

High-Level International Conference

# **Towards a Digitalized World of Work: What Future Works for All?**

*In the context of the International Labour Organization's Centenary*

---

## **2nd Plenary Session**

**25-26 April 2019**

*Hotel Crowne Plaza Vilnius*

*M. K. Ciurlionio 84, Vilnius, Lithuania*



Ministry of Social Security  
and Labour of the Republic  
of Lithuania

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Session: What future can we create for the most vulnerable ones?

**Session outline:** This session reflects on the challenges and opportunities for vulnerable people in the labour market, which arise from digitalisation and new technologies. Special attention will be given to the impact of technology on women youths, and older workers.

**Context:** While there have been major advances in the inclusion of vulnerable workers in labour markets over recent decades, there is still much to be desired, as evident from persistent gender gaps in the quality and quantity of work, lower participation rates of specific socio-economic and age segments of the population, and the scarring effects faced by the generation of young workers most affected by the Great Recession. At the same time, large parts of the region are facing a shrinking potential labour force and strains on social protection systems, pointing to the need to mobilise yet untapped potentials of the population. Current technological advances may provide solutions to overcome some existing barriers, but they also show the potential to create new vulnerabilities and could further increase inequalities.

Technology has substantially contributed to the longevity of workers by unburdening them from the most arduous tasks, and communication technologies have enabled more flexible work arrangements that have helped to overcome mobility challenges. Older people can benefit, because improved transport and communication channels enable access to labour markets beyond their geographical locality, thereby protecting them from having to leave local social networks due to the shift of modes of production. Such technologies can also benefit rural areas and enable those that cannot partake in the strong trend of urbanisation to reap some of its benefits. For women, technology-enabled teleworking arrangements have slightly eased the double burden of paid work and unpaid care work, enabling a better work life balance.

Working time, which has been at the centre of discussion since the industrial revolution, continues to occupy our minds. The Global Commission on the Future of Work – 100 years after the first international labour standard on working time was adopted – called for an expansion of time sovereignty, giving workers greater autonomy over their working time, while meeting enterprise needs. Technology plays an important role as an enabler for more time sovereignty and has potential positive effects for the inclusion of vulnerable workers, including women. While more fundamental shifts in gender perceptions and institutional care frameworks are needed to overcome the care imbalance between men and women, more flexible working time arrangements and the use of communication technologies can enable higher participation of women and older workers in the labour market. Yet, technology also has the potential to further blur the line between work and private life, potentially inducing more stress.

With the increasing importance of digital technologies in the economy, it is important to investigate how new technologies affect people of different ages and gender due to their differences in skill levels and composition. For decades, policy-makers and international institutions have been emphasizing the importance of STEM skills (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), yet the occupational gap between STEM-related fields and others remains strongly segregated along gender lines, despite various policy efforts to the contrary. There is reason to believe that these skills will continue to be fundamental in an age of robotisation, AI and bio-technology. The rapid pace of change and limited availability of lifelong learning opportunities could challenge participation of older workers in a work environment increasingly reliant upon such technologies. Meanwhile, lower participation of women in STEM-related subjects could further increase labour market segmentation along traditional gender stereotypes, with men flocking into technology-driven industries and women ending up in often undervalued care professions. Meanwhile, women and young people are also more affected by the

incidence of non-standard forms of employment, which are often characterised, among other aspects, as jobs without access to adequate learning opportunities.

Hence, learning systems will have to adapt in order to generate the largest possible benefit from technology for enterprises and workers. Current education systems are largely set up for linear progression, separating life in education at a young age and work at later ages. With rapid technological change, education systems need to be responsive to more fragmented biographies, as well as ever changing needs of employers. Lifelong learning must progress from lip service to pragmatic policy solutions that strike a balance between quality, depth and breadth, while allowing for flexible solutions around work and private life, and putting equality considerations at their core. How these systems can be financed without further pitting labour market insiders against outsiders remains a question.

Some of the inequalities outlined here compound over time, so solutions need to be found to not only expand the temporal scope of educational and social interventions, but also to deepen early interventions to avoid accumulation effects in the long run.

### ***International Labour Organisation***

- *How can we ensure digital skills and quality apprenticeships for youth?*
- *How can the aspirations of youth for a better future be realized in order to ensure greater inclusion?*
- *How do we strike a balance between ensuring quality of training and meeting the demand for more flexible and shorter learning pathways?*
- *How do we design and finance lifelong learning systems? What are the respective roles of governments and the social partners?*

### ***Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development***

- *How demographic changes affect vulnerable populations in their efforts to access labour markets?*
- *Inequalities compound over time. How can preventing ageing unequally contribute to addressing multiple inequality challenges?*

### ***European Institute for Gender Equality***

- *Digitalisation is creating exciting new job opportunities and economic growth, but who is benefiting? Persistent differences in study choices by young women and men lead to gender divisions in the labour market. With women making up less than 20 % of ICT graduates in the EU, they will keep missing out on these job opportunities because of gender segregation that shapes their choices from an early age.*
- *How can we break the stereotypes that are fueling this uneven concentration and keeping women out of digital jobs?*

### ***International Trade Union Confederation***

- *Active ageing: how to ensure a healthy, safe and productive working environment and work organisation to enable workers of all ages to remain in employment until legal retirement age?*
- *Could dealing with ageing be only assumed as a responsibility of a country? What can be done to share it internationally?*