Wilton Park

Report: Driving inclusive economies and growth through better protection for workers

Wednesday 25 – Friday 27 March 2026

In association with
the Department for
Business and Trade

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Executive summary

An inclusive economy depends on a well-functioning labour market that drives sustainable growth while enabling all working-age people – including those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – to access good-quality, paid work. It should also support innovation, progression and productivity, underpinned by fairness and constructive cooperation between workers and employers.

The landscape for labour market policy is undergoing significant changes. Policy makers need to react to these major changes, opportunities and challenges, from labour market participation to skills capabilities and the introduction of technologies in the workplace, including artificial intelligence.

This Wilton Park dialogue on 'Driving inclusive economies and growth through better protection for workers' (25 – 27 March 2026) was designed to bring together diverse voices/stakeholders to share strategies to address the major changes, opportunities and challenges in the labour market. It aimed to generate policy recommendations and share strategies for ensuring strong protections for workers, while supporting economic growth and proactively adapting to the changing world of work.

Participants included labour ministers and senior representatives from the UK and Europe, businesses of various sizes, including technology-focused businesses, UK-based and international business representative organisations and trade unions, academics specialising in different elements of labour markets, civil society organisations (including those focused on AI, and gender), as well as international organisations.

Recent legislative changes in the UK provided context to the dialogue. The UK government's Plan to Make Work Pay and the Employment Rights Act 2025 sets out an ambitious agenda to ensure employment rights are fit for a modern economy.

The discussions focused on four interconnected themes: (1) employment protections and productivity and growth, (2) skills and capability, (3) inclusive labour market participation, and (4) the future of work, including the platform economy and artificial intelligence.

Through a mix of plenary and breakout sessions, participants exchanged their views on, and experiences of:

- How employment protections support economic growth.
- How inclusive labour market participation can be achieved.
- How to drive productivity by investing in skills and lifelong learning for the workforce.
- How to respond to the future of work, including the platform economy.
- How to embrace technological integration (AI) and manage job impacts.

The main takeaways and discussion points are detailed under each theme below:

- Theme 1: Employment Protection and Economic Growth
- Theme 2: Inclusive Labour Market Participation
- Theme 3: Skills and Capability
- Theme 4: The Future of Work: AI, and the Platform Economy

This report does not attribute discussions to individual participants, as per the Wilton Park Protcol. This report, including key findings, does not reflect the UK or any other governments' position on these topics or on government policy, but captures the main points, themes, and recommendations discussed by participants.

Overarching themes

While views differed across the themes explored, there was broad consensus that:

1. Employment protections can, and do, support economic growth – these are not mutually exclusive.

2. The pace of change requires us to collectively consider quick, new and imaginative interventions – government regulation is only part of the solution.
3. Labour market challenges and opportunities should be examined holistically, rather than focusing on single issues. This includes policy design.
4. Social partners, governments, unions and business, and civil society need to continue to work together in partnership.
5. Greater transparency for workers and consumers about business decision making, such as when and how AI is used, is key to ensuring the fair distribution of productivity gains and a more inclusive labour market.

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Theme 1: Employment Protections and Economic Growth

This discussion encouraged participants to share reflections and experiences of the relationship between employment rights and economic growth/productivity, and the role of enforcement.

Participants reflected that the rapidly evolving labour market poses opportunities and challenges and that given the fast pace of change, policymakers need to be proactive to both seize new opportunities and to address current and future labour market challenges, to enable long-term economic growth. In the UK context, the Employment Rights Act 2025 and the broader Plan to Make Work Pay were cited as examples of being proactive, as the UK government was updating the employment rights framework to strengthen employment rights and better align it to a modern economy.

Employment protections and economic growth can be mutually reinforcing. This dynamic underpins a pro innovation, pro worker response to the changing nature of work. There was consensus that stronger employment rights, with more secure, fairer work, leads to people staying in work for longer. This would allow businesses to benefit from their experience, skills and leadership over time, and higher levels of productivity – and therefore supporting economic growth. Notably, for economic growth to be inclusive, productivity gains and economic benefits – such as higher incomes, more jobs and greater living standards – need to be distributed fairly across our societies.

