SUMMARY

ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts Regional Webinar

VISIBILITY AND VALUE OF SKILLS IN ALGORITHMICALLY MANAGED WORK IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TÜRKİYE

12 May 2026, 10.00 – 12.00 CET

This regional webinar of the ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts explored the changing visibility and value of skills in algorithmically managed work across the Western Balkans and Türkiye. Against the backdrop of the growing use of algorithmic management in both digital labour platforms and traditional workplaces, the webinar examined how Artificial Intelligence (AI), ratings systems, automated monitoring and performance metrics are reshaping the way workers' skills are defined, evaluated and rewarded. Particular attention was given to the implications of these developments for skills development systems, labour market inequalities, reskilling strategies and policy responses in increasingly data driven labour markets. The discussions also addressed the risks associated with algorithmic management, including the weakening role of formal qualifications, fragmented learning pathways and the growing transfer of power over skills signalling from workers to digital platforms and employers.

Cristiana Burzio (ETF) opened the webinar by welcoming participants to the first regional webinar of the ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts in 2026, dedicated to the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The regional webinars series is designed to address themes identified by members as particularly relevant to their regional contexts. She introduced the Network as a growing international platform bringing together nearly 900 researchers and experts working on skills demand, skills anticipation and future skills trends across ETF partner countries, European Union (EU) Member States and beyond. Burzio is highlighted the increasing importance of understanding how algorithmically managed work is reshaping the visibility, valuation and development of workers' skills in both digital labour platforms and traditional employment settings. She noted that the webinar aims at examining how algorithmic systems influence the way workers' skills are defined, measured and rewarded through ratings systems, automated monitoring and performance metrics, while also exploring implications for skills development and policy responses. Burzio then introduced the webinar agenda, which combines ETF research insights with country perspectives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and regional initiatives across the Western Balkans.

The first speaker, Mirela Gavoci (ETF), presented the main findings of the ETF's research on platform work and new forms of work conducted between 2021 and 2024 across ETF partner countries, including the Western Balkans. She began by clarifying the concept fo "new forms of work" and the distinction between platform work and non platfrom work, emphasising that platform work is specifically characterised by the role of digital labour platforms as intermediaries managing access to work, payments, ratings and aspects of work organisation itself. Gavoci explained that the ETF research combined desk research, automated web scraping from major online labour platforms, stakeholder interviews and focus groups with platform workers in order to capture both statistical trends and workers' lived experiences. Referring to ETF research on Platform Work and New Forms of Work, she highlighted that platform work has become an increasingly important component of labour markets across ETF partner countries, particularly in Serbia and North Macedonia within the Western Balkans. The research showed that platform work is often attractive because of flexibility, opportunities for additional income and possibilities for skills development, especially for online platform workers participating in global

labour markets. At the same time, platform workers frequently face unstable incomes, limited labour protections, weak social security coverage and uncertain long-term career prospects, particularly in on-location platform work such as ride hailing and delivery services.

Gavoci then examined how platform work reshapes skills development, visibility and recognition. She explained that online platform workers generally possess higher educational attainment and require not only technical expertise but also advanced digital, communication, entrepreneurial and self-management skills, alongside foreign language proficiency. However, skills development in platform work often occurs through self-learning rather than formal education and training systems, raising important questions about lifelong learning, certification and recognition of skills acquired outside traditional pathways. By contrast, many on-location platform workers are overqualified for the tasks they perform and face risks of deskilling due to limited opportunities for professional development. The presentation also highlighted broader opportunities associated with platform work, including labour market integration for youth and women, access to global markets and the potential to reduce migration pressures by allowing workers to access international employment opportunities remotely. At the same time, Gavoci stressed growing concerns related to global competition, unequal digital infrastructure, irregular income, insufficient regulation and algorithmic management systems that increasingly shape workers' visibility and access to opportunities through ratings, task allocation and performance monitoring. Concluding the presentation, she introduced the ETF's updated 2026 research methodology currently being implemented in Ukraine, which incorporates survey based evidence and new questions specifically examining algorithmic management, platform reputation systems and the digital visibility of skills in platform work.

