

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

**14<sup>th</sup> ILERA European Congress 10-12 September 2025**

**Durham University Business School, UK**

*“Navigating challenging times. The role of employment relations in addressing the problems caused by political uncertainty and the effects of Brexit, Covid-19, migration, technological and climate change on the workforce and labour standards.”*

We live in a state of uncertainty and multiple crises, causing a slowdown in economic development and widespread social hardship, especially affecting key workers working in sectors that are essential for societies to function. Solving these interrelated problems requires greater dialogue and cooperation among private and public actors and industrial relations institutions at all levels for better coordination. The goal of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Labour and Employment Relations Association (ILERA) Conference is to bring together academics, social partners, and policymakers to discuss common employment challenges and strategic ways how to overcome them.

To combat interrelated challenges, new forms of collaboration among diverse actors will be essential to help workers and make progress in economic, environmental, and social policy areas. National industrial relations systems and the characteristics of collective bargaining actors in different sectors are crucial factors in facilitating coordination and cooperation. Industrial relations systems vary in the extent to which they can protect different workforce groups, especially atypical workers, highlighting the importance of human rights and the legal perspectives on labour regulation to defend basic employment rights.

The Covid pandemic has revealed pre-existing inequalities and gaps in the protection of some categories of workers and workplaces. Vulnerable workers are often women, disabled workers, young or older workers, migrant workers, or workers from ethnic minorities working in industries where atypical forms of employment, characterised by reduced social protection, are widespread. These workforce groups benefit most from coordinated efforts by industrial relations actors at European and national levels aimed at reducing in-work poverty by introducing minimum wage standards.

At the workplace level, actions taken by human resources (HR) as responses to new and challenging developments often depend on whether they are seen as opportunities or threats. Urgent, immediate responses often lead to unilateral workplace restructuring, weakening employment relations and the efficacy of collective action. When the crisis is seen as an

opportunity, HR can embed social and environmental sustainability in organisations. However, implementing new technology to combat climate change and innovate work and the work environment often falls outside union-management relations.

The ILERA Conference aims to shed light on the different responses to these crises used by industrial relations actors, including short-term and long-term and coordinated and uncoordinated responses at different levels - sectoral, national and international levels - in fixing problems, protecting the workforce, and working conditions.

We welcome contributions that stimulate dialogue between academics from different disciplines, social partners, policymakers, and practitioners. Submissions to the five different *Track Themes* can include empirical and conceptual contributions from various disciplines, including industrial relations, management, sociology, law, economics, psychology, and political science, and research at individual, organizational, national, and international levels.

**We particularly encourage submissions that incorporate intersectional research in gender and excluded groups, as well as studies that address Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and sustainability goals aimed at reducing inequality. These contributions are vital for fostering a comprehensive understanding of how diverse identities and systemic inequalities intersect and impact various social and organizational outcomes.**

## **TRACK THEME 1:**

### ***Industrial Relations Adapting to Changing Times***

Industrial relations has undergone significant transformations in recent years, and the world is experiencing economic and social instability that is reminiscent of the 1970s. High inflation, energy crises, and rising unemployment have created a turbulent environment. This instability has brought industrial relations back into focus, with renewed attention on collective wage bargaining and industrial conflicts, such as strikes, to address economic challenges. Trade unions are adapting to changing times by exploring new strategies for organising and mobilising workers. The rise of the platform and gig economy and new technologies has significantly impacted industrial relations. Platform work and digital labour markets present challenges for traditional labour relations frameworks, and employment relations have increasingly shifted towards more flexible and precarious forms of work. Furthermore, environmental and climate change and the transition to a green economy require new skills and job roles, impacting labour markets and employment relations.

