Future of Work with AI

Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of AI and Work Transformation

FUTURE OF WORK WITH AI

Final Report | June 2026

Foreword

When we gathered in Amiens in January 2025, we asked a simple yet uncomfortable question: as AI reshapes work, how do we ensure that people are not left behind? A year and a half later, this revised report answers that question with evidence, not aspiration.

Four working groups, drawing on expertise from more than twenty countries, examined AI's impact across the full arc of working life: from preparation and hiring, through daily work and skills development, to retirement and transition. Their findings are sober. AI expands opportunity in some contexts and quietly strips power in others. It can reduce routine burdens and simultaneously introduce new forms of surveillance. The technology is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently harmful; its effects depend entirely on how it is governed.

Drawing on the UNESCO approach, this document distils those findings into actionable recommendations for governments, organisations, workers' representatives, and standards bodies. It reflects not only the output of four working groups but the broader commitment, shared across the FWWAI coalition, to ensure that AI in the workplace remains a force that serves people and never the reverse, while also amplifying human potential rather than displacing it.

Amiens 2025

Experiences Point

A STRUCTURING FORCE NEEDING GUIDANCE

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping work across the entire worker life cycle, influencing, among others, how people prepare to enter the labour market, are hired, perform tasks, develop skills, and transition between roles. While AI offers significant opportunities to improve efficiency, inclusion, and productivity, its impact is uneven and highly dependent on several factors, including the characteristics of AI systems and the related design, development, and oversight choices. When it comes to jobs and workers, AI introduces unprecedented artificial agents into the workplace, systems that act autonomously without consciousness or moral understanding. This shift from human-only to distributed agency fragments accountability. Unsuitable or poorly implemented AI systems risk reinforcing prejudices, undermining trust, and eroding worker autonomy.

Conversely, ethically acceptable AI, i.e., AI systems that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and that is leveraged responsibly, may help reduce routine workloads and strengthen human capital and empowering workers. Even so, responsible AI should not simply make work faster; it should make work more meaningful, by reducing repetitive burdens, supporting skills development, and preserving workers' agency.

At the societal level, AI may intensify existing challenges related to fairness, education and training, and wealth redistribution. Without deliberate policy choices, productivity gains risk being concentrated among subsets of firms and investors, thus contributing to widen societal inequalities, including gender-related ones.

Robust and worker-respecting governance is essential. International frameworks, binding policy frameworks, and technical standards together provide the means to align AI adoption with decent work, democratic values, and the protection of workers' dignity, freedom, and autonomy.

Fondational Principle

AI systems must consistently enable improved working conditions of workers while respecting their dignity, freedom, and autonomy, in the same manner that AI systems must preserve workers' capacity to reason and decide independently.

1. Impact on the individual

AI shapes the experience of workers or categories of workers in varied and uneven ways. Individuals experience AI differently depending on their employment status, geographic location, sector, and prior exposure to AI technologies, resulting in uneven outcomes. For some workers, AI can expand opportunities by improving communication, supporting learning, and reducing routine tasks. For others, it raises concerns about fairness, privacy, job security, automated decisions, and algorithmic surveillance.

These changes affect multiple dimensions of working life, such as inclusion, skill development, knowledge transmission, career progression, and the protection of fundamental rights. AI also influences workers' emotional, cognitive, and physical engagement by altering perceptions of safety, meaning, and control at work. How workers respond depends partly on their familiarity with these technologies: limited exposure can generate uncertainty or anxiety, while higher levels of AI literacy often foster confidence and more effective use.

The effects of AI therefore depend not only on the technology itself but also on how it is designed, deployed, and integrated into organisational practices. Poorly implemented systems can increase stress, undermine workers' sense of autonomy, and create perceptions of unfairness, particularly when automated assessments lack transparency and clear accountability or substitute procedure for empathy. When responsibly designed and thoughtfully integrated, however, AI can enhance knowledge sharing, streamline processes, support workers' professional development, and long-term employability. These dynamics unfold across the entire worker life cycle. AI increasingly influences how individuals prepare for work, access employment opportunities, perform their roles, develop their skills, and eventually transition to new roles or exit the labour market. Examining these stages highlights how AI reshapes both access to employment and the experience of work itself, revealing distinct opportunities and risks at each phase.

AI intervenes at each stage of the worker life cycle, beginning with hiring, moving through the realities of daily work. Each phase reveals distinct opportunities and risks, showing how AI reshapes access to work, the experience of employment, and the pathways available when workers transition to new roles. Seen in this way, the life cycle becomes an analytical lens, highlighting patterns and trade-offs that are less visible in more fragmented accounts, and underscoring how policy can frame and interpret these shifts across the entirety of the employment experience.

