

72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

2nd Committee Event

“The Future of Work: Making Decent Work a Reality”

4 October 2017, 3-6pm

UNHQ, Conference Room 2

Background

The world of work is undergoing a major process of change. This transformation is driven largely by structural economic shifts, the changing character of production and employment, technological progress, the impact of climate change and new social, political and demographic trends. Together, these factors will impact countries' ability to achieve decent work for all and the 2030 Agenda.

The ILO estimates that 600 million decent jobs will be needed in the next 15 years to achieve this ambitious goal. By 2030 the labour force is expected to reach 3.5 billion people, of which 1.3 billion will be youth aged 15-24, and every year there will be nearly 45 million people entering the global labour market. Some regions will be faced with a doubling of their workforce due to a youth bulge, while other regions and countries will face a rapid process of population ageing and a shrinking labour force.

Careful analysis on the future of work is needed to identify and understand changing labour market dynamics as well as devise appropriate policy options to more effectively manage labour market transitions. This includes responding to social and demographic changes, skills gaps, shifts in political thinking and the role of government and municipalities in society, debates over the benefits of regulation and the economic impact of legislation based on international standards, as well as the changing nature of the social contract and its impact on sustained economic growth.

Currently expected changes in the world of work are likely to have significant consequences beyond the quantity and quality of jobs. In particular, technological shifts might further worsen already high levels of inequality, including gender inequality, with knock-on effects on political pressure for more aggressive redistributive policies or anti-migration and de-globalisation backlashes, both of which would limit prospects for developing countries to catch up. In emerging economies, progress in reducing informal employment might be reversed. Similarly, a further erosion of open-ended, full-time employment contracts might undermine a country's capacity to sustain or expand social protection.

The complexity of questions around inequalities, inclusiveness and sustainability must also factor into these discussions. In developed countries, for example, there has been a fundamental shift in the long held belief that by working hard and contributing to the productivity and profits of the employer, workers might reasonably expect to share in the wealth that they have helped generate and this in turn would improve living standards, increase job security and provide workers with a dignified retirement.

Other key issues, such as the long, slow decline of union membership and its diminished presence in the workplace – resulting in large part from deregulation, industrial change, outsourcing or offshoring, globalization and increased employer resistance to freedom of association which is often spurred by weak government enforcement of the right to organize – need to be equally addressed.

The loss of bargaining power that resulted from the dismantling of collective bargaining mechanisms to establish wages, conditions and hours of work as well as sluggish adherence to and weak enforcement of existing labour laws and standards has contributed to the undermining of a system of standards and norms that were arduously developed and actively promoted internationally since the start of the 20th Century.

Changes to management structures, executive compensation, shareholder's shortened investment horizons extensive, use of contract workers and outsourcing, at a time of intensified price competition

in industries exposed to global competition are all factors that have exerted significant downward pressure on wages and security of employment.

The impact of rapid technological evolution on the number and quality of jobs, the nature of work and structure of labour markets of 2030 is still uncertain. Many are concerned with the fact that labour-saving technologies could constrain the capacity of the labour markets to generate sufficient jobs for the growing young population, leading to segmentation and worsening income inequality.

Shifts in the nature of work can create both challenges and opportunities. Over the last decade, there has been a rise in part-time employment, especially among women. In the majority of countries with available information, part-time jobs outpaced gains in full-time jobs between 2009 and 2015. In some cases, non-standard forms of work can be the entry door to the job market. However these emerging trends can also lead to widespread insecurity.

Developing countries are experiencing additional challenges with high levels of informality and the need to transition these workers to formal employment which can help increase protection as well as enhance revenue for governments to improve and expand the provision of social protection measures, make investments in education and infrastructure. Additionally, they may also be faced with the challenges of diversifying their economies away from a low-productivity agriculture to higher value sectors like banking and finance, service provision, mobile technologies, communications and manufacturing and ensuring that both women and men have access to the educational and employment opportunities that are created in the process.

