



Fondazione
Marco Biagi



UNIMORE
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI
MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA

CALL FOR PAPERS AND PANELS

Towards Equal and Inclusive Labour Relations: Systems, Strategies, and New Conceptual Frameworks

23rd CONFERENCE IN COMMEMORATION OF PROFESSOR MARCO BIAGI

Modena (Italy), 18-19th March 2026

Marco Biagi Foundation - University of Modena and Reggio Emilia

Introduction

In recent years, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) has garnered growing attention from organizations, institutions, scholars, and policymakers worldwide. Indeed, while principles of equality and non-discrimination have long served as foundational safeguards in the definition of workers' rights - enshrined in key instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and various ILO Conventions - labour market and organizations remain profoundly shaped by systemic discrimination, exploitation, structural inequalities, and the persistent underrepresentation of marginalized groups.

These challenges are further compounded by today's rapidly evolving labour markets, shaped by digital and ecological transitions, demographic shifts, and recurrent global crises.

In this context, the workplace stands as both a privileged point of view and a complex arena to implement equality policies, foster inclusion, and reconcile individual rights with organizational objectives.

After a period of relative international alignment on the principles and objectives of EDI, these are now increasingly exposed to challenges and rollbacks, both within institutional frameworks and across the corporate sector.

This complex and dynamic landscape calls for a reimagining of the EDI paradigm, one capable of simultaneously addressing enduring challenges and emerging vulnerabilities.

A renewed and critical focus is required to unfold the multifaceted and intersecting dimensions of inequality in contemporary societies and identify causes, effects and remedies. This endeavour necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from law, organisation studies, economics, sociology, political science, and related disciplines. Such a perspective enables the development of innovative analytical frameworks and comprehensive strategies to effectively and sustainably promote EDI across diverse contexts.

In light of these considerations, the Scientific Committee of the Marco Biagi International Conference is pleased to announce that the 23rd edition will be dedicated to the theme **"Towards Equal and Inclusive Labour Relations: Systems, Strategies, and New Conceptual Frameworks"**.

The event will open with keynote addresses by three distinguished scholars renowned for their contributions to this field in labour law, organisation studies, and economics, respectively: **Professor Mark Bell** (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland); **Professor Patrizia Zanoni** (University of Hasselt, Belgium) and **Professor Nick Drydak** (Anglia Ruskin University, UK).

To this end, with the aim of fostering a critical and interdisciplinary reflection on how these principles can be redefined and advanced within the context of contemporary societal and labour market transformations, the Call for Papers for the 23rd edition of the Marco Biagi Conference encourages submissions of both conceptual and empirical papers across a wide range of disciplines (such as labour law, organisation studies, economics and sociology) and methodologies, dealing with the key issues related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the labour market, on one or more of the following main topics/tracks:

- **Track 1 - Conceptualising (In-)Equality: Shifting Definitions and Emerging Frameworks.**
- **Track 2 - Beyond the Gaps: Understanding the Systems that Produce Inequality.**
- **Track 3 - Actors, Strategies and Policies to Address Labour Market Inequalities.**
- **Track 4 - Redefining Vulnerability and Inclusion in Contemporary Labour Markets.**

Track 1 - Conceptualising (In-)Equality: Shifting Definitions and Emerging Frameworks.

Lately, academic literature has engaged with the evolving meanings of core concepts used to address workplace inequalities. This research framework rests on foundational concepts such as *equality*, *non-discrimination*, *diversity*, and *inclusion*, complemented by dimensions like *belonging*, *accessibility*, and *decolonization*, which collectively highlight the need to address hierarchical, social, and organizational power structures to promote EDI. Despite the growing attention these concepts are receiving, most of them still lack clear definitions within legislative frameworks and beyond. As a result, they remain largely unsupported by specific regulatory responses, creating uncertainty for both organizations and other stakeholders, thereby hindering implementation and potentially undermining EDI objectives.

