International Labour Organization (ILO)

Chair Report

[Agenda A: Balancing future job opportunities regarding machinery automation and AI usage to ensure employment security of laborers]

Yonsei Model United Nations 2026

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About the United Nations

The United Nations is one of most prominent international organisations dedicated to the promotion of world peace and security among nations through cooperation. Founded in 1945, in the aftermath of World War II, the UN was established with the purpose of preventing future conflicts and assisting in the peaceful resolution of global conflicts and challenges. To this day, the UN–a successor of the League of Nations–plays a central role in maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, and above all – fostering global cooperation. With 193 member states, the UN operates through a hybrid structure combining political, judicial, and administrative branches, each dedicated to upholding the core principles listed in the UN Charter.

The UN consists of the following six main organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. While each of these organs has its respective purposes and responsibilities, their collective contribution to the overall functioning of the organisation allows it to address various global issues such as conflict mediation, human rights, economic development, and humanitarian aid.

Since its establishment, the UN has made notable progress in conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, and sustainable development–though not without failures and criticisms–as an

indispensable global institution. With member states convening to build global consensus and frameworks for pressing issues, the UN continues to serve as a unifying force in addressing global challenges.

Committee Introduction

As the only tripartite agenda within the UN, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) operates with the cooperation of governments, employers, and workers to promote social justice and international human and labour rights. Founded in 1919 through the Treaty of Versailles, the ILO was grounded in the conviction that social justice for workers is a precondition for a universal and lasting peace. Since its first conference in 1919, the ILO's work has surrounded the creation of conventions and recommendations on a range of issues such as working hours, maternity protection, and unemployment. Post-World War II, the ILO continued to expand its membership and influence, playing a critical role in the decolonisation process and promoting labour rights during the Great Depression. In the late 20th century, the ILO launched key initiatives to adapt to globalisation, such as the "Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" in 1998 and the "Decent Work Agenda" in 1999.

The ILO emphasises a human-centred approach to advancing a decent work agenda, going beyond the abstract goal of protecting workers' rights. It is dedicated to various objectives, such as creating decent employment, expanding social protection, and fostering social dialogue, as well as implementing development projects that establish the conditions necessary to realise such goals. It is based on the mandate of advancing social and economic justice and promoting decent work for all workers through ways such as setting international labour standards, developing policies, and devising practical programs for member states to participate in. The ILO pursues its mission through the Decent Work Agenda, consisting of four strategic objectives: creating employment, extending social protection, strengthening social dialogue, and promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Today, the ILO continues to provide technical assistance, research, and policy advice to member states on labour issues, with its goals integrated into the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

<u>Agenda Introduction</u>

Machinery automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are pioneering technologies that have contributed to the advancement of workplaces in the 21st century. Most notably, repetitive and low-skill labour that was heavily reliant on human workers is progressively being replaced with automation and AI adoption, further expanding to tasks requiring human intelligence. While such technologies are trusted with the prospect of streamlining operations, boosting efficiency, and transforming jobs—and consequently do so—they inevitably raise concerns regarding job displacements and pose a threat to future employment opportunities.

In fact, occupations at highest risks of automation are recorded to be 28% on average across OECD countries; sectors most affected by AI and automation include manufacturing, healthcare, finance, and transportation. Contrary to the common perception that these technologies only threaten routine jobs where human labour objectively falls behind in efficiency, jobs that require skills once thought to be uniquely human are now at risk: high skill, creative jobs such as education and entertainment.

However, the complexity of this agenda arises from the dual nature of this advancement, as well as the disparities in developed and developing nations. Although AI and automation are main causes of job displacements and exacerbation of inequalities at a glance, they can also create new opportunities that augment human capabilities.

Therefore, it is essential that delegates propose balanced and forward-looking solutions that not only allow countries, firms, and individuals to mitigate the risks of automation and AI but also harness their benefits. Sustainable solutions should focus on reskilling and upskilling, social protection and regulations, and—most importantly—international cooperation to bridge technological gaps and secure the future of global employment.

Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

      As defined by OECD's AI Experts Group (AIGO), Artificial Intelligence (AI)is machine-based technology or system that transforms human-defined objectives into various outputs: predictions, contents, recommendations, or even decisions that can influence physical and virtual environments. AI technology in the workplace is often categorised into two distinct types, based on their function and purpose: direct automation of tasks and algorithmic management.

Automation

      The ILO defines automation in workplace settings as the use of technology to replace human labour for both routine and non-routine tasks. This involves replacing human labour entirely or complementing it with automation technologies such as AI to perform tasks that were once dependent on human judgement and skills. It is important to note that the latter is distinguished as *augmentation* that enhances human capabilities and thus efficiency, contributing to the creation of new roles or improving existing ones. The displacement of jobs due to complete automation is thus considered to be a threat to employment and job opportunities worldwide and should be the focus of this agenda.

Structural Unemployment

      Structural unemployment is a form of unemployment caused by the mismatch between the skills or qualifications of active job seekers and the requirements of available jobs. It occurs due to various factors such as technological change, sectoral shifts in the economy, or a geographical disparity between the workplace and where workers are located.

Reskilling and Upskilling

      Reskilling refers to the process of training individuals to acquire new skills that enable them to transition into a different position within the workplace, or to a new profession in response to technological changes or labour market shifts. Conversely, upskilling involves

enhancing or expanding existing professional skills in the same profession to adapt to evolving job requirements.

Decent Work

As per the ILO's agenda, decent work is defined as productive work for all labourers in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. It involves opportunities for work that guarantees a fair income, security and social protection in workplace settings, prospects of personal growth and social integration. Above all, it highlights inclusivity and sustainability for people in their working lives, allowing them to rightfully enjoy the equality of opportunity and treatment, regardless of gender and status.

Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is an overarching term that reflects the creation and advancement of modern technologies that affect the cultures and economies globally. Building on the the Third Industrial Revolution with its digitised characteristics, 4IR involves the fusion of technologies that blurs the boundaries between the physical, digital, and biological spheres of the world of work.

Historical Background

The rise and integration of automation and AI into industries and employment systems has been a continuous evolution throughout the history of human labour in which technological innovation has consistently redefined the relationship between capital, labour, and productivity. It can be traced back to the Industrial Revolutions, when newfound reliance on steam power and mechanised production radically reshaped the system of labour. In particular, mechanisation in early nineteenth-century Britain displaced artisans and handloom weavers as manual craftsmanship fell far behind the productive capacity of machines – setting the stage for widespread fears of displacement that culminated in the Luddite riots. Yet, these same transitions fostered significant growth in productivity, as well as the emergence of a new industrial workforce adapted to a new form of mechanised economy. This process was beyond a simple

narrative of job loss; it was a redistribution that repeatedly tested societies' capacity to adjust to technological progress.

