

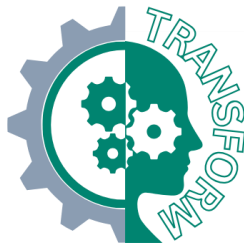
TRANSFORM - THE FUTURE OF HUMAN WORKFORCE: EMBRACING CHANGE, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES



Collaborative Workshop

Novo mesto, Slovenia – 10 OCTOBER 2024





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REPORT OF WORK PACKAGE 2 – PROJECT TRANSFORM

Work Package 2: Collaborative workshop on the Current and Future workforce priorities

On Thursday, October 10th, 2024, the Faculty of Organizational Studies in Novo mesto (Slovenia) together with project partners partners from Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Portugal), UCLL (Belgium), IRES-RVG (Italy), NCPE (Malta), InnovationHive (Greece), CRN (Germany), WellbeingLab (Sweden) and FFI (Poland) hosted an event in scope of Work Package 2 (WP-2) with the title: Collaborative workshop on the Current and Future workforce priorities.

The event took place in-situ in Novo mesto, Slovenia (Ulica talcev 3a, 8000 Novo mesto) and lasted from 16:00 to 19:00. Other residents and citizens were also invited and attended the event in Slovenia. In total we had 34 participants (**28 unique eligible participants**) from 8 countries (Slovenia, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Malta, Greece, Germany and Poland). The participants at this event were TRANSFORM project partners, as well as other citizens and residents of Slovenia.

THE COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOP

The Collaborative Workshop was opened again by FOS dean Dr. Annmarie Gorenc Zoran and Dr. Nadia Molek. Nadia Molek opened the workshop stating that when we talk about "Current and Future Workforce Priorities", we are addressing the most pressing challenges and opportunities that shape the labour markets across different countries in our case, in EU. These priorities are very different. Each EU country faces its own demographic, economic and technological challenges and changes that influence their specific priorities, whether it is tackling the ageing of the workforce, closing skills gaps or integrating disadvantaged groups such as young people, women and migrants into the labour market, etc.



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Afterward, the consortium proceeded to talk with the participants. The consortium opened the discussion with the question, "What do you believe are the challenges and priorities in the labor market today and for the future?".

A participant stated, »You know, for example, in terms of technology, the integration of a robot hand, and then that worker that used to work in that process was then eliminated, or had to be qualified To work with that robot, but it's not (?). And then we asked about safety and quality. And it's not always about safety, because the robot can shut down, does make mistakes, and in one instance, also broke a glass window. Yeah, broke a glass window, so that there was also issues with that. So it's not that robots save everything, but there are issues with robots, and then also«. The participant came to the conclusion that "it is better that are people who work".

Another participant added that it is difficult for older people to adapt to rapid changes: »Older people that work in the company, they have a problem or difficulty to adjust to new programs and everything, and when technology is developing at the fastest basis, it is there is a problem, young people can adapt very quickly regardless more consistency that they need to apply while we had to we are, because we're called digital immigrants, right? Yeah, my age, right? And you guys are the natives, digital natives, right? Yeah, and the skills that now you so the in my company, I work in the laboratory, they want that you have a bachelor degree, at least, to be an analytical that usually have just the high school or any something like that. So you need to have a lot of knowledge, and they want a lot of knowledge to take you. So that's also the problem, because usually the position of analytics was for the people that didn't. Go to college. So that means that re qualification, the demands of the employer are higher now, so the education level has to be what used to be at the high school level or secondary school is now a bachelor's level degree. So that means that then we're thinking of uneducated citizens, right, not having a bachelor's degree and jobs that are open to that.

Input of another participant: »AI when I asked them that they are losing it in their companies, and some of most of them said no, and one said yes, that they integrated a Microsoft co pilot in a pharmaceutical company where she works, but they don't. She doesn't use it because she doesn't need it, so she doesn't even go to it. So maybe it's also an issue of employers not knowing how they can integrate, for example, generative AI into their processes if they should. If into the AI, into their processes, if they should, if they shouldn't, and how then to educate and train employees. (...)



