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TRANSFORM: The Future of Human Workforce: Embracing Change, Challenges, and Opportunities

WP 6: Interdisciplinary Expert Roundtable Symposium

Project 101146985

REPORT



On-site Event Key Information:

Location: Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Date: June 3rd, 2025

Host Partner: ISCTE

Roundtable 1 Speakers:

Sara Ramos, Associate Professor of the Human Resources and Organizational Behavior Department at ISCTE-IUL

Daphne Samara, Differentiated Instruction and Inclusion Specialist and Project Manager at Innovation Hive

Nadia Molek, Applied Anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Organizational Studies (FOS)

Roundtable 2 Speakers:

Alexander van Biezen, Philosopher of Science, Lecturer and Researcher at University College Limburg (UCLL)

Cláudia Vajão, Associate Researcher at DINÂMIA'CET at ISCTE-IUL

Fátima Assunção, Assistant Professor at Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas (ISCSP) of the University of Lisbon

Karolina Mazetyte, Co-founder, Facilitator & Trainer at Well-being Lab

Maria José Sousa, Associate Professor of the Department of Political Science and Public Policy at ISCTE-IUL

Agenda:

HOUR		June 3 rd
14:00	Interdisciplinary Expert Roundtable Symposium	Registration
14:15		Welcome & Introduction (Iscte & UCLL)
14:30		Roundtable 1 – TRANSFORM Project (WP 3, 4 and 5) Challenges & Directions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blueprint Survey Conclusions – Iscte Focus Group Conclusions – Innovation Hive Symposium Conclusions – FOS
15:30		Coffee-break & networking
15:45		Roundtable 2 – Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities for Workforce of the Future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of key themes, recommendations, and future directions
17:30		Open discussion
18:15		Conclusion of the Roundtable Symposium (Iscte)



Participant Demographics:

Total Participants: 26 participants

Gender Distribution: 77% Female, 19% Male, 4% Non-Binary

Age Range: 20 to 61 years old

Country Distribution: 9 different countries

Fields of Expertise: Sociology, Psychology, Political Economy, Industrial Management, Philosophy, Social and Organizational Psychology, Training and Education

Brief overview of the activities:

The *Interdisciplinary Expert Roundtable Symposium* opened with welcoming remarks from the ISCTE team and the coordinators of the Transform Project, based at UCLL. These initial words set the tone for a day of interdisciplinary dialogue focused on the future of the human workforce in Europe, within the framework of the **EU CERV Project – Transform: The Future of Human Workforce: Embracing Change, Challenges, and Opportunities**.

The first roundtable functioned as a space for validating the progress made so far within the project. The Transform initiative aims to enhance Europe's workforce competitiveness and adaptability by examining key structural and technological transformations—namely automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, demographic shifts, skill development, labour market trends, and workplace well-being.

The session began with a presentation of the main findings from **Work Package 3**, based on the large-scale survey "*Blueprint of Tomorrow*", which captured expectations and concerns across six thematic areas: demographic changes, technology and digitalization, new technologies, flexible work arrangements, artificial intelligence, and future skill perspectives. The survey, distributed across nine countries, gathered 833 valid responses, mostly from employed individuals. Among the main trends observed: individuals with lower levels of education, younger people, and women tended to have more negative expectations about the future of work, while hybrid workers and



employees in large companies showed more positive perceptions. Based on these findings, several recommendations were proposed, including strengthening digital and AI literacy, promoting inclusive hiring, supporting flexible work strategies, preparing for the green transition, and reinforcing job security through lifelong learning and social protection.

Following the presentation, several questions were raised by the audience. These included inquiries about the possibility of conducting comparative analyses across different economic sectors and occupational groups, as well as suggestions to explore clustered interpretations of country-level data.

The roundtable then featured key insights from **Work Package 4**, which drew on focus groups with 137 participants, including employers, employees, HR professionals, and institutional stakeholders. These discussions addressed the challenges and opportunities posed by AI, demographic change, and environmental transitions. While digitalisation was widely seen as enhancing efficiency, concerns were raised about job security, skill gaps, and ethical risks. Flexible work was valued, though issues such as isolation and surveillance were noted. Participants stressed the need for stronger policy support, inclusive transition strategies, and investment in training and well-being.

Finally, findings from **Work Package 5**—emerging from the International Interdisciplinary Conference “*The Future of Human Workforce*”—were presented. The conference reaffirmed that the future of work is not solely technological, but also social, ethical, and cultural. Participants warned against the invisibility of algorithmic decision-making and called for frameworks that protect human agency and dignity. Emphasis was placed on themes such as gender equality, migration, and labour segmentation, as well as the need to reclaim creativity, education, and care as central to the future of work. The concluding message was clear: the future must be co-created—through dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity—to ensure that change serves a just and sustainable society.

With that, the work of the first roundtable was concluded and, after a quick coffee break, the conference resumed with the second roundtable, which featured five densely rich presentations focused on various aspects of the labour market.



The presentation by Alexander van Biezen titled **Critical Thinking in the Age of AI Bridging the Gap to the Future of Work** explored the profound transformation in the human workforce driven by advances in artificial intelligence. Drawing parallels with past technological disruptions, such as the disappearance of horse-drawn transport, Dr. van Biezen illustrated how quickly entire industries can vanish. He emphasized recent milestones like AlphaGo, AlphaZero, and the rapid rise of ChatGPT, arguing that these developments mark not just technical progress but the emergence of genuinely agentic AI systems—entities that act autonomously, reason, and learn, rather than just respond.

