

# WORK AND NON-WORK, TODAY

Reframing the Issue through  
an Interdisciplinary Perspective

International Conference  
**XV Edition**

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**



**Bergamo (Italy) | 26-28 November 2025**  
Venue: **Centro Congressi Giovanni XXIII**  
Viale Papa Giovanni XXIII 106, Bergamo

In collaboration with



The concept of work, and what we call 'non-work', is constantly evolving, making it difficult to define the boundaries between its many forms – formal, informal, productive, reproductive, voluntary, and free. Reality often goes beyond rigid theoretical categories, highlighting the importance of analysing the role of institutions and intermediary bodies in regulating and defining these spaces, which are essential for understanding the ongoing transformations. This theme will be the focus of the international conference *WORK and NON-WORK, TODAY: Reframing the Issue through an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, organised by ADAPT's International School of Higher Education in Industrial and Labour Relations and now in its 15th edition. The event aims to foster an open dialogue between the academic world and often marginalised operational realities, reflecting on work in all its facets. In this context, topics ranging from care and domestic work to voluntary and free labour – including internships and informal sectors such as entertainment, sport, and sex work – will be addressed. Additionally, critical issues related to poor, temporary, hazardous, and precarious work will be examined. The aim is to offer a vision capable of overcoming the rigid contrasts between what is considered work today and what is not, adopting an international, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach. To guide the discussion and stimulate debate, several research tracks have been identified, each dedicated to a specific aspect of the relationship between work and non-work. Below is the list of topics proposed for this Call for Abstracts.

### **Track 1 – Work and Non-Work in the Current Labour Market**

Labour market transformations are redefining the boundaries between what is considered work and what is not. The emergence of new types of employment, temporary work, low-hour occupations, and the proliferation of atypical forms of work are fragmenting the traditional concept of work. In recent decades, non-standard forms of work – from part-time and on-call work to collaborations via digital platforms – have multiplied, driven by demographic changes, technological innovations, and new regulations. These changes, on the one hand, facilitate entry into the labour market, but also pose challenges in terms of stability, rights, and economic sustainability. At the same time, Western labour markets are facing a crisis on the labour supply side, driven by demographic dynamics and

intensifying voluntary resignation flows. This scenario is forcing companies to completely reconsider their personnel management strategies, with a particular focus on retention practices. In this context of profound transformation, characterised by the diffusion of non-standard work and the increasing tensions observed in the labour market, interdisciplinary contributions are invited, revolving around the following questions: How are companies' strategies for retaining and attracting workers changing in a market with a high vacancy rate? What are the implications of new forms of work on the quality of employment? How are labour market institutions and actors adapting their rules and policies to respond to the evolution of (new) forms of work?

## **Track 2 – Work and its Rules**

Questioning the notions of work, non-work, and their transformations from a labour law perspective means returning to the fundamentals of labour law and analysing what constitutes work within the scope of relevant regulations. As is well known, this branch of law was created to address the need to regulate a specific phenomenon that emerged during the Industrial Revolution and involves the inclusion of labour activity within a productive organisation managed by an employer. In some legal systems, the legal relationship that frames this situation is identified by the notion of subordination, while in others, it is defined by the two main reference figures – employee and employer – with their respective prerogatives and rights. This gives rise to a scope of application of labour law that corresponds to subordinate or dependent employment. This original approach has been discussed and redefined for decades. This research track aims to host reflections on the evolutions affecting different (national and supranational) systems concerning work relevant to the application of labour law regulations and protections. What are the paths of expansion for national or supranational regulations towards different work modes (e.g., self-employed, parasubordinate, micro-entrepreneurial)? Are there processes to redefine the notion of dependent/subordinate work? Furthermore, what developments have emerged concerning the boundaries of legally relevant work, particularly in relation to activities that have traditionally been excluded from the protective scope of labour law (e.g., voluntary work,

informal work, reproductive work, work in training stages, such as apprenticeships)?