In the mid-twentieth century–often referred to as the Third Industrial Revolution—came the introduction of automation on an unprecedented scale. The fusion of electronics, automation systems, and early computing technologies marked a distinct break from purely mechanical labour – automation not only reduced the demand for repetitive manual and clerical work, but also created new employment opportunities in the sphere of programming, maintenance, and engineering. Based on the initiative of reconciling the efficiency of industrial automation with protection of workers' rights, governments and international institutions such as the ILO and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OED) began to formally introduce the study of technological change and employment. By the 1970s, the debate surrounding labour had evolved into one defined by skill polarisation: the sharp division between high-skill technical work and declining demand for routine, semi-skilled labour.

The rise of globalisation at the close of the twentieth century elevated this dynamic once more: the expansion of trade liberalisation and relocation of production to developing regions. The consequent transformation of global labour markets further intensified the division between high-income and low-income economies. The ILO's *World Employment Programme* (1969) and subsequent *World Employment Report* (1995) called for employment strategies that balanced competitiveness with social protection, thus highlighting the social ramifications of this new trend. Globalisation integrated vast, low-wage workforces from developing countries while reshaping employment protection, marking the beginning of modern structural unemployment and the exacerbation of polarised work opportunities. By the mid-2010s, the world has entered what the World Economic Forum (WEF) referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR): a new era characterised by the convergence of AI, robotics, data analytics, and digital infrastructures. This phase blurred the boundaries between physical and digital labour, offering new opportunities for productivity and safety while renewing anxiety over widespread job displacement. Such concerns catalysed international discourse on the need for a "human-centered" approach to technological transitions — the ILO emphasised lifelong learning, reskilling programs, and stronger labour institutions to ensure the innovation serves as a

complement to human labour, not its complete replacement. This discourse also sparked debates over ethics, debate governance, and social implications of AI adoption across various sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of automation across industries, transforming logistics, manufacturing, and services at an unprecedented rate. Lockdowns and social distancing policies prompted active adoption of AI-drive operations, particularly in contactless services and remote platforms. Industries with higher automation potential experienced sharper employment contractions, disproportionately affecting informal and low-skilled workers. This further illuminated a growing digital divide – the broadening gap between economies capable of leveraging new technologies and those constrained by inadequate infrastructure and training. Overall the alignment of progress with justice, and innovation with the welfare of workers remains one of the biggest challenges to this world of labour.

Status Quo

Current Landscape of the Global Labour Market

The current global labour market is marked by the pervasive integration of automation and AI across a diverse range of sectors: manufacturing, logistics, services, and many more. Robotics have become instrumental in automobile manufacturing, streamlining production lines for efficiency and precision, whereas firms such as Amazon and Alibaba rely on highly automated warehouses that utilise AI-driven inventory management and order fulfillment systems. In customer service, AI scheduling tools optimise the allocation of workforce to meet fluctuating demand, which has been greatly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, small and medium enterprises are increasingly adopting AI solutions to reduce operational costs and enhance productivity, a trend that has been evident only in the largest multinational corporations. Most importantly, AI's impact extends beyond traditionally manual roles to white-collar professions that were once deemed as irreplaceable by AI technology – the influence over sectors such as data analytics, accounting, and journalism where automation is increasingly fused with augmentation of human decision-making processes. However, the global rate of adaptation varies significantly by region; countries in the Global South in particular continue to face infrastructural gaps and skill shortages, leading to slower technological adoption

and further exacerbation of existing inequalities. This uneven landscape presents a fundamental challenge for labour equity and employment security worldwide.

Threats and Challenges to Employment Security

As automation and AI continue to reshape the global labour market, job displacement remains as one of the central challenges to be resolved. Routine, low-skill, and middle-skill occupations–including factory workers, clerks, and drivers–face the highest risk of automation; approximately 14% of global jobs are reported to be highly susceptible to automation within the next two decades. Accordingly, income inequality intensifies as the technological shift disproportionately benefits workers with advanced digital skills and education while marginalising low-skilled labour. Low-skill workers lose bargaining power and economic security, contributing to the growing mismatch between demands of rapidly evolving labour markets and the capacity of capital infrastructure, particularly in developing countries, where retaining resources and access to technology are limited. Job security is further threatened by the rise of gig and platform work, characterised by short-term contracts and limited social protections - putting workers under the danger of economic shocks. Furthermore, the increasing use of AI in job recruitment, monitoring, and performance evaluations of individual workers raises critical concerns about algorithmic bias, discrimination, and privacy, posing new threats to workers' rights and fairness in employment.

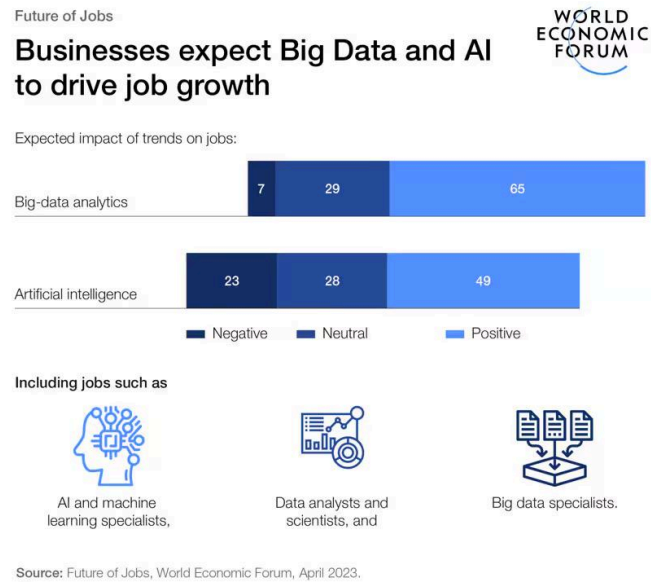*Prospects of Automation and AI for Employment*

Figure 1. Big Data and AI-driven job growth

The resulting trade-off from automation and AI, however, suggest a more optimistic outlook for the future of the labour market. Workplaces transformed by improved productivity and efficiency across various sectors greatly benefit from reduction of human errors, streamlined operations, and an overall increase in productivity, allowing labour to shift toward creative, managerial, and technical roles. The emergence of new job sectors have accelerated since the integration, albeit the creation of positions in AI development, robotic maintenance, data analytics, and digital services. According to the World Economic Forum's 2023 report, digital transformation is projected to create 97 million new jobs by 2030, suggesting a significant expansion of employment opportunities around the world. Automation also enhances workplace safety by automating hazardous tasks; for instance, AI-driven monitoring in mining and construction sites has significantly reduced injuries. Finally, technological progress drives economic growth, boosting global GDP and providing opportunities for investment in welfare programs and worker retaining.

