Do Welfare Regimes Matter?

JOB AUTOMATION AND PARTICIPATION IN ADULT TRAINING

The effects of automation technology on the labour market are one of the most pressing issues of our time. Estimates of the number of jobs at risk of becoming obsolete vary widely. Nevertheless, even under the most optimistic scenario, dislocations are likely to be substantial. ‘Reskilling’ and ‘upskilling’ are relevant dimensions for public policies to deal with these challenges. This requires substantial public and private financial resources and political commitment that are not always evident. It presupposes those workers in jobs facing a high risk of automation have access to adult training and face limited barriers to participate. A recent study in fourteen European countries representing different welfare regimes explores the relation between risk of job automation and probability of participation in training.

Results from previous research

- Workers whose jobs are at high risk of automation were found to be much less likely to engage in adult training than their peers in less exposed jobs.
- Initial educational inequalities perpetuate over the life span and lead to cumulative disadvantages.
- Participation in adult learning is a result of structural conditions and individual agency.
- The type of welfare regime can influence both structure and agency (bounded agency model).
- There are different types of barriers affecting participation in adult learning.

Results from a current study

- Workers in occupations at high-risk of automation are consistently less likely to participate in training across all welfare regimes.
- Workers facing high risk of automation on their jobs report lower rates of unmet demand (that is training wanted but not taken).
- Situational barriers outweigh institutional ones across all welfare regimes.
- The relevant patterns do not differ in kind across welfare states, only in degree.

Key-MESSAGE

Low educated and low skilled workers are likely to bear the brunt of the adjustment costs to technological changes as their jobs are facing a higher risk of automation. Nevertheless, those workers most in need of training are least likely to get some, this pattern is robust across welfare regimes. Workers in these jobs experience cumulative disadvantages and tend to be deadlocked in a vicious circle of limited resources and insufficient training opportunities. The use and extent of education, labour market and social policy instruments targeting the most vulnerable groups can be crucial to foster training opportunities for workers in occupations at high-risk of automation. Several institutional features such as active labour market measures, public spending in open and flexible education and training systems, skills recognition systems, and programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups can play a role in fostering high and widely distributed levels of participation in adult training. Others can enable workers to overcome the various structural constraints (e.g., redistributed policies, family assistance, childcare). No less important is the use of public policies and stakeholder arrangements to influence the skill orientation of the economy.


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