Against this background and despite all the challenges, there is clearly a renewed interest in academia and among policymakers in collective bargaining and worker representation. Trade unions and employer organisations are adapting to the changing landscape. For example, there is an emphasis on expanding collective bargaining to cover non-traditional workers in flexible working arrangements and remote work. Employment relations are increasingly focused on promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace and addressing gender pay gaps, racial and ethnic disparities, and other forms of inequality. Although these are global phenomena, European institutions play a crucial role in shaping industrial relations. However, the

effectiveness of these initiatives in countering these challenging trends remains a topic of discussion. The field of industrial relations faces several theoretical and methodological challenges. Comparative and international studies are particularly valuable in providing insights into how countries address similar challenges.

This proposed track would encourage submissions with the following sub-themes, among others:

- How has the recent instability affected industrial relations, and what measures are social partners taking to address economic challenges?
- In what ways are trade unions adapting to changing times to better organise and mobilise workers?
- How do international and European institutions influence employment relations and social policies in the context of global competition and the evolving nature of work, including traditional jobs, new roles, client-facing positions, and online work? Under what conditions and why?
- How do employment relations and social policies influence gender equality within transnational competition and traditional and online service work? What are the factors driving gender equality at work within changing contexts?
- How do EU policies and regulations, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the establishment of the European Labour Authority, aim to protect workers' rights and promote fair working conditions in the face of de-industrialisation, productivity challenges, and low-carbon transition?
- What types of EU and/or national regulations provide the most robust models for protecting workers' jobs and wages and ensuring labour and social protections in a transnational context marked by risks such as pandemics, climate change, migration, and employment fragmentation?
- Will the recent wave of industrial action redefine power relations between capital and labour and between labour and the state?
- What is the impact of Brexit on industrial relations in the UK and the rest of Europe?

## **TRACK THEME 2:**

### ***The Role of Public Policy in IR/HR Policy in the Post-Pandemic Era***

The Covid-19 pandemic is now largely in the rear-view mirror. However, the crisis has left not only a scar but has also refracted the trajectory of work and employment, with lasting effects that linger. As the recovery progresses, it has been argued that apart from repairing the harm caused by the pandemic, we have a rare opportunity to build even stronger and more resilient

systems to ensure future prosperity. Work and its quality have taken on a different meaning than before, with greater importance given to work-life balance. In this respect, the role of public policy in industrial relations and human resources has become ever more salient to enable and facilitate a transition from legacy systems to a more just and resilient future. The path for public policy is further complicated by several trends that existed even before the pandemic but have accelerated because of machine intelligence, a re-alignment of globalisation due to super-power rivalry, climate change, and xenophobic populism. Accordingly, this track would invite researchers and thought leaders to address the nature and dynamics of innovative public policy and its successes and failures.

This proposed track would encourage intersections with the following sub-themes, among others:

- Public policy for vulnerable workers who were “essential” to our survival throughout the pandemic: the low-wage, casual, part-time, and informal workers in care work, healthcare, food-related industries, communications and infrastructure, and other such industries.
- Public policy developments in the regulation of digital technologies to ensure fair treatment of workers, inclusiveness, and diversity.
- Public policy to facilitate green jobs.
- Public Policy and job quality.
- Public policy in immigration and migration.
- Public policy for a just and fair globalisation.
- Public policy for equal access to skill development for all workers.

### **TRACK THEME 3:**

#### ***Digitalisation of Work and Employment***

Adopting new digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and cloud computing, significantly transforms work, organisations, and labor markets. This digital transformation presents substantial challenges for both workers and their organisations. Algorithmic management and platform work are increasingly prevalent - not only within traditional industries like manufacturing, retail, logistics, and elder care but also in emerging sectors such as fintech and e-commerce. This trend raises questions about managerial authority and potentially obscures managerial decisions, making it more challenging to assign employer responsibility. Additionally, automation of work processes continues across numerous industries, affecting both blue-collar and white-collar jobs. Today, this development is accelerating with the integration of AI, which brings new concerns around worker surveillance, data ownership, and evolving skill needs.

This digital transformation also presents challenges for organising workers. It complicates matters for both managers and employees, as well as the organisations that represent them in negotiations over wages and working conditions. Since the mid-2010s, digital platforms in industries such as transportation, cleaning, and freelancing have enabled workers to earn extra income online – often as self-employed rather than employees, which makes organising

workers and negotiating collective agreements more challenging. We invite submissions on how digitalisation is transforming work and employment as well as capacities to negotiate over its effects.