Past Actions by Nations and Organizations

Japan

Japan has long been at the forefront of automation and innovation in robotics, driven largely by its demographic challenge of an aging population and the corresponding shortages of labour. In response, the Japanese government launched "Society 5.0" in 2016, a policy aimed to create a "super-smart society" through deep integration of AI, the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, and big data across both industrial production and social systems. This vision is rooted in maintaining a balance between automation and human labour – focusing on upskilling and retraining workers whose jobs are directly affected by technological change. Alongside the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has implemented retaining subsidies specifically targeting displaced workers. Japan also aims to foster lifelong learning initiatives, promoting public-private partnerships to expand digital skills training across the country. Despite these advances, difficulties in implementation still remain; small enterprises lack the resources to adopt automation effectively, and women face disparities in accessing digital training programs. Yet, Japan's approach exemplifies how automation can be strategically used to counter labour shortages while preserving employment opportunities by investing in worker adaptability and social inclusion.

South Korea

South Korea's rapid industrialisation has been supported by forward-looking initiatives to integrate automation while training a skilled workforce capable of adapting to new technologies. In 2020, The Ministry of Employment and Labour launched the K-Digital Training Initiative to provide free digital education and AI-related training for young job seekers and displaced manufacturing workers. This program operates through a collaborative effort between the government, universities, and private tech companies, exemplifying the public-private partnership model. The population also showed substantial commitment to upskilling as more than 1.5 million people have enrolled in digital competency courses. However, the persisting disparities remain a challenge, as digital training is heavily concentrated in metropolitan areas, leaving rural communities with limited access. Furthermore, older workers also face major challenges adapting to digital skills requirements. Regardless, South Korea's approach balances industrial competitiveness with a comprehensive development of human capital, positioning it as a model for managing the social implications of automation and AI integration.

Germany

Germany has distinguished itself as Europe's industrial leader and has been active in shaping a digital future through the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' "High Tech Strategy 2025" and "Work 4.0" (Arbeiten 4.0) initiatives. These programs not only prioritise technological innovation, but also the social aspects of automation, such as changes in employment relations, working hours, and collective bargaining structures. Germany's approach highlights a cooperative model in which various unions like IG Metall actively participate in the policymaking process regarding digital transformation. Some practical implementations include a nationwide platform for dialogue that brings together government agencies, employers and unions to promote consensus and collective solutions. The government has also heavily invested in reforming vocational education and promoting a digital apprenticeship system in which workers acquire the necessary skills to develop the labour market. Despite these advances, significant challenges remain as small and medium-sized enterprises are often behind the process of digitalisation, and bureaucratic inertia has hindered the modernisation of the training curriculum. Yet, Germany's comprehensive and consultative strategy closely aligns with the principles of ILO, citing a human-centered automation model that harmonises industrial competitiveness with social equity.

United States

The United States is a pioneer in technological innovation while managing and maintaining its impact on the labour market. The 2020 National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act demonstrates its commitment to funding research on AI's economic and occupational effects. The Labour Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) further complements the initiative by providing federal subsidies to assist displaced retraining programs, reflecting federal-level efforts to facilitate transitions with automation. The 2022 CHIPS and Science Act promotes this agenda by fostering investment in semiconductor manufacturing and strengthening development in the STEM workforce. Aside from government action, leading tech companies such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft have launched extensive AI literacy programs for their employees and the public, improving their digital skills in the workforce from the private sector. However, the lack of strong federal regulations toward algorithmic management and workers rights in the gig economy remain a critical challenge for the U.S., as protections and benefits vary significantly across states. This underscores the ongoing tension between the country's position as a global

innovation hub and its fragmented approach to labour protection as automation and AI integration accelerates.

European Union (EU)

The European Union stands out as a regional leader in shaping the ethics and regulation of AI and automation. Since 2017, the EU has promoted a comprehensive social rights framework in the name of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, outlining the 20 principles to achieve EU-wide targets by 2030, aimed at advancing digital education and skills. Such efforts laid the groundwork for the successive Artificial Intelligence Act, set for 2024, with the goal of establishing the first broad regulation on reliable AI technologies. This law emphasises fairness in the workplace, supporting the use of AI systems in the employment process as it will protect the principles of transparency, non-discrimination, and data protection. To complement this initiative, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) allocates significant funding for training programs, skills development, and worker transition schemes, with the actual implementation varying among Member States. The smaller economies in the EU often face challenges in meeting regulatory standards and securing sufficient funding, emphasising the uneven pace of digital and ethical integration. Yet, a rights-based approach by the EU provides a model for a fair, inclusive, and human-centered employment practices in the age of AI and automation.

G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration (2019)

Released in June 2019, the G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration addressed AI in employment by endorsing the G20 Principles on Artificial Intelligence; it recognises AI's potential to drive prosperity and expand the global digital economy if the use is guided by the principles. The principles advocate a human-centred approach to AI to ensure that its development contributes to the workplace in various ways, including promotion of job quality, worker safety, and fair outcomes for all. For instance, the G20 encourages AI adoption by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to help overcome high adoption costs, and calls upon governments to collaborate with stakeholders to prepare the workforce for the changes brought by AI. The declaration also acknowledged that cross-border data flows and digital trade can boost productivity and innovation if managed in a way that ensures privacy, data protection and

consumer confidence. This approach reflects the priorities of the ILO and connects digital innovation with appropriate work and equitable global development.

Stances of Major Countries and Organizations

United States

The United States maintains its position as a global leader in technological innovation and AI-driven automation, largely shaped by the dominance of major private corporations such as Google, Amazon, Tesla, and OpenAI. The federal policy framework consistently reflects a market-based orientation, balancing the encouragement of innovation with cautious recognition of potential disruptions to the labor market. The National AI Initiative Act of 2020 embodies this philosophy by prioritizing continued leadership in AI research and development while providing only limited direct intervention to safeguard workers displaced by automation. This approach is further reflected in the Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI issued in 2023, which acknowledges the ethical responsibilities of AI governance but falls short of establishing binding federal safeguards for employment.

To enhance workforce adaptability, the U.S. government has increasingly promoted public-private collaborations—most notably through the American AI and Workforce Coalition—that focus on strengthening STEM education and digital skills. Nevertheless, a fragmented regulatory environment continues to pose structural vulnerabilities. The absence of a unified national strategy for addressing employment transitions results in uneven benefits across regions and sectors, while persistently low unionization rates further weaken workers' bargaining power.

On the international stage, the United States advocates market-driven digital innovation and open cross-border trade, while showing considerable resistance to binding global norms or restrictions on AI and automation. This stance reflects the complex reality of the American labor environment—characterized by rapid technological advancement but inconsistent protection for those left behind by such change.