Intersectional approaches have further deepened the topic, showing how identities such as gender, age, race, class, disability, and neurodivergence may interact in complex ways, and addressing diversity through single-axis frameworks could potentially obscure structural inequalities. Within this evolving landscape, it becomes essential to clarify which dimensions of diversity warrant protection and recognition within both legal and organizational boundaries, as well as the relevance of prescriptive models in antidiscrimination frameworks. This track invites contributions from a wide range of academic fields to reflect on how these concepts are defined, combined, and applied in diverse fields and among different contextual, theoretical and methodological settings, concerning, in particular, the following (but not exhaustive) issues and questions:

- How do literature and policymakers define and distinguish between the key concepts of EDI?
- What are the normative foundations of equal treatment and non-discrimination, and are they fit to capture the current societal and economic complexities?
- In what ways do intersectional approaches challenge or enrich existing EDI models?
- What are the risks and limitations of using single-axis approaches to EDI (e.g., gender-only or race-only)?
- What is the interaction between discrimination and health?
- What are the risks and limitations of using prescriptive models in antidiscrimination frameworks?

- How can anti-discrimination provisions be better integrated with other legal frameworks, such as data protection, health and safety regulation, migration law, or social welfare law, to address overlapping vulnerabilities?
- To what extent are dominant EDI frameworks adaptable to sectors with specific institutional logics, such as healthcare, education, or public administration?
- How do collective labour rights intersect with individual rights to equality and non-discrimination in diverse workplace settings?
- To what extent the underlying economic framework can reveal hidden inequalities or limit the path to an inclusive and equitable distribution of labour?

Track 2 - Beyond the Gaps: Understanding the Systems that Produce Inequality.

Structural gaps in access, employment relationships and work opportunity represent some of the main interests for scholars, as inequality remains deeply embedded in the majority of processes within labour markets and organizations. Such disparities manifest in multiple forms, including vertical and horizontal segregation, gender and racial pay gaps, even in leadership positions, for instance through the phenomenon of the glass cliff, whereby women are disproportionately placed in precarious or high-risk executive roles, often under conditions that limit their chances of success. They also encompass transactional inequalities, particularly within value chains and transnational supply chains, as well as the exploitation of vulnerable groups shaped by multiple, intersecting factors, including gender.

These disparities may be rooted in limitations in organisational practices, which many times unwillingly reproduce inequality through organizational processes such as recruitment, promotion and performance management, as well as legal systems, due to institutional and legal biases and the lack of effectiveness in anti-discrimination regulatory frameworks and collective bargaining in ensuring substantive equality. However, there is still no consensus on how to effectively measure these inequalities or identify the organizational and legal systems that contribute to their reproduction.

Coherently, this track invites contributions from a wide range of academic fields that critically investigate how such inequalities are produced and experienced and can be measured. Both theoretical and empirical works – also adopting an intersectional lens – that engage with the drivers and mechanisms of inequality are welcomed.

Potential topics and questions that can be addressed are:

- Measurement of inequalities and visibility of groups of the population at a higher risk to be discriminated against.
- Economic determinants and persistence of pay gaps across gender, sexual orientation, migration background, and (dis)ability status, including their intersectional configurations.
- Structural barriers, occupational segregation and disparities in access to opportunities across gender identities, sexual orientations, and ability status.
- Economic and organisational dimensions of the glass cliff and the concentration of women in precarious or high-risk leadership positions.
- Economic dimensions of poverty and unequal access to resources, services and opportunities across marginalised groups.
- How are gaps produced by everyday organizational practices identified, measured and challenged?

- What are the features of the institutions and regulatory systems that can create, reproduce or remove structural inequalities?
- How effective are existing anti-discrimination legal frameworks in reducing inequality?
- What role does collective bargaining play in promoting EDI beyond legal compliance?
- Do Trade Unions face challenges in representing specific vulnerable groups, and how are these challenges being tackled?
- How can labour law adapt to emerging forms of work and organizational structures that reproduce inequality?

Track 3 - Actors, Strategies and Policies to Address Labour Market and Workplace Inequalities.

Legislators, organizations, trade unions, equality bodies, and workers each play a role in building more equitable workplaces and labour markets.