The proposed track would encourage submissions with the following questions, among others:

- How does the adoption of digital labour platforms transform work? What are the benefits and challenges of integrating AI in workplaces for both workers and organisations? What are the outcomes of the expansion of platform work into knowledge work? What are the current trends and developments regarding the rights of platform workers?
- What are the responses of trade unions to digitalisation and automation of work? How is the labour movement reacting to the platform economy? Why do unions' responses to digitalisation vary? What new modes of collective bargaining are emerging in response to digital tools? How do collective bargaining institutions influence the adoption of these tools within organisations?
- How does digitalisation affect workers and their outcomes? What impacts does digitalisation have on workers' well-being? How does this shift influence their careers? What negative outcomes do novel technologies have on workers and society? Which groups of workers are most adversely affected, and who benefits?
- What are the characteristics of legal frameworks governing labour law in relation to digitalisation within different national contexts? How does digitalisation vary across different regulatory and institutional environments?

#### **TRACK THEME 4:**

##### ***Non-Standard Forms of Work and its Implications on Workplace and Labour Market Inequality***

Non-standard forms of employment have become widespread globally since the mid-1970s. Characterised by flexibility, these arrangements allow employers to adjust both the composition of their workforce and the design of work. Non-standard employment manifests in two primary ways: flexible employment relationships and flexible work organisation. The former includes part-time, short-term, temporary, and contract-based employment, as well as zero-hour contracts. Examples of the latter include remote and hybrid work arrangements. Measures taken during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as lockdowns, have further accelerated the adoption of flexible working, particularly through remote and hybrid models.

Non-standard forms of work and employment relationships have significant implications for labour market and workplace inequality. By contributing to labour market segmentation, these arrangements are often associated with insecure, low-paid jobs and limited employment rights. Flexible work arrangements also exacerbate inequality, particularly gender inequality, by limiting promotion prospects and widening the gender pay gap. Because flexible roles are predominantly held by women with caregiving responsibilities, who often reduce hours in their

current positions, the benefits of improved work-life balance are frequently offset by marginalisation, reduced access to training, and limited career progression.

While there is an extensive body of literature on non-standard forms of employment, further research is needed on the conceptualisation of its various forms, the extent of its adoption, the emergence of new flexible work arrangements, and its long-term consequences.

This track aims to explore these understudied areas, and we encourage submissions addressing the following questions, among others.

- What are the new conceptualisations of flexible work and precarity? Which forms of flexible work constitute precarious work? What are the various manifestations of precarious work? What are the legal and conceptual differences between hybrid and flexible work?
- What are the outcomes of non-standard forms of employment for workers, organisations, and societies? How do flexible work arrangements affect worker well-being and work-life balance? What are the career outcomes associated with these forms of work?
- What new forms of organising are emerging for workers in non-standard employment relationships? How is a flexible workforce being organised? What forms of worker responses have emerged against precarious work, and what were the outcomes of these responses?
- What are the long-term consequences of non-standard employment on labour market segmentation and inequality? How do flexible work arrangements affect workplace inequality?
- How have national contexts influenced the form of precarious work across countries? How do regulatory environments shape employers' choices of working arrangements?

## **TRACK THEME 5:**

### ***Human Resource Management and Employment Relations in Turbulent Times***

Industrial relations currently face a combination of contextual challenges and uncertainties, ranging from de-globalisation and global value chain disruptions, technological innovation to climate change, and international migration and its impact on rising inequality around the world. At the same time, public policies at national and international levels push companies to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, and the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This has an impact on labour markets, industrial relations actors, and human resource management (HRM) policies and practices.

HRM practices are essential for helping organisations meet contextual challenges and for attracting, retaining, and developing talent. They also play a crucial role in ensuring decent, sustainable work and fair labour standards, advancing gender equality, and promoting diverse and inclusive workplaces.