China

The People's Republic of China regards automation and AI as a strategic foundation of national development under its framework "Made in China 2025" – it promotes technological advancement as the key to improving productivity and ensuring long-term economic resilience. Developed as part of China's long-term policy vision, the National AI Development Plan (2017) aims to integrate AI across all industrial sectors and strengthen the nation's position as a global leader in emerging technologies. The digital revolution is further emphasised by the following strategies that highlight the interrelationship between automation, job creation, and industry transformation, particularly focusing on large-scale vocational retaining programs to provide workers with the necessary skills to meet evolving labour demands.

However, centralized governance models as such limit the space for independent worker representation and collective bargaining. Existing regulatory frameworks tend to prioritise national security, productivity, and social stability over participatory labour governance, raising concerns about algorithmic management and digital surveillance in the workplace. Nevertheless, China is recognised globally for its development of the concept of AI sovereignty, advocating voluntary technology governance and promoting a multipolar approach to AI regulation and participation in formation of global standards, albeit documents such as the Shanghai Global AI Governance Declaration (2024).

European Union (EU)

The European Union is distinguished by its rigorous, principle-driven strategy in overseeing automation and artificial intelligence within the workforce. Central to this strategy is the Artificial Intelligence Act enacted in 2024, which establishes mandatory regulations for high-risk AI systems used in the workplace. These regulations mandate transparency, fairness, and rigorous oversight of AI applications utilized for hiring, employee oversight, and workplace surveillance. These regulations effectively ban practices like emotional awareness and social scoring in the workplace. The complementary framework, featuring the European Skills Agenda, intends to re-skill and enhance the skills of over 120 million workers by 2030, ensuring that citizens can adapt to the rapid pace of digital transformation. The EU upholds a consistent dedication to ethical innovation, encourages social dialogue among national governments, employers, and labor groups, enhances policies, and supports the responsible adoption of emerging technologies.

The EU functions within global settings like the OECD and ILO, promoting unified standards for fair employment, accountability in algorithms, and significant worker involvement in the digital economy. With this rights-based focus, the EU offers a complete framework that harmonizes competitiveness and inclusivity, prioritizing social protection and human dignity in the context of technological advancement.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The OECD positions itself as a strategic guide in digital transformation, aiming to curb the spread of inequality while leveraging automation effectively. The OECD employment outlook and the AI principle established in 2019 are at the core of the framework. It offers governments strategic advice on managing job transitions in a chaotic work environment. These papers highlight the significance of holistic development and promote robust skill-enhancement programs backed by data-informed evaluations of national and departmental challenges. A recent report from the organization indicates that around 14% of jobs held by members are at risk of automation and necessitate proactive policy actions in both developed and developing nations. Globally, the OECD promotes unified measurement frameworks like collaborative research and the Going Digital Measurement Roadmap to consistently assess the impacts of automation and ensure equitable solutions worldwide. OECD studies and convening abilities aid in establishing best practices for adaptation, fostering collaboration, and aligning policy priorities to enhance technological progress without jeopardizing the labor market's resilience.

Possible Solutions

Investment in human capital through education reform and skills adaptation

In order to address the challenges of rising automation and integration of AI within the workforce, national governments and international organisations should prioritise investment in human capital, with an emphasis on lifelong learning and adaptive skills development. This would require both developed and developing economies to move beyond reactive measures. In advanced economies, digital infrastructure should be used to integrate flexible corporate training modules that blend data analytics, robotics maintenance, and AI literacy. Developing economies

can focus on more affordable, community-driven skill centers–backed by multilateral development aids— building and thus bridging gaps in low-income settings, expanding access to in-demand skills for marginalised workers. Most importantly, policymakers must foreground the teaching and learning skills that remain "uniquely human" — namely, creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. Embedding these abilities into national education standards and vocational tracks ensures that workforce strategies are future-proofed, rather than reactive. Public-private partnerships (PPP) can further incentivize upskilling by offering tuition assistance, training subsidies, and tax credits for firms investing in their workers' adaptability.

While this approach brings tangible benefits, such as increased employment security, smoother economic transitions and reduced inequities, it is not without limitations; significant fiscal expenditure, robust digital infrastructure, and institutional coordination are prerequisites that many developing countries may not yet possess. Thus, delegates must consider how investment in human capital can serve as a prerequisite for equitable participation in the evolving global labor market.

Balancing automation as augmentation through human-AI collaboration

Shifting the narrative around automation and AI from replacing workers to augmenting their capabilities can offer a practical path to securing employment amid technological change. Encouraging human–AI collaboration through "co-pilot" systems lets artificial intelligence support decision-making and analytics rather than fully supplanting roles. Governments can guide this process by setting industry-specific frameworks that balance efficiency with labor empowerment, recognizing, for example, the need for human oversight in manufacturing and personal contact in services. In developing economies, promoting accessible mechanization paired with worker training can boost agricultural productivity without widespread displacement. Ethical governance must require companies to conduct Automation Impact Assessments ensuring transparency and fairness, while involving trade unions and worker councils in policy design to safeguard interests. Employers should prioritize retraining and redeploying staff internally, supported by government initiatives such as portable retraining accounts that preserve workers' learning investments across career changes. Although such strategies promote sustainable technology adoption and ease labor resistance, their success hinges on strong

institutional support and mutual trust between employers and employees, which is often absent in most developing countries that suffer from internal and institutional instabilities.

Improving social protection and governance systems

Strengthening social safety nets, innovating fiscal policies, and enhancing worker representation can also serve as a multifaceted approach to this agenda. Expanding social protections to include gig and informal workers, who are often overlooked and most vulnerable to displacement is critical; this includes broadening unemployment insurance, healthcare access, and pension schemes. Governments should establish emergency retraining funds financed through targeted automation taxes or levies on companies that replace human labor with machines, ensuring that those displaced receive timely skills development. Pilot programs for Universal Basic Income (UBI) can provide a temporary safety net in regions facing acute automation impacts, safeguarding livelihoods during economic transitions. Fiscal measures encouraging ethical AI use and workforce upskilling, such as tax credits for companies investing in human capital, can balance innovation with social responsibility. Most importantly, embedding worker voices through mandated representation on corporate AI ethics boards and national technology policy forums will ensure that labor concerns shape the governance of automation technologies. On an international scale, coordinated efforts by bodies like the ILO, OECD, and UNDP must focus on closing digital divides and fostering capacity-building in developing economies to prevent premature deindustrialization. While these strategies promise to reduce inequalities and sustain social cohesion, their success depends on overcoming significant fiscal challenges, private sector resistance, and the risk of "automation havens" that could undermine global cooperation.