From a legal standpoint, the fight against discrimination is carried out through a wide range of legislative tools and strategies, which vary depending on the specific vulnerability or discrimination factors involved (i.e. reasonable accommodations, leave or work-life balance policies, certification systems or other transparency tools, protection for whistleblowers). In this context, the growing use of mandatory instruments also raises important questions about how to appropriately balance the promotion of EDI with the preservation of employers' individual freedoms and managerial autonomy.

Nonetheless, organizations are increasingly required to go beyond mere compliance by implementing innovative policies to promote equality. These range from work-life balance initiatives and parental leave policies, which may mitigate motherhood penalty phenomena, to (pay) transparency guidelines, anti-discrimination training, and organisational self-assessments. Considering the gender dimension, these measures may also encompass a gender-mainstreaming lens, implementing crucial tools such as gender budgeting and Gender Equality Plans. Furthermore, it is pivotal to understand the effects of such policies on individuals (e.g., on their wellbeing, engagement, job satisfaction), organizations (e.g., their retention rate, financial performance and sustainability) and society at large. This track invites both conceptual, empirical and comparative contributions from a wide range of academic fields that may shed light on actors and strategies which might concretely shape the pathways toward more inclusive, transparent and just work environments, as well as enabling and hindering practices and factors within organizational contexts.

Potential questions and topics that can be addressed are:

- Which actors play a key role in the definition of policies for equality in the workplace?
- Which policies are regarded to be strategic in fostering equality in the workplace?
- To what extent the allocation of resources is informed by ex-ante evaluation sensitive to the reduction of inequalities?
- What factors might act as challenges or enablers to equality in the workplace?
- What are the impacts of gender-responsive budgeting and Gender Equality Plans in addressing structural inequalities within organisations and public institutions?
- How do pay transparency policies—such as mandatory disclosure of wage bands and gender-pay-gap reporting—affect pay equity and labour-market outcomes?
- What are the distributional and dynamic effects of paid parental-leave policies and incentives for shared caregiving on labour-force participation, wage trajectories and intra-household welfare?
- To what extent can remedial mechanisms be leveraged to strengthen the enforcement of anti-discrimination norms and ensure access to justice for vulnerable groups?
- How can regulatory instruments better capture the phenomena of intersectional discriminations?

- How are workers protected in case of retaliatory conduct?
- What is the role of Equality Bodies in preventing or tackling equality in the workplace?
- What role do Industrial Relations practices play in promoting equality and inclusion?
- Are certain sectors particularly exposed to regulatory gaps or a lack of oversight?

Track 4 - Redefining Vulnerability and Inclusion in Contemporary Labour Market.

Academic literature on equality has lately been increasingly confronted with several evolving transitions, crises, and major socio-technical, environmental, and geopolitical transformations, reshaping the world of work and redefining vulnerability. Both transitions and crises tend to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities while simultaneously making them more visible, thus offering a critical lens through which to interrogate the structural dimensions of exclusion and foster the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the workplace. For instance, the rise of the gig economy and algorithmic management has generated fragmented and precarious forms of employment, often disproportionately reproducing inequalities and affecting those already placed at the borders: migrants, young people, and women to cite a few (e.g., algorithmic bias in digital platforms). At the same time, the environmental crisis and the green transition also create new segregation within the labour market, exposing certain categories of workers (e.g., those in non-convertible sectors) to greater risks of exclusion or exploitation. Policies to mitigate crises, in general, often intersect with pre-existing social inequalities, revealing the complex interconnection between social justice and regulations, particularly when protective measures (such as workplace closures or mobility restrictions during the pandemic) disproportionately impact already vulnerable groups.

This track invites both conceptual, empirical and comparative contributions from a wide range of academic fields linking structural transformations with individual experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and adaptation.