of workers' core skills are expected to evolve by 2030

WEF, 2025

39%

salary premium for workers with AI skills in the same role

PwC AI Jobs Barometer, 2025

+56%

of jobs worldwide are potentially exposed to Generative AI

ILO, 2025

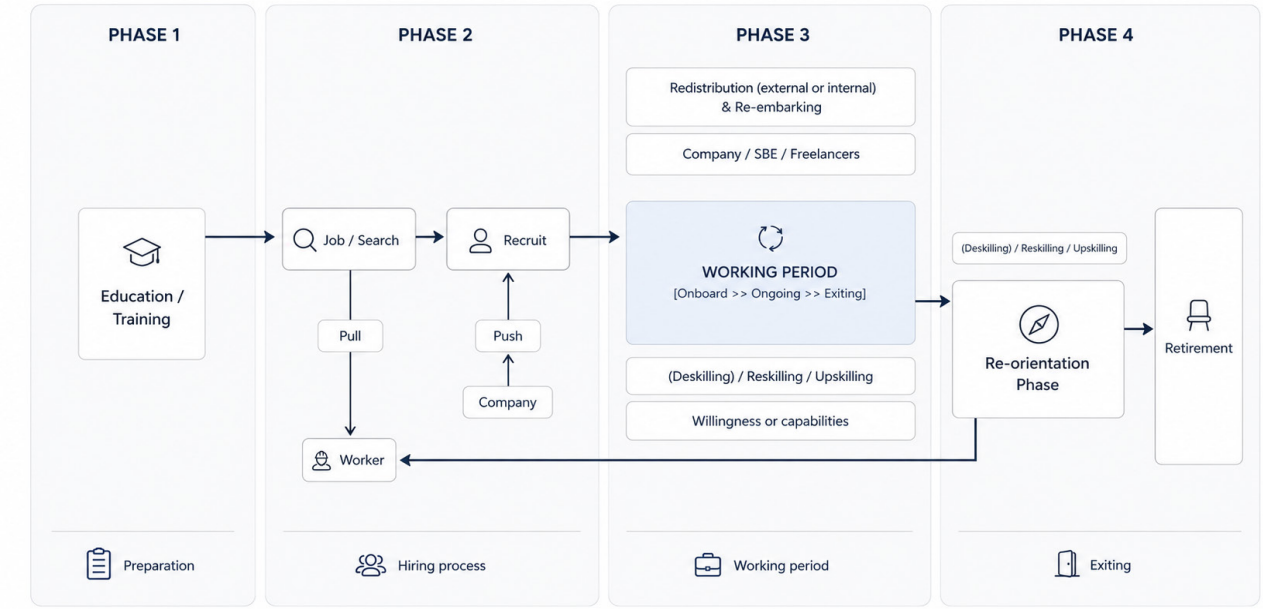
25%

1.1 Worker life cycle

The worker experience can be understood as a life cycle that reflects the evolving relationship between individuals and organisations, spanning the initial search for employment through re-orientation or retirement. AI is now present at every stage of this life cycle, reshaping how workers access opportunities, carry out their roles, build their skills, and navigate career transitions. Its effects are both transformative and disruptive: AI can broaden access to work, reduce routine tasks, and support professional development, yet it can also reinforce inequalities, diminish autonomy, and introduce new forms of pressure.

Its influence varies considerably according to system design, organisational practices, and the regulatory and governance frameworks that guide its deployment. When implemented responsibly, AI can enhance human judgement, enable more personalised career development, and contribute to more inclusive workplace environments. However, AI should not replace human judgement; it should make decisions more informed, career pathways more visible, and workplace inclusion more actionable.

The worker life cycle comprises four phases: preparation, hiring process, working period, and exiting.

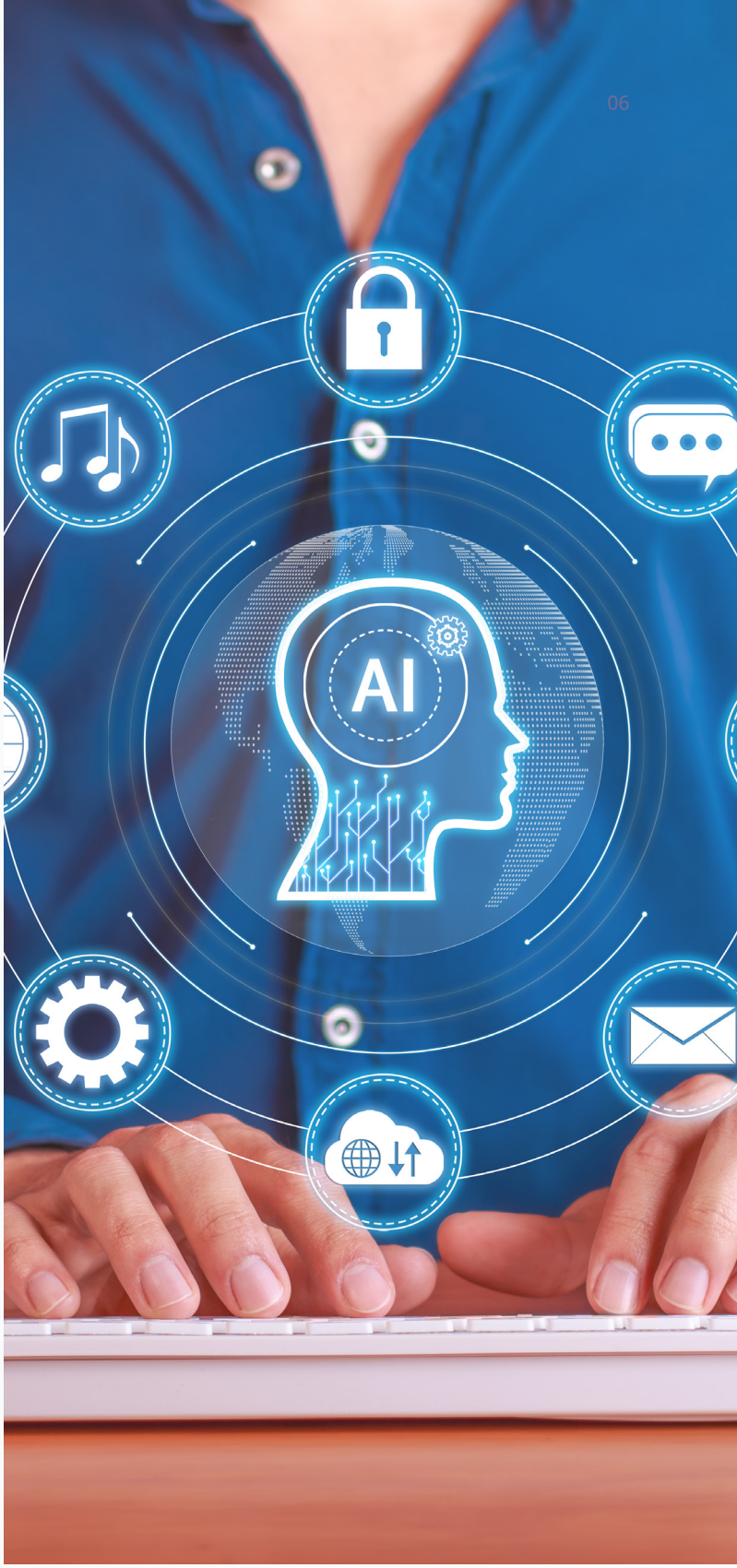


1.2 Preparation

The preparation phase plays a crucial role in aligning candidates' capabilities with the evolving demands of the labour market. It combines two complementary elements: (1) education, which provides foundational knowledge and broad competencies, and (2) training, which develops specific, job-relevant skills. As AI becomes embedded across sectors, future workers increasingly rely on it as a learning companion, using adaptive tools, simulations, and personalised feedback to improve their proficiency. Yet effective preparation requires more than using AI as a training aid. Individuals must also understand how these systems operate, their limitations, and the responsibilities involved in working alongside them. This dual focus ensures that workers can both benefit from AI-enhanced learning and engage critically and safely with the technologies that will shape their professional environments.