Recommendations

Research has shown that improving employment rights can increase economic growth[1]. For example, maternity protections allow women to stay in the workforce, Statutory Sick Pay boosts individual welfare and productivity, and guaranteed hours help minimise uncertainty.

Increased productivity of workers gained through stronger employment rights can be a key driver of long-term growth. Further productivity improvements discussed included utilising the benefits that artificial intelligence can bring to the nature of work.

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[1] Christine Carter, Simon Deakin and Kamelia Pourkermani (University of Cambridge), Conor McCormack (Department for Business and Trade), Assessing the legal and economic implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025, 7 January 2026. Link: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695e23e88832ab3a48513801/assessing-the-legal-and-economic-implications-of-the-employment-rights-act-2025.pdf

Discussion recognised that AI could increase productivity by automating burdensome tasks, which has the potential to free up more time and space for workers to use their own critical thinking and judgement, and to be more creative. AI can also increase productivity through the creation of new jobs (despite its potential to negatively impact and displace other jobs across the labour market). However, as with employment growth, there is a challenge to ensure productivity gains from AI are fairly distributed. Theme 4 gives a detailed overview of the discussions on AI.

Other policy suggestions for increasing productivity and economic growth include:

- Creating a tangible structure for worker engagement so that workers are involved in discussions with their employers on how to respond to the changing nature of work. This is especially necessary in countries with low trade union membership;
- Designing and implementing a crisis management mechanism to respond to un/expected labour market shocks. Inspiration can be taken from Covid-19 crisis management;
- Increased government and employer investment in workforce upskilling, and in quality jobs; and
- Exploring increasing worker flexibility which participants suggested could lead to more efficient work, better work-life balance, reduced burn out and sickness, and higher staff retention.

Enforcement plays a crucial role in upholding employment rights, preventing exploitation, and ensuring fair competition between businesses. However, it is important that enforcement mechanisms are designed in a way that encourage and incentivise businesses to comply rather than relying on enforcement, such as through employment tribunals, which can be disproportionately costly for small and medium sized businesses. In the UK context, HMRC's enforcement of the national minimum wage was shared as a strong positive case study of effective enforcement. The new UK Fair Work Agency launched on 7 April 2026 as a single enforcement body for employment rights, was also highlighted.

There is no-one-size-fits-all way to responding to the changes in the labour market, in the same way that there is no single labour market. Policy interventions should consider the differences across labour markets, including geographic disparities, sectors, sizes of business, and demographics. A combination of interventions, which take account of these nuances, is required. This will also help to reduce unintended consequences e.g., where regulation does not necessarily strengthen secure employment and instead pushes people into platform work because they seek flexibility.

The key to intervention design is to develop these in partnership with businesses, trade unions and civil society organisations. Social dialogue plays an important role in facilitating this. In the context of Spain, sector-level collective agreements are an effective model of tripartite working through national framework agreements.

Theme 2: Inclusive Labour Market Participation

This discussion asked participants to explore how to increase labour market participation among groups most at risk of exclusion. Participants were asked to share their insights on what policies and incentives could be used to encourage employers to invest in recruiting staff from these groups and to address barriers to participation.

Participants explored the role of inclusivity as a critical component to the labour market. Globally, many countries face significant challenges with the exclusion of certain groups in their labour markets.

Examples of these groups who are often on the periphery of labour markets, include:

- People with disabilities. A significant barrier for people with disabilities entering the labour market is the lack of reasonable adjustments and flexible work. The UK's Keep Britain Working Review illustrates a large disability employment gap.
- People with ill health. Some issues with lack of employer confidence to manage workers with health conditions.
- People with caring responsibilities. Lack of flexibility in roles, or awareness of flexible working, can act as a barrier for those with caring responsibilities.
- Older workers.

This is against the backdrop of several broader economic and demographic trends across Europe which impact the supply side of labour markets including rapidly increasing youth inactivity, ageing populations, technological change, and growing global insecurity.

The question of participation is often examined from the angle of getting people into work, but policy makers should also consider the issue of retention – keeping those already in work from leaving. Reducing the flow of people out of the labour market will require rethinking approaches to skills, development opportunities and training. Wider demographic and geopolitical trends will likely mean people stay in work for longer. Cost pressures, competitive markets, the impact of AI and tech will also contribute to this.