During the Q&A session, participants reflected on how rapidly platform work and algorithmic management are evolving across different national contexts and discussed the growing complexity of defining and regulating these forms of work. The discussion highlighted emerging trends in on-location platform work, including cases where platform-based activities are increasingly functioning as small scale entrepreneurial models involving the management of multiple workers and assets. Participants also explored the distinctions between platform work, gig work and digitally enabled freelancing, emphasising that the defining feature of platform work remains the role of digital labour platforms as intermediaries organising access and part of work management itself.. Particular attention was given to the growing influence of algorithmic management systems on workers' visibility, ratings and access to opportunities. The exchange underlined that while algorithmic systems can improve efficiency and matching processes, they may also reinforce inequalities by prioritising lower costs, controlling reputational visibility and limiting workers' autonomy despite the presence of adequate skills. Participants further noted that these developments are evolving much faster than existing policy and research frameworks, making continuous evidence gathering and country specific analysis increasingly important.

The second speaker, **Elvisa Drishti (University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania)**, examined how algorithmic management is transforming the visibility and value of skills in Albania's labour market by increasingly converting skills into measurable data such as ratings, scores and performance metrics. Framing her presentation around what she described as Albania's "labour market paradox", she noted that the country simultaneously experiences labour shortages, high youth unemployment, persistent informality and growing outward migration despite rising educational attainment. Drawing on the World Bank Spring 2026 Regional Economic Report, Drishti argued that traditional systems based on diplomas, qualifications and occupational standards are increasingly failing to connect workers with employment opportunities. In this context, algorithmic matching systems are stepping into the gap by relying on continuous performance data rather than formal credentials to evaluate workers and allocate opportunities. She contrasted traditional "credentialed" labour market matching with algorithmic matching systems based on ratings, reputation scores and real-time productivity indicators, arguing that while algorithmic systems reduce search costs and improve labour market efficiency, the criteria used to evaluate workers are determined unilaterally by platforms and employers rather than through transparent or negotiated processes.

Drishti then illustrated how these dynamics operate across three areas of the Albanian labour market: platform work, business process outsourcing (BPO) and call centres, and public administration. In

platform work, she explained that workers' visibility and access to future employment increasingly depend on customer ratings, acceptance rates and algorithmic reputation systems that workers themselves do not control or own. Referring to labour market evidence and platform work data presented during the webinar, she noted that female Albanian freelancers continue to earn significantly less than men and highlighted growing worker demands for transparency regarding how platforms calculate payments and assign tasks. In BPO and call centre work, she discussed examples of webcam monitoring and data surveillance practices that transformed skills evaluation into forms of behavioural compliance monitored continuously through digital systems. Meanwhile, in public administration, algorithmic tools used in labour inspections and public procurement increasingly redefine professional judgement by positioning workers' expertise as secondary to automated decision systems. Synthesising these developments, Drishti argued that skills are becoming increasingly dynamic, reputational, non-portable and opaque, while existing vocational education and training (VET) systems remain poorly equipped to respond to platform mediated and algorithmically managed forms of work. She concluded by stressing that policymakers face a dual challenge: regulating algorithmic systems and ensuring transparency in highly digitalised sectors, while simultaneously rebuilding matching systems for workers who remain excluded from these rapidly evolving digital labour markets.

The third speaker, **Nermin Oruc (Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research – CREDI, Bosnia and Herzegovina)**, explored how Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management are reshaping access to entry level employment opportunities for young people. Rather than focusing directly on platform work itself, Oruc examined how the growing use of AI across labour markets is transforming traditional pathways through which young workers acquire practical skills and professional experience. He argued that entry level positions have historically played a crucial role not only as employment opportunities but also as spaces where young workers learn workplace norms, gain experience, make mistakes in lower risk environments and gradually build professional judgement. However, with the increasing use of AI to automate repetitive and administrative tasks, many of these positions are now under pressure or disappearing entirely. Oruc stressed that AI is not replacing senior managerial roles to the same extent, but is disproportionately affecting entry level positions traditionally occupied by younger workers. This creates what he described as a "skills paradox", whereby young people need work experience to develop advanced skills, while simultaneously facing shrinking opportunities to access the labour market in the first place.