1.2.1 Education

Today's adaptive platforms adjust content to individual performance, enabling learners to progress at their own pace and increasing their agency over how and when they learn. Yet, AI in education should not be framed only as a tool for personalisation or efficiency. It changes the conditions under which learners access knowledge, build judgement, and take responsibility for their learning. Teaching experience shows that the main risk is not AI use itself, but uncritical delegation: when learners accept automated outputs without questioning their assumptions, sources, or reasoning. Ethical AI in education should therefore combine adaptive support with critical literacy. Learners should be encouraged to use AI to compare perspectives, test arguments, and identify gaps, while remaining accountable for the final interpretation and intellectual work. In this sense, responsible AI does not replace educational judgement; it should help learners develop it.



Further, AI redistributes information and power by shifting control over learning processes towards AI providers, whose algorithms determine what content is emphasised, and how progress is assessed. This creates asymmetries between workers, institutions, and companies that develop educational technologies. Without safeguards, disadvantaged learners may face new barriers if AI systems embed existing biases or restrict access based on opaque profiling.

1.2.2 Training

In the training stage, AI plays a significant role in shaping how workers acquire job-specific skills, offering realistic simulations, personalised exercises, and continuous feedback that can accelerate skills development.

This expands access for those who may lack traditional training pathways and strengthens agency by allowing learners to target gaps and practise tasks in safe, adaptive environments. However, AI can also constrain autonomy if automated systems prescribe narrow learning routes or overemphasise efficiency at the expense of broader competencies. Power dynamics shift as organisations gain detailed insights into workers' learning behaviour, shaping expectations and influencing career progression based on algorithmic assessments rather than holistic evaluation. Workers may be disadvantaged if training systems encode biased assumptions about capability or potential.

1.3 Hiring process

The hiring process is a pivotal stage in shaping access to work, as it determines how candidates and organisations connect, interact, and make employment decisions. AI technologies are increasingly embedded in recruitment processes, influencing both how individuals present themselves and how companies identify and select potential employees. Although the use of AI can enhance efficiency, scalability, and personalisation, concerns arise around fairness, bias, transparency, and authenticity. Importantly, outcomes vary depending on whether AI is not used, used by only one agent, or by both simultaneously, sometimes in cooperative ways, but at times in adversarial dynamics. How AI is used by each agent also plays a significant role.

To capture these dynamics, this section is divided into two parts: job search, which explores how candidates seek opportunities and how companies advertise or actively source talent; and recruitment, which examines how applications are assessed, filtered, and final decisions are made.

1.3.1 Job search

AI tools are now integral to the job search, presenting a dual landscape of significant opportunities for efficiency and improved matching, alongside risks that necessitate careful policy consideration.

In developed countries, large online job platforms use AI to match candidates with opportunities. Jobseekers also rely on generative AI to create resumes or curricula, tailor cover letters, and even deploy automated search agents. These tools expand access and reduce time, but they also risk homogenizing applications and encouraging jobseekers to "write for the machine."

In developing countries, the landscape is different. Digital labour platforms marketed to job seekers in these regions rely on AI-enabled algorithms, to match, rate, and fulfill service requests, in the process of connecting workers to short-term gigs. For many, this expands opportunities, particularly for those outside major cities. Yet, workers are highly dependent on opaque algorithms that determine visibility and income, often without avenues for appeal.

Across contexts, AI risks reproducing inequalities. Algorithms may favour certain regions, races, educational levels, schools, or linguistic styles, unintentionally excluding disadvantaged groups. Guidance for jobseekers and counsellors must therefore include not only digital literacy, but also critical awareness of how AI systems work and their limitations.

Language models trained primarily on dominant languages may perform poorly for minority or regional languages, which can disadvantage candidates in multilingual labour markets. For example, off-the-shelf AI translation, possibly trained somewhere adjacent to the North Atlantic, might struggle with the stenography for a South Pacific language being spoken on a livestreamed event on a job matching app. This might affect either the supply or demand side party, and such an oversight can lead to considerable professional, cultural, and personal impact.

1.3.2 Recruitment

Recruitment has become one of the most visible sites of AI adoption for both candidates and employers.

In developed economies, companies use algorithms to filter thousands of applications, parse CVs, and even analyse micro-expressions during video interviews. For candidates, AI tools assist in real-time interview simulations or optimised application submissions.

In developing countries, adoption is more uneven. Large outsourcing hubs in the Philippines or India increasingly use automated applicant tracking systems (ATS) to manage high recruitment volumes. However, many small and medium-sized enterprises still rely on traditional, relationship-based hiring. Workers often face a "digital divide": those with higher literacy or access to AI tools gain advantages in navigating algorithmic filters, while others are left behind.

Across both contexts, fairness and trust are major concerns. Applicants often perceive AI-based interviews as impersonal, while older workers or those with low digital literacy face disadvantages. Transparency is essential: candidates must know when and how AI is used, what data is collected, and who is accountable for outcomes.

AI recruitment brings inequality, demanding complete transparency.

In "Generative AI as Seniority-Biased Technological Change: Evidence from U.S. Resume and Job Posting Data", Seyed M. Hosseini, Guy Lichtinger, August 2025, Harvard University:

The authors noted that, consistently across all industries, AI-adopting firms significantly reduced the hiring of junior workers, while there is no statistically significant impact on the hiring of senior workers. The authors observed that AI-adopting firms in the wholesale and retail sector experienced the largest decrease in hiring, reducing junior hires by around 40% per quarter compared to non-adopters. This pattern may reflect the greater substitutability of junior tasks in these sectors with generative AI tools, which can automate routine communication, customer service, and documentation.

A visible side effect of Gen AI on recruitment processes

Generative AI has become a working part of how people apply for jobs. Across 2026 job-seeker surveys (including work by Resume Genius and Omni RMS, together covering more than 1,700 applicants) the share of candidates using AI tools to help with applications falls somewhere between roughly a third and a half, with CV drafting and tailoring the most common use. Employers are adopting it too: in the EU, where the most detailed figures are collected, Eurostat reports that 20% of enterprises used AI technologies in 2025, up from 13.5% a year earlier.

The shift runs both ways, and so does the hesitation. Many applicants still trust human-led recruitment more than AI-supported processes, while EU firms that held back cited limited expertise, legal uncertainty, and data protection concerns, which reflects the expectations about transparency and acceptable use are being negotiated.

1.4 Working period

The working period encompasses the everyday reality of employment, where the relationship between individuals and organisations is continuously shaped by tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities for growth. With the integration of AI into workplaces, this stage is undergoing a significant shift: technologies can support workers by automating routine activities, enabling personalisation, and improving efficiency, but they can also displace human judgement, erode skills, and introduce new forms of surveillance. For organisations, the working period is a space where AI promises gains in productivity, adaptability, and cost reduction, while also raising challenges related to culture, trust, and fairness.