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Another participant who works in the service sector stated that they avoid the use of artificial intelligence or the automation of customer service processes because it is important for his SME to prioritise the customer and give them the attention and communication they deserve.

Another participant who works in the public sector sees no need to use it in all work processes.

Participants stated, that they did don't know the policies that Slovenia has about automatization, robotization and about application of AI in the labour market and processes.

The second part of the workshop featured presentations from three of the partners. It followed with the Presentation from Innovation Hive, titled »Transform - Employment and Vocational Training Policies in the Context of Digitalization and Globalization«. The presentation focused on how digitalization and globalization are reshaping labour markets and the role of vocational training in preparing the workforce for these changes. The Impact of Digitalization on Employment with insights on how digitalization reshapes employment relationships, with new roles emerging and changes in how jobs are performed, was highlighted. Then, the presentation of EU policies was showcased, with the EU emphasizing vocational training policies that adapt to digitalization. The SELFIE initiative is highlighted as a tool for assessing digital readiness in work-based learning environments to improve employability. National policies from Greece, Sweden, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Slovenia were presented. The presentation underscored the importance of adapting employment and vocational training policies to meet the demands of an increasingly digital and globalized labour market.

After the presentation from Innovation Hive, Ewelina Barthel from CNE addressed the Greek colleagues, asking them to clarify Greece's strategy for digitalizing the population (as per the Digital Economy and Society Index - DESI). She pointed out that there are specific targets, such as aiming for a certain number of digital skills per person, and that there is a significant focus on improving the digitalization of Greek SMEs, as they rank among the lowest in Europe according to DESI. Her main question was whether there is a concrete plan in place, and what public institutions in Greece (like schools or government agencies) are doing to support this. She suggested that it would be useful to know if there are any initiatives or incentives for businesses to adopt digital tools, and that this information could be incorporated into the ongoing research. Nadia Molek stressed that partners should be careful when quoting the digital plan as its own, since it is for the whole Europe. "Every EU country must have this digital plan. You are European country, I mean, from members, no, no, it's a plan program. Yeah, that's why we need to go to



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the effective policies that, yeah, that, yeah, exactly, exactly, and also the green plan, the green Europe. It's a program.”

Following the workshop session, Agnieszka Stawiszyńska from the Fundacja „Fundusz Inicjatyw” (Poland), presented to colleagues the results of her research on labour market policies at EU and national level and the main policy trends in the countries involved in this project — Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden - as well as the guidelines for the labour market in the EU. It was stated that the European Union’s labour policies are designed to guide all the member states in shaping economic and social frameworks, focusing on employment, social protection, and equality. These policies are built on foundational treaties like the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The EU employs structured mechanisms, including the European Semester, Employment Guidelines, and National Reform Programmes, to ensure that labour policies align with shared goals and address emerging challenges.

Key EU initiatives were mentioned, like the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which focus on improving living and working conditions, promoting inclusivity, and preparing the workforce for technological changes, including automation and AI integration. The EPSR, introduced in 2017, emphasizes equal opportunities, secure employment, and social protection, while the RRF supports recovery efforts, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives are seen as crucial for addressing modern labour market challenges, such as skill shortages, digital literacy deficits, and automation-induced job losses.

Another EU's proactive approach is the Artificial Intelligence Act of 2024, aiming to regulate AI usage and protect citizens while promoting innovation. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including gender pay gaps, skills mismatches, and varying levels of digital readiness among member states, with countries like Poland facing difficulties in meeting EU digital and employment targets. The EU’s labour policies focus on creating a resilient and adaptable labour market that emphasizes upskilling, inclusivity, and equitable opportunities. However, ongoing efforts are required to balance ambitious goals with effective implementation, ensuring that all member states can address the rapid changes in technology, demographics, and global economic shifts.



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Afterwards, the **discussion** focused on existing policies and gaps by country. Key points included the lag in European STEM education, digitalization efforts, and lifelong learning initiatives. Specific examples were the new Flemish government's goals, Germany's digital skills gap, and Greece's improved employment services post-COVID. Italy's new AI and digital transformation law, Malta's Jobs Plus Act, and Poland's integration programs for minorities were highlighted. Portugal's telework policy and right to disconnect were noted, along with Slovenia's focus on lifelong learning and digital skills. Sweden's strong work-life balance policies were also mentioned.

