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A stylized world map in a light blue color, centered on the Atlantic Ocean, set against a background of repeating text from the ILO's 'Decent Work Agenda' in a light blue, semi-transparent font.

The future of work: Trade unions in transformation

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in transformation

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The culmination of almost three years of activities on the future of work, the Symposium provided a platform for workers' organizations to engage with academics as well as governments and employers' representatives on the multitude of different issues that constitute the Future of Work Initiative. The trends witnessed today not only pose challenges but also have the potential to provide great opportunities for workers and workers' organizations.

Preface

Maria Helena André

Director, Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), ILO

The International Labour Organization has taken its own celebrations to mark its 100th year in existence as the opportunity to discuss the issue of transformation in trade unions as part of its Future of Work Initiative, launched by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in 2015.

As the principal UN agency for labour issues in the multilateral system since the formation of the League of Nations in 1919, the ILO mandate has always been firmly set in fighting for social justice and decent work as a means to achieve lasting peace in an era where most of the world was in conflict.

In recent years, the future of work has become a topic at the forefront of discussions among policy-makers, academics and international organizations as well as workers' and employers' representatives. We are confronted with a world in which growing globalization and technological advancements create inequalities that are rising to unsustainable levels. Formal, protected and decent work is declining, and policy-makers are struggling to find solutions to combat climate change and environmental degradation. Thus, international organizations as well as nation States around the world have shifted their focus onto how to best foster the structures that govern the world of work while adapting them effectively to the challenges that lie ahead.

The Future of Work Initiative allows the ILO to look back at its achievements over the last 100 years, at the structures and institutions which have served as cornerstones in achieving its mandate, such as tripartism and the ILO's normative framework. It also gives the opportunity to step back from its day-to-day activities and assess how to adapt and renew to serve workers in the future as it has done in the past.

The ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work, adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2019, is the outcome of this assessment and provides key priorities for both the ILO and its constituents. Core issues around just transition, access to skills and qualifications and universal access to social protection, as well as the importance of labour rights

and decent work for all regardless of the employment relationship were reaffirmed and established as key priorities for the ILO in the coming years. At the multilateral level, this Declaration has been endorsed by the UN General Assembly¹ and welcomed by the Council of the European Union.²

The importance of the Declaration is apparent, given that the challenges ahead are considerable. Globalization and technological advancements are fundamentally changing the organization of work and production on an unprecedented scale.

Although the greater interconnectivity between countries has led to an increase in economic growth, especially in some emerging economies, the pressures of competition that come with the gradual liberalization of trade greatly affects the effectiveness of national regulation. In many countries this is falling painstakingly short in upholding workers's rights such as freedom of association and the quality of employment.

Digital Taylorism, a term predominantly used in manufacturing sectors, is increasingly taking over service industries around the globe. Platform economies and the emergence of new forms of production and employment are making it increasingly difficult to organize workers or to distinguish the employer to bargain with. These developments threaten the traditional model of industrial relations and will be a particular challenge for trade unions.

New technologies have reignited fears of automation and robotization outperforming human workers and leading to mass unemployment that would exacerbate the large inequalities between those who benefit from new technologies and those who do not. While these fears are not new, there is a need for discussion on how new technologies will be used to complement rather than replace workers around the globe.

It has become harder for trade unions in both developed and emerging countries to protect the rights of workers and working conditions, as shown not only in the reduction of unionization, but also the fall in the labour share of income in most countries. The question therefore remains, to what extent do trade unions need to transform themselves in order to serve their members as effectively in the future as they have in the past?

How can trade unions reverse the trend of falling unionization and attract younger workers and those outside a formal employment relationship, as well as remaining a progressive voice in society, speaking up for social justice, peace, democracy and those workers in vulnerable situations?

How are the drivers of change, technological advancements, globalization, climate change and demographical challenges affecting working conditions around the globe, and how can workers' organizations most effectively counter them?

1. See UN General Assembly endorses ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.
2. See Council of the EU welcomes the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.

I am therefore delighted that this edition of the *International Journal of Labour Research* entitled “The future of work: Trade unions in transformation” compiles the thoughts of leading academics on the topics that are shaping discussions on the future of work, and I would like to thank all of them for their contributions.

We hope that this publication, which is a culmination of a two-year process of discussions on the future of work at ACTRAV, will serve as a stepping stone for the labour movement in its own deliberations on how workers’ organizations can react to the fundamental changes that are affecting the world of work, and that it will provide further reflections on the transformation of trade unions these changes might entail.

Finally, I would like to thank all authors and contributors to this edition. My special thanks also to ACTRAV colleagues, who have provided valuable input for this edition of the *Journal*.

Happy reading!

Reflections on the world of work

José Mujica

Former President of Uruguay

ACTRAV was privileged that during its first Regional Conference on the Future of Work in May 2017, José Mujica, former President of Uruguay, gave a speech on world affairs, globalization and his vision for a more sustainable and equitable future. The following excerpts focus on issues surrounding globalization and workers' cultural identity, workers' organizations and their role as active shapers of societies.

Capitalism and its effects on nation States and political autonomy

The nation State is under pressure from a form of civilization that is ever more global and that does not have institutions that organize it. We have generated a civilization in which we are prisoners. No-one is managing it. It is run by the market, by business, but there is no political management. In my view, this is the greatest tragedy of our times. We should be discussing projects that have the potential to reverse climate change, and that are global in scope. Governments are powerless, and in practice give up their sovereignty to the conglomeration of multinational companies. And they do not dare to listen to scientists. Just over 30 years ago we had a meeting in Kyoto, and scientists told us what was going to happen and how we needed to act in order to remedy the situation. We know what we have to do, but we don't do it, and we don't do it because we are politically powerless.

[...]

We have to understand that in this global civilization there are terrible contradictions that are also global in scope. We have strength and the resources to eliminate hunger and poverty. More than 20 million dollars a minute are spent on the military, if we take all the world's countries together, so we cannot claim that this is impossible. To say that we do not have the necessary resources is to not admit to the fact that we are politically powerless.

This is not the first time that the world has experienced globalization. There have been several instances of globalization: the Chinese Empire was one, the Roman Empire another. These empires always had a political mission, both when they made the right choices and when they made the wrong ones. Rome lasted for such a long time because in the end it was more worthwhile to be part of the Empire than outside it, because there was political management. The granting of citizenship, step by step, took place as a result of decisions of a political nature. The Roman Empire had the courage to have about 17 emperors born outside Rome or Italy; that was a political decision.

We, on the other hand, have developed the most spectacular civilization on earth, but it drifts along without anyone at the helm, not even for evil ends. If we had an extremely bad government, we would rise up against it. Instead, we have nothing, and this is far worse. We are drifting along in limbo, not knowing where we are going. And not knowing where we are going could be what endangers the continuation of the species.

Let us not think of ourselves as being able to exist forever. Our ancestor *homo erectus* lived just over two million years until we either wiped him out or interbred with him – which of the two is not clear. If we continue as we are now, I do not think that *homo sapiens* will reach the two-million year mark.

This, then, is the framework within which we must place work and capital, since in the end, capital is accumulated work. Work is a consequence of what nature has bequeathed us; it is the most perfect tool of nature,

included in consciousness. He who has the ability to work is responsible for all that is produced. But as a governor, he is also responsible for a contradiction: the expectation that there be competitiveness, without setting the conditions for such competitiveness.

This world is gambling with the very significant needs of those who are at the bottom of the heap. Capitalism itself requires political management; by its very nature it tends to be predatory, so there must be some consideration for the interests of society that require that public and social goods be distributed and generated in such a way as to cover the costs derived from the contradictions that capitalism produces. Capitalism alone cannot do this; it only focuses on the short term. Capitalism must bring about the reproducing and multiplying of goods, or rather, of value. This is where politics comes in. What I am suggesting could be part of an idea of confrontation. The confrontation that we currently have is not overt because we are not facing reality.

[...]

The United Nations cannot solve any of our problems. It is becoming more and more bureaucratic, and has more and more issues. We are creating gigantic things. But this is basically an expression of our political impotence. We continue to think as individuals and are a long way from thinking as a species about what the civilization that we have created requires of us, namely that we think for men, think for women, and think for life beyond our planet. We have created a civilization that is global in character but we are not taking charge of it.

[...]

In an ideal world, we cannot forget the world of work and must say to capital: "Look, I have to take some money out of your pocket because there are problems that have to be dealt with." And as Soros said, not long ago, "Someone has to put on the brakes, because we are very predatory." For this reason, I think that this ILO centenary must include both festivities and regrets, as well as challenges. We need institutions that are global in scope and that have power. Nation States are progressively losing power to multinational companies, but they do not realize that they have to create an institution that is global in character, in order to delegate certain decisions.

In the area of work, there used to be a perspective that recognized the important role that work plays and that emphasized workers' rights. Trade unions were given recognition and were also resisted, and they were described as lawyers for the public. And did this affect capitalism? No, it helped create a society with a wealth of public goods, and it helped create social policy, which is the mother of all policies, leading the way as it does towards a world that is more equal and in which there is more social justice and less inequality.

As far as the world of work is concerned, I think that we are heading for disaster. The figures are terrifying. To me, it seems that we are going to have to fight to shorten the working day, and that this is unavoidable. It is even more likely that we will have to fight for universal basic income. In the

end, capitalism itself will have to establish this, because robots can stand in for people but not for consumers. The old historical contradiction remains blocked here. If they do not give you work, they will have to give you money to live off because they need you to stay alive, not for human rights reasons, but so that you buy goods. This will be an option, as was slavery, which did not disappear because of human rights but rather because it ceased to be a lucrative business. It was better to have “free workers”.

But our progress down this path will not be without the occasional jolt. We have to think about where we will find the resources that we need in order to bring about these changes. And this brings us back to measures that we will have to take that are global in scope. Will we have the courage to tax financial transactions? Will we be able to come to a consensus, once and for all, on the issue of applying the Tobin Tax?

Culture and individual choices: Shaping the societies we live in

We cannot change who we are, or the way we are hard-wired; we are gregarious creatures. We cannot live in solitude; we are not feline, and for this reason I think that Aristotle was right when he described man as a political animal. Because if people need society, and if society by its very nature implies conflict, then the role of politics is to make life in society viable.

Some people believe that conflict results from class differences, but if one were to imagine that social class did not exist, there would still be conflict. I think that as long as human society exists, there will be conflict. Consequently, politics is an inherent part of what it is to be human. Even if someone says that they are giving up politics, they are acting politically.

Human beings possess a measure of selfishness, as do all living things, because they struggle in order to survive and in order to ensure the survival of what surrounds them. But because they are gregarious and need society, they also need the backing of solidarity. This is what generates civilization: the inherited, intergenerational solidarity that is handed down to us at birth, nothing more and nothing less. This is what makes us different from other species. We are not flawless creatures but we do possess the ability to progress to higher levels of civilization. This is our greatest inherited asset. But because of the contradictions that exist, we need politics.

Having said this, human beings cannot escape the period in which they live. We live in a capitalist system that has developed the forces of production with a level of creativity that has shaped the course of history in ways never before experienced. Capitalism has created this incredible and powerful world, in which our proud species is more powerful than ever before; it has so much power, indeed, that it can destroy itself. But this system, in its current stage of development, has generated a culture in which we are immersed.

I am not talking about the culture of books, pictures or theatre; I am talking about the less obvious kind of culture that exists in homes and in the way in which we live our daily lives.

This culture is necessary for the functioning of the system at this stage of the triumphing of the financial and globalized world. It has worked against politics, because human beings always want to triumph, even when they are not very clear about what triumphing actually means. In the world in which we live today, to triumph means to have money, a car and fame. We must not allow politics to be conducted in such a way as to favour those who have money, because otherwise we are doomed.

I return to the importance of culture. Advertising overwhelms us with the desire to consume. We should not blame the poor folks who suffer tremendously at the end of every month when they have to pay their bills, and who are looking for another job because they have to pay more bills. They have to pay more bills because they have to buy more things, and they have to buy more things because of the idea: "The more you buy, the happier you are." And because we have to buy more things, we don't have time to live. We don't have time to be free. This didn't happen by chance. This culture serves the interests of business. It turns us into gigantic consumers, always eager to consume more. It makes us all potential buyers, and it eats up our time. How can I put aside time for politics if I do not even have time for my children? I leave the house at 6 o'clock in the morning and return at 10 o'clock at night because I don't want there to be things that my child cannot have. But I end up not being there for him.

The Mayans had control over their lands. The Greeks had 150 small cities and when their population grew, they founded another colony; this is how they populated the entire Mediterranean basin. They are the founders of democracy. The cities in which the Renaissance emerged were small ones. Our megalopolises of today can produce nothing but societies that make people sick, because human beings are bound by certain dimensions.

In order to be free, you have to have time to be free. What is it to be free? To spend the time that you have in whatever you please, as long as you do not harm others in the process. For some this might mean fishing, for others it could be anything else. But in order to do this, you have to have time – the famous "leisure" of ancient Greece. This has roots in anthropology. Leisure is very fertile.

So people do not want to hear about trade unions, they don't want to hear about politics, and they don't want to hear about anything else either, because they are compulsive buyers. It is not the individual who is at fault, it's civilization. That is why this is complicated. And this is why we have to stay in the realm of ideas and realize that there is a very simple truth. If you cannot change the world, you can perhaps change your behaviour in the world and the way in which you face life's challenges. Someone once said that to write poetry is to substitute one thing for another, but the same holds

true for doing business. Business has a lot to do with Chinese folk tales, with dreams, with creating the illusion that all one's problems will be solved. This implies that people need to display independence of thought ... if one sets limits, I think that it is possible to attain happiness in this world.