To capture these dynamics, this section follows the worker experience across key stages: onboarding, which covers how new employees are integrated; work activities, which address the organisation of daily tasks; continuous training and development, which focuses on sustaining and enhancing skills; progression and performance, which examines advancement and evaluation; benefits and rewards, which concern compensation and well-being; and exiting/retaining, which explores transitions and retention strategies. These stages are closely connected. For example, an AI system used during onboarding may help a new employee access personalised training, but if the same system later feeds into performance assessment without transparency, it may affect trust, autonomy, and career progression.

1.4.1 Onboarding

Traditionally, this process occurred in employers' offices, but the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to digital and remote onboarding strategies. As hybrid work models become prevalent, digital and AI-driven transformation continues to impact onboarding, requiring organisations to implement remote strategies.

Onboarding with AI offers opportunities for tailored experiences, expedited learning, and decreased administrative overhead. Employees are supported via adaptive training, chatbots, and mentor matching, allowing them to integrate swiftly and confidently. Organisations also benefit from automated processes, improved compliance, and data-driven insights for workforce planning. However, weaker digital infrastructure and lower investment mean that many employees still experience manual onboarding processes, especially in developing economies.

The challenge everywhere is balance. AI can accelerate integration, but over-reliance on automation risks weakening early human connections. Likewise, policy and practice must address privacy, fairness, and the ethical use of AI. For workers in collectivist cultures, which are common across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reduced social contact in onboarding can particularly affect belonging and trust.

For example, a North Atlantic AI might follow a best practice endorsed by an Ivy League university but be blind to South Pacific cultural commencement ceremonies. This can lead to a jarring effect and quick disillusionment. Furthermore, an AI which follows privacy-by-design might be blind to the collective identity expectations held by a family kin group. This can lead to a sense of powerlessness and lack of voice.

1.4.2 Work activities

Work activities shape the daily relationship between individuals and organisations, influencing tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities for growth. The integration of advanced systems automates routine processes, enhances efficiency, and supports decision-making, yet it also changes job content, alters skill requirements, and raises concerns about autonomy and surveillance.

The extent of automation's impact depends on its ability to replace repetitive tasks and augment human capabilities. In roles with high augmentation potential, AI may enhance work without replacing it, enabling employees to acquire new skills and take on broader responsibilities. In highly automated environments, some tasks could be completed more quickly and accurately with AI, improving productivity but potentially reducing the need for less-experienced workers, creating a barrier for junior workers, in line with the results presented in section 1.3.2. However, expectations of productivity gains don't always correspond to reality, and as generative AI is not always accurate, human expertise and critical thinking remain crucial.

For employees, automation absorbs repetitive and time-consuming activities, freeing time for more complex, creative, and collaborative tasks. This shift can improve job satisfaction, well-being, and inclusion. Workers can focus on innovation and teamwork, while intelligent tools support diverse skill sets and help bridge language or capability gaps. However, the removal of simpler tasks can also increase cognitive workload, as employees are left to manage more complex issues and higher customer expectations.

The use of automated systems can also lead to intensified monitoring, faster work pace, and reduced autonomy. In some sectors, algorithmic management assigns tasks, tracks performance, and influences decision-making, raising concerns about fairness and control. Additionally, productivity gains are not always distributed equitably and may result in increased workloads or reduced compensation, particularly in freelance and gig work.

1.4.3 Continuous training and development

Continuous training and development sustain workforce capabilities and ensure employees can adapt to evolving skill demands. The integration of advanced systems supports personalised learning, enables targeted upskilling and reskilling, and helps workers remain competitive as tasks and roles evolve. The worker and their AI tools co-evolve, making it possible for a capability change to quickly translate to the other, often with high fidelity.

AI enhances training through adaptive platforms that personalise learning pathways, tailor content to individual needs, and use predictive analytics to identify emerging skill gaps. Virtual simulations and data-driven feedback improve learning outcomes and leadership development, while continuous assessment ensures that workers acquire relevant competencies. However, access to such tools often depends on infrastructure and affordability, creating disparities between workers in different regions or within the same organisation.

Automation accelerates change, freeing employees from repetitive tasks and allowing them to focus on complex problem-solving, strategic thinking, or entirely new functions. This shift increases the importance of developing new hard and soft skills. However, excessive automation risks deskilling, as workers may become over-reliant on automated systems and lose incentives to deepen their expertise. Combining technical training with mentorship and coaching helps preserve purpose and encourages a growth mindset.

Digital literacy is increasingly essential for employability, with higher proficiency linked to lower displacement risk. New roles created by technological advancements demand not only technical skills but also adaptability, creativity, and collaboration. The key risk is not transformation itself, but unmanaged transformation. When AI replaces core tasks faster than workers can be supported into new roles, reskilling becomes insufficient, and job displacement becomes a governance failure rather than an individual skills gap.

1.4.4 Progression and performance

Progression and performance focus on how data-driven systems evaluate capabilities, support development, and shape career advancement. Continuous feedback, real-time performance tracking, and predictive analytics now play a central role in helping employees build skills and organisations optimise talent management.

Advanced tools allow performance to be monitored beyond traditional annual reviews, identifying strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement as they emerge. Personalised recommendations guide training and career planning, while predictive insights highlight high-potential employees and match them to internal opportunities. Automated assessments can also reduce human bias in promotion decisions and make evaluation processes more transparent and consistent.

Career progression increasingly depends on adaptability and the willingness to acquire new competencies. Automated systems support this by tailoring development pathways and ensuring that qualified employees are considered for advancement. However, over-reliance on algorithmic evaluation risks narrowing performance expectations, encouraging workers to focus solely on measurable outcomes rather than developing broader capabilities.

Concerns about fairness, accountability, and privacy persist. Continuous monitoring may lead to heightened stress, reduced autonomy, and diminished trust if employees feel that decision-making lacks transparency or that data could be used against them. In some sectors, algorithmic scoring directly influences job access and income, intensifying pressure and limiting opportunities for appeal.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 finds that employers expect 39% of workers' core skills will change by 2030. The HR leadership is far from exempt. In fact, a Deloitte analysis of C-suite skill requirements over the past five years found the number of unique skills expected of CHROs has increased by 23% and is the steepest increase of any executive role.

1.4.5 Benefits and rewards

Benefits and rewards focus on how AI personalises compensation, recognition, and well-being initiatives while influencing how organisations distribute the value created by increased productivity. Data-driven systems can tailor financial and non-financial incentives, forecast health risks, deliver targeted wellness programmes, and improve pay transparency. They also support more equitable reward structures by identifying performance metrics and aligning compensation with measurable contributions.

