the use of ICT at work is upper than 3 hours a day (internet, intranet, emails, etc.), increasing work intensification is significant.

Constraints on the pace of work is more and more present with regard to different variables. For instance, when the pace of work depends on a computer control or monitoring.

Within the companies, market and industrial constraints are still increasing. This is also the case for the working environments where the two types of constraints are present (industrial and market constraints).

Qualitative studies

By an ethnographic study of nurses in a Swedish public hospital, Rebecca Selberg (University of Lund, Sweden) shows us how the neoliberal transformations of work (concept of new public management, privatization, subcontracting resources) impacted negatively the working conditions of nurses and can affect the care of patients. It poses a potential risk for the patients and the employees themselves. Turnover of workers in the health units, recurrent staff shortages, minimum staffing, inadequate trainings, etc...causes difficulties for workers who cannot anymore prioritize their interventions near by the patients because too many must be carried out. This leads to increasing workloads and stress. From the point of view of the nurses, strikes are ineffective and costly: What are the best strategies to change? There is a problem with trade unions' role: often they represent only the high skilled nurses and neglect the low skill staff. The division of labour is also very much linked with ethnic stratification of the labour market.

While working in a completely different branch of activity, Ricardo Gutierrez (EFJ, EU) said it is difficult to resist to the increasing global intensity linked with ICT for journalists. With ICT the job is never ended and journalists need to have a lot of arms ("Shiva journalists"). Crisis was also a good reason to impose poor working conditions to the workers. An important issue to be raised is the future of democracy if we consider that the journalists' function is to provide public opinion with an accurate information. With the digitalisation, the number of journalists has decreased in the newspapers which leads to an increasing workload and the development of PSR among the workers in this profession and notably burnout.