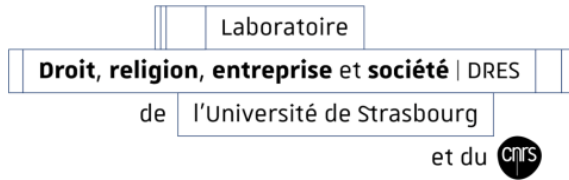




ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE
Service public fédéral
Affaires étrangères,
Commerce extérieur et
Coopération au Développement



Seminar

Social rights in the digital age: challenges and opportunities

Why a seminar on the impact of digital technology and artificial intelligence on social rights?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the digital economy are driving progress in many sectors impacting our daily lives, such as the manufacturing industry, information and communication, transport, tourism and leisure, health and justice. They offer huge economic opportunities and productivity gains, but they also raise several questions. The Council of Europe (CoE) is concerned about the risks of misuse of AI and its potential negative impact on human rights.

In the field of social relations, situations where human beings are controlled by machines will increase. A strict social control of the population through smartphone applications and drones has become possible. The use of algorithms by administrations to improve performance in the allocation of social benefits may also raise serious questions of fairness and privacy, risking introducing or reinforcing various forms of discrimination or segregation.

Labour relations will also be profoundly changed. The jobs of tomorrow will have at least three characteristics: a great flexibility; a strong complementarity with AI and a transversality involving the integration of different disciplines at the same time.

The digital economy exposes workers to new forms of Taylorism and social dumping, with the risk of devaluation of their skills, cognitive overload, loss of autonomy, increased control, and even a loss of meaning in work. How will the actors of the knowledge economy behave so that individuals can be fulfilled in their work? It will certainly be necessary to organise a new social protection system to accompany and supervise the digital economy's irruption into the organisation of work and society. The right to lifelong digital training for the benefit of the greatest number of people should be enshrined in legislation. The role of the States will be to reduce the knowledge divide.

New modes of service provision, such as working via exchange platforms (UBER, AIRBNB etc.) or crowd-working (execution of often repetitive tasks on behalf of GAFA by a multitude of a multitude of non-geographically identified actors) now involve a very large number of economic actors spread over all continents.

In the absence of a clear legal framework, it is the judiciary which, everywhere in the world, is beginning to pave the way for case law and a code of conduct for the players in the gig economy (the economy of small jobs). Several judgments ruled that platform workers were in fact employees and not self-employed, forcing big players like Uber, JustEats and Deliveroo to improve workers' rights. National legislation is also changing: for example, this year Spain introduced the "Rider Law", which regulates delivery workers. In the context of the collaborative economy things are also moving, and the courts tend to be suspicious of the balance of benefits between individuals who collect all sorts of data for a pittance and the relatively high price of the resale of this data by the sponsors of these tasks.

How will international organisations and economic actors behave, both at the level of employers' federations and workers' unions, in the face of these multiple challenges?