Regarding Education and STEM Promotion in Europe, Speaker 1 discusses the lack of substantial efforts by governments in promoting STEM education, particularly in the last two years. He also mentions the recent initiative to digitalize secondary education in Belgium by providing laptops to pupils, funded by the government. It is noted that Europe, on average, lags in these efforts. Speaker 2 from Slovenia highlights the European directive on lifelong learning and its varying implementation across countries, citing Germany and Italy as examples.

Regarding, Digital Skills and Labor Market Integration, Speaker 2 talks about the integration of disadvantaged groups into the labor market and the need for digital skills. Speaker 1 mentions the new Flemish government's responsibility for employment and its goals related to lifelong learning, digital skills, and STEM education. Speaker 3, from Poland, discusses the formation of a new federal government in Belgium and its potential impact on policy intentions. Speaker 1 explains the division of responsibilities between the federal and regional governments in Belgium, particularly in education and labour policies, which complicates the challenge.

Regarding German Policies and Digitalization, the workshop coordinator, Nadia Molek, asks about the recognition of directives and resilience plans in Germany, highlighting the tradition of immigration policies in Germany to address workforce shortage through history. Speaker 4 from Germany discusses the long-standing tradition of dual vocational training in Germany and the recent introduction of new incentives. She also highlights the importance of social rights and the need for digitalization in German policy, noting the slow pace of legislative changes, emphasizing the importance of social rights and the need for digital legislation.

Regarding Greek Employment and Digital Strategy (YPAP), Speaker 5 from Greece, explaining the current role of the Greek organization for employment in matching unemployed individuals with job opportunities. mentions the improvements made to the YPAP system due to COVID-19,



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making it more efficient. In their statement it is also mentioned the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Greek economy and the initiatives to support them.

Regarding Italian Policies and AI Transformation, Speaker 7 from Italy discusses the new policies in Italy, including the AI and digital transformation law, which encourages AI training and investment. She mentions the national strategy plan for gender equality and the challenges faced in implementing it. Nadia Molek notes the parallel with Speaker 1 from Belgium comments on gender equality and the lack of practice compared to promises. Speaker 7 highlights the STEM strategy for women and the cultural challenges in implementing gender equality.

Regarding Maltese Employment Law and Gender Equality, Speaker 8 from Malta explains the Jobs Plus Act in Malta, which oversees employment and provides programs for vulnerable people and reskilling. She also mentions the introduction of the work-life balance directive and the recent labour reforms. The various commissions in Malta that deal with gender equality, disability and gender-based violence are discussed. Molek asks about the identification of European directives in Malta, with Speaker 8 noting the implementation of the well-being directive and the digital plan.

In the case of Polish Digital Plan, the Migrant Integration is highlighted. Speaker 3 from Poland discusses the Polish digital plan and its ambitious goals for digital skills and ICT specialists. She highlights the new initiatives for integrating Roma people into the Polish society and labour market. Speaker 3 mentions the right to disconnect and the telework policy implemented in Poland.

Portuguese highlighted Telework Policy and Digital Skills, Speaker 10 from Portugal explains Portugal's early telework policy and the right to disconnect implemented after the pandemic. She discusses the tax exemption for teleworking expenses and the recent pilot for a four-day workweek. Molek inquires about the telework policy in Portugal, with Speaker 10 noting the high number of teleworkers and the need for regulation. Speaker 10 mentions the initiatives to attract women to engineering and the regulation of digital platform work.

Regarding Slovenian legislation context Speaker 2 from Slovenia discusses the Slovenian employment relationship act and its updates to follow European directives. She mentions the national agency responsible for skilling and the focus on lifelong learning and vocational training. She highlights the governmental strategy for ethical AI and the STEM program for women. Finally she notes the low unemployment rate in Slovenia and the immigration policies to address it.



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Following this, Ewelina Barthel and Katarzyna Wlusek from Germany, with the presentation “Good and weak practices in the labour market regarding the future needs”. The presentation highlights various good and weak practices in the labor market across different EU countries, focusing on their ability to meet future demands, especially concerning technological advancements.