Globally, there is also a gender angle to participation. While significant progress has been made in achieving gender equality, especially in advanced economies[2], there is still some way to go to address systemic gender inequality in labour markets. Women face lower employment rates with persistent barriers linked to unequal (and often unpaid) care responsibilities, social norms of gendered stereotypes that shape job roles, and inaccessible workplaces. Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles[3]. This inequality is amplified by the growing impact of AI. The underrepresentation of women in AI design could lead to increasing bias and exclusion.

Recommendations

There is no single solution or easy fix to address participation issues. Policymakers should work with social partners and civil society organisations to develop multi-pronged approaches.

Strong employment rights are the foundation of an inclusive labour market, and interventions should be rooted in international labour standards, products of social dialogue, collective bargaining, and anti-harassment frameworks, as a few examples.

At the core of any solution is a people centred approach, that is developed at both a local and national level. This is particularly relevant in economies that are uneven. Any intervention or policy aimed at increasing labour market participation and inclusion should take account of individual circumstances rather than treating groups as a monolith. For example, according to the OECD, in 2024, 12.85% of 15–19-year-olds globally were NEETs (not in employment, education or training). These NEETs are individuals with individual stories. Similarly, and from the perspective of individual countries, policies that are designed at a local level can better reflect the nuances of a particular group/area. While increasing participation and inclusivity is a national priority for many countries, the details should be worked through at a local level with local communities. One example of this is in Spain, where national equality plans are designed with businesses and unions discussing specific detailed points at both national and local/regional levels.

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[2] OECD, Pursuing Gender Equality in a Changing World, 15 September 2025. Link: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pursuing-gender-equality-in-a-changing-world_e8d9869a-en/full-report.html#boxsection-d1e32

[3] OECD, Gender Equality in a Changing World: Taking Stock and Moving Forward. 15 September 2025. Link: https://doi.org/10.1787/e808086f-en.

Businesses and trade unions should be at the core of developing any solutions. An example of this in the UK context is the 'Vanguard' group of the Keep Britain Working Review, where c.150 businesses employing 1.5 million workers have signed up to a three-year programme to develop solutions to transform workplace health and inclusion in the UK[4]. Charters are another means to achieving these goals.

Other interventions include:

- Updating and strengthening leave policies, including but not limited to (paid) parental leave and carers leave.
- Establishing and strengthening reasonable adjustments and flexible working. This could also include wider flexibility, such as paid sabbaticals and phased retirements.
- Better signposting of existing rights, including by employers in job advertisements. For example, in the UK context, there is already a right to request flexible work, and protected reasonable adjustments for those with disabilities, but many are unaware of these. There is a significant disincentive for those with caring responsibilities or that have disabilities to apply for jobs if they cannot see that these adjustments are available to them.
- Tailored guidance for employers. Groups who are under-represented in the labour market are not homogenous and may require different adjustments or types of flexible working (e.g. those with disabilities).
- Youth job guarantees e.g. schemes in the UK and across Europe.

Ultimately, there is no single solution to an inclusive approach to increasing labour market participation. Interventions require government, businesses, unions and civil society organisations to work together to develop multiple approaches that place labour markets as part of a wider economic system.

[4] Department for Work and Pensions (Press Release), Support for Keep Britain Working ramps us across employers and regions. 31 March 2026. Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/support-for-keep-britain-working-ramps-up-across-employers-and-regions

Theme 3: Skills and Capability

Throughout the conference, participants discussed the role of skills in driving economic growth. This included exchanging ideas and recommendations on how to close skills gaps and how to build an adaptive, future-ready workforce capable of sustaining productivity in a fast-changing economy.

Participants discussed how closing skills gaps is central to boosting economic performance. Rapid technological change, demographic shifts, and evolving labour market needs are placing increasing pressure on skills systems worldwide. Investing in workforce skills drives long-term economic growth and strengthens labour market resilience.

Advanced economies are now beginning to face challenges regarding skills that were previously associated with developing economies, albeit with stronger institutions. These challenges include the number of workers engaged in informal work, higher insecurity for workers and low capacity for government programmes. Across the developed world, there is an ongoing challenge to ensure necessary skills are matched with appropriate jobs and employers. Data gaps, including using education as a proxy for skills, makes identifying the issues and measuring the effectiveness of interventions difficult.

