

Digital Welfare & the Limits of Human Oversight: Rethinking Power & Expertise in PES & Career Decision Making

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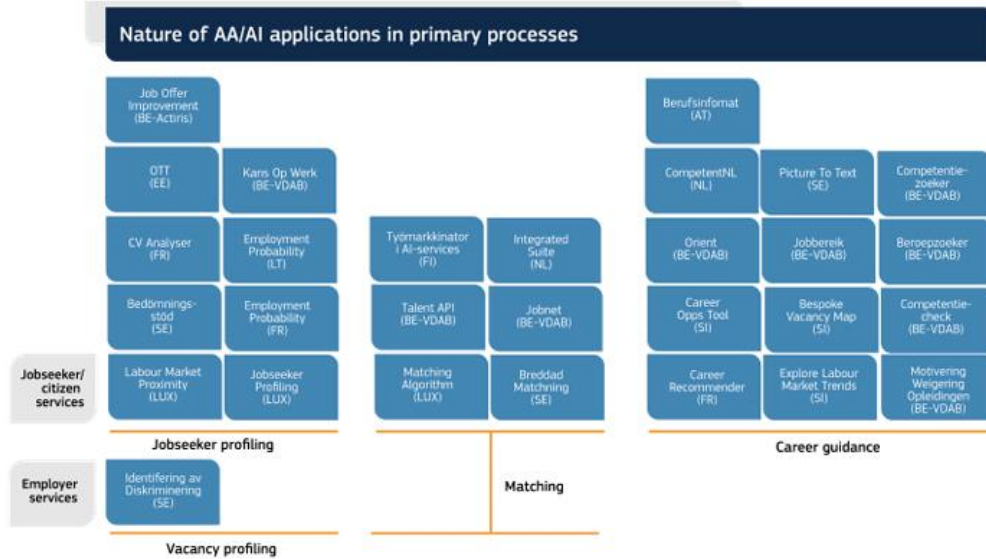
 Hecat
Digital Technology Supporting Labour Market Decision Making
 This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme under grant agreement No 870702

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South East Technological University



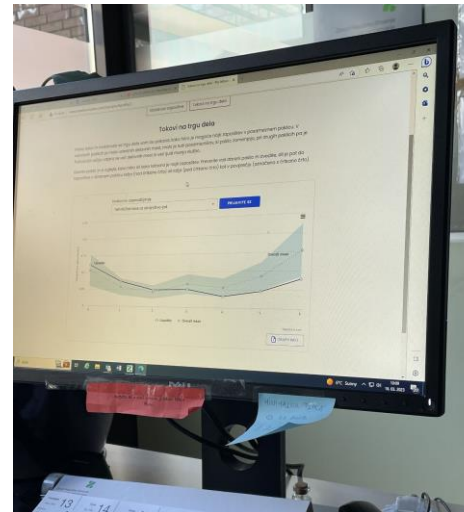
Who is the expert in a digitised world?

Figure 3. Overview of the nature of AA/AI applications in primary processes



Reproduced from: *Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services: PES Network Report exploring PES experiences, best practices and emerging business value (Pieterse, 2025).*

Public Employment Services are increasingly moving toward advance digitalisation through LLMs and AI



Trace Method (Sevenhuijsen, 2004): to analyse the normative language and frameworks within the AI Act and associated documents (Human Rights Watch & PES Network Report)-supported though findings from HECAT and MLM piloting

Disruptive technology

<http://pinta.ijs.si/hecat/api/v2/swagger-ui/>

<http://www.mylabourmarket.com/en/>



Hecat
Disruptive Technologies Supporting
Labour Market Decision Making



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Self-service
& caseworker-led



Evidence-based labour
market decision-making
support



Seeing the labour market rendering visible the market (using new measures), taking the labour market seriously (markets as being distinct from the state), return data to citizens, help people



Skills-related job search that broadening job search horizons and allow people to quick identify feasible job/career opportunities



Quality-based jobs search rebalancing job search to sustainable job search



AI Act

REGULATION (EU) 2024/1689

Tracing the Human in AI ‘Oversight’

Preface Notes:

(4) AI is a fast evolving family of technologies **that contributes to a wide array of economic, environmental and societal benefits** across the entire spectrum of industries and social activities. By improving prediction, optimising operations and resource allocation, and **personalising digital solutions available for individuals** ...and support socially and environmentally beneficial outcomes...

(5) At the same time, depending on the circumstances regarding its specific application, use, and level of technological development, **AI may generate risks and cause harm to public interests and fundamental rights** that are protected by Union law. Such harm might be material or immaterial, including physical, **psychological, societal or economic** harm.

