



UNTANGLED

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LAUNCHING UNTANGLED ON LABOUR DAY

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Launching UNTANGLED
on Labour Day

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More than 100 years ago, workers, employers and governments in the West were struggling with the effects of rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and demographic change including mass migration from the Old World. Their collective response to those challenges was far from a smooth process, and often descended into violence before the relative stability of workers' movements and labour unions emerged. The May Day workers' holiday was born as a part of that movement.

That makes 1 May a particularly appropriate day for the launch of UNTANGLED: two decades into the 21st century, European employers, governments and policy-makers are once again coping with the effects on the labour market of a series of globe-spanning trends. Just like the Industrial Revolution, mass immigration to America and 19th century workers' uprisings in Europe, today's challenges of globalisation, technological change and migration are interconnected, reinforcing each other in ways that may not be immediately obvious.

Our project seeks to untangle those trends, examining their impact on labour markets in Europe and beyond. Based on a series of research papers and market scenarios, we will develop policy recommendations to help governments cushion the negative impacts of these trends, promoting fairness and prosperity for the people of Europe and beyond.

UNTANGLED is for both researchers and practitioners; our success depends on vigorous engagement by stakeholders from companies, civil society, academia and other areas. We hope you'll find this newsletter engaging and informative – and we invite you to subscribe as a first step toward contributing your voice and your unique perspective to UNTANGLED.



As we adapt to shifting pandemic-related restrictions, we're still putting the finishing touches to our schedule of events for the coming quarter.

Follow us on social media or check projectuntangled.eu to make sure you don't miss out!



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WHY UNTANGLED? WHY NOW?

Message from
Christophe Degryse
European Trade
Union Institute



Christophe Degryse
UNTANGLED
Advisory Board Member

Christophe is Senior Researcher and Head of the Foresight Unit at the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI). He serves on the UNTANGLED Advisory Board, whose mission is to mobilise best-available knowledge, ensuring that UNTANGLED responds to the key concerns of workers, business, policy-makers and society. Board members provide us with their expertise on the needs and problems that their stakeholder groups are currently facing, delivering advice and feedback on our ideas, pilot actions and project outcomes.

Why do we need yet another project to examine the future of work? After all, recent years have seen an explosion of research, reports and conferences on the subject. But due to its interdisciplinary approach to examining how the megatrends of technology, globalisation and demography interact with each other, and its commitment to stakeholder input, UNTANGLED genuinely offers a fresh approach to these issues. Technological transformation, advances in robotics, digitalisation/computerisation/automation and advances in artificial intelligence have been at the centre of discussions, both in the United States and in Europe, on the transformation of jobs, labour markets and business models, particularly with the emergence and development of the platform economy.

With a little hindsight, we can distinguish three epistemic communities among the main actors in these debates. The first is that of economists, engineers and experts in managerial economics. Very early on, they began to question the effects of technological transformation, particularly in terms of job creation, destruction and displacement. They opened up these debates, in which Frey and Osborne's alarmist 2013 study, announcing a technological threat to 47% of jobs in the United States, was a milestone. A second epistemic community was then formed, bringing together lawyers and specialists in labour and social security law, around the question of workers' status in this digital economy, in particular in new business models such as the platform economy. Workers who are self-employed but subordinated to the algorithms of digital platforms, micro-work, subcontracting; entrepreneurs who are still somehow controlled, disciplined or even sanctioned by these algorithms: the question has emerged of the status of these workers and, consequently, of their access to the various benefits of social security systems. Finally, a third epistemic community was formed around the question of the quality of jobs and the working conditions of these "new" workers, sometimes called gig or crowd workers, or "ghost workers", or "digital galley slaves". This was particularly the case for sociologists, but also for ergonomists and occupational health and safety experts.

Of course, this quick sketch of the evolution of the debates over the last few years is oversimplified, but it does help to set the scene. It could also be observed that these debates are rooted in a long historical tradition, since the question of job-killing robots is an old one (the Luddites, the Canuts), as is the question of worker status (home-based, piecework), and of course that of the quality of work – see in particular Georges Friedmann's *Le travail en miettes* (Work in crumbs), written as far back as 1956. But by focusing on technological developments, have other dimensions not been underestimated, such as the transformations of global value chains, the sometimes chaotic developments of globalisation, demographic evolutions, emigration, immigration, geographical and social mobilities? How do these dimensions, which are little explored in the debate on digitalisation, intertwine? And what transformations are they likely to accelerate or slow down? It is the combined effects of these different dimensions of labour markets that will be the focus of UNTANGLED's research questions, helping to broaden the discussion on the future of work and, one can hope, inform policy makers towards a fairer society and greater shared prosperity.

COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH TO TACKLE COMPLEX ISSUES

Message from
Monique Ramioul
KU Leuven



Prof. Dr Monique Ramioul
Project Coordinator

Monique teaches organisation sociology at KU Leuven and is Head of the Work Organisation and Social Dialogue Research Group at KU Leuven's Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA). Her research interests focus on organisational change and changes in work, including those related to globalisation and technological change, and their impact on job and employment quality, including job content, working conditions, occupational health and safety, and voice and representation.

Technological transformation, globalisation and demographic change are having profound effects on our labour markets, but none of them can be understood in isolation. Each of these trends acts on the others, in a mutually reinforcing cycle; it's only by looking at them holistically that we can hope to generate an effective policy response. That's why the European Commission has called for a robust scientific investigation of the interrelationship of these three trends and their combined impact on our labour markets. Such an approach is needed to develop more effective responses, which is exactly what we plan to deliver with UNTANGLED. And while the name of our project may suggest that we will delve into each of the three trends separately, in fact we will combine our knowledge of these trends and integrate our findings. From that perspective, UNTANGLED is above all a comprehensive and integrating research project.

First, UNTANGLED involves detailed analyses of the effects of globalisation, technological transformations and demographic change on all crucial factors that determine inequality: skills, employability, wage and income inequality, migration. Second, we will address these trends and their effects at all levels of interest: the macro level, in view of understanding how they change our societies and economies as a whole; the regional perspective, which will enable us to identify opportunities for action at the level where policymaking is most crucial to implementing change in an effective way; a sectoral approach that enables us to achieve a diversified understanding of how the three specific trends play out in different industries and what their specific needs and possible responses are; and finally the micro level, where we aim to achieve a real understanding of who are the winners and who risk being the losers of all these complex and interrelated developments, and how their impact varies according to age, gender, education level or firm size.

To jointly investigate technological transformations, globalisation and demographic changes from all these perspectives is the prerequisite for the two key objectives of UNTANGLED: to develop integrated, model-based scenarios for the next decades, overall and for various subpopulations, sectors and regions, and – on that basis – to contribute to evidence-based policy recommendations fostering shared prosperity and social inclusion. A third aspect of the comprehensive and integrating approach of UNTANGLED is that we work as an interdisciplinary team that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and adopts a cross-country perspective, not only covering the entire EU but also taking into account developments on other continents.

Finally, UNTANGLED is a comprehensive and integrating research project because right from the start we engage in extensive consultations and set up feedback loops with stakeholders. These systematic stakeholder consultations will not only complement but also validate the economic and institutional analyses of the research. They are essential to keeping our finger firmly on the pulse, and they will also help us develop concrete policy proposals. And to maximise UNTANGLED's impact, we will also disseminate our findings more broadly to stakeholders and the public. Last but not least we have an ambitious scientific publication agenda, to subject our findings to critical peer review and contribute to substantial scientific advancement within the domain of Horizon 2020 research.

GET TO KNOW US



RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR
WORK AND SOCIETY

KU Leuven in UNTANGLED

Within UNTANGLED, KU Leuven is leading three of the nine project areas: Project management and coordination (WP1), Framework and joint infrastructure (WP2) and Synthesis and policy (WP7).

KU Leuven's team in UNTANGLED

KU LEUVEN

KU Leuven's Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA) is a multidisciplinary research institute, giving it a unique position both within and outside the university. Its top priorities are scientific quality and societal relevance. HIVA conducts high-quality, innovative academic and policy-oriented research that delivers results for people and society and translates its findings into policy advice and tailored training.

Workers, socially vulnerable groups, social organisations and movements in society are the common themes of all the Institute's work, which emphasises concern for a caring, solidarity-based and sustainable society. By gathering scientific knowledge and applying it to socially relevant topics, HIVA works to ensure greater social justice, more participation and equal opportunities for all citizens. The European comparative perspective is an important framework in HIVA's analyses. The institute's interdisciplinary research applies a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including the development of concrete methodologies and instruments.

Expertise

HIVA carries out policy-oriented research and provides expert advice on opportunities for high-quality, long-term jobs and on how the policies applied by organisations, sectors and other actors affect those opportunities. Inequality of opportunity, and eliminating it through participation and social dialogue, form an important focus of interest. This research boasts a long tradition within HIVA, and the group is recognised for its participation in national and European research programmes and its strong relationships with social partners and other civil society actors.



Monique RAMIOUL
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Karolien LENAERTS
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GET TO KNOW US



Institute of Population and Labour Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

The **Chinese Academy of Social Sciences** (CASS), established in 1977, is the most comprehensive academic research centre in the People's Republic of China for almost all disciplines of social sciences. It is also one of the country's top think tanks, and has a university and a graduate school. The Institute of Population and Labour Economics (IPLE), affiliated with CASS, is one of China's top labour economics institutions. The IPLE has also been advancing collaboration between its faculties and international scholars in formats including joint research, exchange programmes and international conferences.