Central to the presentation was the assertion that critical thinking and AI literacy must become core competencies in education. Rather than viewing AI as just a tool, the audience was urged to recognize it as a new kind of agent—something closer to a partner than a program. He highlighted examples of AI agents influencing real-world decisions (e.g., tariff policies), underlining the risks of blindly trusting machine outputs. To prepare for a future of AI-human symbiosis, he concluded, society must rethink its educational priorities, foster creativity, and ensure regulatory frameworks evolve in tandem with the growing autonomy of intelligent systems.

The presentation by Cláudia Vajão, titled **The Role of Firms in the Labour Market**, critically examined the role of firms in shaping labour market dynamics in Portugal. Drawing on firm-level data from the 'Quadros de Pessoal' (2010–2018), the research identified four typologies of firms—Stable, Dual, Flexible, and Contingent—each with distinct employment strategies and levels of contractual stability. Contrary to the narrative that firms lack flexibility, the study revealed that all firms make use of flexible labour arrangements, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as youth, low-skilled workers, and women. Importantly, the reforms imposed during the Troika period did not reduce segmentation; instead, they entrenched it, making precarious employment more widespread.

The presentation concluded that deregulation is not the solution, as firms already possess sufficient flexibility. Instead, policy should focus on strengthening internal labour markets, investing in human capital, and fostering responsible human resource strategies. The



segmentation of the workforce, exacerbated during crises such as COVID-19, is not only an economic issue but a societal one—undermining inclusion, equity, and cohesion. It was made a good argument for a rethinking of firms' responsibilities in the labour market, emphasizing the need for inclusive employment practices that promote stability and long-term productivity.

The presentation by Karolina Mazetyte addressed concerns related to **well-being in the workplace**, with particular emphasis on mental health challenges stemming from the absence of effective integration policies. Offering a perspective rooted in the experiences of the younger generation, the presentation highlighted how mental health and overall well-being are becoming central issues in the evolving world of work. Her intervention prompted a broader reflection on what the future may hold in these areas, underscoring the urgency of addressing psychosocial risks and promoting inclusive, supportive working environments.

Fátima Assunção's presentation explored **gender-related dynamics within the labour market**, drawing from comparative European data sources such as Eurostat, the Labour Force Survey, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Survey on Gender Gaps. One of the key highlights was the finding that Portugal stands out as one of the EU countries with the highest rates of female participation in employment. While this may initially appear to reflect progress in gender equality, the audience was invited to adopt a more critical lens. It was emphasized that quantitative indicators could obscure underlying socio-economic realities, noting that countries with higher female employment rates often also exhibit features such as lower wage levels or a greater prevalence of precarious employment conditions. As such, the data may reflect economic necessity rather than genuine advances in gender equity.

In addition, the presentation examined the sectoral distribution of employment by gender, revealing deeper imbalances. Women remain highly concentrated in specific sectors—often those that are undervalued and underpaid—raising questions about the horizontal and vertical segregation that persist in labour markets across Europe. This part of the analysis stressed the importance of not only increasing women's participation in



employment but ensuring that such participation occurs under conditions of fairness, recognition, and opportunity for progression. This intervention underscored the need for more nuanced readings of statistical indicators, encouraging policy and academic audiences to interrogate what lies behind apparently favourable trends.

The intervention by Maria José Sousa focused on the imperative to **rethink the future of workplaces and the profiles of the emerging workforce**, particularly considering technological disruption and shifting societal expectations. Building on findings already explored within Work Package 3, she underscored the urgent need to close the digital skills gap, and to prepare both current and future workers to navigate increasingly complex, data-driven work environments. It was argued that technical training alone will be insufficient if not accompanied by the development of transversal skills—such as adaptability, collaboration, and digital literacy—which are becoming essential in rapidly changing organisational contexts.

The distinct motivations and preferences of younger generations, who are entering the labour market with new expectations regarding the nature of work were also brought up. Unlike previous generations, many young people express a preference for project-based work, greater autonomy, and clear boundaries between work and personal life. Mental health, well-being, and purpose have become central criteria in how they assess employment opportunities. It was emphasised that employers and policymakers must recognise and adapt to this cultural shift, or risk failing to attract and retain the talent needed to drive innovation and sustainability in future economies.

The roundtable concluded with an open discussion with the audience, which allowed for further engagement with the themes presented. Several participants raised thoughtful questions and reflections, particularly around the topic of women's integration into the labour market and the persistence of gender imbalances across sectors and organisational hierarchies. It was also discussed the AI Challenges and the need for the competencies development but also the development of policies that protect the workers from inadequate control/monitorization. Finally, some of the experts also highlighted the Ageing of the workforce demand the adaptation of the work design and



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conditions. The dialogue reinforced the complexity of interpreting statistical data and the need for policy responses that go beyond numerical targets to address structural inequalities.

This final exchange provided a meaningful closure to the session, highlighting the relevance and timeliness of the issues discussed. With these contributions, the symposium was formally concluded, marking the end of a rich and multifaceted reflection on the transformations shaping the future of the human workforce in Europe.

Annex

Photos from the Roundtables participants