Participants highlighted issues with defining and conceptualising skills gaps. There was agreement between participants that often what is referred to as a skills gap is instead a lack of coordination between employers and workers. Additionally, employers can lack information as to what they should be upskilling towards. Structural mismatches between education and the workplace can worsen this.

Participants therefore stressed the importance of defining skills gaps, and measurement of interventions. Reframing the question of skills mismatches to high demand and low demand skills, can allow for tailoring of interventions.

Recommendations

Skills systems need to adapt to the changing demands of labour markets. This requires flexibility such as modular, short-course learning that is demand-led. Coordination between national and local bodies best enable this. This also facilitates the tailoring of systems for different groups i.e. those already in work, NEETs, and those who are far from the labour market. In Greece, there are various programmes for reskilling and upskilling the workforce, including subsidy schemes for different groups (e.g., long-term unemployed individuals, unemployed women, middle-aged jobseekers) and 'Job-Link' vouchers which focus on job creation in specific regions.

A clear progression pathway for skilling and reskilling throughout people's working lives would support productivity goals. Successful interventions meet workers where they are, with a clear pathway linking skills provision and employment outcomes.

The most effective skills are personalised and relevant to starting points. Some people, particularly in low-wage sectors, may require greater access to foundational skills, including support with interview training, boosting social skills in a work context, critical thinking skills, and support with getting to and from work. This includes tailored training for those with neurodivergence.

Policy solutions and interventions should consider how to engage those least likely to access training, due to structural barriers (e.g. low paid jobs, in particular sectors), and individual circumstances (e.g. low confidence, caring responsibilities), who often require training the most.

While technical and functional skills are important, management skills also have productivity benefits[5]. Across sectors, good management can improve the culture in workplaces, uphold employment rights, allow businesses to retain employees, and increase wellbeing. On the other hand, bad management is often cited as a major factor for workers leaving roles, particularly in some sectors such as engineering where poor management is often a key driver of high drop-out rates for women.

AI can be better utilised in training and upskilling but concerns around ethical, social and economic implications remain. Some businesses are unaware or unsure of how to best use AI in upskilling their employees. There are also knowledge gaps on business boards creating barriers to the adoption of AI in upskilling/training.

Incentives for businesses of all sizes, employees and government need to be better aligned. SMEs have the appetite to invest in skills but face constraints, such as time, cost (even when funded by external parties, this can be volatile and short-term), and a low confidence in return on investment. In the UK, there are constraints on the self-

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[5] John Van Reenan, Professor Nicholas Bloom, Professor Raffaella Sadun, 'Improving productivity thorough better management practices', 2021. Link: https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-impact-case-studies/2021/improving-productivity-through-better-management-practices

employed, and their ability to take up training. There are also opportunity costs for workers of re-skilling or up-skilling, so there need to be clear incentives for workers.

Social partners should be strategic, long-term partners in developing and delivering workplace learning. For example, chartered professional bodies can facilitate employer-led promoting ecosystems to promote employers, educators and individuals – to get young people into programmes and mentoring, which boosts their confidence and skills and prepares them to enter the labour market. Unions can also play a significant role in this, often acting as seed funding i.e. where a union invests, employers and suppliers follow which brings together businesses and workers.

The private sector has a role to play in designing skills interventions. Effective curriculums are designed in collaboration with employers and businesses to ensure that skills are closely aligned to demand. Employers may need to widen their understanding of skills and to allow the evidencing of skills in non-work-related contexts. This will facilitate higher participation for those who are just entering the labour market.

Ultimately, skills are one feature of wider labour market issues, such as youth participation and productivity. Early interventions can make a sizable impact, and interventions need to be tracked, e.g. through Key Performance Indicators. An effective system delineates roles and responsibilities between government and businesses regarding skills investment. International examples of successful interventions include labour diagnostic mechanisms for recording and analysing labour market skills needs, tax exemptions, using vouchers to incentivise workers, designing flexible and modular training programmes, introducing work-life balance measures (e.g. paid parental leave) and continuously upskilling and reskilling.