Revisiting and updating global and regional frameworks on AI-driven transitions

Revisiting and revising legal frameworks can also effectively address the issue arising from AI-driven transitions in the workplace. Building on the foundation of the ILO Centenary Declaration (2019), member states can develop a dedicated convention that establishes international standards for human-centered AI development, emphasising workers' rights and equitable transitions. On top of this, delegates may consider complementary measures that provide real-time monitoring of automation and its labour impacts across borders, thus enabling

data-driven policy responses by nations. Additionally, establishing global benchmarks on "ethical automation" can promote algorithmic transparency and equitable distribution of productivity gains between capital and labor. While implementing such frameworks enhances international coherence and accountability, the political challenge remains substantial, as some states may resist regulations perceived to constrain economic competitiveness. Thus, it is important to articulate a comprehensive approach that not only mitigates the risks posed by automation but also to actively promote fair, sustainable employment outcomes that can be adopted equally by relevant states.

Questions to Consider

- What role should worker organisations and trade unions play in the governance of automation policies to ensure fair labour transitions?

- To what extent should automation and AI-integration be accepted as a replacement or complement to human labour, and how can this balance be effectively determined at national and international levels?

- How can international cooperation ensure that future job opportunities are fairly distributed between developing and developed countries, particularly where technology adoption remains uneven?

- What mechanisms can policymakers adopt to guarantee that AI-driven job creation complements rather than completely replaces existing roles, preserving employment security?

- What forms of international cooperation and regulation are necessary to establish global standards for ethical and responsible AI deployment?

- How can trust be built among human levels—workers, employers, and governments—to support a human-centric, inclusive future of work in the face of rapid technological integration?

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International Labour Organization (ILO)

Chair Report

[Agenda B: Protecting workers rights to amidst rising trade tensions and economic instability]

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frameworks for pressing issues, the UN continues to serve as a unifying force in addressing global challenges.

Committee Introduction

As the only tripartite agenda within the UN, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) operates with the cooperation of governments, employers, and workers to promote social justice and international human and labour rights. Founded in 1919 through the Treaty of Versailles, the ILO was grounded in the conviction that social justice for workers is a precondition for a universal and lasting peace. Since its first conference in 1919, the ILO's work has surrounded the creation of conventions and recommendations on a range of issues such as working hours, maternity protection, and unemployment. Post-World War II, the ILO continued to expand its membership and influence, playing a critical role in the decolonisation process and promoting labour rights during the Great Depression. In the late 20th century, the ILO launched key initiatives to adapt to globalisation, such as the "Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" in 1998 and the "Decent Work Agenda" in 1999.

The ILO emphasises a human-centred approach to advancing a decent work agenda, going beyond the abstract goal of protecting workers' rights. It is dedicated to various objectives, such as creating decent employment, expanding social protection, and fostering social dialogue, as well as implementing development projects that establish the conditions necessary to realise such goals. It is based on the mandate of advancing social and economic justice and promoting decent work for all workers through ways such as setting international labour standards, developing policies, and devising practical programs for member states to participate in. The ILO pursues its mission through the Decent Work Agenda, consisting of four strategic objectives: creating employment, extending social protection, strengthening social dialogue, and promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Today, the ILO continues to provide technical assistance, research, and policy advice to member states on labour issues, with its goals integrated into the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Agenda Introduction

The ILO defines workers' rights as human rights that promote social justice and dignity in the workplace — it emphasises the commitment by governments, employers and workers' organisations to reinforce shared principles of equity and justice in its Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998). Amid the recent escalation in global trade tensions, exemplified by the ongoing disputes between the United States and China, persistent geopolitical uncertainty and heightened trade policy changes only seem to have further exacerbated economic instability worldwide. Most prominently, a significant trade tension stems from renewed tariffs imposed by the U.S. under a "Trump 2.0" administration.

On the surface level, such scenarios are estimated to hinder both short-term and ongoing-term growth prospects of the global economy, and to varying degrees across different nations. When examined more closely, the consequences of trade tensions and economic instability fall disproportionately on workers, putting them at risk of job displacement or wage stagnation. According to the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), an estimated 20% US tariff on EU goods could curtail EU exports by nearly 15%, putting at risk up to 720,000 jobs out of the 4.8 million supported by the EU-US trade. The implications of rising trade tensions and resulting global economic fragility for workers' rights range from wage suppressions to job insecurities, as countries are likely to lower labour standards to maintain competitiveness or gain an unfair advantage in trade. As a result, basic workers rights—right to decent work and an adequate standard of living—are under pressure, thus requiring policy actions and enhanced cooperation between governments, employers, and unions.

For this agenda, delegates must formulate comprehensive solutions that go beyond government and policy actions. Areas such as worker empowerment and representation, as well as institutional and global cooperation, should also be considered as part of ensuring fair transitions and job security amidst economic shifts.

Key Terms

Workers rights

      Workers rights—as defined by the ILO–refer to the promotion of social and economic justice under the five fundamental principles: freedom of association and collective bargaining, elimination of forced or compulsory labour, the abolition of child labour, elimination of employment discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment. Such principles serve as the pillars of the ground that all workers deserve to work in conditions that are just and favourable, and their dignity, well-being, and livelihoods protected by various legal frameworks and international labour standards.

Trade tensions

      Trade tensions arise from disagreement over trade practices, policies, or economic imbalances between bilateral or multilateral trade relations, leading to strained relationships between nations. These tensions can either be observed through threats such as retaliation, or implementations of protectionist measures such as tariffs and import quotas. As one of the recurring features of international relations throughout history, trade tensions were accompanied by the use of trade policies to exert influence, protect respective infant industries, or retaliate against perceived unfair trade practices that would eventually escalate to "trade war" between nations. A notable period of heightened trade tensions can be traced down to 2018, when the United States and China engaged in a trade dispute marked by mutual imposition of extensive tariffs, thus opening a new

Decent Work

      As per the ILO's agenda, decent work is defined as productive work for all labourers in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. It involves opportunities for work that guarantees a fair income, security and social protection in workplace settings, prospects of personal growth and social integration. Above all, it highlights inclusivity and sustainability for people in their working lives, allowing them to rightfully enjoy the equality of opportunity and treatment, regardless of gender and status.

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining refers to the process of negotiations between workers and employers to determine the terms and conditions of employment, including pay, benefits, working hours, workplace safety, and more. A result of such negotiations is the collective bargaining agreement (CBA), which is a legally enforceable contract that outlines the conditions and rules of employment for the duration of the agreement.

Labour Standards

In essence, labour standards are defined as the set of principles and regulations designed to protect workers' rights and welfare by establishing minimum acceptable conditions of employment. They range from more immediate and measurable aspects—including wages, working hours, and occupational health and safety—to broader institutional guarantees, such as non-discrimination, freedom of association, and general employment protection, which ensures fairness and stability within the workplace, especially during periods of trade volatility and economic uncertainty.