To address these issues policies should take into consideration the evolution of the world of work, stimulating investment opportunities to boost job creation and productivity, while also ensuring adequate income security to all types of workers, both women and men, not just those on stable contracts. Skills development, social protection, social dialogue, equal opportunity, occupation safety and health and adequate labour market regulations are essential components of the policy response to shape a future of work with sustained and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.

Objective, format and outcome

The capacity to anticipate future challenges and outcomes related to the world of work in 2030 and to coordinate policy responses will be crucial to ensure successful achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The purpose of this side event is to enhance the Committee's understanding about the impacts of emerging trends related to innovation and technology, demographics and structural economic transformation in the world of work as well as the processes of change that are accompanied by very high levels of uncertainty and inequalities. It will highlight the particular interdependencies of these trends as well as the implications for broader macro-economic considerations around inclusive growth, fiscal and environmental sustainability and global economic convergence.

The event will take an expanded view of key issues and policy areas that are and will continue to influence how the world of work is changing. It will explore a range of social and demographic changes, the need for inclusive and sustainable economies, the changing nature of the employment relationship, a shifting view of the role of government and legislation, and the impact this transformation is having globally on people and societies.

The event will include a discussion on the types of skills and digital competencies needed to benefit from existing and emerging technologies and increasing digitalization in the context of the 4th industrial revolution. It will focus on policy considerations and recommendations that need to be taken into account, particularly by developing countries, especially LDCs, when designing education and training policies aimed at taking advantage of emerging technologies. This discussion will draw on the current priority theme of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) on "Building digital competencies to benefit from existing and emerging technologies, with special focus on gender and youth dimensions".

The event will consist of a panel discussion with a few presentations by governments, representatives of trade unions, business and UN partner agencies. Speakers will aim to identify good practices and share specific challenges and opportunities. This will be followed by an interactive dialogue among all meeting participants.

The outcome of the meeting will be an informal summary by the Secretariat highlighting the main points of the discussions and specific proposals or ideas leading to action-oriented results and helping to help frame the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Suggested questions for discussion

- Where will the jobs of tomorrow come from and what will they look like, including the interplay of technological innovations and the role of demographic change?
- What does the future of work mean for low-income economies? What are the challenges and opportunities?
- In an increasingly globalized economy, technological advancement and competitiveness are stimulating rapid evolution in the organization of work and production. What types of changes are expected in the way businesses work, including the implications of what it means to be an employer and an employee? How will women and men be differently impacted and how can the gaps be addressed?
- How can societies respond to the erosion of the established framework of social dialogue, norms and institutions for regulating work?
- How is the interplay of technological innovations, structural transformation, economic development and social change expected to shape the future of work, particularly in relation to the longstanding policy commitment to full and decent employment?
- What are the challenges and opportunities young people are facing as they make the transition into the world of work. What do they see as the path forward to achieve sustainable inclusive growth for future generations?
- How can workers and companies from developing economies compete and how can workers' rights and benefits be maximized?
- What policies and investments should governments, corporations, educators, and donors prioritize to prepare for this future? How will the political space for such strategies be affected by changes in the world of work?
- Can specific sectors and skill requirements be identified as the greatest potential for job creation in high, middle and low income countries, what types of skills are needed and how to ensure that women and men have equal opportunity to acquire them?

List of Participants

- Government representatives, trade unions, businesses, foundations, academia and research institutions, civil society, and UN officials

Panellists

- **Mr Jonas Prising**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, ManpowerGroup
- **Mr Mthunzi Mdwaba**, President and CEO, TZoro IBC and Business Unity South Africa
- **Ms Jillian Bartlett**, 2nd Vice President, Caribbean Congress of Labour
- **Mr Lawrence Jeff Johnson**, Deputy Director, Research Department, ILO
- **Professor A Min Tjoa**, Vice-chair of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development and Director of the Institute of Software Technology and Chair of the Austrian National Competence Center for Security Research

Moderator

- **Mr. Wang Guan**, Chief Correspondent & Anchor, CCTV/CGTN America

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