Project 101051759
*Initiating activities to implement the European Social
Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalisation (EFAD)*
co-funded by the European Union

**Title:** Digitalisation of work and employment. A threat or an opportunity for employees?

**LEAD:** The pace of change in the labour market is definitely accelerating under the impact of new technologies resulting from the use of automation, robot adoption, artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms.

We all feel that the world is changing- In late 2022, ChatGPT broke records when the platform reached 1 million users in less than a week. In early 2023, ChatGPT gathered more than 100 million users per month.

The use of AI in the workplace can no longer be ignored.

**Preparing for change**

Awareness of these processes could be seen during the implementation of the project that is just now coming to a close: Initiating activities to implement the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalisation (EFAD). During the two-year project, the phenomenon of digitalisation and automation of the labour market has accelerated significantly and there is no turning back, which is why the social partners, with trade unions in particular, must adapt to this change as soon as possible. The use of AI in business has become increasingly common and systematically replaces simpler office work, which forces both companies and employees to change and/or improve their digital skills.

It is already clear that digitalisation can contribute to reducing repetitive tasks previously performed by employees and to greater work efficiency. However, this process is also associated with multiple concerns about the preservation of jobs or discrimination resulting from algorithmic management. Nowadays, the right to disconnect is becoming increasingly important, primarily to maintain mental balance. Therefore, preparing trade unions to be active in initiating collective bargaining in this area was the project's main axis. Applying the right to disconnect is important in the face of a declining work-life balance and use of AI to increase surveillance and intensify work.

With the impact of new digital technologies on the work environment still poorly explored, trade unions must be prepared to properly identify the risks arising from the deployment of new technologies in the workplace in order to effectively protect the interests and rights of employees. Tracking software, surveillance software (e.g. through keystroke monitoring) and performance management software are increasingly more frequent in the work environment. Many companies are installing cameras to check on employees. Recruitment software is widely used to select candidates for recruitment or promotion.

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**The key role of the social partners**

Trade union leaders must be ready to talk to employers about transparency in the use of algorithmic management and about clear rules for the deployment and use of algorithms, which should be included in a written agreement/contract. Employees have the right to be informed about algorithmic management tools and to challenge those they consider harmful. Algorithms are there to support the work of managers but not to replace them. Trade union members should demand that employees have access to all data collected about them and to any algorithmic assessments of their performance and, after leaving their job, they should have the right to request that all their personal data be erased.

Given how dynamic technological and social progress is, the final project report includes a set of guidelines and suggestions for trade union actions in the work environment that is increasingly saturated with new technologies. Trade unions, therefore, have the right to demand explanations about how algorithms operate and should understand the methods of collecting, storing and searching for employees' personal data obtained by employers through digital technologies, while data management is to be in accordance with the GDPR. These topics, among others, were the subject of the project's training sessions based on a handbook developed for the purpose, which contains tips on how to keep up with the digitalisation changes introduced in the workplace.

Trade unions must be aware of how dynamically the market for AI technologies is developing - The AI market will grow by 26% in 2025.

Business analysts estimate that by 2026 the value of the US AI market will reach almost USD300 billion.

The world's second-largest economy, China, will have an AI industry worth about USD40.6 billion by 2026. By 2030, China will have a 26.1% share in the global AI market.

**No standing still**

The need for training, also in the area of employee reskilling due to the introduction of new technologies, is included in the National Action Plans developed by the social partners during the project. These plans not only set the directions for future action but may also serve as a reference framework in the event of disputes, misunderstandings or even open conflicts between the parties concerned. The Polish Action Plan on Digitalisation will be further developed by the Social Dialogue Council. All the documents referred to above, available for download, alongside the other information regarding the EFAD Project, can be found at: https://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/projekty-i-dokumenty/cyfryzacja-rynku-pracy-projekt-efad/

In the era of digitalisation and globalisation, however, emotional intelligence and empathy will continue to be key skills. The ability to understand and manage one's emotions, as well as the emotions of others, will be increasingly valued. They facilitate collaboration and teamwork,

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both in the workplace and in virtual environments. It is also important for both upskilling and gaining digital skills to be firmly rooted in collective agreements, which is why collective bargaining on competences and skills is needed. Strategic plans in companies and public policies will inevitably focus on reskilling and upskilling through continuous vocational training. Their aim is to protect jobs so that the spectre of technological unemployment does not become a grim reality for many employees.

Let us remember that for employee representation and trade unions to be effective we must learn to keep up to date with the basic trends in the development of AI and algorithms. They surround our lives in an increasing number of dimensions. They are becoming an increasingly large business: for example, Netflix's recommendation technology is worth USD1 billion in revenue per year. Many consumers will probably agree that Netflix's use of AI is one of their greatest assets. The streaming platform uses AI to personalise recommendations and tailor them to viewers' interests.

Contrary to widespread concerns, AI will not necessarily replace human jobs but, being a revolution in itself, it will change the way we work and will create entirely new professions. Those who can adapt and learn how to use new tools will be better equipped to succeed in the job market in the future. But let us remember that AI still lacks the ability to replicate human creativity, empathy and innovation, despite its ability to process information at high speed and perform repetitive tasks with precision.