Personalisation enables organisations to adapt rewards to individual needs, enhancing motivation, satisfaction, and engagement. By analysing behaviour and performance, automated systems can recommend relevant benefits, from flexible working arrangements to development opportunities, and ensure that recognition extends beyond output to include skills, collaboration, and innovation. In some cases, they have contributed to reducing gender pay gaps and advancing pay equity.

However, the collection and use of sensitive employee data raise significant ethical and privacy concerns. The opaque nature of algorithmic decision-making can undermine trust if employees do not understand how rewards are determined or if they perceive decisions as unfair. Excessive reliance on automation may also reduce employees' sense of agency or diminish the perceived value of human judgement in reward decisions.

Equitable distribution of productivity gains remains a critical challenge. If the value generated by AI is not shared fairly, existing inequalities may deepen, particularly for self-employed or contract workers who often face declining pay rates and increased workloads. Ensuring that gains are reflected in higher wages, shorter working hours, or enhanced well-being initiatives is essential to maintaining fairness.

According to PWC's 2025 AI Job Barometer, roles requiring specialist AI skills command a 56% wage premium over similar roles without them, showing more than double from 25% the year before.

1.5 Exiting

- Predictive analytics
- Worker retraining
- Knowledge transfer
- Power dynamics

1.5.1 Reorientation

Exiting and retraining address the final stage of the worker life cycle, where organisations seek to maintain talent while managing voluntary and involuntary departures. Advanced systems now play a critical role in predicting attrition, identifying disengagement, and designing strategies to improve retention, while also supporting smoother transitions for those leaving the organisation. Predictive analytics can detect early signs of dissatisfaction and inform targeted interventions, such as career development initiatives or workload adjustments, that increase loyalty and reduce turnover. Hyper-personalised feedback, tailored career pathways, and enhanced employee support programmes foster engagement and encourage long-term commitment. When departures are unavoidable, automated tools can map transferable skills, recommend reskilling pathways, and connect workers with new opportunities, helping them remain employable in a changing labour market. Despite these opportunities, risks persist. Perceptions of surveillance, job insecurity, or unfair treatment can increase turnover, even when predictive measures are in place. Over-reliance on automation may also depersonalise retention efforts, undermining trust and reducing employees' sense of belonging. Unequal access to digital tools can widen disparities, leaving some workers, particularly older, lower-skilled, or informal workers, without adequate support during transitions.

1.5.2 Retirement

During the retirement phase, AI influences how knowledge is transferred, how exit decisions are anticipated, and how financial security is managed, while also reshaping intergenerational dynamics within organisations. AI-driven workforce planning and cost optimisation may incentivise earlier or less supported exits, potentially undermining financial security and diminishing the recognition and transfer of accumulated knowledge. Freelancers face additional challenges, as their bargaining power often weakens when clients compare their services to automated alternatives, leading to lower fees and reduced income security. Without social dialogue or collective bargaining mechanisms, many become vulnerable to exploitation and market volatility. In some contexts, it might be rational for the firm to not refill jobs after workers leave, while in others the departing worker might be taking crucial knowledge of the firm with them. This shows how AI is changing the underlying power dynamics of jobs, workers and labour.

2. Impact on society

AI is not only transforming work. It is reshaping the social conditions around work, including access to education, economic opportunity, fairness, and the distribution of power. The central question is therefore not only how societies adopt technology, but how they govern its effects and share its benefits.

Fairness is shaped by the use of automated systems in recruitment, promotion, credit allocation, and public services. Education is reshaped through its role in preparing individuals for rapidly changing socio-technical environments, influencing digital literacy, ethical awareness, and equitable access to skills. Wealth redistribution is transformed as productivity gains are captured unevenly.

Automation boosts changes in productivity and efficiency, concentrating profits among large firms and investors and shifting economic risks towards workers and communities. Bias in data and opaque algorithms can reproduce or intensify discrimination across gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography. Education systems serve as a mechanism for adaptation by equipping people with the capacity to question, use, and collaborate with technologies, while governance systems influence how transparently and responsibly AI is deployed.

Workers face job displacement, wage stagnation, and reduced labour demand, while firms capture rising value. Women are less likely to use or benefit from advanced technologies, reinforcing existing gender inequalities. Studies indicate that, even when content for women is generated by an LLM, the style may still exhibit a more informal tone, for example lowering the overall quality of recommendation letters for female job candidates. Marginalised groups and low-income regions may fall further behind without targeted educational and infrastructure investments. Automated systems can mitigate or intensify inequality depending on how they are governed.

Opaque algorithms risk perpetuating discrimination, undermining trust in public and private institutions. Educational disparities may widen, particularly for women and under-represented groups. Poor governance can erode social cohesion by concentrating power and limiting democratic oversight. The absence of transparent accountability mechanisms further undermines fairness and public trust. Linking wage growth to productivity, reducing working hours without income loss, and expanding social protections can redistribute value more fairly. Public investment in education, digital infrastructure, and community development can broaden access to technological benefits. Bias-aware design, representative datasets, and robust accountability processes support fairer outcomes. When responsibly managed, technological change can enhance social cohesion, increase shared prosperity, and build more resilient and interconnected societies.

For example, the Māori Data Governance Model is an approach to data and AI which proceeds from a South Pacific approach rather than a North Atlantic one. This model presents a reprioritised set of data practices from an indigenous perspective where values such as dignity, equity and shared prosperity are an outcome from the practices.

2.1 Fairness

Fairness is a fundamental consideration in the societal impact of automated systems, which have the potential both to challenge and reinforce existing inequalities. Their application in recruitment, promotion, and resource allocation often raises trust concerns when biases embedded in data or models lead to discriminatory outcomes. Automated hiring processes, for instance, can inadvertently disadvantage candidates based on gender, ethnicity, or location, undermining equal opportunity and inclusivity. Fairness is therefore not solely a technical issue but also a deeply social one, closely linked to trust in institutions and the legitimacy of decisions that shape people's lives.

Achieving fairness requires a multi-layered approach. At the governance level, organisations must treat fairness as a strategic priority, ensuring that the deployment of automated systems is accompanied by clear communication about where and how they are used, the decisions they influence, and the ways individuals can challenge outcomes. Publishing governance standards and involving workers in design processes further strengthens trust and accountability. From a technical perspective, systems should be built using representative data with clearly documented provenance and undergo rigorous testing to detect and address disparate impacts across different groups. Continuous audits and evaluations after deployment are essential with clear accountability for outcomes. Ensuring fairness requires moving beyond a purely "human-in-the-loop" approach, where human intervention risks becoming little more than the validation of automated outputs. Greater emphasis should instead be placed on "meaningful human-at-the-design-stage" governance, through ex ante safeguards, and on "human-on-the-loop" oversight, based on broader auditing and monitoring functions. In this way, human oversight remains meaningful and effective, rather than merely symbolic.