It does not cost much to be happy. So we have to protect the love of life, which is the only important thing that we have: the opportunity to be alive, that is slipping away from us. So I think that we have to put these struggles in the context of the realm of ideas, of philosophy, and of values. Since the time of Adam Smith, more or less, philosophy and economics were one and the same thing. With the discovery of the market, the two disciplines began to drift apart, and now it seems as if the world is macroeconomics. It is not politics, or philosophy, or anything else.

We cannot give up a particular vision of life. So I think that in the trade union struggle and in the political struggle it is necessary to fight for the value of ideas and feelings in human life, to organize and struggle in order to organize and plan for human life to be worth living with intensity. But I am convinced that we have to make life the focus. And the difference between us and other animals is that we can attribute meaning to things. I do not know if we will triumph, but I do know that the battles lost will be less painful. Triumph is to be understood in the apocalyptic sense of "it did not turn out to be impossible", because we will all die in the end. But the fact of us all dying is a great act of justice, because it gives value to every minute that we are alive.

So I think that our comrades in the trade union movement, in private companies, and in political parties have a really worthwhile life-focused cause motivating their struggles. It is possible to live for one's job because you need to earn money in order to be able to put food on your plate, and in order to live, as some say. But it is possible to act thinking of other things, beyond one's work, and with passion, because you are committed to who you are. That, to me, is what loving life means. That is why, despite the bitterness that I feel, I am optimistic.

And I would like it to be the case that once one has chosen a path, one could say, "I demand work." But as this is not possible, I'd rather that things were not simply left up in the air. It would be a good thing if future generations could have somewhat better lives or live in a slightly more peaceful world. This is the only thing worth striving for. Monuments, names, town squares; all these things are ancillary, useless. Why should we think that the life of a human being is more important than that of a cockroach, as far as the vastness of the universe is concerned? I don't think that we are all that important. Those with a religious vocation and a certain perspective are in their rights to see things differently, but I would not be honest if I did not express what I thought.

Can unions revitalize themselves?

Jelle Visser

Amsterdam Institute of Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS)
Bremen International Graduate School for the Social Sciences (BIGSSS)

Introduction

The report of the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work, titled *Work for a brighter future* (ILO, 2019), lists various challenges which, if left unattended, threaten the well-being, job prospects and security of entire populations, and thus the social and economic foundations for growth, freedom and democracy. The social and regional divide connected with digitalization; the skill deficits and mismatches associated with artificial intelligence, automation and robotics; the return to 19th-century employment relations in gig-work and crowdworking; and the disruptive effects of climate change and population shifts call more than ever for the sort of solidarity that trade unions stand for. Recently, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has come forward with a similar appeal. In his introduction to the *2019 Employment Outlook*, Secretary-General Angel Gurría writes that “many people and communities have been left behind by globalisation and a digital divide persists in access to new technologies – resulting in inequalities along age, gender, and socio-economic lines”, and “greater focus must also be placed on collective bargaining and social dialogue, both of which can complement government efforts to make labour markets more adaptable, secure and inclusive (OECD, 2019, pp. 1–2). The question is: can unions do it? Can they break the trend of declining unionization and bargaining coverage of recent decades in the analogue world, strengthen their representative legitimacy, and be innovative in engaging with workers in the digital economy?

That unions need to revitalize themselves and reach out beyond their present constituency in order to stay relevant is beyond doubt. In both industrialized and developing countries, trade unions struggle to expand beyond the narrowing minority of workers in declining industries, large firms and the public sector. In the industrialized countries union membership is ageing; in low-income and developing countries trade unions have contracted with the decline in formal employment. Lacking or weak representation of young people, of workers with temporary employment contracts, of women in some countries, and of freelance and own-account workers, whether correctly or falsely classified like those in the gig economy, weakens the future growth of trade unions, narrows their agenda and erodes their legitimacy in collective bargaining and social dialogue.

In the first part of this article, I briefly delineate the trends in union membership across world regions and then analyse how much of the current decline is affected by industrial change, changes in society (education, the advance of women in the labour market, changing patterns of work and family) and changes in employment relations (the rise of temporary, own-account, casual and informal work). The second part is devoted to union revitalization. To understand what union revitalization is, we must consider the alternatives, of what will happen if unions do not renew. There are four,

in my view (Visser, 2019a). The first is *marginalization* based on a prolongation of present downward trends, aggravated by the exit of a large cohort of ageing members and the historically extremely low recruitment rate of young people. The second is *dualization*, with trade unions spending their decreasing resources on defending the members currently organized and closest to them, those in large firms and with stable jobs. The third is *substitution*, of unions gradually being replaced by other forms of social organization and interest representation, such as social movements, Internet-based communities, cooperatives, guilds, works councils and living wage campaigns.

Revitalization, the fourth scenario, must find an answer or alternative to each. For this to happen and avoid marginalization, trade unions must first and foremost prioritize the organization and representation of young people, bringing more of them into leadership positions and adopting agendas and forms of communication and association that appeal to them. Secondly, in order to beat dualization, trade unions must favour an inclusive approach, bring more workers in small firms, temporary and precarious jobs into their ranks, and bridge the often diverging interests of workers in large and small firms, and those in temporary and stable jobs. Third, revitalization includes the courage to innovate and experiment with new forms of association, use digital tools, and broaden unions' reach through coalition-building with other groups.

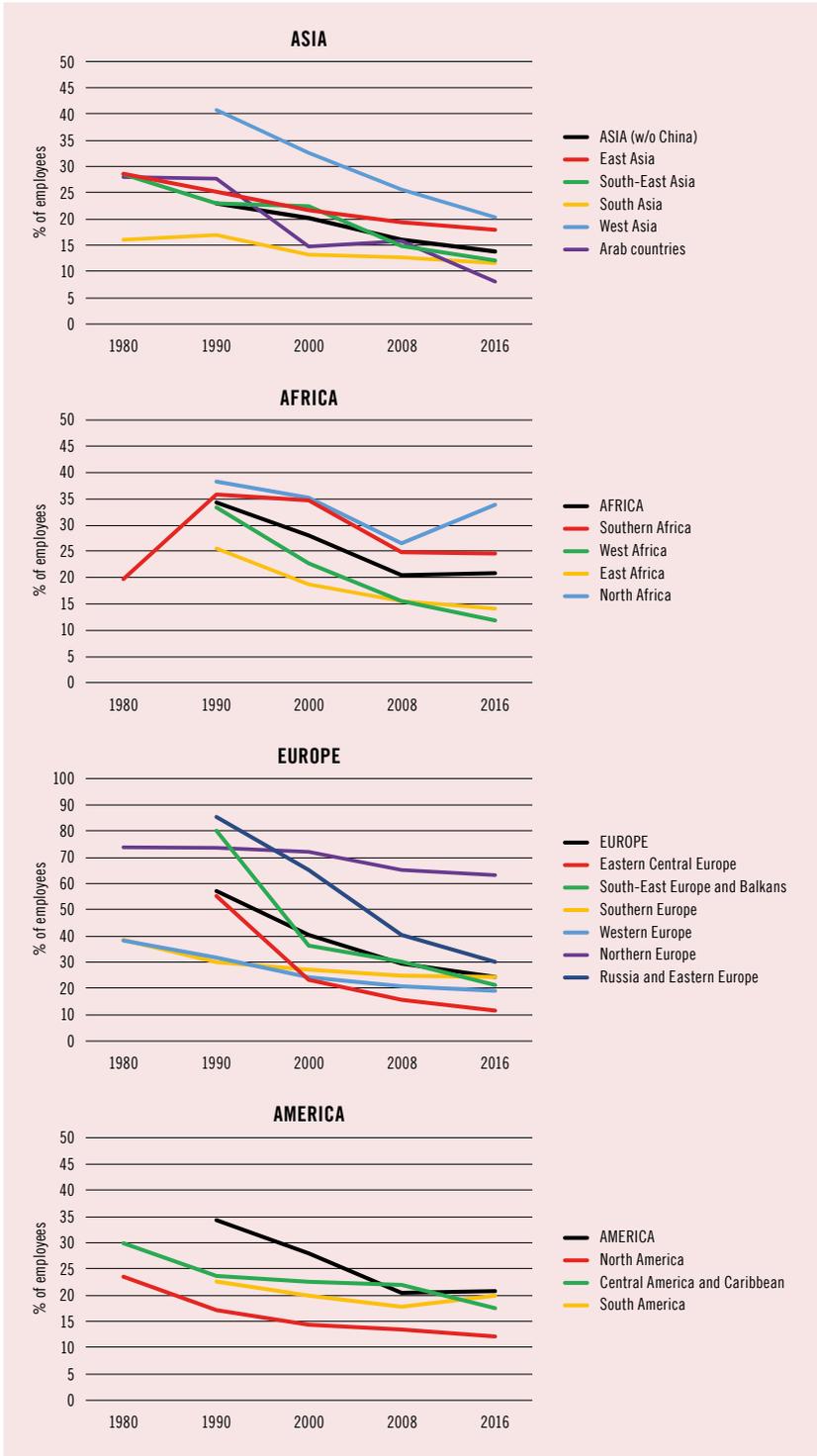
How union membership has changed

The decline in unionization rates across the world

Since the 1980s there has been a move away from the standard employment relationship that was the norm in larger organizations, among blue-collar workers in union-organized industries and white-collar employees in managerial and clerical occupations in the developed countries (Stone and Arthurs, 2015). This was paralleled by the shrinkage of the formal sector in Africa, Asia and Latin America after the abandonment of import-substitution industrialization policies in the 1980s and 1990s. These developments are at the root of the worldwide fall in the union density – union membership as a share of salaried workers. The global union density rate has halved from an estimated 36 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent in 2016. Figure 1 shows that unions have declined in each of four regions: Africa, Americas, Asia and Europe.¹

1. Union density rates are calculated by taking union membership, net of retired and unemployed workers, as a percentage of the employed dependent labour force, i.e. those employed on wages or salaries. The data on union membership and union density in this article, and in the figures, are based on two sources: the ICTWSS database, version 6.0, currently held at the University of Amsterdam (<http://uva-aias.net/en/ictwss>) (Visser, 2019b) and the ILOSTAT database (www.ilo.org/ilostat/irdata).

Figure 1. Union density rates in world regions, 1980–2016



Union density rates vary within and between regions, but this variation has become smaller as countries have converged onto a common path of decline. The good news is that union decline has slowed since the worldwide financial crisis and recession of 2008 and there are some bright spots: unions in North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia) gained massive support during and after the Arab Spring, though little renewal of union policies and structures has followed and unions remain highly dependent on political patronage; something similar happened in South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay) in the mid-2000s, but the current move to the right does not bode well for the unions.

No single factor can explain the rather general pattern of union decline. A full explanation must include changes in the structure of the economy and the employment shift from industry to services; the decline of the standard employment relationship based on work performed at the employer's place of business and involving a shared expectation of continued employment; changing working patterns with women entering the workplace; the rise of part-time work; more and longer education and changes in the transition from education to employment; management resistance to unionization and the shift to decentralized bargaining tied to new HRM strategies and the search for flexibility within a more internationally competitive environment; as well as behavioural changes of workers and, in particular, young people. For reasons of length, it is impossible to discuss all these factors, but the most important ones will be addressed in the sections that follow.

De-industrialization and the rise of the service economy

Currently, nearly 70 per cent of all jobs in developing, 40 per cent in lower-middle income, 16 per cent in upper-middle income, and just 3 per cent in developed countries are in agriculture, and these shares are expected to further decline (ILO, 2018a). The share of manufacturing employment is also expected to continue its decline. Currently, manufacturing accounts for 13 per cent of total employment in developed countries, 16 per cent in upper-middle income, 12 per cent in lower-middle income, and only 6 per cent in developing countries. By 2017, the service sector employed the largest share of the workforce everywhere, with the exception of the low-income developing countries, where the employment share of services (21 per cent) was more than three times smaller than that of agriculture (70 per cent). In developed countries today, three out of four workers have a job in services.

De-industrialization has been going on for some time and has transformed the trade unions. One or two generations ago the bulk of the membership worked in industry. Today, the majority of union members works in services. With few exceptions (Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea and Slovakia), today's largest trade unions represent service workers,

often those in the public sector. Averaged for the 18 advanced industrial countries of Western Europe and North America, the membership share of industry shrank from 43 per cent in 1980 to 22 per cent in 2016.

It is attractive to think that the smaller share of industrial employment “explains” the overall decline in unionization. Actually, it explains very little. In the OECD countries nearly one-third of all workers had a job in industry (manufacturing, mining, construction, utilities) in 1980 and almost 40 per cent of these workers joined a union.² If that had been the same in 2016/17, there would have been 22 million extra union members above the actual number of 58 million and the union density rate would have been 22.1 rather than 17.7 per cent. But union density in industry has decreased as much as the general trend, from nearly 40 per cent in 1980 to below 20 per cent today.

The big question is why did union membership in industry decrease so much – from 28 million to 13 million in less than 40 years – while the absolute number of industrial workers stayed roughly the same – just under 70 million (which of course represents a much lower share of total employment in 2016/17 than in 1980). Various developments have gone against the unions: the closing down and downsizing of highly unionized industries such as coal mining, steel and shipyards; the increased use of subcontracting, with much lower union density rates in smaller firms; the rising share of temporary and work agency employment, often with very low levels of union membership; the shift from manual to non-manual work and substitution of usually highly unionized jobs of skilled and craft workers by robots and digital programmes (Autor, Levy and Murnane, 2003).

In Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States, the countries where this happened earliest and in a context of government policies that were hostile to unions and collective bargaining, the average union density rate within manufacturing dropped from 47 per cent in 1980 to 17 per cent in 2017. The sharpest falls occurred among skilled and semi-skilled manual workers. However, unions in countries with less marked neo-liberal policies were hit as well. From 1980 to 2017, the average unionization rate in manufacturing in the four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) dropped from 90 to 68 per cent; in continental Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland) from 43 to 24 per cent. I have no good *historical* data for developing countries, though there is evidence that trade unions in, for instance, India, Kenya and South Africa lost out in manufacturing with the rise of casual labour. In the newly industrializing countries of South-East Asia workers in manufacturing were poorly unionized from the start.

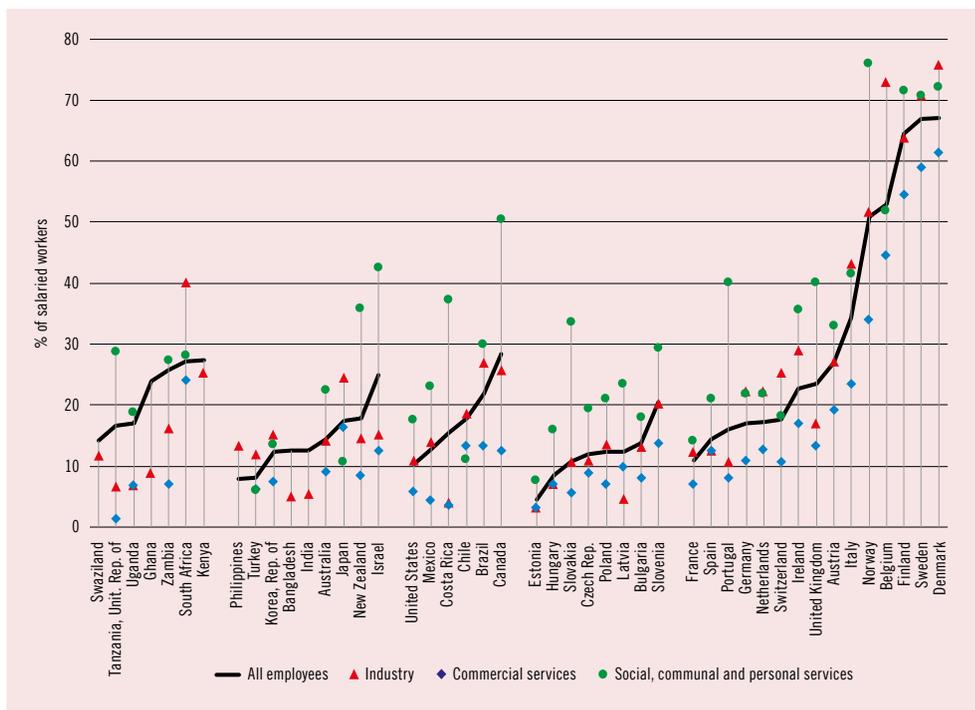
2. These statistics refer to 19 of the 24 OECD member countries of 1980 for which the necessary longitudinal data are available: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.

Can unions revitalize themselves?

Figure 2 splits the economy into three compartments: industry (manufacturing, construction, mining and utilities), commercial services (trade, tourism, transport and communication, finance and business) and social, communal and personal services (public administration, security and social insurance, education, health, social services, arts and personal services, including household work). Generally, across all countries and regions, the highest level of union organization occurs in social and communal services and the lowest in commercial services (especially in trade, tourism and business services, the sectors that have really expanded since 1980). Union density in industry is often close to the average (the black line in figure 2). In some countries, for instance Belgium, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea and South Africa, union density among industrial workers is still way above the average, but the other side of the coin is that unions in these countries are weak in private services. In most African countries, but also in Bangladesh, India, Israel, Latvia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, union density in industry is below average and here the strength of unions depends on public services.

In most countries the menace of future union decline now comes from the rise of employment in commercial services, combined with privatization and commercialization of public and general services. Averaged over the

Figure 2. Union density rates by broad sectors, 45 countries, in or close to 2016



45 countries shown in figure 2, the level of unionization is three times higher in social and communal services than in commercial services. Civil servants, administrators and workers in local and central government, teachers and, where it is allowed, the police and the military are those with the highest density rates in any country, unless they are denied the right to unionize (for instance, in Chile or, partially, Turkey). There can be many reasons for this, such as facilitation of union organizing by public authorities, professionalism and *esprit de corps* (teachers, nurses, police officers) and more employment security, although short-time contracts and interim work have become quite common, especially in education, health care and subsidiary government services.

Given the financial constraints on the expansion of public and social services, it is in the expanding commercial services rather than in the contracting manufacturing sector that newcomers to the labour market and those losing their jobs in manufacturing must find employment. Work in the platform economy is also located here, in online retailing, food delivery, room rentals, business services, work agencies, communication, security and household services. In these activities temporary work, part-time jobs and true or bogus self-employment are pervasive, and even among workers with standard employment contracts union density rates are low. Within commercial services, which also comprises public transport, postal services, banking and insurance, typically only the larger firms (department stores, railways and national airlines, municipal road transport, postal companies, larger banks and insurance companies, especially those with a public share) are unionized. Most employment is located in small and micro firms or in the case of informal work or platform work not at all attached to stable and accountable employment units with employers assuming responsibility for decent working conditions.

Figure 3 compares the changes in average density rates within commercial and social and services for 25 advanced and emerging industrial countries, including Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, from the late 1990s till about 2016 (or the most recent year). We see that in all sectors, with the exception of health services, density rates have declined. The largest decline occurred in transport, communication, and financial and business services, followed by public administration; the lowest current level of unionization is in trade and tourism, about 11 per cent and slightly lower than in 1997. Whereas tourism has expanded nearly everywhere, unions have lost out, most notably in the United States where union density in the hotel, restaurant and hospitality sector fell from 11 per cent in 2000 to 2.5 per cent in 2016. Density rates as low as these are not uncommon, for instance in Australia and New Zealand, or in Africa, and given the expansion of tourism in low-income countries in Asia and Africa these are dramatic figures.

On the positive side, in another expanding sector – health and care – unions have made gains in most countries. Notable exceptions are Australia, where union density in health services fell from 45 to 22 per cent

Figure 3. Changes in union density rates in commercial and social services, 1997–2016 (averages of 25 advanced industrialized countries)



in one generation, and the United Kingdom with a fall from 48 to 38 per cent. The United States is an international exception with a union density rate in health and care services as low as 9 per cent. Education is still the most unionized sector, with a median density rate of 39 per cent. In developing countries, especially in Africa, teachers’ unions are often the most organized parts of the labour movement.

Societal changes, education and the advance of women

Social and cultural changes related to more and longer education, more women in the labour force, and new work–family patterns have altered the environment and composition of trade unions. Over the past 40 years, in industrialized economies the share of married women in paid employment and those working part-time has doubled. The increase in women’s paid employment coincided with profound changes in both the workplace and the family. While employers require more flexibility and commitment to work from men and women, and fewer live in a double-parenting household, the educational requirements needed to prepare children for increasingly competitive labour markets have increased. This has given working time and work–family issues a prominent place on the agenda of trade unions. The rise of part-time work is part of this development.

There are more women than ever in trade unions and the differences in unionization between men and women have narrowed. There are more women than men in the trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe, northern Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Ireland, Israel and the United Kingdom, and in countries as different as Cambodia, Nicaragua

and Tunisia. Union density rates are higher for female than for male workers in half of the 56 countries shown in figure 4.

The lowest unionization rates of women and the largest gap between male and female rates are witnessed in Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malta, Pakistan and Turkey. It is not always clear why unions in these countries have failed to recruit more women. In some, notably in Germany, Japan and Republic of Korea, there is a strong and successful tradition of trade unions in heavy industry and maybe this has delayed the focus on women and female unionization that is found in public and private services (Hassel, 2007). Religious and cultural factors (Confucianism in Japan, the influence of Islam in Pakistan, a masculine union culture in Republic of Korea, machismo in Argentina and paternalism in Africa, and the persistence of the male breadwinner model in some continental European countries) may also explain something. However, variations within the same regions, cultures and even religions, and in some cases rapid changes over time (for instance in Ireland and the Netherlands), suggest that unions can break out of such constraints if they want.

With the advance of women, unions have opened their ranks to part-time workers. The OECD (2017) estimates that 16.7 per cent of all employees in the developed economies work part-time, 70 per cent of them women. The share of part-time workers in the unions has also gone up, slowly, and currently reaches 13 per cent, varying from 2 per cent in Greece to 33 per cent in the Netherlands. The gap in union density rates of part-time and full-time workers has become smaller in most countries. On average, a full-time worker

Figure 4. Male and female union density rates in 56 countries, 2016

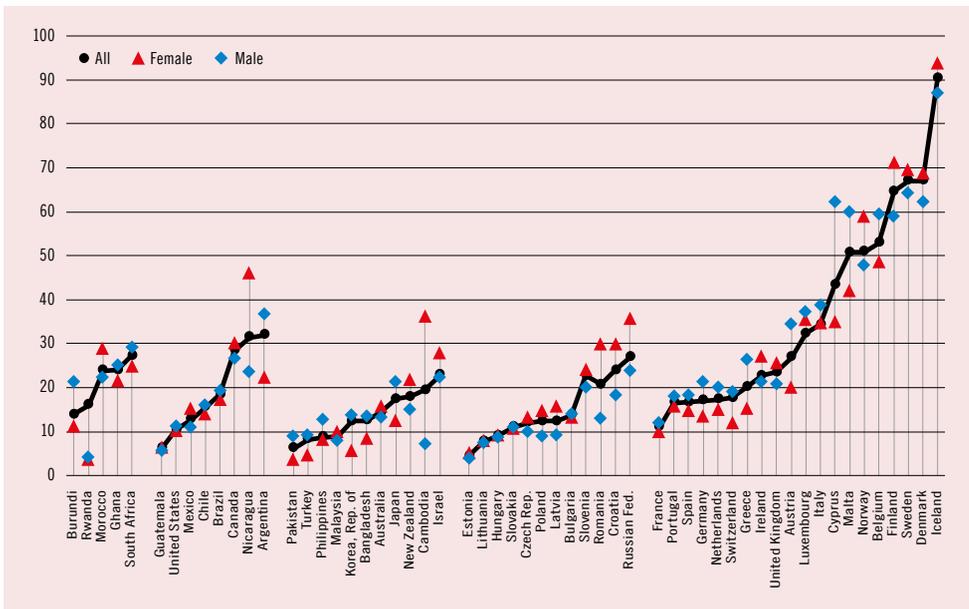
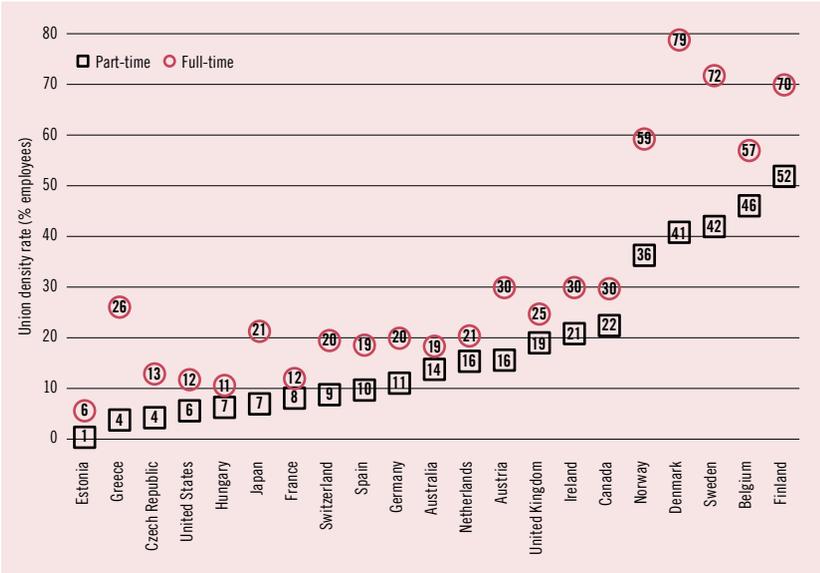
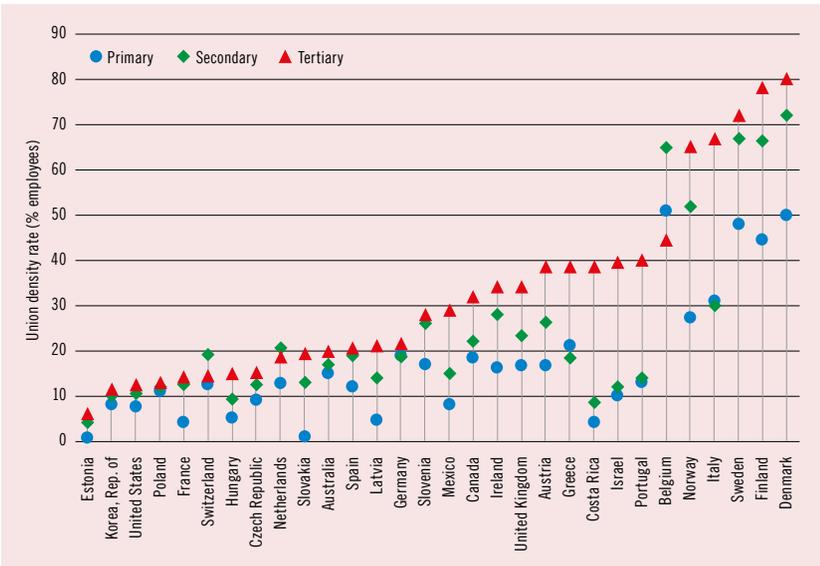


Figure 5. Union density rates of full-time and part-time workers, 21 countries, 2015/16



is twice as likely to join a union than a part-time worker (figure 5). This difference becomes smaller if we leave out people working very few hours, and control for temporary contracts. Why part-time workers in large (20 to 30 hours) “open-ended” jobs and in similar occupations and industries are still underrepresented in unions is unclear; perhaps for many of them union membership is too expensive unless unions apply special rates.