Connected to this track are also insights regarding what can and cannot be the subject of an employment contract – that is, the constraints concerning activities that, in some legal systems, cannot lawfully be the subject of an employment contract, whereas, in others, they are permitted with specific protection techniques. Therefore, another key research question is: what is the legal framework surrounding the activities of sex workers, particularly in light of new modes of performance associated with new technologies?

### **Track 3 – Work and Non-Work in Contractual Dynamics**

The transformations of work that have taken place over the last two to three decades, driven by the digital transition and beyond, when analysed from a labour law perspective, raise numerous questions about the boundaries between work and non-work within the contractual dynamics of individual employment relationships. The proliferation of so-called 'atypical' employment relationships, characterised by marked fragmentation in terms of time and space, has led to many uncertainties – even among experts in the field – regarding which activities can be considered 'work' and which cannot. Consequently, this raises questions about which activities fall within, and which should be placed 'outside', the scope of national and European Union regulations on working hours, remuneration, health and safety, and other fundamental issues related to labour law. This track aims to stimulate discussion on the issues outlined above, welcoming contributions that delve into some fundamental aspects of the boundaries between work and non-work within contractual dynamics, and seek to provide answers to the following questions: Investigating the temporal limits of the employment relationship, how has the notion of work (and non-work) evolved for the purposes of applying European/national working time legislation (including those on the right to disconnect), in light of the changes in the organisational models of companies? The subject of working time can also be explored by focusing on the porosity between working time and non-working time post-digital transition: under what conditions can this be considered an advantage for workers, and when, conversely, does it represent a disadvantage? What are the legal and organisational

perspectives for managing this phenomenon? Finally, the porosity between private life and work services, which today can often be carried out anywhere and at any time, makes the boundaries between activities relevant to the employment relationship – and thus, susceptible to economic compensation – and those of a purely personal nature (e.g., activities on social media) uncertain: which services within the employment relationship constitute remunerable activities, and which must instead be considered non-remunerable? What are the current and future perspectives on this issue, particularly in the context of the minimum wage directive?

#### **Track 4 – Care Work: Free Provision and the Services Market**

For several years now, we have been observing a demographic transition, with, on the one hand, an increase in the average age of the population, at least at the European level, and, on the other, a significant decline in birth rates. These phenomena make it necessary to bring the issue of care work to the forefront of public, political, and scientific debate, in order to understand both how to meet the needs of an increasingly elderly population and how to encourage birth rates without penalising women, as has long been the case (the reference is also to the historic undervaluation of care work, traditionally done predominantly by women, and the implications this has had for many low-paid care workers). Currently, one of the main obstacles to the social and economic valorisation of care work is recognised in the absence of a clear and shared definition of the perimeter and characteristics of this work, both at national and supranational levels. This track aims to broadly examine care work as the set of activities and relationships designed to meet the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of adults and children, the elderly and the young, the frail and the able-bodied, in line with the definition provided by the International Labour Organisation in 2018. By adopting this perspective, we simultaneously take a critical look at the systematic mixing, both conceptual and substantive, of unpaid and paid work, and the consequences this overlap continues to produce in terms of recognising the value of care work. Contributions are invited to address the following questions: What is the perimeter of care work, and what parameters are useful in identifying it? What, if any, are the differences between paid and unpaid care work? Is remuneration the only useful variable to define the boundary between work and non-work in the



specific context of care work? Furthermore, what is the relationship between the economic and social valorisation of care work? Can the category of 'reproductive' still be suitable for describing activities embedded within a market context? Is there a correlation between the naturalisation of care tasks, the valorisation of care work, and rates of irregularity?