Oruc then reflected on the policy implications of these developments, arguing that education and employment systems must adapt rapidly to ensure that young workers remain competitive not against AI itself, but as advanced users capable of supervising, validating and complementing AI generated outputs. He stressed that education systems across the region still insufficiently integrate AI related competences and that future employability increasingly depends on higher order cognitive and transversal skills such as critical judgement, validation, problem solving and advanced digital literacy. In this context, he argued that repetitive tasks previously used as learning opportunities are increasingly automated, making it necessary to redesign both education systems and employment support programmes for young people. He particularly emphasised the need to shift labour market policies away from predominantly subsidy based employment support towards programmes focused on training, reskilling and AI related competences. Finally, Oruc highlighted the importance of employers taking a longer term perspective on workforce development by investing in young people's skills rather than focusing exclusively on short term efficiency gains through automation. He concluded that the central challenge for policymakers is ensuring that AI becomes a tool that empowers young workers rather than one that excludes them from opportunities to enter and progress within the labour market.

In the Q&A session, participants explored how platform based reputation systems and algorithmically generated skills data could become more transparent, portable and formally recognised beyond individual digital platforms. The discussion highlighted the possibility of integrating platform reputation, ratings and performance data into vocational education and training (VET) systems through micro credentials, certification schemes and public employment services, allowing workers to retain evidence of their skills and professional trajectories when moving between jobs or platforms. Participants also reflected on the growing importance of unions and collective representation in platform work, noting that many traditional forms of labour organisation remain poorly adapted to algorithmically managed forms

of employment. Examples from Albania illustrated how platform workers increasingly demand transparency not only regarding wages and working conditions but also regarding the functioning of algorithms, payment calculations and data driven management systems. The discussion further addressed the need for broader systemic policy responses, including strengthening Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy within education systems, redesigning active labour market programmes and adapting labour regulations to formally recognise platform workers and protect their rights in increasingly digitalised labour markets.

The fourth speaker, **Majlinda Rizvanolli Bajraktari (Matching Skills to Jobs Project, Kosovo),** presented reflections from the Swiss funded "Matching Skills to Jobs" project, which seeks to strengthen vocational education and training (VET) governance while simultaneously supporting private sector driven skills development solutions in Kosovo. She explained that the project operates through two complementary components: one focused on supporting formal VET governance and policymaking, and another working directly with companies to develop flexible, industry led responses to rapidly evolving labour market needs. Bajraktari argued that labour markets are increasingly shaped by digital tools, platform based work organisation and data driven performance management systems, making traditional understandings of "matching skills to jobs" significantly more complex than simple alignment between qualifications and occupations. Drawing on the project's first year of implementation, she noted that employers increasingly prioritise digital literacy, adaptability, communication, problem solving and operational flexibility over formal qualifications alone, as skills demands evolve much faster than formal curricula and occupational standards can adapt. She also stressed that one of the major challenges facing the Kosovo labour market is making skills more visible and understandable to employers, particularly in increasingly digitalised and performance driven labour market environments.

Bajraktari then illustrated these dynamics through the example of Ascendio, a locally developed digital platform supported through the project and designed for the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector. The platform monitors employees' performance during daily work activities and uses these observations to recommend personalised training modules aimed at addressing identified skills gaps. She explained that the platform generated contrasting reactions among stakeholders during its launch in Kosovo. While company managers viewed it as an innovative tool capable of improving workforce development and supporting middle management decision making, many freelancers and workers expressed concern that algorithmic monitoring systems could expose weaknesses in their performance and potentially increase risks of dismissal. These discussions reflected wider anxieties surrounding algorithmic management and workplace surveillance previously raised throughout the webinar. Reflecting on these developments, Bajraktari argued that policymakers and education providers must move towards more agile and responsive skills systems capable of adapting rapidly to changing labour market realities. She concluded by emphasising the need for stronger employer engagement, expanded non formal training opportunities, improved labour market intelligence and greater focus on transferable skills such as digital literacy, adaptability and communication in order to ensure that skills systems can respond effectively to continuously evolving forms of work.