Theme 4: The Future of Work: AI, and the Platform Economy

Artificial Intelligence

Given the profound and rapid technological changes shaping our world, a common theme discussed throughout the conference was the role of AI in shaping and reshaping labour markets. These discussions included how technology and AI can promote fair work and strengthen productivity, while addressing risks. Participants also explored how to harness AI for growth, while addressing the uneven distribution of its benefits.

Participants stressed that the extent of change amounts to a fourth industrial revolution. While AI and automation offer significant opportunities for productivity gains and innovation, they also pose challenges for employment stability, including the risk of large-scale displacement in roles with high routine content and a potential decline in job quality. It is crucial to continue to constantly monitor and debate the role of AI in the world of work, even in the absence of full information.

There are some misconceptions around the role of AI in labour markets. These include:

- The assumption that AI automatically causes job losses. This presumption risks normalising and accepting job losses as inevitable. This is not to negate the fact that some jobs will no longer exist in the same way as they previously did, and that there will be job displacement. These impacts should be managed.
- The misconception that the use of AI and its impacts will be uniform. The use of AI varies significantly across and within different labour markets. The same is true for the impact that AI will have on different labour markets and different types of workers, businesses, unions, and governments. Generalisations can be unhelpful and result in poor policy making.
- AI's impact will be beyond human agency. There should be a feeling of empowerment with AI, which can be controlled to ensure positive impacts on the world of work. AI will alter the demand for jobs and will change the world of work, but this is not necessarily bad – it is up to us to decide how to use AI.

The use of AI in workplaces is rapidly spreading across all sectors and can boost productivity at both a micro- and macro-level, but these productivity gains require distributional consideration. Deploying AI in workplaces can enhance workers' performance. In the UK, it is estimated that around 70% of workers are in occupations where AI could perform or enhance tasks[6]. This may improve the quality of jobs, if workers can use the time saved by AI technologies to work on meaningful tasks. However, there is a risk that this leads to intensified workloads and job degradation.

On a macro-level, AI is a driver of innovation and can lead to the creation of new jobs. AI will remove parts of jobs that are easily automated and can restructure labour markets in a more productive way. However, this positive result only happens when innovation is strong, and AI is adopted by employers in a way that increases demand for skills and jobs.

AI will likely impact specific groups in the labour market more than others and employment rights should be updated accordingly. In many countries, women are over-represented in jobs that involve tasks that AI can replace[7]. This over-exposure to the negative impacts of AI is compounded by the fact that women are less likely to receive AI training and, in some countries are generally more sceptical of using AI. This is accompanied by a trend towards more restrictive gender norms. There are also barriers to adoption among some groups e.g. older women and some organisations, partly due to different organisational cultures around AI and due to uneven learning curves amongst workers. This increases the importance of training workers to build confidence and capability to effectively use AI to enhance the quality of their jobs.

The adoption of AI in workplaces will impact the development of skills for those who are early on in their careers. There are some tasks that, despite being routine or basic, are necessary foundational skills to build – particularly in a knowledge economy. Care needs to be taken to ensure that workers can develop these skills amidst the increased automation of routine tasks.

Algorithmic management is increasingly being used across all sectors, and is not limited to the platform economy, raising significant questions about surveillance and autonomy at work. Using algorithms to set pay, monitor workers, and recruit, can lead to negative unintended consequences such as opaque decision making, intrusive

[6] International Monetary Fund, 'Gen AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work', 14 January 2024, Link: https://www.imf.org/en/publications/staff-discussion-notes/issues/2024/01/14/gen-ai-artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-work-542379
[7] International Labour Organization, 'Gen AI, occupational segregation and gender equality in the world of work',5 March 2026. Link: https://www.ilo.org/publications/gen-ai-occupational-segregation-and-gender-equality-world-work

monitoring and biased recruitment systems. There is also asymmetry of information between workers and employers as to how AI technologies are being used.

There are wider risks of deploying AI without proper oversight. This includes concerns about data rights e.g. how worker-generated data is used and protected and the wider environmental impact of using AI.

Policy makers should therefore consider the benefits of AI in workplaces, and what role governments, businesses, unions and workers should have in securing fair distribution of these. Government plays a role, but exactly what this is depends on national and local contexts. Regulation can ensure that employment rights frameworks are updated for AI-driven workplaces.