## **Track 5 - Work and Non-Work: The Role for Industrial Relations**

The history of industrial relations is closely linked to the history of capitalism, emerging particularly in the United States in the early decades of the 20th century to preserve the market economy through the imposition of curbs and remedies to the main 'labour problems'. The original focus of industrial relations was, therefore, the employment relationship, around which labour legislation, trade unions, and collective bargaining were built, providing the main guarantees for market stability. However, for decades, there has been talk of a crisis of legitimacy for these actors and institutions, challenged by phenomena such as production fragmentation, labour market segmentation, and the proliferation of new international power centres. While these processes undermine industrial relations, starting from their ability to balance traditional labour markets in the context of growing fractures in the relationship between worker and employer, the emergence of new sectors and markets further challenges the status quo. It exacerbates the crisis of the theoretical and institutional categories on which labour protection was founded in the 20th century (e.g., legal subordination, the division between productive and reproductive labour, the opposition between the interests of the employer and the employee). The exit of certain domestic and care activities from the family sphere and their entry into the wage labour market, for example, requires that the actors of industrial relations also recognise the economic value of social reproduction. Moreover, it is in frontier areas like these that gender identity, ethnicity, and more broadly intersectionality often acquire relevance, mediating relations between capital and labour. At the same time, sectors with high intellectual content, such as the creative and cultural industries, are prompting representation to rethink its organisational logic, beyond the mere contraposition of interests, towards constructing and protecting a professional identity. This track aims to stimulate reflections on the role of industrial relations in the face of transformations that test the inclusiveness of traditional markets – with the emergence of poor and discontinuous

labour – and new areas of salaried work that subvert the pillars of the old social contract (as in the case of creative, sexual, sporting, and care work). How are the traditional actors (governments, representative associations) responding, and what are their adaptation strategies? What new solutions are emerging outside the institutional perimeters (e.g., direct participation and forms of workers' self-organisation)? How can industrial relations be rethought as a political and intellectual project so that decent conditions are guaranteed for those working at the frontiers of labour? We therefore encourage the submission of contributions that address these issues through theoretical and empirical analyses, national and international case studies, identifying innovative perspectives for the future of industrial relations.

## **Track 6 - Collective Bargaining between Transformation and Discontinuity: Comparative Perspectives**

Collective bargaining remains a cornerstone of labour regulation, but economic and social transformations are redefining its role and functioning. Production fragmentation, atypical work, and supranational influence challenge its ability to guarantee protection and regulate the labour market. A central issue concerns the extension of the effectiveness of collective agreements. In some countries, coverage remains high thanks to established regulatory instruments, while in others, deregulation has reduced access to protections. *Erga omnes*, legislative intervention, and the role of bilateral bodies are key factors in the resilience of the bargaining system.

The relationship between the different levels of bargaining affects the balance between flexibility and guarantees. The growing importance of company bargaining alters traditional dynamics, making multi-level regulation essential in some contexts and marginal in others. The content of bargaining also evolves, addressing issues such as minimum wage, working hours, welfare, and new topics like artificial intelligence and sustainability. Digitalisation and the environmental transition are redefining bargaining priorities, pushing towards new forms of protection. Finally, the transparency and accessibility of collective bargaining are crucial for monitoring the evolution of practices and evaluating their effectiveness. The systematisation of agreements affects the capacity for analysis and knowledge of labour rules.

By encouraging the sharing of interdisciplinary and comparative studies examining the role of bargaining in labour transformations, this research track seeks to collect contributions aimed at answering, for example, the following questions: How are national models of collective bargaining evolving, and what factors influence their transformations? What strategies are being adopted to extend the effectiveness of collective agreements, and what are the consequences of these mechanisms on the labour market? How are globalisation and digitalisation changing the dynamics of negotiations and the content of bargaining, with a focus on wages, welfare, and sustainability?