(6) Given the major impact that AI can have on society and the need to build trust...As a prerequisite, **AI should be a human-centric technology. It should serve as a tool for people, with the ultimate aim of increasing human well-being**

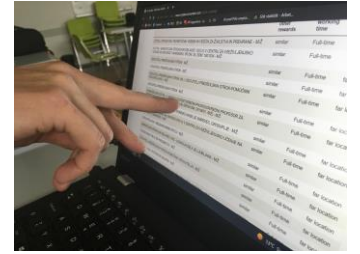
Act emphasises that AI systems should support human agency, transparency and informed decision-making, particularly for high-risk systems (Annex III: systems that determine eligibility for public services are high-risk)

Article 14: Human oversight- high-risk AI systems must be designed so they “can be effectively overseen by natural persons”

The “human” is largely the deployer, operator or institutional professional not the citizen affected by the decision. These remain comparatively absent from the practical mechanisms through which oversight is enacted.

Human oversight becomes human override, preserving discretionary authority rather than redistributing epistemic authority more collaboratively.

Tracing the Human in AI ‘Oversight’



Q&A: How the EU’s Flawed Artificial Intelligence
Regulation Endangers the Social Safety Net

- **Human Rights Watch** analysis foregrounded unemployed people and welfare recipients as rights-bearing subjects directly affected by algorithmic governance.
- The critique argued that “access to social security benefits and other social services” should be **considered inherently high-risk** due to their potential impact on access to essential services, social security and economic wellbeing with AI systems.
- Specifically, the report notes how a **previous provision** that would allow people to “decide not to use the high-risk AI system or its outputs” if a negative output was expected (pg 21). This specifically removes any legislative power of citizens to refuse automated decisions.
- Importantly, the document highlighted not only risks associated with automated decisions themselves, but also the difficulties citizens face in understanding, challenging and navigating digital welfare systems.
- This emphasis shifts oversight away from institutional supervision and toward contestability, accessibility and participation.
- Critique implicitly **places citizens at the centre of the Act**, as those who it will impact most and therefore the **real ‘end user’**

Tracing the Human in AI ‘Oversight’



European Network of Public
Employment Services

Opportunities of AI within PES
processes and services

PES Network Report exploring PES experiences, best
practices and emerging business value

Written by ICF
Dr Willem Pieterse
January - 2025



Pieterse, W., 2025. *Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services: PES Network Report exploring PES experiences, best practices and emerging business value*, Brussels: European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fd9qOT69wYc>

Report acknowledges responsible AI, transparency and stakeholder involvement

However, it consistently & implicitly **constructs the caseworker as the principal user** and interpreter of digital labour market information

Even as beneficiaries of improved services **unemployed people are rarely positioned as active participants** in interpreting or shaping algorithmic outputs.

Much of the discussion centres on the organisational and “business” value of AI implementation, focusing on **language of organisational efficiency** subtly positions the improvement of PES performance **over** the enhancement of **care, well-being autonomy or collaborative decision-making for unemployed citizens**.

Noted in both report and webinar is that success indicators are **only ‘soft’** (i.e. qualitative and experiential from users). The importance of these are minimised by lack of comparative **‘hard’** (quants, metrics) indicators. This framing implicitly privileges measurable organisational metrics over relational and experiential dimensions of welfare encounters.

Overall, labour market data and predictive insights remain institutionally mediated through **professional judgement**. This reflects a continuation of longstanding street-level welfare practices in which **discretionary authority is preserved through the management and interpretation of information**.

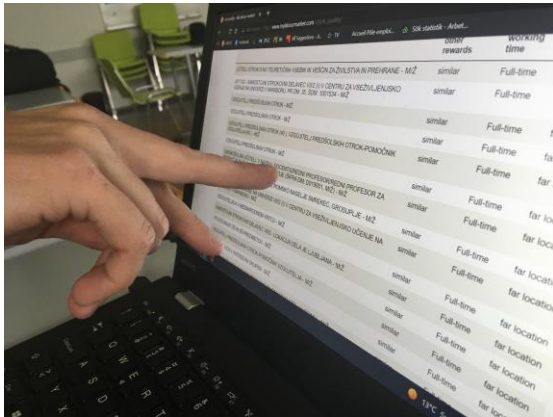
User Responses...



MY
LABOUR
MARKET



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Caseworkers positive about the technology but expressed continued and entrenched normative opinion that they should control access to knowledge

Unemployed people desired autonomy & access to the information but also expressed wishes for a hybrid approach with caseworkers

Piloting Slovenia (ESS)

24 Unemployed people

14 Caseworkers & Counsellors

6 PES Management Interviews & Demonstrations

Expert Panel Focus Groups

Country	Policy makers	PES Counsellors	Unemployed people	Total
Denmark	3	5	4	12
France	5	9	9	23
Ireland	5	6	5	16
Slovenia	4	4	4	12
Total	17	24	22	63

Barriers to Democratising LM Knowledge



Normative language and frameworks fail to ‘disrupt’ entrenched biases, opinions, working methods

PES commission and purchase advanced digital systems= client and end user

Potential for AI, LLM, Big Data to improve information and knowledge for collaborative decision making

Representation & voice to enable individual needs, meaningful work, job quality and longer term sustainability



Questions,
discussion + thanks

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