Recommendations

Given the nature and pace of change, interventions should:

- Consider how to distribute the productivity gains of AI fairly to support both economic growth and improved outcomes for workers.
- Respond rapidly to the sheer pace of change. Interventions should be quick and flexible.
- Centre transparency and agency for workers. This is essential to ensuring that workers are brought along throughout the AI transformation, and that changes do not simply happen to them. Trade unions can play a role in facilitating this.
- Focus on building trust and dialogue between workers and employers. As AI technologies are introduced into workplaces, and as they continue to evolve, workers and employers should be in continuous dialogue to ensure AI is used fairly and transparently. As use of algorithmic management increases, stronger trust building measures are required in recruitment processes and workplace monitoring. Examples of interventions suggested by participants included co-created AI strategies and policies, and worker led choices to technological changes.
- Create clear governance frameworks that explicitly incorporate AI. This should include transparency around acceptable and unacceptable uses.
- Account for regional variations in the use and impacts of AI. Hyper-local interventions can be developed. Other interventions could include job guarantees, especially in managing communities through industrial challenges/transitions.

- Involve gathering and analysing data. There are currently different indices and proxies that are used to measure the impact of AI. These are often inaccurate and result in businesses making significant decisions on AI strategies based on general assumptions. There should be greater examination of what metrics are useful, and who should be collecting this data. For example, there should be national statistics that measure job quality to better understand the impact of AI on the quality of work.

There are broader questions of the impact of AI on the concept of work and how it is shaping the relationship with work. Policy makers need to consider the role of AI in reshaping the meaning of work, jobs and our societies. The way in which AI is used can determine whether work becomes intensified or more flexible and can allow jobs to be designed in a different way. A humanist approach to AI holds human resilience as central to this progress, considering psychological, cultural, environmental resilience and not just economic resilience.

Platform Economy

Digital labour platforms are creating new markets for businesses and expanding job opportunities for people, including those who would otherwise be unemployed. However, these digital platform models challenge established workers' protections. In this session, participants explored how to ensure fair working conditions in the platform economy while continuing to support innovation and growth. Participants discussed definitions of platform work, its potential benefits and risks, and recommendations to address these.

Defining platform work is complex. Platform work encompasses paid work, organised or mediated through technology (website, application), which matches demand for a service with an individual who can supply this. It uses algorithmic systems to allocate tasks and sets conditions to monitor performance. The platform itself does not define employment status. However, whether platform work can be categorised as a sector is up for debate. On one hand, platform work has distinctively different features and different labour markets – suggesting it is a unique sector. On the other hand, platform work is not limited to a single service / sector in that it provides a service across sectors through technology by matching the demand of a service and supply of workers. The number of tasks available to workers and frequency of these tasks is regulated by algorithms. Platforms supply services beyond typical sectors such as food or transport and include sectors such as health care and education. These platforms should have a responsibility towards those working through their technologies.

Platform workers are not limited to one type of employment status category or one model of employment. Platform workers can be employees, workers or self-employed. Their employment status will depend on different factors and can change.

Platform work has numerous benefits, including:

- Diverse forms of work which result in flexibility for workers. This gives people greater individual freedom to choose how and when they work. People can engage in different types of jobs, including taking up several jobs at the same time. Platform work provides geographical flexibility as workers can often choose where they take up work. In Ukraine, platform work offers the labour market some stability in an otherwise unstable environment, where they have lost a quarter of their workforce. In Ukraine, platforms provide people, especially young people, with the ability to earn money quickly, to gain work experience, and to earn money from different and/or multiple jobs at the same time.
- Employment opportunities for those who might otherwise be excluded from the labour market. The flexibility provided by platform work attracts people to work who otherwise would not be able to undertake traditional employment (reducing inactivity). It also allows for quick access to work – allowing people to quickly earn additional income or to easily gain access to work for a limited period i.e. more flexible form of part-time work.
- Broader economic opportunities. It matches demand for services with a large (and often international) supply of skills, quickly.