Fairness also depends on empowering workers to contest automated decisions and access effective remedies. Automated systems should be designed to augment rather than replace human judgement, with roles clearly defined to ensure human input where it is most valuable and to maintain system reliability and auditability.

Furthermore, decision-making processes should evolve from hierarchical, top-down models to collaborative governance structures involving workers, managers, and domain experts. Such joint councils can establish boundaries for system use, define rights of appeal, and co-design auditing practices, shifting power dynamics towards more equitable and participatory approaches.

A structured approach to recruitment and promotion is crucial for embedding fairness. This involves prohibiting the use of biased proxies such as postcode or school prestige, standardising assessments through structured interviews and skills-based tasks and continuously monitoring outcomes through impact testing. It also requires providing candidates with clear explanations of decisions and straightforward appeal mechanisms, supported by regular independent audits of high-stakes models. UNESCO's guidance further underscores the importance of measurement, inclusion, and remedies across the entire system life cycle.
When implemented responsibly, automated systems can deliver significant benefits. They can enhance candidate matching and throughput, as evidenced by studies showing improved offer rates and candidate quality when automated voice agents are used in interviews. They can improve the candidate experience by offering scalable, 24/7 access and faster decision-making, although careful monitoring is needed to address potential negative quality sorting, where less suitable candidates may self-select. Properly validated and audited systems can also reduce human bias, standardise evaluation criteria, and allow recruiters to focus on contextual decision-making rather than initial screening. Additionally, they can deliver substantial efficiency gains and cost savings, particularly where human-led processes are resource-intensive.

Despite these advantages, many organisations remain cautious about adopting automated systems for mission-critical decisions due to ongoing concerns about trust and reliability. Addressing these challenges requires sustained attention to fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, and ethical alignment. When these principles are embedded throughout system design and governance, automation can support more equitable, transparent, and inclusive decision-making, ultimately contributing to fairer outcomes across the workplace.

For example, any jurisdiction with equity expectations (such as gender or ethnicity) has a strong incentive to control for difference-blind AI applications. It is important for maintaining social licence for AI adoption in keeping an overall human decision maker in mixed human-AI knowledge work. In one project analysing complex rule changes, it was found preferable to have both a human-in-the-loop as well as a human-on-the-loop. Furthermore, a third person in the role of deep subject matter expert was found to be necessary for stakeholders accepting the outcome.

EQUITY
FAIRNESS
ETHICS
INCLUSION

2.2 Education

Education is a decisive factor in determining how societies adapt to and benefit from technological change. It shapes whether emerging technologies serve as public goods that enhance collective well-being or remain private advantages concentrated among a few. The role of education extends beyond employability to include the cultivation of ethical judgement, agency, creativity, and social responsibility, ensuring that individuals and communities thrive without compromising dignity, rights, or the public interest. As automation transforms labour markets and daily life, education systems must equip learners with the skills, adaptability, and critical awareness necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and dynamic environment. At the same time, the growing involvement of private companies in shaping curricula and funding programmes raises questions about equity, accountability, and long-term societal priorities.

An effective educational response requires integrating ethical principles, protecting human rights, and fostering diversity and inclusivity. It must balance individual responsibility for lifelong learning with collective commitments to equality and justice. Education should also address the environmental impacts of AI use while promoting solidarity and global cooperation. Curricula should develop comprehensive literacy in data, algorithms, and system limitations, as well as safety issues such as privacy, security, bias, accountability, and consent. Learners need to understand how to work with AI, treating it as a co-creator rather than merely a tool. This involves framing problems, questioning outputs, and deciding when not to deploy automated systems. It also requires awareness of rights such as explainability and contestation, as well as principles when learner work or teaching materials contribute to system training.

Closing persistent participation gaps, particularly those affecting girls and under-represented groups, is essential. UNESCO recommends gender-responsive funding, national action plans, harassment-free environments, and rigorous monitoring to ensure equal access and benefit. Pedagogical approaches should evolve to support these goals. Instruction should prioritise critical thinking and guided inquiry, with automated systems acting as tutors that prompt reasoning and reflection rather than simply providing answers. Transparent use of AI in assessment is vital: learners should disclose how tools are used, provide process documentation, and be evaluated on the quality of their decisions rather than outputs alone. Classrooms must also address bias detection, fairness auditing, and the societal implications of data-driven systems. Role-play and co-creation exercises—such as using automated tools as reviewers, experts, or novice learners—can help learners test arguments, challenge assumptions, and translate ideas for different audiences. Every project should include a reflection on the environmental impact of AI use, encouraging awareness of energy consumption and data provenance.

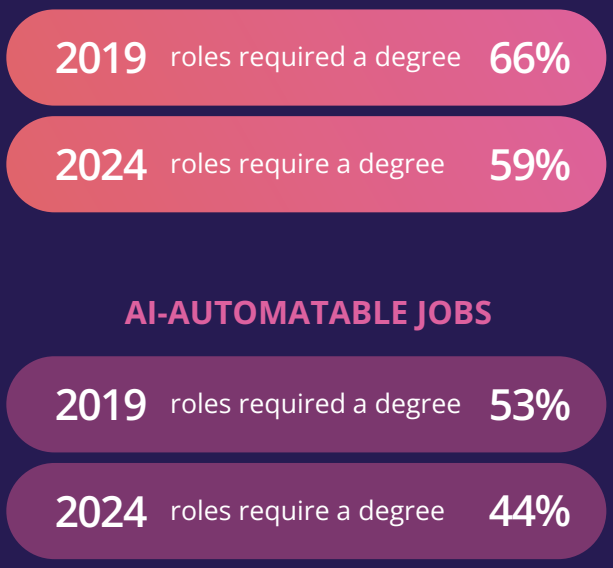
Private sector involvement must be carefully governed to prevent monopolisation and safeguard the public interest. Industry contributions to content, computational resources, and training should be accompanied by public-good conditions such as open curricula, transparent model documentation, and independent audits. National roadmaps should anchor these partnerships, integrating legal, educational, economic, and technical considerations.

Responsibility for the impacts of automation in education operates at three levels: (1) individuals must disclose and verify tool use; (2) institutions must establish governance frameworks, training programmes, and audit cycles; and (3) AI system deployers and regulators must ensure accountability through consent mechanisms, independent oversight, and public reporting.