### **Track 7 - Health Protection at Work and Beyond: Safety, Psychosocial Risks, and New Forms of Social Protection**

In recent years, particularly after the pandemic, the focus on the health and safety of workers—especially in Europe, though not exclusively—has increased significantly. This phenomenon is further amplified by demographic trends in many countries, which show a progressive ageing of the workforce and an increasing incidence of chronic diseases. However, the concept of occupational health can no longer be limited solely to the prevention of accidents or physical illnesses. There is a growing need to consider mental health and psychosocial risks, which represent one of the main challenges in the contemporary world of work. The issue of worker protection is therefore becoming more pressing, and there remains ample scope for intervention by both the state and social partners. On the one hand, a sharp divide between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' persists: while workers with regular contracts benefit from a well-defined system of protections in the event of illness or accident, informal workers—primarily caregivers—are often excluded from these protections. On the other hand, even for employees, the traditional approach to sickness protection remains anchored in a rigid 'work/non-work' dichotomy, where the main (if not only) measure of protection is the suspension of work. This approach, though necessary, is insufficient to meet the needs of workers with chronic illnesses or disabilities, who experience continuous transitions between care time and work time. These often fragmented and unstable pathways not only entail economic risks but also have significant psychological and social repercussions. The stress of precariousness, the risk of isolation, burnout, and anxiety related to job continuity are just some of the emerging issues that



call for a rethinking of welfare policies and psychosocial risk prevention strategies. The objective of this research outline is to prompt reflections on how to ensure greater equity in work protections by broadening the concept of health and safety. This should encompass both objective aspects (types of illness, prevention tools, and support measures) and subjective aspects (including informal workers and addressing mental health and psychological wellbeing needs). In light of these elements, the following questions arise: What solutions can public policies adopt to extend protection to informal workers? How can social actors—trade unions, professional associations, and third-sector bodies—intervene to improve the situation? How do the ageing workforce and the rise in chronic diseases affect mental health and wellbeing at work? What tools can be introduced to prevent psychosocial risks and ensure adequate support for those in vulnerable conditions?

## **Track 8 - The Role of Social Partners in Promoting Equal Opportunities Inside and Outside the Labour Market**

In recent decades, both globally and particularly in the most economically advanced countries, the boundary between the working and non-working spheres has become increasingly blurred, with significant repercussions on individual and collective wellbeing. The transformations of the labour market, the growing demand for flexibility, and the evolution of employment forms have made the need to balance time and responsibilities in different areas of life ever more pressing, without creating new forms of inequality or exclusion.

In this context, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies have emerged as essential tools to ensure access and full participation in employment and social life for traditionally disadvantaged groups, including women, people with disabilities, older workers, young people, foreigners, parents, and carers. However, the actual impact of these policies depends on the ability of institutions and social partners to integrate them into broader labour regulation strategies, so they do not result in piecemeal measures or be limited to individual companies. In this regard, the role of collective bargaining and industrial relations is crucial. In some contexts, companies and trade unions are experimenting with new tools to reconcile work and private life, enhance differences, and reduce barriers to inclusion—both within companies and in the broader

economic and social fabric. In other cases, however, structural and cultural obstacles persist, making it difficult to overcome old inequalities and adapt to new challenges. This track aims to investigate the role of social partners and institutions in promoting equal opportunities inside and outside the labour market, with particular attention to the implications of ongoing transformations. Key research questions include: What role do social partners play in shaping inclusion and equal opportunities policies in an increasingly fragmented labour market? How does their work intersect with different national, regional, and local legislation, and how does this influence the effectiveness of DEI policies? How are collective bargaining and company initiatives responding to new challenges related to work flexibility, discontinuous work, and work-life balance? Which tools and strategies have proven most effective in promoting the labour inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups? The aim is to stimulate a critical discussion on how to guarantee equal opportunities in a continuously transforming world of work, moving beyond a purely normative approach to analyse the real dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in various productive and social contexts.

### **Track 9 – Work and Non-Work: The Question of Skills Formation**

In the debate on the meaning of 'work' and 'non-work,' vocational training and its pathways (including apprenticeships, traineeships, and dual pathways in general) emerge as one of the paradigmatic spaces in which this dichotomy is constantly negotiated and redefined. Far from being merely transitional phases towards employment, these pathways represent real laboratories in which skills, professional identities, and relationships with the world of work are developed. Their hybrid nature raises questions about the increasingly porous boundary between what we traditionally define as 'training' and what we consider 'work.' Dual apprenticeships, in particular, highlight this ambivalence: apprentices are both workers and students, producers of value and trainees inserted in pathways often characterised by companies playing a leading role in the development of young people's skills. This intermediate condition prompts reflections on the economic and symbolic value of acquired skills, the relationship between working time and learning time, and the role of institutions in organising, legitimising, and encouraging these hybrid forms of labour market participation. At the same time, vocational training challenges the idea that skill acquisition is an activity confined to the formal spaces of education, separate from work,

