

News

Robots' rise could lead to 'human job quotas'

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By Annie Makoff

International study warns that legal frameworks are becoming outdated, as UK research finds reports of jobs lost to automation so far are overblown

A rise in robotics could lead to a modern-day industrial revolution, forcing governments to legislate for human job quotas and alter traditional employment law frameworks, the International Bar Association has warned.

In its 120-page report into the legal implications of rapid technological change, lawyers from the association refer to an "industrial revolution 4.0" which involves the increase of robotics across the production and service sectors, and cites Amazon, Facebook and 3D printing as "pioneers".

Writing in the report, Gerlind Wisskirchen, lead author and employment lawyer in Cologne, said: "What is new about the present revolution is the alacrity with which change is occurring, and the broadness of impact being brought about by AI [artificial intelligence] and robotics. Jobs at all levels in society presently undertaken by humans are at risk of being reassigned to robots or AI, and the legislation once in place to protect the rights of human workers may be no longer fit for purpose."

The news comes as collaborative research from the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors (CIEHF) and CV-Library indicates that automation and AI are, so far, not putting UK jobs at risk.

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of the 1,000 manufacturing professionals polled said they had never witnessed job losses as a result of automation. A further third (37 per cent) said job creation actually increased due to the introduction of robots or automated processes.

Nearly three-quarters of the manufacturing professionals surveyed said they felt the public are being scare-mongered into believing robotics are replacing jobs, and 52 per cent admitted there was 'resistance' from staff when implementing automated processes. Four out of five manufacturers said more should be done to promote the benefit of workplace automation.

Steve Barraclough, CEO of the CIEHF, said robotics and automation were regularly given a "bad name" – despite their "significant contribution" to upskilling employees. Because automation requires programmers and maintainers in areas where they may not have previously been necessary, the field of automation presents a "real opportunity" to businesses and manufacturers embracing change, he insisted.

Guy Kirkwood, chief operating officer at Uipath, said: "All this panic about robots stealing jobs makes

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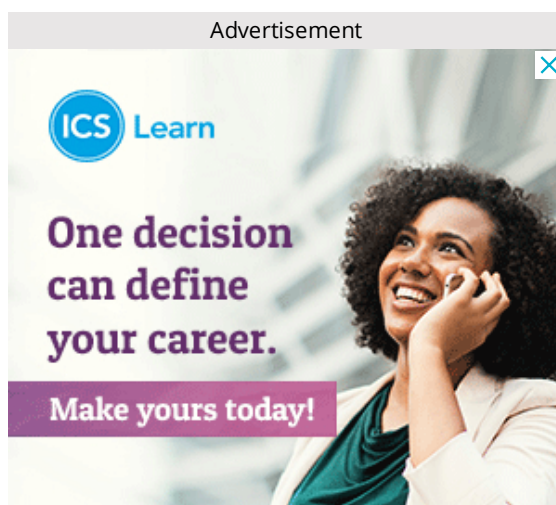
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are at 'high risk'. Jobs are also at risk in manufacturing (1.2mn), administrative and support services (1.1mn), and transport and storage (950,000), said the report.

Meanwhile, a US-based study by the National Bureau of Economic Research revealed that automation in manufacturing **led to an average loss of 6.2 human jobs between 1990 and 2007** and, last week, Capita Resourcing revealed that 67 per cent of UK employees feared automatic would result in "less friendly" workplaces.

Annabel Jones, HR director at Automatic Data Process Ltd, called on employers to respond to the UK market's fear of automation – regardless of whether automation replaces jobs or not. "Employers should ensure they are not over reliant on technology and still build a human connection with their employees, offering an adequate amount of workplace support and encouragement," she added.

According to Ben Gibson, managing associate at national law firm Bond Dickinson LLP, unless policy makers chose to adopt an interventionist policy against automation, market forces and economic imperatives are likely to result in a big uptake of such technologies. Predictions of job losses due to automation, were therefore "persuasive" he said.