Expertise

Research areas at the IPLE include employment and wages, social security, labour relations, human resources and population ageing. In addition to publishing research papers in academic journals, many faculty members at IPLE have served as advisors to Chinese government ministries. The IPLE has also been leading two influential surveys in China: the China Urban Labour Survey (CULS) and China Employer-Employee Survey (CEES).

The IPLE in UNTANGLED

The IPLE's main contributions to UNTANGLED will come in two areas. As part of the project's macro-level analysis (WP3), the Institute will prepare a case study on China for Task 3.7, Challenges and opportunities from automation, labour supply and skills for the future of the global value chain. The IPLE will also be engaged in Meso-level analysis (WP4) in Task 4.5, which will be based on 13 case studies in three sectors, with the goal of gaining deeper insight into social partners', collective actors' and companies' perceptions of the impact of technological change.

The IPLE's team in UNTANGLED



Yang DU
Local project manager



Peng JIA
Researcher



Meiyan WANG
Researcher

WHAT'S NEW AT UNTANGLED



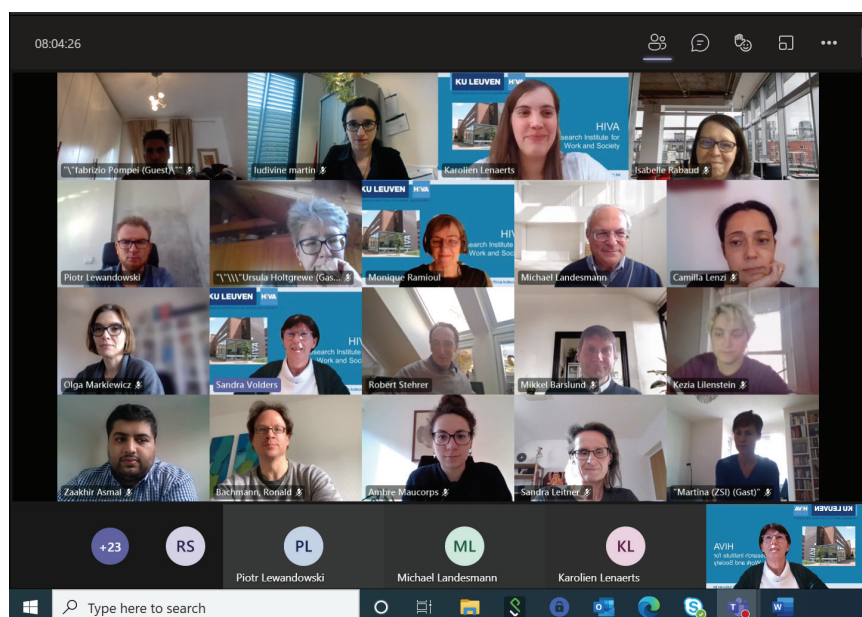
UNTANGLED launch meeting

On 21 April, all consortium partners met to officially launch UNTANGLED, setting out on our three-year mission to explore the effects of technological transformations, globalisation and demographic change on labour markets. In normal times the official inauguration of this Horizon2020 project would have taken place at KU Leuven, but due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions it was held online.

The meeting started with welcoming speeches from Geert Van Hootegeem, general director at KU Leuven's HIVA institute, which is leading UNTANGLED, and Project Coordinator Monique Ramioul. Kerstin Wilde, a project officer at European Commission Research Executive Agency, gave a brief but important presentation on the Agency's expectations, including how the project should be managed in areas such as relations with the Commission, periodic reporting, collaboration with other projects and impact. Nele Van Eesbeek of KU Leuven talked about the administrative, financial and legal aspects of UNTANGLED.

This was followed by two sessions devoted to work packages. The first featured presentations from the leaders of three work packages that affect all the others – WP2: Framework of joint infrastructure, WP8: Stakeholder engagement and WP9: Dissemination and Communication. After a break, it was time for presentations from the leaders of the three key research packages launched in the first project phase: WP3: Macro-level analysis, WP4: Meso-level analysis, and WP5: Micro-level analysis. Task leaders also talked about how they want to approach their research agendas in the coming months, and discussed how to organise and share responsibilities to provide the best possible results, on time.

All of us are looking forward to being able to hold our next meeting offline. In the meantime, we'll be sure to keep you posted on the next deliverables as they arise: webinars, papers and much more!





UNTANGLED is a three-year interdisciplinary Horizon 2020 research project that seeks to examine the interconnected trends of globalisation, demographic change and technological transformation, and their effects on labour markets in the European Union and beyond. By engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including companies and civil society organisations, we will develop practical policy proposals to help governments cushion the negative impacts of these trends and ensure their benefits are enjoyed fairly across regions and sectors.

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