Figure 6. Union density rates by level of education, 30 countries, 2015/16



Another area of change is education and, at first sight, unions seem to have done a good job while moving up the ladder. In the OECD, two-fifths of all union members have tertiary education, another two-fifths secondary education, and one-fifth primary education. In fact, in most countries people with higher education are the most unionized category – this reflects the stronger position of trade unions among professional and highly skilled workers and in the public services (education, health, social security). Whether this is also true for unions in developing and emerging economies is impossible to say, given the lack of survey data, though the strong position of teachers' unions in many countries might be an indication that better-educated workers have always played an important role. The data shown in figure 6 suggest that in many countries low-educated workers are underrepresented. They are more likely to end up in unstable and precarious jobs.

Non-standard employment relations

The nature of the employment relationship has changed. More intensive competition on a worldwide scale has made firms acutely aware of costs and productivity. The solution many employers have reached is to reorganize work around decentralized management of human resources, customized products and working schedules, and reorganize tasks in such ways that they can be partitioned in modules. This makes it easier to subcontract tasks, employ part-time workers and hire temporary staff for some tasks, while core work is multi-tasked and carried out in teams. Employment security and remuneration tend to be defined less in terms of the seniority and job status of workers than in terms of the knowledge or competences they bring to the job and acquire while working. The effect of this differentiation and individualization is to separate the employee relations of more workers from the kind of permanent, full-time job in stable internal labour markets that had characterized post-Second World War development in Western Europe, Japan and the United States.

As a result, the diversity of work and employment relationships has increased and ranges from permanent or stable formal employment to different forms of non-standard work, in particular part-time work, fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, on-call work, and different forms of self-employment and informal work. Increased flexibility and diversity can also be observed with respect to working time, mobile working patterns and working from home. Some of these new work arrangements position workers as autonomous, independent or self-employed, dispatch them from a temporary employment agency, post them to other countries on temporary contracts, or redeploy them from the core workforce of large dominant firms to their smaller and less stable suppliers.

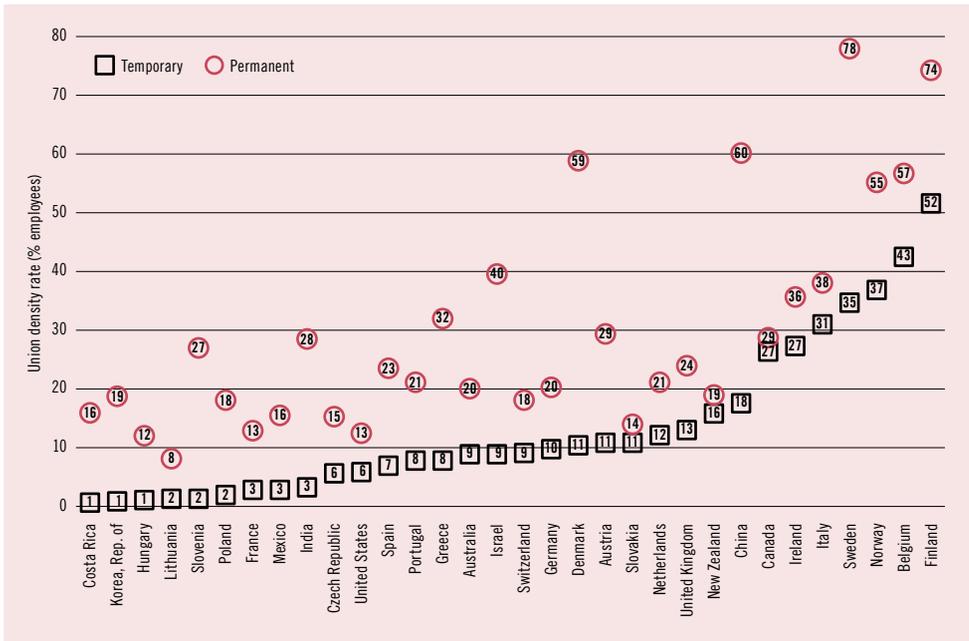
The OECD (2017) estimates that non-standard work, which includes self-employed, temporary and part-time workers on temporary contracts, makes up almost a quarter of total employment in rich countries. Part-time work is particularly widespread among women, whereas temporary jobs now dominate the work experience of young people. In developing countries, women rather than men are sorted and kept in informal jobs, whereas self-employment in high-income countries is the domain of men. Taking the average over some 150 countries, the ILO (2016) estimates average use of temporary employees in private sector firms in the formal sector at 11 per cent, with about one-third of countries around this mean. There are wide divergences ranging from under 5 per cent in Jordan, Latvia, Norway and Sierra Leone to over 25 per cent in Mongolia, Peru and Spain. Casual employment is a prominent feature in low- and middle-income countries and has grown in importance in industrialized countries. In Bangladesh nearly two-thirds of wage employment is casual; in Mali and Zimbabwe one in three employees works in a casual job. In Australia, casual employment affects one out of four employees. In Indian manufacturing, contract labour reached 34.7 per cent in 2012, up from negligible levels in the early 1970s (ILO, 2016a). In industrialized countries, the splitting up of part-time work into “very short hours”, “on-call” or “zero-hours” contracts (with no guaranteed minimum), has parallels with casual work in developing countries. The ILO estimates that this affects up to 10 per cent of the US workforce, with the highest incidence among low-income workers.

The average union density rate for the countries in figure 7 is 30 per cent for workers on open employment contracts and 14 per cent for temporary workers. Across these countries, permanent workers are two to four times more likely to be unionized, with the biggest deficits in unionization of temporary workers in Denmark, Greece, Hungary, India, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Slovenia and Spain. There are many possible reasons why unions have such a hard time organizing temporary workers – the concentration of temporary employment in particular sectors, in hard-to-unionize small firms and among migrants; labour laws that hamper recruitment; and union policies that treat temporary work and work in small firms as a buffer for the defence of their core membership in open-ended jobs in large firms. In Denmark, unions appear to have lost support among temporary and part-time workers and among migrants with the changes in unemployment insurance tied to union membership; similar but less severe losses have plagued Finnish and Swedish unions (Kjellberg and Ibsen, 2017).

Own-account work is widespread in the informal economy and often not acknowledged and protected under laws which tend to cover only workers with employee status. In 2002 the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution on decent work and the informal economy, advocating expanded coverage of labour and social insurance laws and recognizing the right of own-account workers to join or form unions and engage in collective

bargaining (ILO, 2002). This was in 2015 extended into a Recommendation calling upon ILO member States to promote the transition of informal workers and units to the formal economy and prevent further informalization (ILO, 2015). In the OECD area, self-employment has increased modestly to about 10 per cent of total employment on average, though in some countries there has been a spectacular rise, for instance in Chile, Israel, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These are jobs in construction, road haulage, food and tourism, financial services, tax and business consultancy, information technology, media and arts, some of them through online platforms. In many countries the law excludes worker-contractors from collective bargaining over wages, as this is classified as price-fixing and in breach of existing competition law. In the case of disguised or misclassified self-employment, courts have however granted collective bargaining rights and allowed unions to extend bargaining coverage to the self-employed (OECD, 2019). In addition to job and income insecurity, self-employed workers are likely to receive less in work-related benefits than most employees. This is the case notably for unemployment benefits, and eligibility for employment injury, sickness and maternity benefits (ILO, 2016a).

Figure 7. Union density rates of workers in “permanent” and “fixed-term” jobs, 32 countries, 2015/16



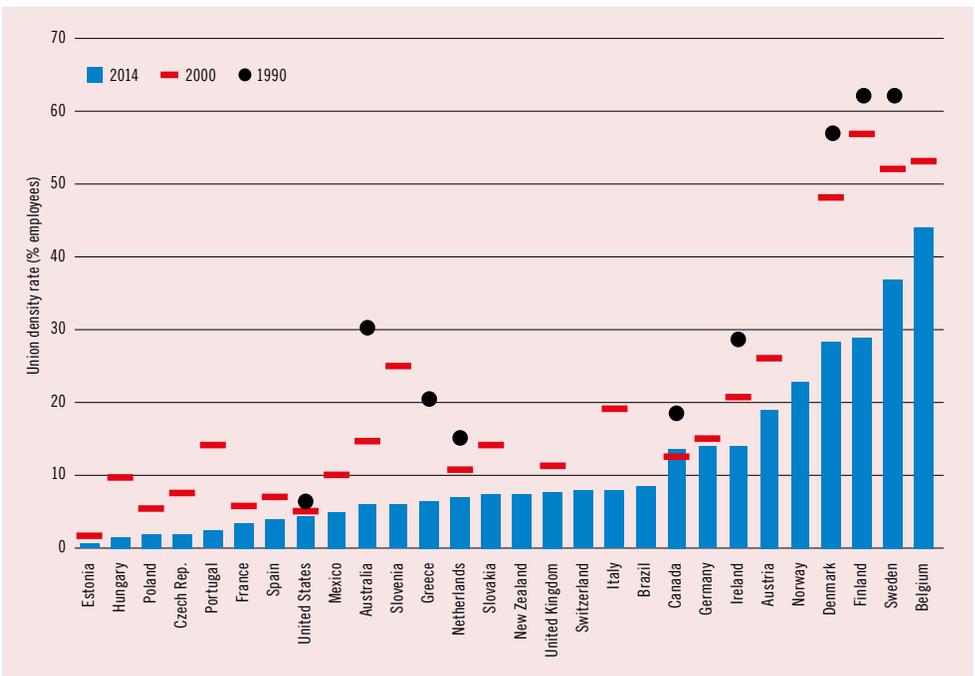
Have young people turned their back on trade unions?

Can unions revitalize themselves?

In the past generation or two there has been a sharp fall in the union density rate of young people under the age of 25 years. Currently, union density rates in this age group vary from 1 per cent in Estonia (and virtually zero in Latvia and Lithuania), 2 per cent in Poland, between 3 and 5 per cent in France and the United States, and at the high end, 29 per cent in Denmark, 37 per cent in Sweden and 44 per cent in Belgium. The average for this group of 28 countries has halved in one generation, from 21 to 11 per cent, and in half of these countries less than 7 per cent of young people join a union. The corollary is that the average age of union members has risen to over 45 years and that on average one-fifth of all union members are close to retirement, four times the number of those who have entered unions in the past five to ten years.

Youth unemployment and job instability have been around for some time and do not explain why union density rates among young people have kept falling in the past 30 years. Young people stay longer in education, and surely the difficulty of finding a stable job has increased for many of them, but when we compare the older age groups, from 25 to 35 or 35 to 45 years, we find a similar (although slightly less dramatic) decline. For each (ten-year) age cohort of workers entering the labour market since the late 1970s, the union density rate of young people is lower, and it stays lower over their

Figure 8. Union density rates of young workers (16-25 years), 28 countries, 1990, 2000 and 2014



lifetime. Research has shown that workers join the union when they are young, most often at the time of landing their first stable job and establishing a family (Visser, 2002). Workers who do not join the union before the age of 30 or 35 will probably never join. With the decline of union membership of young people during the past 30 years, the proportion of workers who have never joined a union has also increased (Booth, Budd and Munday, 2010; Bryson and Gomez, 2005).

Informal work, migrants and work in the gig economy

In its most recent statistical profile, the ILO (2018b) estimates that worldwide 61 per cent of all jobs are in the informal economy, varying from 86 per cent in Africa to 25 per cent in Europe and central Asia. Recent trends toward the casualization of work and non-standard employment relations have expanded the informal economy beyond the developing world, and more employees work informally than before – 40 per cent worldwide, around 10 per cent in the rich economies of Western Europe and North America. Rather than separated in two distinct worlds, formal and informal work are often interconnected.

Organizing informal workers was never easy (Bonner and Spooner, 2011) and the number of them durably organized in trade unions or cooperatives is very small, despite some remarkable initiatives in some countries and regions (India, West and East Africa, Latin and Central America) and for some groups (homeworkers in the garment industry, bikers, wastepickers). Without a standard workplace around which they can coalesce, many informal workers are situated in scattered, individualized workplaces or homes, or they are on the move. In the absence of an employment relationship, most workers fall outside the legal framework for labour rights and social protection. Where an employment relationship does exist, for instance for day-labourers in agriculture, construction or home-based garment workers, the workplaces are often so scattered, small or hidden in individual households that workers lack power to confront their employers or middlemen. Migrant workers form another large group of informal workers. Often undocumented and wanting to operate “under the radar”, they are particularly insecure and vulnerable to exploitation and harassment.

