

## Next recession to usher in wave of artificial intelligence

Written by Lorna Hutchinson on 17 October 2018 in News  
News

Major corporations are gearing up for a surge in robotics-based technology over the next decade and Europe needs to do the same.



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The European Union needs to brace itself for the prospect of a new wave of technology and productivity resurgence in ten to fifteen years' time, spearheaded by the implementation of AI and robotics innovations.

This was the message introduced by Stefan Crets, Executive Director of CSR Europe, who, opening the high-level event, said that digitisation required a new agility in the workplace and a new way of collaborating.

“The future of work is determined by the actions we take today and the choices we make. It’s about

driving and inspiring a people-centred working environment. What we want to do is exchange experience, pull the expertise together and find the best practices.”

Economist Mirko Draca, co-author of a London School of Economics (LSE) report commissioned by Huawei, entitled ‘The evolving role of ICT in the economy,’ said that a new wave of automation had started.

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“We can see AI and robotics over the horizon. We expect to see another technology surge in the next ten to fifteen years, based on AI and robotics technology,” Draca said, adding that this new wave of automation was likely to take root during the next major economic downturn, when technology-inspired restructuring in jobs tends to take place.

Speaking at the Sustainability and Innovation Conference ‘Digitalisation & Work: ICT, Driver of Social Value,’ organised by CSR Europe and Huawei, Draca said that major corporations were “clearly gearing up to something,” citing the case of tech giant Google, whose research and development expenditure in 2013 soared from \$7bn to \$16.6bn.

“One of the sleeper issues is the role of big technology companies such as Huawei and the big five technology companies in the US... What we think they’re gearing up to in terms of research is a surge in productivity, driven by AI and robotics, that we expect to see in the next ten years.”

The LSE report looks at what kind of impact a set of AI and robotics-based ‘super innovations’ could have on employment and productivity and explains that automation, which would entail the displacement of jobs by machines, is the major challenge created by ICT in the labour market.

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The introduction of autonomous vehicles, for example, could lead to the annual shedding of around 200,000 drivers from the 3.5 million-strong US commercial driver workforce.

Draca said that technically demanding manual jobs such as textile cutting and textile bleaching, were also no longer immune to mechanisation.

## WIDESPREAD FEAR OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

Workers find it hard to keep up with the latest developments in technology and there is an underlying fear in the workforce that machines will replace people in future.

Luca Jahier, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, said it was important to take

account of people's concerns surrounding artificial intelligence and robotics.

"For some this is exciting, but others feel frightened. In Europe, 70 percent of people worry that a robot will take their job. We cannot and should not ignore people's fears."

Jahier said that while the world of work has always known technological innovations, the rapid pace and nature of this current transformation with new technologies such as AI and robotics was "without precedent."

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Jahier cited OECD studies showing significant employment disruptions in sectors such as manufacturing, transport, health, hospitality, education, where nine percent of jobs are at risk of being displaced as over 70 percent of the tasks they involve can be automated.

## **AI ALSO CREATES JOBS**

But it's not all doom and gloom. According to a so-called 'maximalist scenario,' AI and robotics technology could also offset negative impacts on employment effect in other areas.

"It is inevitable that some jobs will change. Some will also disappear, but I do not believe in the mass unemployment scenario of a job-less future," Jahier said, adding that while technology destroys some jobs and creates others, its greatest effect is to transform jobs.

"Some new jobs have already appeared, such as web analysts and applications developers. The development of artificial intelligence systems will also require new jobs in engineering, IT and telecommunications and in big data."

"An increasing part of work can be automated - not only the simple, repetitive tasks, but even more complex tasks. Some of these changes may have a considerable positive effect notably regarding working conditions, work-life balance and access to the labour market for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups," he said.

Gaston Khoury, Huawei Technologies Western Europe Sales Vice President, agreed, saying, "while we should not be complacent about the effect of automation on employment - job losses are a source of concern for both blue and white-collar workers - research has shown that artificial intelligence works best in collaboration with humans."

"There will be a rising demand for new skills and profiles which we have to address now, in schools and universities. We need to make sure that young people are educated and trained to meet the rising demand for new skills and profiles and fill the jobs of the future," he said.

Khoury spoke of Huawei's 'Seeds for the Future' international ICT training programme, as well as its Innovation Research Programme, another Huawei initiative promoting ICT education in Europe.

"At Huawei, we don't think for one minute that tomorrow's workplace will be run by machines: we believe it will be run by highly-skilled workers assisted by intelligent devices," he said.

## **About the author**

Lorna Hutchinson is a reporter and sub-editor at The Parliament Magazine

## Tags

[Digital Agenda](#) [6]

[Research and Innovation](#) [7]

## Categories

[Business and industry](#) [8]

[AI and robotics](#) [9]

[Employment](#) [10]

[Science, technology and research](#) [11]

[Society and welfare](#) [12]



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