

Digital transformation—challenge and opportunity for migrant workers

July 24 2018

As technology transforms the job market, migrant workers are in a more precarious position than others, according to a new study from the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's science and knowledge service.

The digital transformation, from robotics to artificial intelligence, is transforming our jobs.

It is opening up new working opportunities as our societies become more technologically advanced. At the same time, computers could soon be replacing humans and performing their tasks across a number of sectors.

As we start to see the effects of this transformation in the EU, [migrant workers](#) are in a more precarious position compared to others.

Around half who have come from outside the EU to make a living are performing tasks that automation could render obsolete, according to a new study carried out by the JRC and the University of Salamanca.

But of course automation poses challenges and opportunities—provided the right policies are in place to ensure we are prepared for the digital transformation—for all workers in the EU, not just migrants.

In this context, the European Pillar of Social Rights focuses on inclusive education and training policies, the importance of which has been confirmed through the EU's Skills Agenda for Europe and the European

Education Area.

The results of the study show that migrants are particularly exposed to the effects of the digital transformation and are therefore more in need of specific interventions – from education and training to social protection.

These kinds of interventions can help them to take advantage of the new career opportunities the transformation could offer.

The Skills Agenda for Europe launched 10 actions to make the right training, skills and support available to people in the EU. It also includes specific actions to support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications of third country nationals.

In addition, the Upskilling Pathways initiative, as part of the Agenda, helps low-skilled adults, including migrants, to strengthen their basic skills and align them with labour market needs.

The Commission also acknowledged the need to support third country nationals in the context of the proposals for the EU's long-term budget 2021-2027.

In line with the approach to invest in people, the new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will specifically support the socio-economic integration of non-EU nationals in the long term, with measures to reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and health, and combat discrimination and inequalities.

Education versus automation

Scientists considered 9 job categories and the extent to which they contain routine tasks that might readily be automated with advancements

in technology.

From office cleaners to food prep assistants, 49.54% of workers who have come from outside the EU are doing jobs categorised as 'elementary' or 'sales and service'.

Elementary occupations are those at the highest risk of automation as jobs requiring the solution of complex problems or negotiating with people are harder to automate. This would be the case for managerial or professional occupations, where only 15.99% of non-EU workers are employed.

A person's job depends significantly on their educational attainment and, hence, the analysis takes that into account.

That being said, migrant workers are much more likely to be doing jobs with a high automation potential than people living and working in their home country.

Their odds of having such a job are between 2.3 and 3 times higher. This is true even for highly educated migrant workers:

- 34.3% of EU citizens living and working in their home country have a university degree. This group has the lowest chance of working in a job with a high automation potential;
- Graduates make up 34.9% of EU citizens who have moved to work in another European country, and 27.6% of third country nationals. However for both groups, the odds of being employed in a job with a high automation potential are 3 times that of EU citizens with university degrees who are living and working in their home country.

The European Social Fund provides valuable support to migrants,

helping to improve their skills and career prospects. The Fund reached 1.7 million migrants and persons with a foreign or minority background between 2014 and 2017.

In addition, Under the European Semester, the EU's key instrument to steer social reforms in the Member States, several countries received recommendations to improve access to quality education and training and to social protection.

The study forms part of the European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography's work which provides EU policymakers with the knowledge and analysis needed to strengthen the response to the challenges of migration and to fully seize its opportunities.

The European Commission's 2018 Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) review gives a comprehensive analysis of the digital transformation, how it changes the relation between labour and machines, and how it the changes the nature of work.

The study 'Migrant workers and the [digital transformation](#) in the EU' provides insights on the possible implications of these changes on the labour market integration of migrants.

It is based on the most recent data from the EU Labour Force Survey and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

The sample data only covers the resident population so does not include information on the working activities of undocumented migrants.

Provided by CORDIS

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