Historical Background

The late twentieth century marked the beginning of a new chapter for international labour, characterised by the seismic expansion of global trade and intensified competition across borders. The neoliberal turn of the 1980s, evident in the economic reforms of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, heralded a period in which deregulation and privatisation upended the Keynesian assumptions—wages and prices remain relatively unresponsive to changes in economic conditions—underlying postwar economic and social policies, accelerating the spread of austerity measures and diminishing the scope of protection for organised labour. As manufacturing and service industries expanded around the world, developing nations were swiftly woven into supply chains; often on terms dictated by foreign capital and multinational corporations, with local labour rights sacrificed at the expense of comparative advantage. This era was thus reviewed as "a race to the bottom", where states would compete to attract investment by curtailing wages and regulatory measures, resulting in stark disparities between workers in the global North and South. These disparities include differences in income levels, access to social protections, educational opportunities, and working conditions – a trend that has

been observed throughout history and continues to this day. Yet, not all nations responded alike: while some benefitted from export-driven flexibility, others preserved robust social contracts or developed hybrid systems that aimed to balance competitiveness and protection concurrently.

The birth of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 consolidated the ideals of free trade, but it also exposed the persistent divides on the connection between commercial openness and fundamental labour protections. Major economies sought to introduce labour standards into multilateral trade agreements, but many developing countries objected in fear of protectionist barriers undermining their development prospects. Accordingly, the WTO emerged as a powerful forum for trade liberalisation, but remained mostly silent on rights in the workplace. This left the responsibility of protecting workers largely to other bodies, resulting in varied regulatory frameworks.

In response, the ILO advanced its Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998, embodying freedom of association, collective bargaining, the elimination of forced and child labour, and non-discrimination as universal standards. According to comparative studies, this served as a global turning point that allowed national and regional labour regimes to be measured against a set of minimum standards, despite the uneven level of enforcement among nations. Developed economies often integrated these principles within broader welfare systems, while developing countries shifted between formal adoption and practical neglect, largely due to domestic priorities and external pressures.

However, the 2008 financial crisis shattered many of the underlying assumptions of contemporary labour markets. Mass layoffs, austerity, and weakened labour unions dictated the recovery efforts, where governments would prioritise rapid growth over job security. As major institutions such as the IMF and World Bank recommended resilience through adaptability over guaranteed rights, many employers were given more authority to hire, fire, and regulate work hours – which made the labour market far more "flexible" in a way that placed workers at a greater disadvantage than employers. As a result, the dramatic expansion of informal and precarious employment prompted further reflection on the role of institutions in safeguarding workers rights and welfare.

As trade tensions escalated in the 2010s—most notably in the US-China tariff conflict—the according labour disruptions compounded the rise of precarious labour initiated by the earlier global shifts. Manufacturing industries were faced with significant job losses and factory relocations, while governments experimented with reshoring and nearshoring as a strategy to mitigate the risks from the global trade atmosphere, which left more workers displaced and in search for stability. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, as in 2020 alone over 255 million full-time workers were wiped out. This exposed both the fragility of global supply chains as well as the limited reach of labour protections worldwide. With millions of labourers forced into informal and hazardous conditions, local governments faced new objectives to balance recovery with long-term reforms. Given the volatility of the global economy, the tension between national interests and global standards has continuously shaped worker protections throughout modern history.

Status Quo

The volatility of global economy

The global economy remains highly volatile marked by successive shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, and prolonged trade tensions, particularly between the United States and China. Such disruptions have intensified trade protectionism, mainly driven by geopolitical rivalries and vulnerabilities within intertwined supply chains, prompting both nations and firms to revisit external dependencies to strengthen strategic autonomy. For instance, the US-China trade war has not only redrawn global trade landscapes but also inspired the European Union's strategic autonomy policies and the rise of friendshoring: supply chains realign toward politically reliable partners. These shifts, accumulated by persistent inflationary pressures and rising energy costs, weigh heavily on global markets, undermining employment stability and prospects of economic growth. For workers, such economic instability translates into heightened job insecurities from factories being shut down, offshoring, and automation, as well as wage stagnation amid firms cutting production costs.

Degradation of working conditions is especially evident in export-dependent sectors, where labour protections are less robust; global informal employment significantly increases as firms seek flexibility to navigate uncertainty, pushing more workers outside the protection of formal social safety nets. The ILO's 2024 World Employment and Social Outlook warns that despite a tentative post-pandemic recovery, the labor market remains precarious, with widening inequalities across regions and demographics.

Promising developments

The strengthening of social protection systems over recent years reflects a collective effort to shield workers from the adverse effects of economic volatility and structural changes triggered by trade tensions and conflicts. Many states have expanded unemployment benefits and income support schemes, with the European Union's temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) program notably providing up to €100 billion in loans to help member countries maintain labor market stability during the pandemic-induced shock, especially through short-term work schemes that preserve jobs and incomes. At the same time, rebuilding resilient global supply chains has become a priority, with post-pandemic trade agreements such as the USMCA adding enforceable labor clauses designed to uphold workers' rights across borders, while collaboration between the ILO and WTO seeks to harmonize labor and trade policies to better balance economic integration with social protection. These efforts are accompanied by an increase in tripartite social dialogue, where governments, employers, and workers collectively negotiate labor reforms to ensure inclusivity and adaptability.

Additionally, digital innovation offers new platforms to enhance labor transparency: AI and blockchain technologies are being piloted to track compliance with labor standards and to combat exploitation in complex supply chains, thus promising a future where enhanced oversight might protect vulnerable workers more effectively. Together, these promising developments signal a move toward more integrated, technology-enabled, and rights-focused frameworks for protecting workers in an uncertain global economy.

Persistent inequalities and vulnerable groups

Persistent inequalities and vulnerable groups remain as a central challenge to global labor markets, shaping deeply uneven experiences of economic disruption and recovery. While many high-income nations are increasingly expanding the use of automation and reshoring policies to safeguard domestic employment, many low-income countries, particularly export-dependent economies in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, face risks of deindustrialisation and rising unemployment as demand for their labor diminishes. Migrant workers—a significant component of global labor flows—continue to suffer from exclusion, often denied adequate protections and caught between tightening immigration policies and heightened cross-border tensions. Gender and class inequalities also persist, with women sustaining disproportionate job losses in informal and care sectors during economic shocks, thereby exacerbating economic vulnerabilities, while working-class populations bear a heavier burden of long-term unemployment compared to their more skilled peers who adapt more readily to shifting labor demands. Moreover, the erosion of collective bargaining power—driven by declining union memberships and combined employer pushback—weakens workers' ability to challenge deteriorating conditions and wage stagnation, worsening power asymmetries globally.