Potential questions and topics that can be addressed are:

- How do climate-driven industrial shifts impact labour protections and employment relations, particularly in vulnerable economic sectors or regions?
- What tensions emerge from the unequal distribution of training and reskilling opportunities during green and digital transitions?
- How does the interaction between labour law and climate policies affect the inclusion of vulnerable workers in the context of the green transition?
- How does the interaction between labour law and migration policies affect the inclusion of vulnerable workers in the context of the green transition?
- How do enabling technologies reshape employment relationships, and what implications does this have for traditional labour protections?
- How do crises affect labour market outcomes for structurally disadvantaged groups, and through which mechanisms do they exacerbate or reproduce existing inequalities?
- To what extent do crisis mitigation policies – such as employment protection measures, income support or mobility restrictions – reinforce or reduce social and economic inequalities among vulnerable populations?
- How does crisis literature intersect with equality literature?
- Through which organizational processes and practices are employees marginalised in the workplace?
- What challenges do algorithmic management and AI-based decision-making pose for labour law in ensuring fairness and non-discrimination?
- How can labour law frameworks ensure that digital and green transitions, as well as global crises (e.g., the pandemic, inflation, geopolitical shocks) do not reproduce or deepen precariousness among low-skilled and informal workers?

- How do national legal systems differ in their approach to addressing precarious work as a source of structural inequality?

SUBMISSIONS

1) **Papers.** Scholars who intend to contribute to one of the conference tracks should present by 15th November 2025 a submission by filling the form at the following link (<https://fmb.unimore.it/submission-form-call-for-papers-panels/>) with:

- the title of the proposed paper;
- an extended abstract **of about 2000 words** (not including references), specifying the topic and the nature of the paper (*e.g.*, theoretical analysis, discussion paper, presentation of empirical data);
- the disciplinary (or inter-disciplinary) domain of the paper (*e.g.*, Labour Law, Organisation Theory, Labour Economics, Sociology, Industrial Relations);
- the author's affiliation;
- an indication of the conference track for which the paper is intended, bearing in mind that the Scientific Committee reserves the prerogative to assign papers to the track and session it deems to be most appropriate.

2) **Panels/Round Tables/Book presentations.** The organisers welcome the submission of proposals for full panel sessions (including round tables, book presentation or other innovative panel formats) addressing topics described in this call. Panels should consist of four presentations or three paper presentations and one discussant. The panel convenor may also serve as the chairperson of the panel. Proposals should be submitted by the panel convenor by 15th November 2025 by filling the form at the following link (<https://fmb.unimore.it/submission-form-call-for-papers-panels/>) and should indicate, in one single document:

- the title of the proposed panel and papers;
- the names of the speakers/discussant/chairperson;
- a brief outline of the objective and the rationale of the panel (about 500 words);
- an abstract of each paper (about 2000 words not including the bibliography).

Paper and panel/round tables/book presentation proposals will be selected by the Scientific Committee by 2nd December 2024.

Selected authors (including panel proposals) will be required to submit a paper of 8000 - 10000 words no later than 24th February 2026. The papers should take the form of a research article rather than simply the description of a work in progress.

The Scientific Committee reserves the right to reject papers and panel proposals that are not consistent with the conference tracks or papers that are not consistent with the abstract previously approved.

As a condition of participation in the conference, the proposed work must remain unpublished (i.e., not under any stage of submission or review at any journal or book) before the closing of the conference.

Primary publication opportunities will be provided to proponents of works selected by the Scientific Committee of the Conference.

Contributions may be considered for publication in the following journals: *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, *Italian Labour Law e-Journal*, *Diritti Lavori Mercati International*. A special issue of “*International journal of Manpower*” is also expected to collect a selection of the presented papers.

The working language of the conference sessions is English, and interpretation services will not be available. Abstracts and papers should be submitted in English.

DEADLINES

- Deadline for submission of expressions of interest and abstracts (papers and panels): **15th November 2025**.
- Notification of acceptance: **2nd December 2025**.
- Deadline for submission of full papers (papers and panels): **24th February 2026**.

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CONTACTS

Expressions of interest, panel proposals, abstracts, and full papers, as well as requests for information, should be addressed to the e-mail address: marcobiagiconference@unimore.it

The first draft of the conference programme will be distributed by the end of January 2026.

Further information will be posted on the Marco Biagi Foundation website: www.fmb.unimore.it

This call for papers has been elaborated by the Local Scientific Committee with the support of: Dr. Carlotta Barra (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia), Dr. Francesca Nepoti (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia); Dr. Federica Palmirota (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia); Dr. Ilaria Purificato (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Marco Biagi Foundation).