

Issues note -Plenary IV: The future of diversity

New technologies are having a profound impact on labour markets and social interactions. This digital transformation constitutes an opportunity for more diversity but also poses challenges.

Technological change is creating major new opportunities for making societies more inclusive of their increasingly diverse social groups. More flexible ways of working make it easier for parents to combine paid work with caring responsibilities: OECD countries with the highest shares of women working from home also tend to have high maternal employment rates, while no such relationship emerges for men. Additionally, new survey technologies such as computer-assisted self-interviewing can improve respondents' sense of anonymity and privacy thereby increasing chances that sexual and gender minorities come out to surveys; this in turn makes it possible to measure the penalty they may suffer due to their LGBT status. US data collected between 2005 and 2010 show that the proportion of individuals who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual is twice as high when information on sexual orientation is collected through computer-assisted self-interviewing as when it is filled out by the interviewer in the context of a face-to-face or telephone interview.

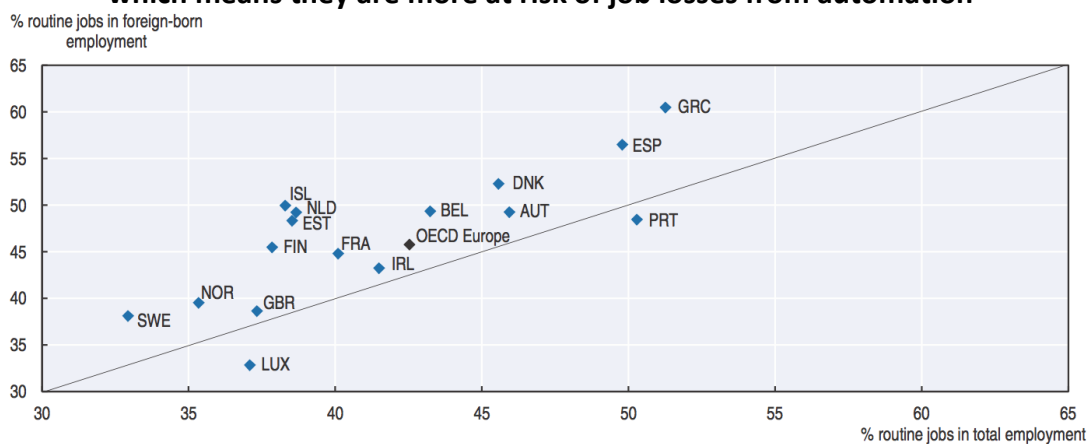
Access to the digital world also has the potential to improve the lives and promote the labour market and social inclusion of people with disabilities. A wide range of new technologies improve accessibility for blind or visually impaired people: braille keyboards, speakers (that transform text into a computer generated voice) and microphones (that convert speech into text or other actions by specialised softwares), Project-Ray smartphone (a vision-free smartphone that is controlled via touch, voice and sound controls), OrCam (a device that recognizes text and objects and describes them to its wearer via a bone-conduction earpiece and creates artificial vision) or Nano Retina (artificial retina that can return a person's sight). New technologies can also facilitate language learning for newly-arrived immigrants and provide the means for a better assessment of their skills. What is more, the spread of digitally-enabled independent work with the development of online platforms offer job prospects to young NEETs (not in employment, education or training), among which young immigrants and native-born youth with immigrant parents are largely overrepresented.

HR analytics, the use of big data for human resources, may be the next frontier for cutting unconscious bias and discrimination, although this approach needs to be complemented by prejudice- and stereotype-reducing interventions among managers and coworkers to be fully effective. [A recent study](#) provides the first experimental evidence about the impact of algorithms on the probability of atypical job candidates to be hired. It reveals that the machine and human screeners disagree on about 30% of candidates with the machine being better at identifying the "right" candidates: the marginal candidate picked by the machine (but not by the human) is +17% more likely to pass a double-blind face-to-face interview with co-workers and receive a job offer, while the marginal candidate picked by a human (but not the machine) is less likely to pass the double-blind interview. Put differently, the algorithm benefits candidates who would otherwise have been discriminated against, such as individuals who lack job referrals, those without prior experience, or those with atypical credentials. [Another recent study](#) on the use of job-testing recruitment technologies further confirms that firms that rely less on human judgement when making hiring decisions end up with better hires.

But digital transformation also comes with potential threats. Access to information and communication technologies has dramatically improved. The share of internet users in OECD countries grew by an average of 30 percentage points over the last ten years. While this has brought benefits for many, some groups are at higher risk of exclusion, such as older people who lack the full set of skills to thrive in a digital

working environment. Data from OECD countries confirm that younger people are better prepared for the digital working environment than older people: some 42% of adults aged 25 to 34 can complete tasks involving multiple steps and requiring the use of specific technology applications, such as an online form, but in the age group 55-65, only one in ten can do so. Computers and robots are being increasingly used as substitutes for routine activities performed by low- and middle-skilled workers, thereby contributing to a polarization of jobs. The loss of upward social mobility prospects for a substantial fraction of the workforce has contributed to the growing dissatisfaction about the effects of globalisation, technological changes and migration flows. This anxiety can in turn fuel a tendency to turn inward and question the benefits of diversity. Automation also hits diversity more directly, with migrant workers being over-represented in jobs involving routine tasks. Making sure that digital gains are accessible to all is a priority to guarantee a flourishing future for diversity.

In European OECD countries, 47% of foreign-born workers are involved in routine jobs, which means they are more at risk of job losses from automation



Source: [OECD International Migration Outlook \(2017\)](#)

Questions for discussion

- How can we use digital technology to foster a more diverse workforce?
- Are HR analytics the next frontier for reducing unconscious bias and discrimination?
- How can policy respond to anxieties related to automation and job loss?
- What skills are needed to thrive in the digital economy?

Speakers

- Sergei Guriev* Chief Economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Professor at Sciences Po Paris
- Barbara Levéel* Global Head of Diversity and HR CSR at BNP Paribas
- Irena Moozova* Director responsible for Equality and Union at the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- Annabelle Pinel* Big Data & Analytics Business Developer at Capgemini
- Ivan Scalfarotto* State Secretary for Economic Development