Among Good Practices:

Belgium: Strong vocational training systems that align well with labour market needs, ensuring students acquire relevant skills.

Germany: The "New Quality of Work Initiative" (INQA) helps small and medium enterprises improve work culture and adapt to future needs, especially through self-assessments and coaching.

Greece: The Digital Transformation Plan, funded by the EU Recovery Fund, aims to fully digitize public and private sectors by 2025.

Italy: The National Strategy for Digital Skills, under the "Repubblica Digitale" initiative, focuses on improving e-skills for citizens and workers, with set targets for 2026.

Poland: Recent amendments to the labor code allowing remote work provide flexibility and are well-received by employees.

Portugal: The Action Plan for Digital Transition enhances digital transformation by promoting digital inclusion and transforming businesses and public services.

Among Weak Practices:

Belgium: Inclusivity remains an issue, with challenges like segmentation and discrimination against migrants in the labour market.

Germany: The new Skilled Immigration Law and Opportunity Card face challenges due to complex bureaucratic processes.

Greece: Small and medium enterprises have a low level of digital intensity, lagging behind EU averages.

Italy: There is a disconnection between training programs and labor market needs, with poor coordination and skills forecasting.

Malta: Digital skills integration into the education system is lacking, exacerbating skill mismatches.



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Poland: The vocational training system is outdated, contributing to a mismatch between education and labor market requirements.

Finally, all participants were engaged in a group discussion to identify and prioritize workforce needs. As final remarks, Speaker 7 asks about the right to disconnection in Italy, with Speaker 2 suggesting adding a note about social dialogue in the final report. Speaker 2 concludes the meeting, thanking everyone for their contributions and suggesting the addition of comments to the final report.

Conclusions were drawn on the topic of Employment Rates and Skill Mismatch in Europe. Speaker 4 discusses the issue of skill mismatch in various European countries, including Sweden and Poland, and highlights the need for updated skills among school graduates. Speaker 1 emphasizes the high employment rate in Flanders but notes the government's goal to increase it further by engaging groups currently distant from the labor market. He also points out the challenges faced by less skilled individuals, including those with disabilities, in accessing the labor market.

About the issue of Regional Employment Disparities in Belgium, Speaker 2 explains the difference in employment rates between the Dutch-speaking Flanders and the French-speaking Wallonia regions of Belgium. She stresses that the overall employment rate for Belgium is lower than the EU average due to these regional disparities, creating tension within the country. Speaker 2 also mentions that the goal in Wallonia is to increase employment rates from around 70% to 80%. Speaker 1 suggests specifying Flanders to avoid confusion, as the employment situation varies significantly between regions.

Regarding Complexities of Federal Government Systems, Speaker 5 acknowledges the complexity of federal government systems, particularly in Belgium, and their impact on policy implementation. Speaker 3 finds it interesting to explore the practice of regional differences in vocational training. Speaker 2 humorously describes the Belgian federal government system as "very complicated, so complicated that it becomes unworkable". Speaker 5 clarifies that the opinions expressed are based on research articles, not personal opinions.

When concluding about regional Autonomy and Policy Implementation, Speaker 4 highlights the regional differences in labour and training policies, noting that these policies are made on a regional basis. It is also mentioned that autonomous regions can implement policies independently, which affects the overall picture. Speaker 5 acknowledges the regional differences in Germany, where some regions are more centralized while others are more



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regionalized. The discussion emphasizes the need to clarify these regional differences in policy analysis and research.

In the final discussion, the group also identified the main topics to be covered in the upcoming survey, including demographics, technology, green transition, climate change, labour shortage, skills, and well-being.

There was discussion about the need to also consider the perspective of employees, not just employers, when looking at issues like skills mismatch and working conditions.

The group agreed that "how people work" should be an additional category to capture changes in work arrangements, productivity, wages, etc. and their impact on well-being.

The survey should aim to be pragmatic and take around 10 minutes to complete, focusing on the key topics identified.

Next steps include further defining the target groups for the survey and the technical details of rolling it out across the participating countries.

CONCLUSION

The event concluded with a networking session that lasted until 7:00 PM.