This track encourages research addressing the following questions, among others:

- How are current challenges, such as global value chain disruptions, climate change, immigration, and the pandemic impacting HRM and employment relations? What are the implications of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the ILO's Decent Work agenda for HRM and employment relations?
- How are new forms of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives affecting HRM practices and policies? How can HRM promote equitable engagement and connect diverse groups in organisations?
- What are the institutional, social, and cultural sources of variation in HRM practices across different countries? Are we seeing more convergence or divergence in HRM practices across national contexts? How do national education and training systems, legal systems, and labour market and industrial relations institutions influence HRM policies?
- How are new developments in HR practices in the areas of work design, HR planning, recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, and health and safety shaping worker perceptions, attitudes, and experiences? What are the causes and consequences of recent trends such as "quiet quitting" and the "Great Resignation"? How does the organisational context influence employee voice, and whose voice is unheard, and why?
- How have HRM practices been transformed by the adoption of HR and talent analytics, and what are the consequences of this transformation? What are the key ethical and legal issues related to the type of HR data collected and used? What challenges do organisations face when adopting and using novel HRM tools and practices?

## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

### ***Paper Abstract***

The paper abstract should relate to one of the congress TRACK THEMES or special sessions and contain a maximum of 250 words without any illustrations, graphs, or tables.

- Paper abstracts are to be submitted in **English**.
- All abstracts will be reviewed by members of the Academic Committee or appointed reviewers.
- Accepted abstracts will be published in the book of abstracts.
- The organisers will publish only the abstracts submitted by authors who have paid their registration fee.

### ***Notes for authors***

Submit an abstract using the [conference webpage \(https://durham.ac.uk/ilera2025\)](https://durham.ac.uk/ilera2025). The 14th

ILERA European Congress submission portal will open on 14 January 2025.

Please DO NOT email us a full copy of your paper (neither before nor after the conference). Abstracts sent by email will not be accepted.

Authors are invited to submit their abstracts to either a Research Track, a special session, or the open sessions.

Each registered participant can submit and present one paper abstract.

The submitting author will be considered the presenting author. There are NO limitations for co-authoring/co-authorship.

- Deadline for submitting abstracts: 31/03/2025
- Notification of abstract acceptance: 30/04/2025

ILERA membership is not mandatory, but we encourage participants to become members of ILERA. You can do this directly via the ILERA website: <https://ilo-ilera.org/>

If you have any questions about the conference, please contact the organizing team by using the following email address: [ilera2025@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ilera2025@durham.ac.uk)

Further information on the conference including, for example, travel information, accommodation will be available on the website. Please visit the ILERA 2025 website:

<https://durham.ac.uk/ilera2025>

## **Special Sessions Proposals**

Submissions for special sessions are invited for ILERA 2025.

### ***Special Session Submission Guidelines***

Special sessions should typically cover topics that extend beyond the track themes or have a special focus or idea.

Each special session proposal must contain the following information:

- Title of the proposed special session.
- Names and affiliations of the organisers (including contact information for each organiser).
- Up to five keywords.
- A summary of up to 250 words stating the topic, idea, and importance of the special session.
- A tentative list of participants who could contribute to the session and the role of the participants (e.g., presenter, discussant, chair, etc.). Note that special sessions should



have a minimum of 4 participants.

- Special sessions may have a different format from a regular session, e.g., panel discussion, longer summary talks, or a mix thereof. The session format should be clearly defined in the proposal. Examples of session formats are paper development sessions, presenting research papers, book presentations, round table discussions, etc.
- Proposals will be evaluated by the organising committee.

**Collect this information in a Word document and send it to [ilera2025@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ilera2025@durham.ac.uk).**

Abstracts for approved special sessions must be submitted according to the same schedule and procedure for regular papers. Please note that all speakers, including Chairs, Paper Presenters, and Discussants, must be registered participants in the conference.

**Deadline for submission of special sessions: 14 February 2025**

If you are new to organising a session proposal and have questions, please email [barbara.bechter@durham.ac.uk](mailto:barbara.bechter@durham.ac.uk).