Education must therefore move away from the mere evaluation of outputs that AI systems can now readily generate and place greater emphasis on the assessment of reasoning processes, critical engagement, and intellectual accountability. Greater weight should be given to forms of meta-cognitive reflection capable of demonstrating genuine understanding. In this context, the value of education lies less in the retention of information and more in the ability to interpret, evaluate, and give meaning to knowledge within an environment of increasing automation. Schools and universities should function as living laboratories for digital ethics, creativity, and civic responsibility, where learners explore trade-offs between autonomy and automation, or innovation and accountability. The classroom must become a space for experimentation, where learners and educators co-create, challenge, and sometimes reject AI outputs to cultivate judgement, imagination, and agency.

Achieving this vision demands a profound transformation of educational institutions. They must evolve from knowledge transmitters into adaptive ecosystems that integrate research, practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Governance models should embed technological foresight, ethical oversight, and co-creation into strategic planning. Faculty development must go beyond technical skills to embrace cultural and pedagogical change, enabling educators to act as curators and facilitators of learning experiences. Ultimately, education should help learners move from passive use of AI to responsible engagement with it. For example, instead of simply asking learners to produce an AI assisted essay, educators can ask them to compare the AI output with scientific sources, identify missing assumptions, and justify what they kept, corrected, or rejected. This turns AI from a shortcut into a tool for critical thinking.

PwC 2025 Global AI Job Barometer:
The Decline in Degree Requirements (2019–2024)



Source: PwC's 2025 Global AI Job Barometer.
Employer demand for degrees is falling fastest in roles with the highest exposure to AI.

2.3 Wealth redistribution

Redistribution is at the centre of one of the most significant societal debates surrounding AI in the workplace. As organisations use automation to increase productivity and efficiency, critical questions arise over how the resulting economic gains are shared. If profits rise sharply while job opportunities diminish due to technological change, tensions around fairness and social equity intensify. The challenge is to ensure that the value generated does not accumulate solely among companies and investors but is reinvested into society in ways that support workers, communities, and inclusive development. Redistribution policies aim to transform technological progress into shared prosperity rather than deepening inequality.

Redistribution in the AI economy should not be limited to wages or traditional labour protections, but must also encompass forms of "data dignity." Mechanisms to ensure consent, credit, and compensation ("3Cs") are particularly relevant in creative sectors where livelihoods and intellectual contributions are at stake. Individuals should retain: Consent over the use of their behavioural and personal data; Credit for the informational and creative contributions that help train AI systems; and Compensation where such contributions generate economic value. Without these safeguards, the benefits produced by AI risk flowing disproportionately from workers and users to digital platforms, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them.

A key question underpinning redistribution is who ultimately benefits from rising productivity. Without deliberate policy, value tends to concentrate among capital owners and a small number of dominant firms, while risks such as job displacement and income insecurity are widely spread. A redistribution approach ensures that gains are returned to workers and underrepresented groups, integrating equity into the design, governance, and deployment of AI technologies.

Several policy mechanisms can support shared prosperity. Wage growth should be linked directly to productivity gains, with collective bargaining mechanisms ensuring that efficiency improvements translate into higher pay. Where feasible, reduced working hours without income loss can distribute labour-saving benefits more fairly. A fair AI transition requires more than training programmes. Workers also need portable benefits, income support during reskilling, and credible pathways from one job to another. Without these safeguards, the cost of adaptation falls disproportionately on those with the least bargaining power, particularly precarious workers and freelancers. Public investment is another crucial lever: allocating a portion of AI-related profits, for instance through windfall or excess-profit taxes, to education, digital infrastructure, and community development can broaden long-term opportunity. Strengthening worker representation in company- and sector-level governance is also vital, particularly in sectors where unionisation is difficult, to ensure that adoption decisions and value flows reflect worker interests.

Gender Disparities in Generative AI Adoption
Harvard Business School Analysis: Who Benefits from AI Productivity Gains

CHATGPT WEBSITE USERS

Female Share	total website users	~42%
Access vs. Usage	Gap persists even when access is equalised	
Core Risk	AI systems are trained on skewed user data	

CHATGPT APP DOWNLOADS

Female Share	total app downloads	~27%
Access vs. Usage	Wider adoption disparity on mobile platforms	
Core Risk	Value created by AI bypasses women	

Source: Harvard Business School analysis synthesising 18 studies of 143,008 people worldwide. As firms capture rising productivity from AI, the benefits are not gender-neutral. Without intentional action, this dynamic can deepen existing gender inequalities and lock in self-reinforcing disparities.

Redistribution must also account for gender dynamics. Evidence shows persistent gender gaps in the use and benefits of emerging technologies. Across multiple studies, women are consistently less likely than men to use AI tools, even when access is equal. This imbalance risks allowing most economic gains to accrue to men, while also skewing data sets and limiting women's influence in shaping future technologies. Without targeted intervention, such disparities could deepen existing inequalities and reinforce structural disadvantages.

Ensuring redistribution is inclusive by design requires dedicated funding and policy frameworks. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence calls for gender-transformative approaches, including national action plans, equal pay enforcement, and reporting on participation, leadership, and flexible work options. Organisations should be required to publish gender equality plans, address harassment, and monitor progress through indicators such as pay gaps, leadership representation, and the share of full-time roles.

In sectors reliant on data and intellectual property, traditional wage mechanisms are insufficient. Additional measures are needed, such as adopting 3Cs as default norms for using creative outputs in training and commercial applications. Royalties and standardised contracts can ensure contributors are compensated, even after employment ends. Profit-sharing schemes based on collaborative principles can distribute gains across all contributors, with transparent and auditable formulas to maintain trust. Data valuation frameworks and dividends can also help allocate benefits to those whose work underpins model training.

Ultimately, redistribution is not only an economic necessity but also a social imperative. Equitable sharing of technological gains builds trust, strengthens social cohesion, and ensures that innovation contributes to a fairer, more inclusive future of work.

3. Recommendations for governance, policy, and standards

Artificial intelligence is more than just an innovation; over time, it has evolved into a social force increasingly influencing decisions that affect individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Its impacts underscore the need to anchor technological development in shared ethical values and aligned with a collective governance system.

Governance and regulation are critical in determining how AI technologies are designed, deployed, and governed in workplaces and society. To address these challenges, both public institutions and private organisations must operate within robust governance frameworks that safeguard fairness, transparency, accountability, and human dignity.