Participants also identified risks from platform work including, but not limited, to:

- Undermining of employment rights due to power imbalances between employers and platform workers. Platform providers have greater power to set conditions for workers compared to traditional work. Employment rights could be impacted, e.g. with workers experiencing increased vulnerability and insecurity, poor health and safety protections (partly because this type of work is difficult to inspect), and in the worst cases, risks of modern slavery.

- Data issues, such as the portability of ratings across platforms. Platform workers' reputation exists solely on, or is owned by, the platform. As consumer ratings are vital for businesses particularly SMEs, the question of who owns and manages this data determines the power dynamic between the platform provider and the individual.

Recommendations

Platform work discourse should centre on addressing power imbalances and increasing job quality. As platform providers have greater power to set conditions compared to traditional work, there should be greater focus placed on the responsibilities of platform providers.

Given that platform work can span across different sectors, demographics of workers and geographical borders, interventions require tailoring / cannot be uniform. International examples include the European Union's Directive on Platform Work, Spain's "Ley Rider" (Rider Law), (Spain was the first country to issue regulation in the sector), in 2021) and India's Code on Social Security (recognition of the platform economy and broader protection for platform workers, in effect from November 2025).

Other suggestions included:

- Greater transparency in discussions around platform work. There are parallels between the discourse around social media and its impacts, and the technology companies that facilitate platform work. Platform workers should be made aware of how algorithms are being used to manage their work.
- More agency for platform workers. This could include giving platform workers more control over algorithmic work, for example, clearer choices and mechanisms to challenge decisions made by algorithmic managements or to request meaningful human oversight. Another suggestion was to create a genuine mechanism for platform workers to opt in or out of algorithmic systems.
- Human-centred and transparent approach to algorithmic management and automated decision making. Platform workers should understand how algorithms operate and impact their work. This transparency should extend to consumers, e.g. if companies use surge pricing, consumers should be made aware of the surge paying of employees.

- Clarity on employment status. Platform workers should have the correct employment status. One option could be using the 'worker' status as a default, but businesses may disagree with this approach. Another option could be giving those who are genuinely self-employed similar protections to those with other employment statuses. Ultimately, there should be a practical and workable solution that does not rely on presumption as this will lead to unnecessary strain on the enforcement system.
- New forms of collective bargaining / trade unionism to adapt to the new type of work that platform work represents.
- Access to welfare: Providing welfare provisions to platform workers, such as insurance and social security for platform workers.
- Consumers should also be part of the conversation about how technology, algorithms and platform work shape the quality of work and services provided. Firstly, platform workers and consumers are not always separate entities. Secondly, there should be consideration of protections for consumers e.g. in relation to dynamic pricing.

Given that platform work transcends national borders, it is crucial to discuss the role of regulation at an international/global level. This could include regulation at a regional level such as the EU's Platform Work Directive. To ensure more coverage globally, this should also include regulation at a multilateral level, for example, as is currently being negotiated at the International Labour Organization.

The impacts on the wider labour market should be considered when designing and implementing regulations. For instance, the regulation of platforms may change the supply of labour in different markets.

It will be challenging to measure the impacts of regulations or interventions on the platform economy. Data is not comprehensive as to the size, gender and geographic breakdown of the platform economy. This makes it harder to anticipate how firms might respond to regulation. It will take time to get the regulation right, and new regulation may not always be necessary, e.g. where technology facilitates existing practices, existing labour laws already apply.

Next steps

This Wilton Park dialogue brought together a diverse group of stakeholders with a range of perspectives on the future of work.

There was strong agreement that effective labour market reform relies on robust partnership between government, employers, unions and civil society. Participants welcomed the open and honest discussion that was facilitated by this Wilton Park dialogue and strongly agreed that discussions of this kind should be held more regularly.

There is no doubt the global labour market is transforming rapidly bringing both challenges and opportunities at national, sectoral and individual levels. Consequently, labour market policy is becoming increasingly complex, and policymakers should seize these opportunities and address these challenges while ensuring strong employment protections and driving economic growth.

The UK government looks forward to further discussions with stakeholders and feeding our learning into domestic policy development and implementation for the next stage of the Plan to Make Work Pay.

Francesca Rogers

Wilton Park | March 2026

Wilton Park is a discreet think-space designed for experts and policy-makers to engage in genuine dialogue with a network of diverse voices, in order to address the most pressing challenges of our time.

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