

Brief report of EPSU workshop on digitalisation 8 December 2022

Overview

This report gives a short overview of discussion and main conclusions. The report and the presentations are also on the EPSU website [meeting page](#).

Penny Clarke EPSU welcomed participants and recalled that the aim of the meeting was to take stock of current activities and to reflect on future EPSU priorities, also in light of the upcoming EPSU Congress.

EPSU update

Richard Pond EPSU gave an update on recent EPSU work. Not so many unions have negotiated agreements on digitalisation (as have done Fagforbundet Norway), but more unions have included aspects related to digitalisation as part of broader agreements. These tend to deal with data privacy and protection and use of AI (an example of latter is the use by French tax administration to control conformity with renovation requirements). Efficiency gains are not evident however (example tax administration in Denmark). Key is to ensure information and consultation over intended reforms. In EPSU's sectors all are busy with employers to strengthen workers' rights over digitalisation processes. Key questions concern: Who has access to data, role of Big Tech, public control (that is linked to be able to understand what needs to be controlled), how errors are dealt with.

By way of example, *Nadja Salson* EPSU gave a [presentation](#) of the recent TUNED/EUPAE digitalisation agreement, how the agreement had been negotiated and the aim behind the different chapters. Importantly, the agreement underlines the need for administrations to develop IT/digitalisation skills so that they are not reliant on external providers. It also includes the right of users to have a personal contact (in person or on-line). The agreement will provide an important benchmark for unions.

PSI 'Our Digital Future' project

Danny Bertossa PSI and *Christina Colclough* Why Not Lab gave a joint [presentation](#) on the PSI [Our Digital Future](#) project. As Christina put it, digitalisation presents a big challenge because "we don't know what we don't know" and we need to change this. Big Tech is reinforcing the shift in power towards capital and undermining workers' and citizens' rights, and governments are largely standing on the side-lines. Unions need to step up their demands on data collection and analysis (where is data stored, who has access and for what purpose, what happens afterwards) remain crucial questions that need to be addressed. Employers may not understand the systems that they are using either. There is also the dimension of unions' own internal use of membership data.

To support unions, PSI's digital bargaining [hub](#) provides information on 60+ collective agreements and giving analysis of different aspects of issues covered. Analysis to date shows that while many address training and skills, few agreements cover surveillance, discrimination, data rights. The PSI hub also provides model clauses to support negotiators.

In discussion, Jo Kraner NSF Norway asked what the necessary pre-requisites might be for the successful introduction of digitalisation (trust, engagement, information and consultation, good work organisation...). Given the constant and fast rate of digital change, such pre-requisites are difficult to pin down in practice, and indeed can also be costly (as there is a constant need for training for example). As mentioned by Nadja EPSU, is there not a case for banning or at least slowing down digital change in order to protect the overall well-being and health and safety of workers and citizens? Digitalisation should be tool, not a goal in itself.

OSE project

The presentation on the OSE [DIGIQU@LPUB](#) (*impact of digitalisation on job quality and social dialogue in the public services*) did not take place but Richard EPSU informed that over 6,000 responses from 8 countries had been collected so far, many pointing to work intensification caused by digitalisation. A further workshop is planned in Spring 2023 and a final conference in September.

ETUC/ETUI updates on AI

Stefan Gran ETUC informed about ETUC work to influence EU legislation, in particular the AI Act that is currently being discussed by the Council and European Parliament. The ETUC position¹ on the Act remain critical, as it gives a too big place to self-assessment of risks and does not really cover the use of AI. ETUC would like to see a dedicated Directive on the use of AI in the workplace, banning certain highly intrusive applications and ensuring information and consultation rights both at the time when introduced and on an on-going basis. This will be a key lobbying demand towards the European Parliament in the next mandate (post 2024).

In discussion some examples were given of the unsatisfactory use of AI (on scandals regarding child benefits in the Netherlands or examination results in the UK) as well as disappointing impacts on productivity (welfare benefits in Sweden). Veronique Michel IPSO pointed to the need to train all categories and ages of workers to ensure that equal treatment and opportunities for all. Richard EPSU reinforced the need for a 'right to training' that is not a reality for many workers. At EU level competence on training is limited. Especially important is training for senior management, so that they know what they are buying. Jo NSF reminded that the big advances come from cooperation across boundaries, giving the mRNA vaccine as an example. Such cooperation however can be undermined by private copyright, trade secrets etc. A public cloud and development of public digital providers would increase confidence in the use of AI digital technologies. EPSU has put forward amendments to the ETUC's upcoming Congress Action Programme calling for this.

Aida Ponce ETUI gave the final input into the workshop. Her presentation advocated that unions should make more use of existing rights, notably those in the GDPR² that for example forbids video surveillance. As Christina Why Not Lab, she emphasised that knowing how data is being collected and used is the key first step. Social partners and labour inspectorates have a role to play.

In discussion Jackie Green PCS reminded that workers and people were not in principle against new technologies, but there is anxiety over their monitoring capabilities and workers need to see the benefits. Aida ETUI pointed out that there are few (if any?) examples to date of the positive impact of AI in the workplace and recalled the need to activate rights that are in the GDPR in order to protect workers.

¹ Available soon on <https://www.etuc.org/en/documents/adopted>

² See [EPSU guide on GDPR](#)

Closing remarks

Richard and Penny EPSU reminded at the close that the presentations would be circulated, along with information about upcoming training sessions (mentioned above) and information about the PSI's digital hub.

Given the relatively low participation in the workshop it was not appropriate to draw any firm conclusions (of 42 registered only less than half connected) but there is a strong case for continued EPSU engagement. On 26 January and 2 and 9 February (15.00-17.00 CET) we will organise three on-line workshops as part of PSI's [Our Digital Future](#) Project. We encourage affiliates to participate in these workshops so that we can draw more conclusions that support our future work. These upcoming workshops will cover:

- **PSI's Digital Bargaining Hub** – a resource for unions across the world
- **Negotiating Data Rights** – an online tool to help you improve workers' data rights.
- **Co-governing algorithmic systems** – a guide to hold management accountable and liable for the digital systems they are using so harms are prevented, and rights respected.