The fifth speaker, **Sandra Brkanovic (Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe – ERI SEE)**, presented a regional perspective on how education and skills systems across the Western Balkans are responding to algorithmically managed work and rapidly changing labour market expectations. Introducing ERI SEE as an intergovernmental organisation supporting regional cooperation in education and training, she explained that the organisation works closely with ministries, vocational education and training (VET) agencies, qualification authorities, chambers of commerce and teacher training institutions across the region. Brkanovic outlined ERI SEE's work on the development of regionally aligned occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula and lifelong learning initiatives across sectors including construction, tourism, agriculture, logistics, mechatronics and digitally connected industries. Reflecting on lessons learned from regional cooperation, she emphasised that labour markets across the Western Balkans increasingly demand similar combinations of competences that combine technical knowledge with digital, transversal and adaptive skills. She argued that while algorithmically managed work and digital systems can improve efficiency, coordination and information processing, they also create growing concerns related to reduced worker autonomy, intensified performance monitoring and the increasing reduction of skills to measurable indicators and data points.

Brkanovic stressed that education systems are already operating within an ongoing digital transformation and therefore need to respond much faster to changing labour market realities. Drawing on ERI SEE's experience in developing regional occupational and qualification standards, she highlighted the importance of embedding broader competences into education systems alongside technical skills, including digital competences, communication, teamwork, adaptability and the eight key competences for lifelong learning promoted at European level. However, she argued that the greatest challenge is no longer the development of standards themselves, but their implementation in practice. In particular, she underlined the urgent need to invest in teachers' continuous professional development, noting that many educators completed their own training before the emergence of the technological transformations currently reshaping labour markets and education systems. Brkanovic also emphasised the growing importance of lifelong learning, modular learning pathways, micro credentials and the recognition of competences acquired through non formal and informal learning. Concluding her presentation, she stressed that regional cooperation remains essential because labour markets across the Western Balkans are deeply interconnected and face many shared challenges linked to digitalisation and algorithmically managed work. She argued that education systems should not simply adapt passively to algorithms, but should preserve a broader understanding of skills, competences and human development while strengthening implementation capacity and regional cooperation.

During the final Q&A session, participants reflected on how vocational education and training (VET) systems across the Western Balkans can remain relevant in rapidly changing labour markets shaped by digitalisation and algorithmic management. The discussion highlighted the importance of regional cooperation, exchange of experiences and joint development of solutions to shared labour market challenges, with participants stressing that interconnected regional approaches can help education systems respond more effectively to emerging forms of work and skills requirements. Particular attention was given to the need for more flexible and pragmatic VET systems capable of adapting more quickly to labour market changes. Participants noted that formal education systems are often slowed by complex bureaucratic procedures and lengthy processes for updating occupational standards and qualifications, which can discourage employer participation and limit responsiveness to rapidly evolving skills needs. The discussion also underlined the growing importance of non formal learning, micro credentials, reskilling and upskilling opportunities as mechanisms that allow faster adaptation to technological and labour market transformations. The session concluded with a shared recognition that the webinar had opened many important questions regarding the future relationship between formal and non formal education systems, digital labour markets and algorithmically managed work, while also reinforcing the need for continued regional dialogue and cooperation on these issues.

In her closing remarks, **Cristiana Burzio (ETF)** thanked the speakers, moderator and participants for what she described as a highly thought provoking and inspiring discussion on the growing impact of algorithmic management and Artificial Intelligence (AI) on skills systems and labour markets. Reflecting on the discussions throughout the session, she noted that algorithmic systems increasingly shape not only skills development and skills measurement, but also workers' visibility and access to opportunities, shifting influence and control towards employers and digital platforms. Burzio highlighted the multiple challenges raised during the webinar, including the growing pressure placed on formal education systems that often remain too closely linked to traditional occupations and struggle to keep pace with rapidly changing labour market realities. While acknowledging that no single solution currently exists, she emphasised the importance of more flexible learning pathways, lifelong learning, non formal and informal learning opportunities and the increased use of micro credentials as possible directions for future policy development. She concluded by encouraging participants to continue exchanging ideas through the ETF Skills Lab Network LinkedIn group and informed them that all webinar materials, recordings and the webinar summary would be made availableon the ETF Open Space platform.

Resources

All presentations and materials presented at the event can be found at:

https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/events/regional-webinar-visibility-and-value-skills-algorithmically-managed-work-western-balkans

New forms of work and platform in Central Asia:

https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/new-forms-work-and-platform-work-central-asia

The impact of AI on labour markets:

https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/impact-ai-labour-markets

Digital monitoring, algorithmic management and the platformisation of work in the EU:

https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC144330

Algorithmic management in the workplace:

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/algorithmic-management-in-the-workplace_287c13c4-en.html