demonstrating how "savoir-faire" is built through a continuous interweaving of practical experience and theoretical reflection. Vocational training and its pathways can thus be understood as institutions through which the "tension" between work and non-work is experienced, raising questions about the meaning of skills, the value of training time, and the role of training in the construction of professional and personal identities. This research outline encourages contributions aimed at answering the following questions: How is the boundary between training and work in learning pathways being redefined, and with what criteria and tools? What value do competences acquired in vocational training courses hold, and how are they recognised in the labour market? Conversely, how is the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts facilitated? How does the blurring of the boundary between training and work impact the possibility of providing remuneration for participants in 'dual' pathways (e.g. internships, apprenticeships)? What safeguards can be introduced for those attending learning pathways with a work-based component realised in working contexts?

### **Track 10 – From Work to Quality Work: Changes and New Skills**

In recent years, the employment debate has increasingly shifted from the mere quantity of available employment to the quality of work itself. The International Labour Organisation has long promoted the concept of decent work. Similarly, the European Union has placed the concept of quality jobs at the centre of its agenda, recognising that decent employment must guarantee not only adequate income but also stability, social security, opportunities for professional growth, and a fair work-life balance. In line with this emphasis, the European Commission assigned its Vice-President the delegations on social rights, skills, quality jobs, and preparation for future challenges, aiming to promote policies that improve working conditions and reduce inequalities. The European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirms the right to fair and inclusive working conditions, stressing the key role of training and lifelong learning. However, ongoing transformations are redefining what it means to work and the characteristics of quality work. Digitalisation, the ecological transition, the hybridisation of employment and self-employment, and the rise of new contractual forms are fragmenting career paths and widening the gap between traditional protections and contemporary employment realities. In this context, the quality of work

depends on multiple factors: from contractual conditions and wages to health and safety protection, from organisational well-being to opportunities for professional development and growth. Skills play a crucial role in these factors. The growing mismatch between demand and supply of skills contributes to phenomena such as the working poor and labour market polarisation, limiting social mobility and increasing the risk of exclusion. While improving skills is essential, it alone is not enough: without adequate policies and new protection models, the risk is an increasingly fragmented and vulnerable workforce. This track invites reflection on how to ensure not just more work, but better work, exploring questions such as: How are the parameters defining decent and sustainable employment changing? What role do training, retraining, and lifelong learning play in improving the quality of employment? How are European and international policies addressing the issue of quality jobs? Interdisciplinary contributions are encouraged that explore the issue of quality jobs from various perspectives (economic, sociological, pedagogical, legal), combining theoretical analyses, case studies, and public policy insights at national and international levels.

## **Track II – Reimagining the Relationship Between Work, Life, and Identity: Media Representations and Perspectives of New Generations**

Over the past thirty years, various movements and narratives have emerged in different parts of the world, questioning the traditional role of work in people's lives. Since the 1910s in the United States, there has been a revival of frugalist philosophies, which gained momentum in the early 1990s with the idea of 'retiring early' (FIRE: Financial Independence, Retire Early). In China, there is a reaction against overwork in the so-called Chinese '996 culture' (the 9 am–9 pm, six days a week working schedule) and the related 'Tang Ping' ('lying down on the floor') phenomenon.