This section explores existing frameworks, general ethics principles, emerging governance approaches, and policy mechanisms aimed at maximising the benefits of AI while mitigating its risks. It also emphasises the role of standards in reflecting the state of the art and best practices to help normalise the market, providing recommendations to ensure that innovation remains aligned with democratic values and social priorities. Basically, while guidelines and regulations shape governance horizontally, standards act as vertical mechanisms for enforcing best practices.

The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), adopted unanimously by 193 Member States, remains the most comprehensive global ethical framework because it directly addresses how AI systems reshape labour markets, employment relations, and workplace decision-making. The Recommendation is particularly relevant for the future of work because it translates ethical principles into workplace governance issues. It links human rights, fairness, transparency, accountability, and sustainability to practical questions such as recruitment, performance assessment, workplace surveillance, and task automation.

Its relevance is strengthened by the accompanying implementation tools. The Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) enables governments to evaluate whether their legal, economic, educational, and institutional frameworks are prepared to manage AI-driven transformations of work, skills, and labour markets, identifying gaps in regulation, social protection, and workforce preparedness. Complementarily, the Ethical Impact Assessment (EIA) provides a concrete, ex-ante and ex-post mechanism to assess risks to labour rights, non-discrimination, human oversight, and worker autonomy before AI systems are deployed in employment and public-sector settings.

Several complementary international initiatives strengthen this framework and are directly relevant to shaping the future of work with AI. The OECD AI Principles (2019) provide a widely endorsed, human-centred reference for national and sectoral strategies, explicitly linking trustworthy AI to inclusive growth, skills development, and fair labour transitions, and guiding governments in supporting workers as AI reshapes tasks and employment structures.

The EU AI Act (2024) marks a decisive shift from soft law to binding obligations, introducing a risk-based regulatory model that directly affects workplace uses of AI. By classifying systems used in recruitment, performance evaluation, and algorithmic management as high-risk, it imposes requirements on transparency, human oversight, bias mitigation, and accountability, thereby setting enforceable safeguards for workers' rights in AI-mediated employment contexts.

At the pan-European level, the Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI (2024) anchors AI governance firmly in human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, explicitly recognising socio-economic impacts such as employment and labour. This makes it a key reference for ensuring that AI-driven workplace practices remain compatible with fundamental rights, non-discrimination, and individual autonomy.

Finally, the G7 Toolkit for AI in the Public Sector (2024) translates these principles into operational guidance, offering concrete case studies, governance models, and practical tools for responsible AI deployment. Its focus on skills, organisational change, and public-sector workforce transformation makes it particularly relevant for anticipating how AI will reshape jobs, competencies, and working practices in both public administrations and, by extension, private-sector organisations.

Together, these documents offer a practical and globally agreed roadmap to ensure that AI adoption in the workplace supports decent work, protects workers' rights, and aligns technological innovation with democratic values and social priorities, rather than allowing labour practices to be shaped solely by market or efficiency considerations.

Beyond policy, technical standards play a vital role in translating principles into measurable outcomes and explicit procedures. Implementing principles such as transparency, fairness, human oversight, and sustainability into operational practice remains difficult. Many organisations lack the technical maturity, governance experience, and measurable indicators required to implement AI responsibly at scale, particularly in workplace contexts. In response to this gap, international standardisation bodies have played a critical role. ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 42 has been developing foundational AI standards since 2018, providing globally recognised frameworks for AI governance, risk management, data quality, and trustworthiness. In parallel, CEN and CENELEC JTC 21 adapt and extend this work to the European context, ensuring alignment with EU values, labour frameworks, and regulatory initiatives.

Together, their works offer practical guidance for deploying AI in the future of work, supporting organisations in designing AI systems that are accountable, interoperable, and aligned with worker-respecting practices, while facilitating compliance, skills development, and cross-border adoption. Even if necessary, this is not yet sufficient. In the future, standardisation should be complemented by dedicated standards, guidelines, and technical reports developed in coordination with other standardisation bodies such as IEEE, ETSI, and ITU to provide concrete and harmonised guidance.

Cognitive AI Stewardship

All the quoted recommendations and guidelines are necessary but still not sufficient. We need to transform high-level AI principles into actionable ones that enable organisations to implement responsible AI in real-world contexts. This means moving from ethics-as-compliance to ethics-as-cognitive stewardship: protecting not just what workers can do with AI, but how they think alongside it.

Governing and defining technical requirements for evolving technologies can be challenging and sometimes counterproductive, as narratives may be driven more by imagination than by technological reality. The use of AI systems is inevitable, both out of necessity given the vast volumes of data that must be managed and due to user perceptions, particularly the willingness to delegate repetitive and monotonous tasks to AI-based agents. Nevertheless, any guideline or standard should be evidence-based, to avoid normalising science-fiction scenarios or introducing inapplicable rules. The future of work with AI should be guided by a clear foundational principle: AI systems must consistently save workers time while respecting their dignity, freedom, and autonomy.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence has become a structuring force capable of impacting the entire worker life cycle, from education and hiring to daily work, career progression, and exit. Its effects are uneven and depend not only on the AI technology itself, but also on the way it is governed and implemented in the workplace. The way AI is designed, deployed, governed, and used may have first-order effects on the benefits it can deliver, including productivity gains, and on how it affects workers and organisational settings. Poorly implemented AI can deepen inequalities, erode trust, and reduce autonomy, whereas ethical, responsible and human centered development and deployment may reduce routine burdens, expand access, multiply opportunities, and strengthen human judgement.

At the societal level, AI contributes to intensify challenges around fairness, education, and wealth distribution, among others. Productivity gains risk being concentrated among a subset of economic agents, unless matched by inclusive education systems, redistribution mechanisms, and protections for vulnerable groups. Education shall endeavour to combine skills development with ethical literacy and critical agency.

These challenges can be addressed through coherent governance that aligns regulation, policy, and technical standards. International frameworks establish shared principles and binding safeguards for the use of AI at work, while practical implementation tools and standards help translate these values into operational requirements. To remain legitimate and effective, such measures shall be grounded in evidence and real workplace practice. Responsible governance moves beyond narrow efficiency. AI should augment human capabilities, support meaningful participation, and preserve the ability to question, contest, and shape technological systems. Ultimately, the purpose is not merely to manage risk, but to ensure that progress contributes to human flourishing.

The future of work with AI will depend less on what technology can automate than on what societies choose to protect, strengthen, and share. If governed responsibly, AI can become more than a tool for efficiency: it can support human judgement, expand opportunity, and help build workplaces where productivity and dignity advance together.

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