This wide array of disparities reveals that without deliberate, targeted policies addressing these intersections of vulnerability, economic instability and trade tensions will perpetuate cycles of exclusion and inequity, undermining not only social cohesion but also the prospects for sustainable development and decent work.

Gaps in governance and future outlook

Despite the growing recognition of workers' rights as integral to sustainable economic development, systemic gaps persist in governance structures, hindering the effectiveness of protection measures at the intersection of global trade and labor standards. The labour market is devoid of a comprehensive framework that universally binds global trade rules to enforceable labor protection mechanisms, rendering efforts fragmented and frequently symbolic. Though the WTO and ILO share overlapping objectives, their coordination remains largely confined to dialogue rather than concrete, binding agreements, with the former reluctant to incorporate labor standards formally into its dispute settlement mechanisms. Inconsistent ratification and uneven implementation of ILO conventions further undermine the universality of global labor standards,

especially among states that remain outside formal treaty obligations. These limitations are paralleled by the widespread inadequacy of social safety nets across many regions, which leave workers exposed to future trade shocks or financial crises without meaningful recourse or protection.

The cumulative effect is a global labor market fraught with vulnerabilities, where economic advancement and trade liberalization continue to outpace the institutional safeguards that should ensure decent work, dignity, and equity. Addressing this governance deficit is not just a normative goal but essential to securing labor markets that are resilient, fair, and inclusive in the volatile realities of the twenty-first century.

Past Actions by Nations and Organizations

United States

The United States has long played a central role in shaping global labor and trade policies, striving to balance protections for domestic workers while maintaining its international competitiveness. Since the 1960s, the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program has provided displaced workers with retraining, income support, and relocation assistance, reflecting a foundational effort to soften the impact of trade-driven job losses. More recently, the USMCA replaced NAFTA in 2020, enhancing labor provisions by requiring stricter enforcement of union rights and collective bargaining in Mexico.

Trade policy continued to evolve with a greater emphasis on labor rights, positioning trade as a tool to advance fair competition and workers' welfare rather than mere liberalization. Agencies such as the Department of Labor and U.S. Trade Representative actively enforce labor rules embedded in trade deals and cooperate with labor organizations like the AFL-CIO to monitor working conditions abroad. Yet, domestic challenges persist; increasing gig work and low union density undermine consistent labor protections, while the scope of retraining programs remains limited for many displaced workers. The U.S. approaches thus illustrate the ongoing tension between advocating strong labor standards internationally and addressing uneven worker protections domestically, reflecting the complex realities of global labor governance.

China

Through years of rapid industrialisation, China has become a central figure in global trade debates concerning labor standards and working conditions. The 2008 Labour Contract Law marked a significant step toward regulating employment contracts and limiting informal labor, while the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans emphasize stable employment, industrial upgrading, and social protections amidst ongoing economic restructuring. Vocational retraining programs have been developed to support workers displaced by automation and shifts in global supply chains. The government's priority has been to maintain job stability and social harmony, with state-led policies guiding workforce resilience. However, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the sole legal union, operates under state control, effectively limiting independent collective bargaining and restricting labor activism. Internationally, China's Belt and Road Initiative extends its economic influence but faces criticism over labor rights, as Beijing resists linking labor standards to trade sanctions on sovereignty grounds. Ultimately, China's model prioritizes economic security and social control over liberalization of labor freedoms, which significantly influences global discussions on fair trade and workers' rights.

ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019)

Adopted in 2019 to mark its 100th anniversary, The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work reasserts the organisation's commitment to social justice amid profound transformations such as automation, globalization, and persistent inequality. It establishes a human-centered agenda that prioritizes lifelong learning and skills development, universal social protection, and gender equality in safe workplaces. The Declaration also emphasizes the necessity of robust social dialogue and collective bargaining to manage economic shifts responsibly. Serving as a guiding framework, it influences national employment and trade policies and features prominently in regional strategies like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and EU labor programs. However, its voluntary nature means a considerably varying level of enforcement, with limited impact in countries facing weak institutions or large informal sectors. Nonetheless, foundational commitment underscores the indispensable role of decent work and social justice in sustaining equitable global economic governance today.

World Trade Organisation

Since its establishment in 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been the cornerstone of the global trading system, emphasizing liberalization and dispute resolution. However, its engagement with labor standards has remained limited and contentious. The 1996 Ministerial Conference in Singapore marked the first significant debate over linking trade and labor rights, ultimately deciding that labor issues fall under the purview of the International Labour Organization (ILO), not the WTO. Subsequent joint WTO–ILO reports in 2007 and 2017 acknowledged the importance of inclusive globalization and explored trade's impact on employment and inequality, yet the WTO has stopped short of adopting binding labor provisions. While recent trade agreements incorporate "Trade and Sustainable Development" chapters, these lack enforceability. Developing countries frequently argue that tying labor standards to trade policies risks protectionism disguised as fairness. This persistent divergence leaves labor protections on the periphery of WTO enforcement and exacerbates global employment insecurity as trade liberalization outpaces social safeguards. The WTO's limited role thus highlights a crucial governance deficit in ensuring that economic integration translates into decent work and equitable conditions globally.

North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC)

Established in 1994 as the labour side agreement to NAFTA, The North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC) marked an early attempt to embed labor provisions within a regional trade pact. It required the United States, Canada, and Mexico to enforce their own labor laws, upholding eleven core labor principles including prohibitions on child labor, guarantees for minimum wage enforcement, and workplace safety standards. The agreement established a Commission for Labor Cooperation tasked with overseeing its implementation and addressing complaints. Though it facilitated cross-border cooperation, technical assistance, and dispute resolution, enforcement remained largely symbolic, with few sanctions or binding outcomes resulting from complaints. NAALC helped bring attention to labor rights violations, notably in Mexican maquiladora factories, but critics saw it as largely ineffective in driving substantive change. Nevertheless, it laid the groundwork for the more robust labor chapter of the 2020 USMCA, representing an evolution toward stronger labor governance in North American trade relations.

Stances of Major Countries and Organizations

United States

  The United States continues to play a central role in steering global trade and labor policy, maintaining a delicate balance between protecting domestic employment and defending competitive market engagement. Its involvement in the protracted U.S.–China trade war has profoundly shaped global conversations on fair labor standards and ethical supply chains, driving increased scrutiny of working conditions in trade partners. The U.S. embeds enforceable labor rights clauses in pivotal trade agreements such as the USMCA, while domestic programs like Trade Adjustment Assistance channel resources toward workforce retraining and efforts to revitalize unions. Internationally, it insists on linking trade benefits to labor rights compliance, targeting nations such as Mexico, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, and advocates for rigorous oversight of labor conditions in supply chains. Nonetheless, critiques of U.S. policy highlight a protective posture cloaked in labor advocacy, with inconsistent enforcement of labor provisions and a domestic decline in unionization reflecting inherent contradictions. Thus, the U.S. exemplifies the tension between pursuing equitable labor standards and safeguarding economic competitiveness within an increasingly fragmented global economy.