There are many parallels with work in the platform economy. Digital intermediaries such as Uber, Deliveroo, TaskRabbit, ClickWork or Fiverr are fundamentally transforming the employment relationship. Some specialize in tasks that can be executed anywhere in the world and online (for instance, editing or graphic design), others are local or require physical presence (food delivery, cleaning a house, or taxi driving). What all these forms have in common is that they enable individuals to operate with relative autonomy outside traditional structures defined by laws and collective agreements that

set limits on working hours, establish a mandatory minimum wage and define liabilities (OECD, 2016). Online platforms that specialize in tasks that can be done remotely and allow jobs to be broken up in a series of assignments are a further potentially revolutionary step in the rise of a truly global labour market and a “new strain of globalization in its rawest form” (O’Connor, 2018). Online crowdsourcing for activities that can be executed anywhere can draw from a global pool of workers with the possibility to auction national labour laws and put participants from high-wage economies in direct competition with those accustomed to wages and working conditions that are unacceptable in any domestic employment relationship (Finkin, 2016; Todolf-Signes, 2017). A recent ILO study (Berg et al., 2018), based on a survey conducted in 2015 and 2017 among 3,500 platform workers in 75 countries, found that platforms typically classify workers as self-employed, which has had the effect of depriving workers of the protections of labour and social security law.

Turning unions around

Rejuvenating the unions

Getting more young people into the unions is key to any strategy of union renewal. The gap in unionization between young workers entering the labour market and older workers close to retirement is larger than ever. Currently, in advanced industrial countries the age cohort of older workers, those who entered the labour market in the 1970s, is on average four times more unionized than the age cohort that joined the labour market in the past ten years. Revitalization requires that, as a minimum, unions must aim to double the current union density rate of young people up to the age of 30, raising the average from the present 11 to 22 per cent. There might be several ways to achieve this. The high unionization rate among young people in Belgium – 44 per cent in 2013 compared to 53 per cent in 2002 – suggests that radically reducing the dues rate for young people might help, though it does not address the lack of active participation of young people in the unions (Pulignano and Doerflinger, 2014). The Belgian example loses some of its shine, however, if we consider the rather low employment rate of persons in the 16–24 age group, 23 per cent, which is half the employment rate of youth in Germany and only one-third of the 60 per cent employment rate in, for instance, Denmark and the Netherlands (EC, 2018). Youth employment rates that high imply that many if not most students work for money in jobs that are probably part-time, temporary and channelled through work agencies or based on apprenticeships in a dual learning track.

Union recruitment in an early stage, in vocational schools and at universities, and during the transition from school to work, requires that unions introduce special membership programmes, with reduced dues and targeted benefits

that help young people at this stage of their lives. It inevitably requires that unions shift some of their resources, benefits and policies from older to younger workers. Leadership change is an aspect of this, but surely it would help to see more young people in the top leadership of the unions and confederations. The Italian union confederation CGIL has made a start by setting a quota of 20 per cent for workers under the age of 30 years for elected union officials. Similar but much higher quotas in the case of women have worked to bring more women into union leadership positions, and it is plausible that together with a change in policies this has made the unions more attractive to women.

Inclusion

Emigration tends to increase the youth deficit in trade unions. In Central and Eastern Europe, unemployment, low wages and emigration have drained the unions of young people. In countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania there are hardly any young people left in the unions. Korkut et al. (2017) point out that instead of increasing union bargaining power by limiting labour supply, the departure of more entrepreneurial young people has stalled union renewal and threatens in many sectors the intergenerational continuation of union activity. A joint study of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the ILO makes the same point about the negative consequences of emigration for the unions in Lebanon (CRI, 2016). The departure of young people is a threat to trade unions in many African countries as well. In the countries of destination – whether in northern and Western Europe, in South Africa, North America or the Arab States – migrants are generally underrepresented in the unions and it is therefore a loss on two sides unless, of course, these mostly younger migrants become unionized and accepted in leadership positions, and bring back not only vocational but also union skills when they return to their countries of origin. Helping migrants to return and be successful could be part of a policy programme for revitalizing unions.

Since 2000, trade unions in North America, Western Europe and South-East Asia have become more “inclusionary” towards migrants (Caspersz, 2013). In Western Europe and North America, trade unions began to see the enforcement of employment standards as a more effective way to protect the labour market than migration controls (Krings, 2010). In 2000, the AFL–CIO in the United States adopted a pro-immigrant policy stance, abandoned its previous support for restrictive measures and embraced the cause of immigrant rights and a path to legalization for undocumented workers from Central and South America (Milkman, 2013). In a number of European countries such as Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, trade unions have become vocal supporters of immigrant rights (Marino, Roosblad and Penninx, 2017; Jacobson and Geron, 2011, Tapia and

Turner, 2013). In Jordan, legal changes in 2010–11 ended the prohibition for migrant workers to join a union and migrants now make up 12 per cent of the total union membership. In 2015, the first migrant domestic worker network, with its main basis in the garment industry and nearly half its membership female, was formed to advocate for full rights for home-based workers. In Lebanon, domestic workers, whether nationals or migrants, are excluded from coverage under the labour law and vulnerable to rights violations. The national union confederation, with the assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the International Trades Union Congress (ITUC), has after years of campaigning created a Domestic Workers' Union, which is described by the ILO's Bureau of Worker Activities (ACTRAV) as an "excellent example of workers of various nationalities coming together in a restrictive legislative context" (CRI, 2016).

What can we learn from a contrasting case, for instance Spain, where the differences in unionization of young and old, migrant and native workers is particularly large and has widened in the past decade? In Spain, native workers are three times more unionized than migrants, the highest such difference in Europe (Kranendonk and de Beer, 2016). The difference in unionization between older and younger workers, expressed as a ratio, has widened from 2.4 in the early 2000s to 3.2 in 2008 and 7.5 in 2014. The union growth of previous decades has stopped, and on aggregate Spanish unions have lost close to one-quarter of their members since 2008. Pulignano, Gervasi and de Franceschi (2016) attribute the poor performance of Spanish unions among young people and migrants to the fact that most of them are trapped in temporary and precarious jobs and that Spanish unions are mainly there for permanent workers. This dualism was always there but has been reinforced during the 2008 crisis and the austerity policies that followed, when unemployment and precarious employment among young people increased massively (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian, 2016). This may well be the reason why *Juventud sin Futuro* (Youth without a Future), a movement that denounced the precarious situation of young people and emerged at the same time as the *Indignados* movement in 2011 (Antenas, 2015), explicitly rejected links with the unions (and the established political parties). "They do not represent us" was one of their slogans (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2017). Trapping young people in precarious jobs risks trapping unions into becoming marginal.

Although unions across Europe have responded to the challenge of contingent labour in different ways, there was a common element in their approach (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011). Initially, they were less concerned about representation than about opposing this kind of work and seeking its prohibition. When that failed and the unions began to realize that contingent work is there to stay, they changed their response, from exclusion to engagement and from neglect to representation. The German IG Metall, for example, traditionally refused to organize workers dispatched from temporary work agencies on the grounds that this would give these agencies legitimacy. Realizing

that agency work had become a permanent feature in metal engineering and undermined the unions' bargaining position, the union started a campaign for "Equal Work – Equal Pay", during which many agency workers joined the union (Benassi and Dorigatti, 2015). It was one of the changes in policy that made the union gain profile and members (Schmalz and Thiel, 2017). Around 2014 trade unions in the Czech and Slovak car industry, itself a subsidiary of the main German car producers, tried something similar, but missing resolve and resources, the results were less convincing (Bernaciak and Kahancová, 2017). More explicitly inspired by the "organizing model" imported from the United States, many unions in Europe engaged in organizing campaigns among workers with temporary contracts and in precarious positions, some of which were quite successful: security guards in Hamburg, call centre workers in Austria, cleaners and meatpackers in the Netherlands, workers in fast-food outlets and shopping centres in France, retail workers in Poland, sales workers in Sweden, hotel workers in Ireland, meatpackers in Britain (Berntsen, 2015; Connolly, Marino and Martinez Lucio, 2017; Czarzasty, Gajewska and Mrozowicki, 2014; Holtgrewe and Doellgast, 2012; Murphy and Turner, 2016). Some of these campaigns were modelled on the successful Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States (Erickson et al., 2002).

The fact that temporary agency work and temporary employment generally has become the reality for many young people is another powerful reason why unions had to adjust their policies. It is one of the reasons why, for instance, Japanese unions have changed their attitude towards part-time workers, most of whom are young, female and with limited employment protection. Their recruitment campaign towards part-time workers met with modest success, but also with many internal obstacles due the enterprise structure of unions, a problem that also comes up in the Korean case. Enterprise unions often limit their recruitment to regular workers and fail to contribute to the campaigns for more inclusive membership policies issued by the sectoral union federations to which they belong (Jeong, 2001; Durazzi, Fleckenstein and Lee, 2018).

Overcoming dualism

Although labour movements typically expound an ideology of equal rights, they sometimes accept policies and negotiate productivity or job preservation agreements in defence of their core membership in which temporary workers and small firms are treated as a buffer against uncertainty (Emmenegger, 2014; Hassel, 2014). Lee (2010) writes about the double dualism of Japanese and Korean enterprise unions, which by excluding small firms also exclude temporary workers and foreigners.

Firms with less than ten employees might be called micro, firms with less than 100 employees small. These firms have grown in importance in terms

of employment creation, partly as a result of outsourcing and networking. In many of the new service industries micro and small firms dominate the picture alongside giants such as Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Apple. Micro businesses and self-employment are mainstays of both the informal and the Internet economy. Unions are hardly present at all in micro firms, just as they are newcomers to organizing the new self-employed. (There is a long tradition of guild-like associations that set and supervise the entry and licensing rules in many of the older professions.) In the OECD area, on average, 62 per cent of all union members work in large firms with more than 100 employees, 27 per cent in small firms (10-100) and 11 per cent in micro firms. In Japan and Republic of Korea nearly all union members work in large firms, in France, Germany and the Netherlands well over 70 per cent; in Canada the large firm share is over 50 per cent. (I have no data for the United States but it is unlikely that it offers a different picture.)

In many countries – from Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea and Mexico to Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Poland and Spain – trade unions are hardly present at all in micro firms – fewer than four out of 100 workers join a union. The odds that workers in large firms join a union are seven times larger compared to workers in micro firms, and more than two times larger compared to workers in small firms. In countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland these differences are much smaller, about 1.5 times for micro firms and 1.2 for small firms. This suggests a difference in union policy as well as the presence of sectoral institutions (collective agreements, training, social security and fringe benefits) that equalize or mitigate the differences in being employed in large, small or micro firms.

Sectoral and regional structures above the level of single firms and workplaces are crucial. Setting up and maintaining a union in a micro and small firm is costly. In many countries there are legal obstacles. In Poland, for example, any starting union needs ten members. Intended to forestall union fragmentation, this excludes many workers from union representation. In Thailand the threshold lies at ten employees, in Romania at 15, in Honduras and Peru at 20, just to give some examples. Such exclusionary thresholds can have a huge effect. In Poland an estimated 30 per cent of all employees, including some categories in the public service, are legally excluded from joining or forming a union. In Thailand about 15 per cent of all workers, employed in over a quarter of a million industrial enterprises, almost three-quarters of the registered total, are barred from union representation (Brown, 2016). Milkman (2013) cites data for the United States showing that in the 1990s 22 per cent of private sector workers were excluded from the protections of the (“New Deal”) National Labour Relations Act. Among them are managers, independent contractors, micro businesses, agricultural and domestic workers, and temporary agency workers. Thresholds for mandated employee representation such as works councils are also relevant, as there is

much research evidence that such workplace institutions help unions to recruit and retain members. Works councils are rare in micro and small firms even where the law allows or mandates them.

Doellgast, Lillie and Pulignano (2018) present nine comparative case studies in industries and occupations such as metal manufacturing, chemicals, retail, cleaning, local government, freelance music, logistics and slaughterhouses in 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and observe both inclusionary and exclusionary (dualist) strategies. In their studies, dualism is not the dominant union response to the rise in job instability. For successful inclusionary policies, however, unions need the support of institutions above the level of single firms, “deriving from some combination of state and union power to extend institutional protection from stronger to weaker groups” (ibid. p. 8). These case studies give some impressive examples from trade unions in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy and Sweden that have mobilized successfully for inclusionary policies thanks to the combination of such institutions and union pressure.

Bridging the gap: The organization of formal and informal workers

Trade unions have long ignored or underestimated the informal sector, considering it a transient phenomenon and too difficult to organize (Gallin, 2001). In recent years, however, unions in Africa, Asia and Latin America have expanded their activities to include workers in the informal sector and they have become willing to engage with non-union organizations in the field, as becomes apparent in the profiles on labour markets and unions on the website of the Danish Trade Union Development Agency (TUDA, 2014–19). Around the year 2000 the TUC in Ghana and COSATU in South Africa amended their bylaws and allowed self-account workers into their ranks. Around the same time unions in the clothing and garment industry in Australia and Canada began to organize home-based workers. There are also examples of union confederations setting up special associations for informal sector workers, as in Senegal (transport), or Hong Kong (China), where the main union assisted in the establishment of the Asian Domestic Workers’ Union with mostly Filipino and Thai women. Unions in Sierra Leone, with the help of the teachers’ unions, promoted several bikers’ unions. In Nigeria organizing attempts focused on self-employed workers in the garment industry. In South Africa the textile workers’ union, having lost thousands of members due to factory closures after tariff reductions, extended representation to home-based workers (Mosoetsa, 2012). In Kenya, after decades of union decline and a shrinking formal sector through massive lay-offs, outsourcing and casualization, the main union confederation has in

recent years refocused on the informal sector, with seven new affiliates since 2015 and a growth to 2.7 million members of whom just 650,000 are in the formal (mainly public) sector. Other examples relate to agricultural workers and day labourers in Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nepal and Paraguay. Not always are these attempts to extend union rights to informal and self-employed workers successful. In South Africa, the initially successful campaign of the transport workers union to organize minibus drivers collapsed under fierce intimidation by employers. Xenophobia and violence against migrants have been nasty companions in the unions' struggle to organize street vendors and security workers (Gordon and Maharaj, 2014). In Brazil union attempts to make inroads into the informal sector have not been very successful due to inter-union conflict and lack of commitment (Ramalho, 2010; Frangi and Routh, 2014).