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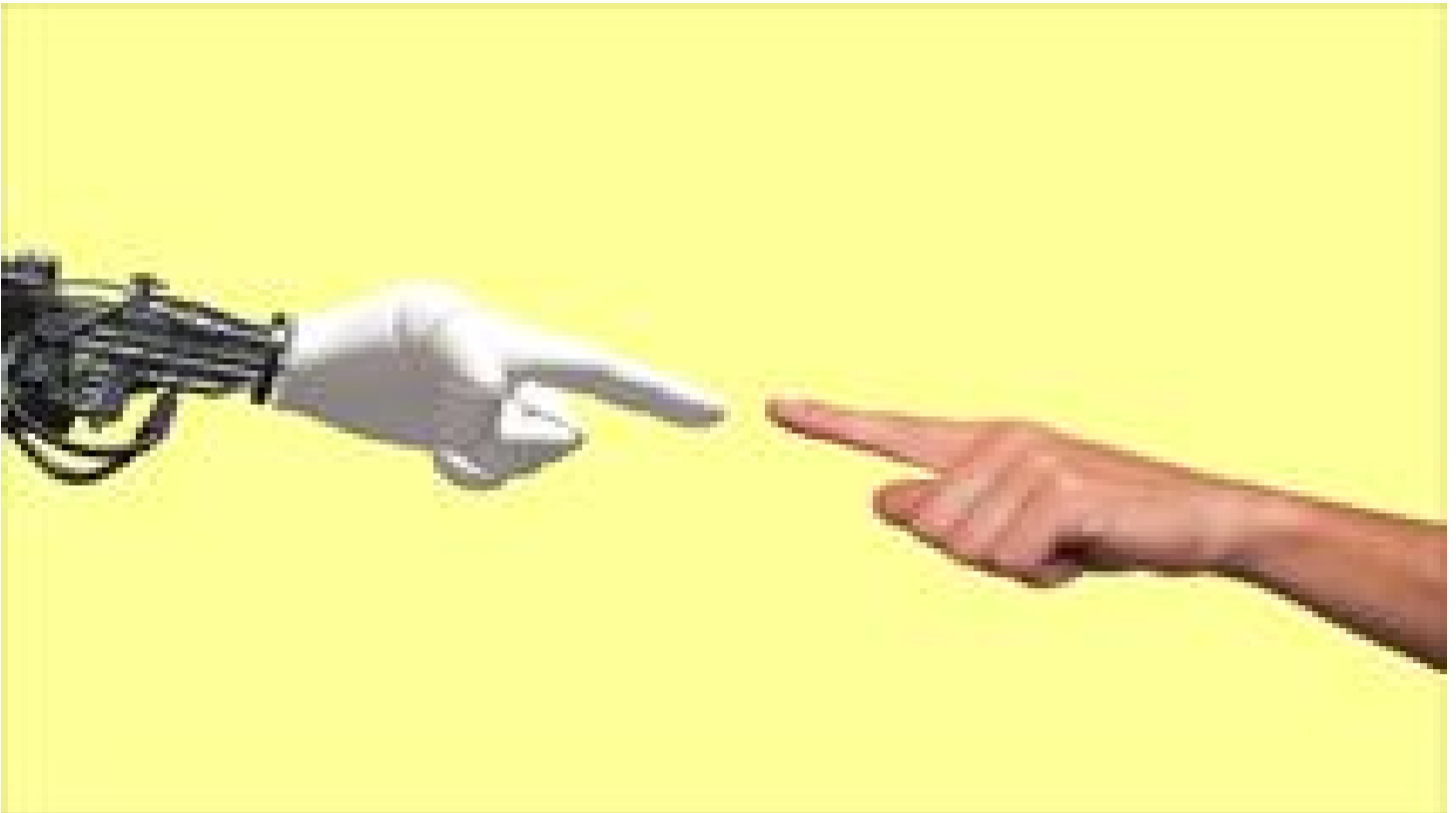
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