



Eurofedop Seminar

Impact of AI on work in public services

**08-10.07.2026
Helsinki (Finland)**

Short Report

Representatives of public service trade unions from across Europe gathered to discuss the effects of artificial intelligence on work in the public sector.

Since the last such Eurofedop event in Estonia in 2024, much progress has happened and many new challenges must be faced. The seminar venue Helsinki was a symbolic choice given Finland's border with Russia. President Norbert Schnedl reiterated in his welcoming speech in this regard, that Eurofedop member organizations affirm their commitment to democracy, the rule of law and freedom as pillars of our society that need to be defended right now. On AI, our guiding principle is already clear: never forget the human being and never stop thinking for ourselves. Participants were also greeted by EZA Co-President Piergiorgio Sciacqua, who grounded his reflections on AI in Christian teaching and ethics, arguing that meeting this challenge requires investing in local innovation and, above all, in people.

The first day of the seminar incorporated three highly informative and inspiring keynote presentations. Thomas Letinen, representative of the City of Helsinki, shared the story of how the whole city organization built responsible AI. Gerfried Stocker (Ars Electronica Centre) pointed out societal stakes, while Kristel Kriisa (TalTech Estonia) highlighted that technology is neutral, but its effects on workers are not — thus deliberate governance and collective bargaining are essential. More substantial cooperation on the European level is desirable.

Participants spent the first half of the second seminar day receiving scientific inputs from researchers on the future of AI at work in the public sector. Talking about transparency, Dr. Didem Özkizilan Wagenführer (WZB Germany) underlined that social dialogue should be an ongoing process throughout the AI lifecycle, and Steve Dhondt (TNO/KUL) encouraged participants to engage in collective bargaining. The future of AI depends on us humans, on governance, and not on the technology. Participants discussed some examples of best- and worst case practices and the black box effect amongst others and also arrived at the conclusion that more human control is needed.

Before engaging in an interactive workshop exercise, Prof. Viorel Rotila (FSSR / Eurofedop Vice-President) widened participants' horizons by talking about the AI knowledge gap. Five pillars - training, co-creation, protection, union AI capacity - are essential, in combination with workers' own expertise in their field, can be used to influence the creation of a future that is in employee's favour. Encouraged by these inputs, participants gathered in groups and actively engaged in a model exercise on how AI can be used by workers' organisations to bring forward their goals.

After the lunch break, Debolina Paul (BIAS project) presented a project that is detecting biases in recruiting due to the use of AI. Machines and humans should complement each other. Ms Paul raised awareness for the fact that the machine replicates human biases and views of the world that we input in it. During the second part of the afternoon, a tour through the Technical Museum of Helsinki placed artificial intelligence and robotics and its possible future scenarios in the context of technological developments and inventions made by humans through history, from a historical and ethical point of view. A very knowledgeable and enthusiastic young guide provided ideas and food for thought.

The last day of the seminar commenced with a practice-oriented and insightful presentation by Daniel Markovič, Associate Professor of Social Work. Using several examples from the field of social work and the health sector, we understood that the law sets the legal perimeter, but the real substance of human-in-control gets negotiated at the bargaining table of social dialogue. Finally, Dr. Anna-Mari Wallenberg highlighted the dangers and failures of AI from the perspective of a country with a very rapid and high amount of adopting and using AI in the public sector. Speedy adoption of AI in the public sector must be accompanied by profound training on legal and ethical aspects. Employees - those who will use AI as a work tool - must be involved and trained before, not at or after the adoption of AI in working processes.

One can conclude that AI can be a very useful tool. At the same time, across all sessions of the seminar, one message recurred: the future of AI in public services depends on governance and people, not on the technology itself - and trade unions have a central role to play in shaping it through social dialogue.

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