Unionization of workers in the informal sector often relies on cooperation with other social and political organizations. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, probably the largest organization of informal workers with nearly two million members in 2013 and a member of the ITUC, has been a trailblazer in an approach to informal work by stressing the full gamut of civil, social and economic rights, and acting as both co-operative and union. The success stories told in a recent collection from the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Herberg, 2018) of Ugandan transport workers, Kenyan security guards, Nigerian textile workers, Indian street vendors and South Korean cleaners show how workers in non-standard forms of employment eschewed traditional forms of trade unionism and created new coalitions or hybrid organizations in which a cross-over from the informal to the formal sector, and vice versa, took place. Combined with organizational flexibility, a more inclusive understanding of solidarity and of who is a worker enabled unions to approach workers in informal arrangements and come up with innovative ways of collaboration and interest representation.

Temporary workers' alliances and community-based unions have also formed in Japan and the Republic of Korea to assist workers, especially women, employed in industries where union organization is weak or absent or where women are excluded from mainstream enterprise unions. In South-East Asia, NGOs and female-only organizations sometimes serve as an alternative to unions in defending the rights of women workers (Broadbent and Ford, 2008). Initially, community initiatives supported by NGOs offer a substitute for unions, as was shown in a comparative study of street vendors and wastepickers in Ghana, India, Peru and Thailand (Chen, Madhaw and Sankaran, 2014). In order to turn such initiatives into permanent organizations capable of negotiating and enforcing agreements, the experience, skills and professionalism of trade unions can be useful. Unions can also bring specialist knowledge, for instance on how to use labour clauses in preferential trade agreements or monitoring mechanisms provided by the ILO or the OECD (Raess, Dürr and Sari, 2018; ILO, 2016b). But trade unions do well

to acknowledge that their place is next to others. Holgate's (2015) work on community unionism shows how unions in London, Sydney and Toronto have tried to redefine the locus of their activity from the workplace to the local community, becoming part of city-wide alliances and extending the focus of union activity from employment rights to citizen rights. Such alliances can enhance the public profile and support for unions and bring more diversity and attention to minority rights into the union mainstream.

Engaging with platform workers

Platform workers face many challenges when attempting to associate for the purpose of collective voice and agency. The ways in which many platform markets currently function raise issues with regard to freedom of association and right to collective bargaining (De Stefano, 2017). Many platforms deny or disguise employer responsibility. In the United States there is a still unsettled legal battle over whether Uber drivers should be considered employees or independent contractors. In 2016 in the United Kingdom, two Uber drivers took the company to court on behalf of a larger group, arguing successfully that Uber's 40,000 drivers were not self-employed and should receive the minimum wage and paid holidays. In 2017, a protest by platform workers in Switzerland, backed by the unions, resulted in improvements in wages and working conditions, and recognition that they were not independent contractors. In Bologna, Italy, a charter has been signed between the local riders' union, the three main trade union confederations, the city council and some local food delivery platforms, setting a framework of minimum standards for remuneration, working time and insurance. When platforms such as Deliveroo, Foodora and JustEat refused to sign the charter, the mayor of Bologna called on customers to boycott them (Vandaele, 2018). A recent case in Italy brought against Foodora, however, confirmed the self-employed status of its gig workers (Eurofound, 2018).

Reclassifying independent contractors as employees has been one of the classic union responses towards the spreading platform economy (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2018), but this will not always work. Other responses include setting up cooperatives and guild-like associations to share information and set minimum standards. The US example of "workers' centres", in some cases incubated by labour unions and in others launched by activists who viewed conventional unions as poorly suited to organizing excluded workers (Fine, 2006, 2011), is another inspiration. While the gains that workers' centres have achieved are not specific to the platform economy, the approaches used for non-standard worker organizing have potential applications to platform workers. The National Day Laborers Organizing Network in the United States stresses the similarities between the work of day labourers, or *Jornaler@s*, and platform work. Day labourers have in fact begun

to see their jobs move to online platforms through Apps such as TaskRabbit and Handy. The Workers' Union of Great Britain (WUGB) is another example of a cross-over. This organization operates outside the TUC and was founded for the purpose of supporting low-wage and immigrant workers. In August 2016 when Deliveroo informed online delivery workers that pay rates would be lowered, WUGB organized their protest and has since tried to organize delivery workers locally. In some countries – for instance Austria and Germany – works councils have been established for the purpose of defining and defending minimum conditions. A more challenging experiment for the unions was provided by Smart (*Société mutuelle pour les artistes*), a Belgian cooperative providing services to project-based workers throughout Europe (Xhauflair, Huybrechts and Pichault, 2018). In 2016 Smart signed a protocol with two food delivery platforms, guaranteeing a minimum number of hours paid after the first call, insurance packages for bike couriers and reimbursement of professional expenses. One of the platforms went bust, the other unilaterally cancelled the agreement, which led to a union-supported response of a new couriers' collective, a protest rally and a strike which drew the attention and support of several other unions and courier organizations in Europe (Vandaele, 2018).

The traditional concept of “employee” is shifting and can no longer be the exclusive criterion for union membership. Many people, especially the young, go through various transitions in which a variety of jobs, some with dubious legal status and rights, are combined with other activities outside the labour market. Self-employment, whether true or disguised, voluntary or involuntary, has become a more frequent option in online service industries, and in order to attract young people in these transitional labour markets trade unions must welcome and support self-employed workers. In recent years unions in several countries have changed their bylaws to admit own-account workers, and in some countries they have set up special unions or sections for this purpose. In some contexts, for instance the Freelancers' Union in the United States, these are so-called minority unions which have no collective bargaining rights. In that case they are rather advocacy groups, perhaps combined with setting minimum rules unilaterally and providing insurance, not unlike the early craft unions or guilds.

Making the unions relevant and attractive to self-employed and gig workers requires in my view the extension of collective bargaining rights to them. The obstacles of competition law must be overcome. Collective agreements with platforms have been signed in Sweden, between Bzzt and the transport workers union (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2018). In Denmark, Hilfr.dk, a platform for cleaning in private homes, signed in 2018 a collective agreement with 3F, a Danish trade union. The new collective agreement will guarantee people who work on the platform sick pay, holiday allowances and a contribution to their pension, and created an individual choice menu for workers to opt for employee and independent status.

One of the most interesting approaches to gig work is IG Metall's launch of a crowdworker website (www.faircrowdwork.org), as this shows how Internet tools can be used in the battle for transparency, fairness and decent work. Rating systems which encourage workers to share their experiences may become a potential entry point for subsequent collective voice. Internet forums of crowdworkers, who are often geographically dispersed and work online in isolation, may help workers to discriminate between equitable and exploitative requesters, share their experience, identify best practices and become a springboard for collective voice. Amazon Mechanical Turk, an online marketplace for computer-based microtasks, has spawned some of these forums. Social media and ICT tools can fill a void where there is no union allowed or where workers are scattered across different geographical areas, occupations and platforms. Bryson et al. (2017) give the example of OUR.Walmart, in which a small group created a Facebook-based app for campaigning within this notorious anti-union company with 1.5 million employees.

IG Metall has also developed a code of conduct signed by eight Germany-based platforms, in which they pledge to adhere to local wage standards (Vandaele, 2018). One of IG Metall's partners in this project is Unionen, Sweden's largest union. Unionen does not think there is anything wrong with the idea of online labour platforms but believes they need standards, and envisions creating a new type of institution jointly owned by the social partners and tasked with designing and enforcing industry standards. In order for firms to participate in this institution, they must have a collective bargaining agreement in place.

Concluding observations

Unions can revitalize themselves, but only if they rejuvenate and put resources and new thinking into making it attractive for young people to join. Social movements, cooperatives, worker centres, minority unions and union-like organizations can be the springboard for organizing workers in the informal sector, platform workers, women, young people and precarious workers. The "forward momentum" of women in the unions, for instance, owes much to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Cook, 1984). Mainstream trade unions often need a "thorn in the flesh" – small, independent or alternative organizations or movements that address new issues and pioneer new approaches.

Organizing campaigns directed at temporary and precarious workers have brought new life into the unions. Ibsen and Tapia (2017) rightly point to the importance of supportive institutional frameworks as a condition to reap the benefits from organizing campaigns, for instance through building the conditions for multi-employer bargaining and extending collective

agreements to outsiders. To be successful and durable, inclusionary union strategies need the support of institutions above the level of single firms, supported by public policy and union pressure, as was shown in the studies collected in Doellgast, Lillie and Pulignano (2018).

There appears to be no evidence that young people value the ideas of unions and solidarity less or that they hold different preferences compared to older people or earlier generations (Ebbinghaus, Göbel and Koos, 2011; Frangi, Koos and Shadziabdic, 2016; OECD, 2019). Many young people subscribe to the solidaristic values that unions advocate. However, what trade unions have on offer must be made more attractive. This can be a matter of lower contributions and targeted benefits, of leadership and image, but it probably also requires a different way of “being a member”.

There are signs that traditional forms of labour solidarity are in decline and becoming replaced by single-issue protests and movements such as Occupy, the Mozilla movement for a free Internet, and student campaigns for labour standards (Heckscher and McCarthy, 2014). The “collaborative solidarity” that lies at the heart of these movements is based on “weak ties” established via social media and Internet platforms. They rest on shared values and empathy rather than the common experience of work and membership that characterized the trade union. According to Heckscher and McCarthy, collective action attuned to the Internet Age takes the form of “swarming”, multiple actions organized independently by groups of movement supporters in pursuit of a common goal, rather than durable organization with membership as a once and for all fixed package of rights, benefits and obligations. The big question for the future of unions, it seems to me, is whether they will be able to reinvent themselves as membership organizations based on passing, fragile and project-based commitments that inevitably define varying rights to benefits and voting, and yet remain capable of negotiating agreements that bind not only employers (and governments) but also members.

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Precarious work: Experimenting with new forms of representation

South African labour responds

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Introduction

Much of the conversation on the future of work has focused on responses to technological trends (for example, automation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution) rather than ways of addressing shifting power dynamics amongst precarious workers.¹ Furthermore, in the work of key analysts of precarious work such as Guy Standing there is a lack of attention to contemporary labour or the labour movement's organizations and strategies (Standing, 2011). In a challenge to the widespread pessimism on the future of labour, labour scholar Ronaldo Munck provides in his latest book, *Rethinking global labour* (2018), a complex but optimistic account of an emerging global working class. He makes a powerful call for labour to return to its social movement origins and fulfil its historic role in a post-globalized world.

Similarly Herberg, reporting on the results of a global research project, *Trade unions in transformation* (2018) identifies 25 instances of successful trade union revitalization: the accounts of Ugandan transport workers, Kenyan security guards, Nigerian textile workers, Indian street traders and South Korean cleaners, crossing the divide between the formal and informal economy, suggest that innovative organizing strategies are emerging on the periphery of the labour movement. "Moving away from the standard depiction of unions as victims of globalisation," writes Herberg, "the project highlights that unions do have agency and power" (2018, p. 6).

A good example of agency is the Ugandan Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU). ATGWU was faced with plummeting membership due to redundancies as state-owned bus companies became privatized under the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s. By 2006, its membership had fallen to 2,000 (John Mark Mwanika, ATGWU official, and David Spooner, Director of the Global Labour Institute, interview 22 Nov. 2018).

The ATGWU decided to rebuild by "crossing the divide" and including informal transport workers, taxi and *boda-boda* drivers (commuting across Kenyan/Ugandan borders) by incorporating their membership-based associations into the union. The Airport Taxi Operators Association was the first to affiliate in 2008. The ATGWU used its established presence with formal airport workers to negotiate better conditions for own-account airport taxi drivers. It now has a membership of 60,000 and unionization has had a dramatic impact on workers' lives, including a reduction in police harassment, gains through collective bargaining, reduced conflict within associations, and an improvement in the visibility and status of informal women transport workers.