Across both the East and the West, some influencers are promoting resignation, and in the months following the Covid-19 pandemic, this trend gained traction under the hashtag #Quittok. More broadly, the phenomenon known as 'the great resignation' has emerged, marked by workers' interest in flexible organisational forms (e.g. smart working, shorter weeks) and rejection of middle management positions (the so-called 'conscious

unbossing'). In response to these phenomena, which are united by a shift in perspective where success and career are no longer exclusively associated with income and prestige, the following research questions arise: What role do social media, blogs, video platforms, and influencers play in promoting visions that prioritise free time, organisational freedom, and personal well-being? How do labour policies and industrial relations respond to demands for flexibility and work-life balance? Is a 'right to decide' how many hours to work, in what forms, and with what guarantees conceivable? What generational differences are observable regarding the value of work? What socio-economic consequences might the reduction of work in an economy still based on competitiveness and productivity have in the long run? This research track seeks to explore the languages, digital platforms, and narrative strategies that fuel new work and non-work scenarios, examining company management strategies, legislative and negotiation developments (including those on the right to disconnect), and the psychological dimensions of the desire for personal freedom, alongside the need for long-term economic and social sustainability.

## **DEADLINES**

- Abstracts can be submitted between **3 March** and **18 May 2025**
- Notifications of selection will be communicated by **13 June 2025**
- Confirmation of attendance at the conference must be received by **31 July 2025**
- Full papers for Authors whose contributions have been accepted and who are interested in publication must be submitted by **31 October 2025**

## **GUIDELINES FOR SENDING ABSTRACTS AND WORKSHOP PROPOSALS**

Abstracts and workshop proposals must be submitted via the [Submission Portal](#), which also contains detailed submission instructions. The collection of selected abstracts will be published, accepted proposals will be published in the **Book of Abstracts** on the official event website.

## SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

To ensure high standards, the ADAPT International Scientific Committee was involved in all organisational stages of the conference. Below is a list of its academic members:

- Prof. **Lena Abrahamsson** (Luleå University of Technology, Sweden)  
Prof. **Giuseppe Bertagna** (University of Bergamo, Italy)  
Prof. **John Budd** (University of Minnesota, USA)  
Prof. **Alexis Bugada** (Aix-Marseille University, France)  
Prof. **Jesús Cruz Villalón** (University of Seville, Spain)  
Prof. **Marc De Vos** (Ghent Law School, Belgium)  
Prof. **Juan Raso Delgue** (University of the Republic, Uruguay)  
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Prof. **Anthony Forsyth** (RMIT University, Australia)  
Prof. **Bernard Gazier** (University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, France)  
Prof. **José Luis Gil y Gil** (University of Alcalá, Spain)  
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Prof. **Alfredo Sánchez Castañeda** (National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico)  
Prof. **Michele Tiraboschi** (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy) – Coordinator  
Prof. **Eric Tucker** (York University, Canada)  
Prof. em. Dr. **Manfred Weiss** (Goethe University, Germany)  
Prof. **Adrian Wilkinson** (Griffith University, Australia; University of Sheffield, UK)

## PAPERS

The best full papers presented at the conference will be evaluated for publication in [Professionalità Studi](#), [Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali](#), [E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies](#) and [Revista Internacional y Comparada de Relaciones Laborales y Derecho del Empleo](#)



or in a special volume to be included in the [ADAPT Labour Studies Book-Series](#) (Cambridge Scholars Publishing). Papers from those who are unable to attend the conference but are still willing to contribute will also be considered for publication.

## **COSTS**

Participation in the conference is free of charge. Travel and accommodation costs are the responsibility of each participant. A limited number of scholarships to partially cover travel costs will be made available to students or PhD students whose abstracts are particularly deserving in terms of originality and scientific quality. The request for the grant to partially cover travel costs must be sent, together with the submission of abstracts, by e-mail to [adaptconference@adapt.it](mailto:adaptconference@adapt.it).

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information, please write to [adaptconference@adapt.it](mailto:adaptconference@adapt.it).

## **STAY IN TOUCH**

Updates and notices regarding the **#ADAPTConference2025** (social media hashtag) will be communicated on the official website of the event [internationalconference.adapt.it](http://internationalconference.adapt.it) and through the social channels [@ADAPT\\_Bulletin](#) (X in English), [@adaptland](#) (X in Italian), [@adaptland](#) (Instagram), [ADAPT](#) (Facebook) and [ADAPT](#) (LinkedIn).