Algorithmic Management – The Role of Trade Unions

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1. Introduction: Challenges of AM
2. Awareness Raising & Training
3. Collective Bargaining
4. EU Regulation
Introduction: Challenges of AM

Surveillance and AM at work: shift allocation, tracking of activity, performance assessment, recruitment...

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have seen an increase of surveillance tools invading workers’ homes as they have to work remotely.

AM/AI systems can impact on workers’ physical & mental health and they can have dehumanising effects.

There is a risk of unethical use of AI systems and the infringement of fundamental rights.

Lack of transparency & power imbalance: many workers don’t know what data employers collect about them, what AM systems are used and if it is done appropriately.
The European Services Workers Union

Awareness Raising & Training


Objectives: Raise awareness among our members about the role of the social partners; make the voice of workers heard in the AI debate and develop AI as a topic for collective bargaining.

Topics: Ethical AI, the role of social partners, data management, skills & training, bias and right to disconnect.

Survey on awareness regarding AM tools (Jan-Feb 2022) shows high uncertainty and lack of transparency about AM usage at work.
AM should be a topic for collective bargaining at all levels. Social partners play a key role in negotiating the design, implementation and governance of AM tools.

Many unions have started to provide guidelines for negotiating on AM, covering issues like data protection or accountability.

There are not many agreements yet that directly focus on AM. But several CBAs in Europe that provide language regarding AM related issues.

Workers expect employer to inform them and to mitigate risks of AM usage: What AM systems are used? How do they work?
Collective Bargaining - Demands

Justification: Data collection or surveillance of the workforce should be for a clearly justifiable purpose.

Transparency: Employer should be obliged to inform, explain and agree with workers before AM tools are applied.

Clear red lines for unethical AI systems impacting fundamental rights, workers’ rights and privacy.

Human-in-command approach: Algorithms should advise, humans should decide. Workers should always have the right to appeal to a human authorised to override the algorithm.
UNI Europa has been lobbying on the EU AI Act and the Directive on Platform Work. We also contribute to the ETUC and TUC working groups on AI.

Key concerns: involvement of social partners in the development, deployment & governance of AI systems; human in command approach, scope of legislation.

All AI systems used in employment should be categorised as high-risk and be subject to an independent third party impact assessment.

AI Act should not undermine existing protections at national level (legislation, collective bargaining).

Platform Directive: AM definition limits the scope to fully automated systems. Too restrictive as creates loopholes.
Read more about the UNI Europa position on AI

https://www.uni-europa.org/topics/ai/

….and the UNI PM guide to algorithmic management


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