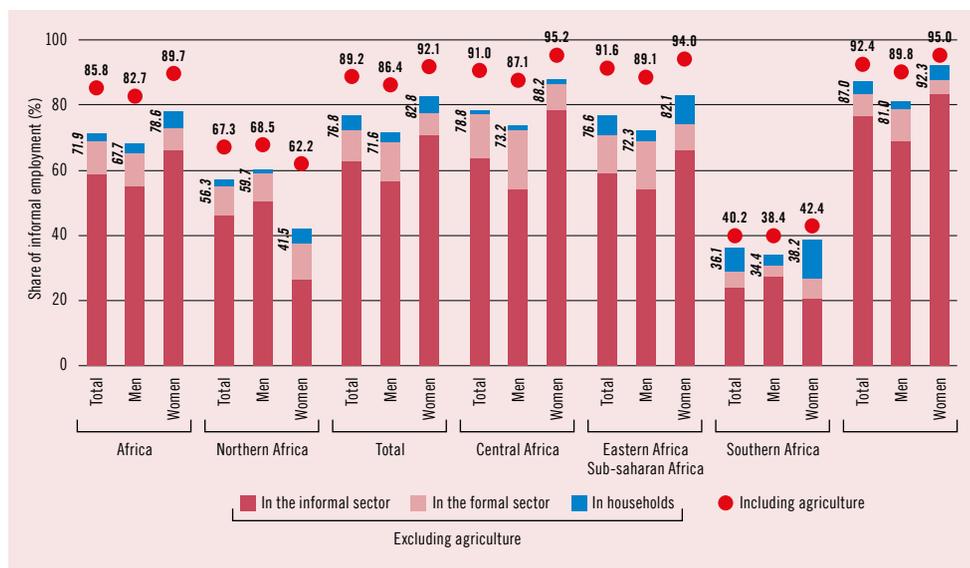
1. In this article precarious work is variously named informal work/employment, own-account/self-employed work, and wage-remunerated vulnerable casual and contracted employment. Such terms are ambiguous, overlap and are fluid although the difference between informal and formal work is distinct (see figure 2: Fluid classes of labour).

The union revised its constitution and adapted a dues system to integrate informal workers, initially through an ATGWU Informal Sector Committee comprised of the leadership of affiliated associations. By 2017 informal workers had full membership and constituted 50 per cent of the executive. The associations continue to function, providing services such as loans to buy vehicles, and promoting ownership and better security. The union deals with regular worker issues, while the associations assist drivers to become entrepreneurs.

In contrast, the South African labour movement is something of a laggard in crossing the divide. South Africa's larger industrial base means that unions can survive financially without recruiting non-standard workers. This is linked to South Africa's labour market where informality is less widespread than elsewhere in Africa, standing at 30 per cent of the economically active population (Mike Rogan, WIEGO General Assembly, 14 November 2018). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 89.2 per cent of employment in sub-Saharan Africa (including agriculture) is informal, but informality reaches only 40.2 per cent in southern Africa, as illustrated in figure 1.

Experiments in representation are the focus of this article. The first part analyses attempts by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Vulnerable Workers Task Team (VWTT) to develop a campaign to organize vulnerable workers. COSATU benefits from strong institutional power, making it less urgent to transform itself (Paret, 2015). But the world of work has changed since the 1990s and COSATU's membership

Figure 1. Informal employment as a percentage of total employment in Africa



Source: ILO, 2018, p. 27).

has not diversified significantly to include outsourced, casual, migrant or informal workers. This became a concern to the Federation as it began to feel the pressure of large-scale retrenchments and informalization: the labour relations system based on the traditional employer/employee system was being eroded by labour broker intermediaries (Kenny and Webster, 1998). COSATU's 1997 September Commission "assessed the changing nature of the labour market ... and recommended that it commit itself to the strategic objective of organising vulnerable sectors ..." (COSATU, 1997, Chapter 7). This was endorsed in successive Congress resolutions although little action transpired.

COSATU's 2012 Congress mandated it to explore the organization of non-standard workers, and the VWTT was subsequently launched. Between 2013 and 2014, it brought together representatives from its affiliates as well as two informal worker associations – South African Informal Traders Alliance (SAITA) and South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU); two informal worker international federations – Women in Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and StreetNet International; and a number of research organizations. Its aim was to encourage and assist the recruitment of precarious workers through the campaign.

But events overtook this imaginative initiative. After meeting regularly between 2013 and 2014, the VWTT ceased to function at the end of 2014. In November 2014, COSATU's largest affiliate, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, was expelled, followed by the expulsion of its general secretary, Zwelizima Vavi, in March 2015. While the issues that led to the COSATU split had no bearing on the VWTT (Craven, 2016), the VWTT debates occurring outside the established unions made this a moment of significant experimentation in the representation of precariously employed workers.

The second part of this article examines an initiative that preceded the VWTT which took place outside traditional unions – the organization of street traders. This has drawn on existing labour market institutions to build organization from above strengthened by initiatives from below. The conclusion is that contrary to the popular view that there is little organization of precarious workers in South Africa, a number of successful initiatives *outside* traditional unions exist, often with little or no support from the established labour movement. The use of strong tripartite institutions has a contradictory effect: it gives precarious workers access to policy-making and influence but also acts as a barrier to established unions crossing the divide, as it lends them a vested interest in the labour relations status quo.

In exploring the theme of experimentation outside traditional unions, this study of street trader organization focuses on the building of local power and alternative bargaining arrangements, and using national institutional power to obtain a voice.

COSATU's Vulnerable Workers Task Team

Precarious work:
Experimenting
with new forms
of representation

Central to the activities of the VWTT was the need to overcome the representation gap between established unions and growing numbers of workers outside standard employment (Webster and Bischoff, 2011). The core unions in the Task Team (TT) were SADSAWU, the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), the South African Transport & Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the Street Vendors Alliance (SVA). The team met monthly and soon realized that a diversity of sectors and forms of employment existed. The employment status – self-employed or wage worker, employer or own-account worker – is important for understanding changing structures of employment, and the possibilities of organizing.

Bernstein (2007) suggests that Africa's labour market is best understood as divided into "classes of labour". There are people who sell their labour power in some kind of market – either directly as wage labour or indirectly through a product market. Categories such as worker, peasant, employed and self-employed are fluid. Working people alternate between "earning a living" through wage labour and "making a living" through various livelihood strategies.

In practise what you have in African cities is a large group who simultaneously and ambiguously combine employment and self-employment ... In the shantytowns are large numbers of individuals who are sometimes unemployed and work intermittently in wage labour in small workshops or performing services. In short, there is no "homogeneous proletarian condition" within the "South", other than that essential condition ... the need to secure reproduction needs (survival) through the (direct and indirect) sale of labour power. (Bernstein, 2007, p. 5)

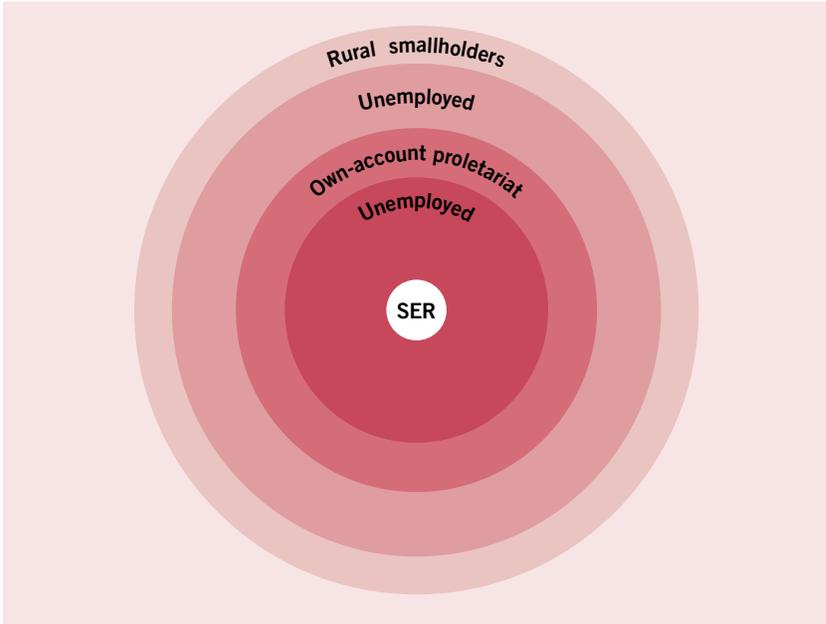
Figure 2 identifies five broad "classes of labour".

This ambiguity over class location raises difficult questions for union organizers. Who is a worker? Is a person who owns one minibus and drives it a worker? What about someone who owns two minibuses and hires a person to drive the second? If the person owns 200 minibuses, are they a street trader, worker or an entrepreneur? (Barrett, 2018). This ambiguity has led to hybrid forms of organization combining the function of a trade union (collective bargaining) with that of an association or cooperative (a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise) (Webster and Bischoff, 2011).

Work in standard employment usually occurs in defined built spaces such as factories, offices or shops, at certain fixed times. The regulated workplace is crucial for organizing workers into unions. In contrast, precarious work – whether formal or informal – takes place in a variety of spaces (some invisible), such as streets or workers' or employees' homes.

Although the central focus of the VWTT became the campaign, the meetings mirrored a range of activities involving the organization of

Figure 2. Fluid classes of labour



Note: SER: a standard employment relationship where the employee works full-time, on the premises of the employer, and that employment is permanent – or at least ongoing for an indeterminate period.
Source: Webster and Englert, 2018.

precarious workers. These included discussions on a national minimum wage, implemented in January 2019 (Valodia and Francis, 2018); a workshop on migrant labour; and a workshop on precarious work and the future of labour in 2013. This was subsequently turned into an edited volume (Webster, Britwum and Bhowmik, 2017). In discussion it emerged that legal advice offices were re-emerging to service precarious workers not represented by traditional unions, and two research organizations were commissioned to conduct a survey of these services. About 129 telephone interviews with advice offices and six site visits were conducted, including the Casual Workers' Advice Office in Germiston (Wilderman et al., 2013; Webster and Englert, 2018).

The TT targeted three sectors: farm and domestic workers in casual employment and street traders (own-account proletariat in figure 2). It was agreed to campaign from July to October 2014 around five decent work demands: the right to make or earn a decent living, work security, comprehensive social protection, full organizational rights for all workers, and safe and healthy workplaces (COSATU VWTT, Minutes, September 2013 to October 2014).² The aim of the campaign, according to the TT, “must first and foremost build organisation ... We must find a balance between collecting demands from below, and providing leadership and direction as a

2. Edward Webster, the present author, was a TT member and took notes of discussions.

Task Team. A set of demands can draw workers together to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' in preparation for moving forward to deepen organisation" (ibid.).

For the TT, the campaign was about recruitment and "listening and learning". The demands "must unite, and be linked to an agreed strategy to make the links between workers who are fragmented through sub-contracting, labour broking, part time work, etc". The campaign, it was agreed, must also engage public perceptions of wastepickers as "scavengers". The demand for a safe and healthy workplace was added to the four core demands. The TT concluded by emphasizing that "Worker knowledge of rights and state enforcement is critical to achieving rights – if they are there on paper but not implemented they are worth nothing" (ibid.).

The wording of the first demand – for a living wage – was challenged, as some precarious workers did not earn wages. It was changed to "decent work and livelihoods for all" and extended to include "respect for own account workers (the self-employed), including rights and access to materials, markets and space"(ibid.).

The second demand (work security) was expanded to include "direct access to work opportunities for both employed workers and own account workers – away with middle men!", a reference to opposition to labour brokers. Under social protection, a demand was made for a Basic Income Grant and for the Unemployment Insurance Fund to be "expanded to include all those without unemployment".³ It was proposed that the UIF be brought under the control of the unions rather than the Department of Labour (DOL). The fourth demand for union rights was amended to:

Full representational and organisational rights for all workers: the right of all workers to meet and gather in every work place regardless of who the employer is, including shopping malls, farms, homes, airports, stations and other multiple employer work spaces and in the case of own account workers, public spaces; the statutory right to representation and collective bargaining for both employed workers and own account workers; the right of access of organisational representatives to all work places to recruit and represent workers. (ibid.)

We turn now to discussion of the three targeted sectors.

3. To claim UIF benefits you must have been previously employed, with the employer and employee respectively contributing 1 per cent of monthly wages. Application for UIF benefits must be made within six months of termination of employment and is a finite cash payment depending on length of service. No other unemployed members of society are eligible.

Domestic workers

Of the vulnerable work targeted by VWTT, domestic work was identified as the most difficult to organize. Ally quotes one comment: “Paid domestic work is distinctive not in being the worst job of all but in being regarded as something other than employment” (Hondagneu-Sotelo cited in Ally, 2010, p. 3). Ally argues that domestic work is rarely recognized as employment because of its extension of women’s apparently “natural” roles. It is often seen as a continuation of kinship rather than contractual obligations. Importantly, Ally observes, the arrival of the South African democratic State began from the premise “that domestic work was a form of work like any other, and should be formalised, modernised, and professionalised as a form of employment” (ibid. p.3) In spite of domestic workers acquiring rights to organize, they have been “politically incorporated as ‘vulnerable’” and the State has substituted itself “for the union and demobilised domestics” (ibid. p. 162). Ally argues convincingly that the State can manipulate the victimhood of domestic workers, but acknowledges that they are in a weak bargaining position, especially because “domestic work is an intimate form of labour” (ibid. p 10). Under these circumstances, the democratic State can become a crucial ally in the same way as it has intervened to set a minimum wage for vulnerable workers.

This “vulnerability” emerged in the VWTT discussions when the SADSAWU representative, Eunice Dhladhla, spoke of the need to obtain assistance with union education, recruitment pamphlets and recruitment generally (COSATU VWTT, Minutes, September 2013 to October 2014). She emphasized the need for state sectoral determination and urged participants “to participate in hearings, as part of an organising strategy” (ibid.). The meeting encouraged her to use DOL provincial offices. Dhladhla urged VWTT participants to encourage their domestic workers to join SADSAWU.