China

  As the world's largest exporter and a linchpin in trade tensions, China champions a state-led globalization paradigm prioritizing productivity, economic stability, and social harmony over Western-style labor reform that emphasizes collective bargaining. Labor rights in China are framed within the concept of "social harmony," anchored by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the sole legal union under strict state control. China's policy center on employment stability amid trade disruptions and supply chain restructuring reinforces labor contract enforcement domestically and invests in vocational training and poverty alleviation to sustain the workforce. Internationally, China promotes "globalization with Chinese characteristics," most notably via its Belt and Road Initiative, while opposing the integration of labor rights into trade sanctions on grounds of sovereignty. Criticism persists regarding

inadequate working conditions and constrained labor activism, reflecting a prioritization of economic security and controlled adaptation over systemic labor liberalization.

European Union (EU)

The European Union leads by integrating social sustainability and labor rights within its trade policy framework, advocating a rights-based multilateral system that aligns trade with international labor standards. The European Pillar of Social Rights enshrines fair wages, work–life balance, and labor mobility, while EU trade agreements regularly embed Trade and Sustainable Development chapters mandating ILO convention adherence. The EU invests in labor capacity-building worldwide and uses mechanisms like the GSP+ to incentivize compliance. Despite this, enforcement remains predominantly soft, with scarce sanctions, and internal socio-economic divides complicate uniform labor rights application. Nonetheless, the EU's principled, rules-based stance positions it as a progressive force in advancing labor protections in times of economic tumult.

World Economic Forum (WEF)

The World Economic Forum advances "stakeholder capitalism," positioning human labor as a vital asset essential to value creation rather than a cost element. Its flagship Reskilling Revolution aims to furnish one billion workers with improved skills and education by 2030, facilitating adaptability to technological change. The WEF's approach underscores the role of private-sector leadership in driving workforce transformation aligned with inclusive growth objectives. However, this voluntary framework lacks binding accountability, illustrating limits in its capacity to guarantee comprehensive labor protections, and highlighting the necessity of complementary enforceable standards to safeguard workers in the global economy.

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Representing over 200 million workers worldwide, the ITUC rigorously advocates for enforceable global labor standards, centering the protection of workers' rights amid rising trade tensions and economic instability. It demands binding labor provisions within trade agreements and opposes deregulation and austerity policies that undermine worker protections. Serving as the civil society voice alongside the ILO, the ITUC amplifies labor concerns on the international

stage, pressing for systemic reforms that prioritize social justice and empower workers across global supply chains. Its unwavering focus on enforceability and equity underscores the critical need for accountability mechanisms to safeguard labor rights amid escalating trade tensions and economic instabilities.

Possible Solutions

Reinforcing global and regional labour governance frameworks

Modernizing international labor governance frameworks is essential to safeguarding workers' rights amid escalating trade tensions and growing economic instability. To this end, revisiting foundational agreements such as the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019) is critical, ensuring they explicitly address the realities of trade disruptions and global market volatility. One promising avenue is deepening collaboration between the WTO and ILO to embed enforceable labor standards within trade agreements, moving beyond voluntary commitments. Encouraging regional and bilateral trade pacts—including ASEAN, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the CPTPP—to incorporate binding Trade and Labor Chapters can strengthen obligations, while independent monitoring bodies or ombudspersons should be established to oversee compliance and recommend appropriate sanctions or support. Additionally, creating an ILO-led guidance on economic crisis management could offer rapid coordinated action during global trade shocks, combining emergency social protection funds with technical assistance for affected economies.

Strengthening social protection systems and inclusive labour policies

Expanding social protection systems is also essential to protecting workers amid economic downturns and trade-related disruptions. This entails extending unemployment benefits, healthcare, and pension coverage to informal and gig-economy workers who have long been excluded from traditional frameworks. International financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF must tie social protection floors to recovery programs, shifting away from austerity measures which historically undermine workers' security. Crisis-responsive safety nets,

such as Employment Stabilization Funds funded by national governments and international partners—mirroring EU's SURE program—can provide vital wage subsidies or retraining support during sudden trade shocks. Supporting vulnerable sectors, notably SMEs and export-dependent industries like textiles and electronics, with temporary tax relief and microcredit can stabilize employment. Exploring Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilots in volatile economies can also offer short-term relief, especially when linked to retraining or job search requirements, striking a balance between welfare and incentive.

Ultimately, such policies serve to preserve household consumption and prevent poverty traps triggered by trade disruptions. However, challenges persist due to high fiscal demands and implementation barriers in countries with limited administrative capacities, underscoring the need for international cooperation and tailored support.

Region-specific approaches for developed vs. developing countries

Adopting region-specific solutions is vital to protecting workers' rights amid the diverging challenges faced by developed and developing economies. In advanced nations, policies must focus on managing industrial transitions driven by reshoring, automation, and green restructuring to preserve decent work. Strengthening retraining programs, diversifying industrial sectors, and implementing taxes on automation windfalls can generate funds for social reinvestment that supports displaced workers. Conversely, developing economies require prioritization of industrial diversification alongside digital inclusion initiatives to prevent a labor "race to the bottom."

Expanding technical cooperation through multilateral bodies such as the ILO, UNDP, and OECD can finance critical digital infrastructure, support small and medium enterprises, and enhance vocational training. Ensuring fairer trade agreements will also help maintain export competitiveness without sacrificing labor standards. Bridging the North–South divide necessitates developed countries financing technology transfers, labor monitoring, and climate-resilient job schemes via aid-for-trade programs, while encouraging South–South partnerships to share best practices in social protection and crisis management. Such an approach promotes an equitable economic recovery and balanced globalization, addressing the root causes of inequality rather than its symptoms. However, delegates must be aware that realizing these

goals depends on sustained international cooperation and long-term commitments of funding, which highlights the complexity of forging effective, inclusive labor protections on a global scale.

Questions to Consider

- How can global standards be more effectively tailored to reflect the distinct economic situations and policy capacities of developed vs. developing countries?

- For vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, women, and those in informal employment – what specific measures should be taken in order to address increased discrimination and job insecurity fueled by economic instability?

- In what ways should governments design financial support measures to protect workers particularly in sectors heavily impacted by trade disruption or economic restructuring?

- How can North-South cooperation be strengthened to address structural inequalities in labour protection?

- How can monitoring mechanisms be implemented to ensure that social clauses in trade agreements have meaningful, measurable impact?

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