The dependence of domestic workers on the employer’s good will, and the issue of sexual harassment, emerged as key to their vulnerability. Dhladhla spoke of “persistent and repeated sexual harassment, including rape silenced through bribery, which sometimes even results in pregnancy” (ibid.). She argued that “silence and acquiescence of the workers is a major problem, compounded by the dependence of workers on the employer for accommodation in ‘back rooms’. The notion of domestic workers being part of the family is not as it is – workers are workers and nothing else” (ibid.).

The campaign made little impact on domestic recruitment and no advice office for these workers has been established. The strongest support the VWTT offered was to recommend that the Central Executive Committee encourage their domestic workers to join a union (ibid.). Subsequently a new registered domestic worker association driven by younger women has emerged in Pretoria to challenge SADSAWU. “They got sick of SADSAWU saying they couldn’t represent workers,” commented Jane Barrett, Director of the WIEGO Organisation and Representation Programme, in an interview on 22 March 2019.

Farmworkers

Union density in the agriculture sector is low, about 3 per cent, and the impact of informalization on union organizing is profound (Webster and Nkosi, 2013). In the VWTT, FAWU targeted recruitment of 250,000 members by 2015 (COSATU VWTT, Minutes, September 2013 to October 2014). Importantly it proposed a new recruitment strategy that “follows the value chain” (ibid., p. 40). This involved tackling retailers who determine prices, and exploring with COSATU the possibility of a merger between the South African Commercial Catering & Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) and FAWU. It involved connecting with shop stewards in supermarkets and city markets “where the prices of products are also determined” (ibid.).

These were innovative ideas. Regular reports were given at TT meetings and capacity-building workshops were proposed in KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Some progress was made, including cane growers being recruited in Illovo Sugar with the next target being Tongaat Hulett. However, a major hitch occurred when the DOL stopped its roving safety project. Provinces had succumbed to employer pressure who saw it as “having the intention to organise workers” (ibid., p. 5).

FAWU has not reached its targets. In 2019 it has 124,000 members; few cane growers have been recruited; unity with SACCAWU has not been pursued and inter-union competition in the formal sector is high with FAWU capturing SACCAWU’s Choppies supermarket membership; innovative ways of organizing have not been explored although in the approach to its 2020 Congress such discussions will occur. FAWU left COSATU in 2016 and joined the new South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) which has “few resources to engage with organising vulnerable workers” according to Katishi Masemola, FAWU’s General Secretary (telephone interview 29 Mar. 2019).

Street traders

Street traders were represented in the VWTT by SAITA, a national alliance of informal traders. Earlier, COSATU had agreed to establish a project to organize street traders to campaign for the right to trade, access to financial and government services, and social insurance and cooperatives. It agreed to work with the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) to implement these demands, but a political problem arose as to whether “self-employed workers always have the same interests /aspirations as employed workers” (Launch SAITA Kimberley, 15-16 April 2013, COSATU VWTT, Minutes, p. 8). But, COSATU declared, by working with SAMWU the working-class character of street trader organizations would be maintained and defended (see below, ‘Organizing informal traders’).

Outside the traditional unions innovative forms of organization were emerging amongst precarious workers. Some of these organizations such as SAITA and the Migrant Workers Association (MWA) had been invited to participate in VWTT meetings.

In April 2014 the VWTT was addressed by the MWA which worked with migrants in South Africa. It is not a union but a registered non-profit organization (NPO) focused on assisting foreign nationals to obtain documentation and take up employment. Documentation difficulties were formidable, especially for informal workers who amongst other things struggled to open bank accounts. Xenophobia compounded their difficulties, intensified by politicians uttering anti-foreigner statements in the run-up to elections. Many migrants were desperate but feared association with a union or worker association. MWA aimed to provide a complementary service to unions, and hoped that progressive policies would emerge from its activism around documentation. It operated an office in Johannesburg city and asked a 40-rand joining fee. Governance structures and a constitution were in place, and it held an Annual General Meeting in 2014 to elect a committee comprised of migrant members (COSATU VWTT, Minutes, October 2014).

The VWTT's impact was limited. It contributed directly to discussions on the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015, No. 204), and brought informal and formal workers together for the first time in COSATU. However, few affiliates engaged with the VWTT pamphlet. This reflected the gap between rhetoric and practice which had characterized COSATU's engagement with vulnerable workers over the years. It had not fundamentally shifted its organizing strategy to incorporate precarious workers. A growing disconnect was evident between its members and unions as the politics of the Triple Alliance – COSATU, South African Communist Party, and African National Congress – were reproduced in COSATU. Its leadership was preoccupied with influencing Alliance politics and largely indifferent to representing more vulnerable workers (Craven, 2016).

What emerged from these VWTT discussions was the complex nature of precarious work, and the different demands these workers were making on those in standard employment. This is illustrated by the content of the VWTT pamphlet *Join the drive to organise all vulnerable workers!*, designed as an educative tool for unionists. A key demand was the removal of obstacles for own-account workers to earn a living income rather than a wage. This new way of framing remuneration demands took into account changing workplace and employment relations. The VWTT account also demonstrates that organizational experimentation around precarious work was mainly happening *outside* affiliates, which was reflected in COSATU structure discussions.

The VWTT demonstrated that when the established unions engage with more vulnerable workers, new ideas and organizing strategies can emerge – but they need to be supported by union leadership and structures.

The campaign highlighted the danger of unions and their federations aligning with the dominant political party as an overriding strategy to solve worker problems and build worker power. Unions can get sucked into political battles and leadership political ambitions to the detriment of basic organizing work. In the process a representational gap emerges and unions become alienated from their worker base. The growing gap between workers and unions makes it difficult for unions to develop and implement new and creative organizational strategies to represent and build the power of more precarious workers. This is especially the case with vulnerable and informal workers where multiple employers, or the absence of an employer, and the need to engage with state institutions, necessitate new organizational approaches.

Organizing informal traders

Building local recognition

Post-democracy, informal street traders have organized themselves in single and umbrella organizations to advance their concerns and demand changes from municipal authorities. Unlike South Africa's trade unions in the formal sector, which in the early days had a clear bargaining partner at enterprise level or through bargaining institutions, informal traders turned to local government to change their conditions. In the same way that the unions of the 1970s and 1980s met obdurate employers reluctant to give workers an equal say in wages and conditions, informal workers have been confronted with hard-nosed city authorities who have obstructed their attempts to be heard or assisted. In such interactions street vendors identified themselves primarily as traders and not as workers eking out a living on the city streets. In turn, municipal authorities had a vision of world-class South African cities with pristine sidewalks unsullied by the clutter that African cities elsewhere were identified with, and along which people would briskly make their way to their employment. They imagined hawker and street trading activity being contained in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which would develop into sustainable businesses employing local labour.

Confronted with these contradictory visions, street traders' interaction with municipal officials was difficult from the start. However, at times, especially in the early days of democracy when a spirit of *ubuntu* (good will) prevailed, city authorities moderately tolerated street trader activity. But as numbers of vendors increased, municipal attitudes hardened and trader associations were often greeted with hostility or inertia. Responses were uneven, however, and the city manager's approach would often determine whether traders' demands were heard or not, and whether some kind of negotiating forum was established. In Johannesburg and Durban immediately post-1994, the authorities demonstrated an initial willingness to engage with

street vendors, but this soon hardened into a more autocratic form of governance. Although negotiating forums were established, in Durban for example where the Department of Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunities (DITSBO) was given the mandate to meet and consult with street vendors (especially women) regularly, the forum was quickly appropriated by the municipality to rubber-stamp policy with little consultation. Thus in 1995, the eThekweni (Durban) Municipality passed new street trade bylaws with minimal discussion with street traders. In Johannesburg clashes soon erupted on the streets between street vendors and the Johannesburg Metro Police Division (JMPD) over permission to trade on its sidewalks. Instead of developing effective administrative structures to manage this, the city passed the responsibility to the Metro Trading Company (MTC), a municipal technical entity unsuited to the task (Horn, 2016).⁴

Informal trader organization was constantly renewed, often in response to a crisis, and would again confront city authorities, sometimes with a single issue success. However, such informal organizations, and the negotiating platforms they prompted, were seldom sustained. Nevertheless, with each setback or advance informal workers entrenched their existence as a sector that was not going to disappear and with which local government was going to have to interact. Thus, following a near insurrection by vendors in 2007 when the eThekweni council attempted to close the Warwick Road market, the municipality opened its doors to consultation with street vendor organizations which they had previously excluded from the eThekweni Municipality Informal Economy Forum (EMIEF). These periods of transparency were however persistently followed by the council seeking to take back control. The Business Support Unit (BSU) that had absorbed the DITSBO then sidelined the multi-stakeholder EMIEF and invited WIEGO and other researchers to advise it. Later it turned to the ILO to act as a broker and advisor in its dealings with informal traders, but in all cases it ignored recommendations and continued along a unilateral path (Horn, 2016).

In their reluctance to consult street vendors, municipalities created high levels of tension, at times erupting into violence. Divide and rule tactics were common, and clashes between, for instance, permit and non-permit holders provided councils with further reason to remove traders from the streets. Politics too fed into the municipal management of vendors. When elections and a period of political turmoil surfaced in Durban in 2015 including tense internal provincial leadership conflicts in the ruling ANC, regional and municipal political leadership was paralysed and meetings with street trader representatives fell away (*ibid.*).

The above brief overview of the failure to sustain informal trader/local government social dialogue belies the indirect power that was being

4. Horn gives a detailed account of local government interactions with informal traders between 1990 and 2015 in Durban and Johannesburg.

incrementally built by informal traders. It implies that informal workers had little agency, while in fact over the years they were relentlessly pushing back boundaries and establishing themselves as a city partner that could not be ignored. Smaller committees combined to approach the council in a united manner; traders fought back both physically and with determination when their stands were threatened or their goods confiscated; and in crisis periods when city councils attempted to enforce hostile by-laws they forced municipalities to hear their objections. They have shown a sustained willingness to bargain, consult and work with city representatives; and they have drawn up demands and charters to communicate their needs (ibid.).⁵

Street vendors have also used legal organizing tools to powerful effect. In 2013 they took the Johannesburg mayor to court to challenge the city's "Operation Clean Sweep" aimed at clearing Johannesburg's pavements of traders' stalls, where they were regularly, often violently, evicted from their spaces and had their goods confiscated. "All the goods were jumbled together onto the back of a truck – no receipts were given and it was impossible to find and claim your things later," commented Lulama Mali, a Johannesburg street trader (interview, 8 Mar. 2019). The issue reached the Constitutional Court which ruled that trader evictions violated city by-laws. It ordered the city to allow traders to return to their places of work. Evoking the spirit of Nelson Mandela, the Acting Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke condemned the operation as an act of "humiliation and degradation" which rendered thousands of people, and their children, destitute (Zondo, 2014).

A further court challenge in the Durban High Court in 2015 held that the eThekweni municipality's confiscation of traders' goods under the 2014 Informal Trading Bylaw was unconstitutional and unlawful (Benjamin, 2015). These judgements had a disciplining effect on municipalities, who feared that if they tampered with traders' rights they might find themselves entangled in expensive and humiliating court cases.

Street vendors have also been resourceful in utilizing both local and international organizations to help reach their goals: "We'll work with anyone who can push our struggle forward and teach us something and working with WIEGO and Streetnet ... has helped us," commented Mali (interview 8 Mar. 2019).

In 2002 the Streetnet International alliance of street vendors was launched in Durban. It included membership-based organizations (unions,

5. For example, the Save the Hawkers Campaign Charter demands included taking stock of the African informal trader reality; recognizing and resourcing an independent Informal Traders Forum where traders could make inputs into policies and implementation; establishing a multi-stakeholder Informal Trading Committee to build consensus and find solutions with traders themselves; and clarifying responsibilities and mandates with an accountable municipal department in charge of street trading, including area-based management committees to end governance opacity and delegate local issues to area level.

cooperatives or associations) organizing street or market vendors, and hawkers across Africa, South America and South-East Asia. Its aim was to promote an exchange of information and ideas on issues impacting informal workers, as well as to discuss practical organizing and advocacy strategies. Streetnet became affiliated to WIEGO, which worked with similar organizations to provide technical support through workshops, to augment the voice and visibility of informal workers, and to conduct research where findings, data, case studies and lessons learned were disseminated. These organizations brought a critical new perspective to organizing informal traders: they were seen as both traders and *workers*. Many traders saw themselves as entrepreneurs and did not consider themselves as workers entitled to the rights that all workers have in South Africa, and this view unleashed a whole new way of organizing and framing demands. Through a worker lens, WIEGO and Streetnet helped to deepen and build more sustainable organization amongst street traders, wastepickers and other own-account workers (Pat Horn, interview 8 Mar. 2019; Jane Barrett, interview 22 Mar. 2019).

Some WIEGO and Streetnet organizers (mainly women) had worked in the South African trade union movement in the 1980s and had the flexibility and foresight to bring their organizing experience to the informal sector. They brought with them useful understandings of how to build worker power. These included the construction of unity and solidarity; the centrality of worker control and independence; basic organizing tools, including tactical and strategic engagement combined with hard work, attention to detail, and use of legal strategy; the importance of influencing ILO task teams and forging international Recommendations and Conventions which in turn could be used by workers; and the centrality of negotiations and building bargaining institutions. Engaging with these principles and ways of operating bolstered confidence and gave informal workers a progressively stronger voice. Old trade union tropes were still being utilized but in different ways with a different class of worker.

Both organizations entered a terrain where informal workers were already organizing and bargaining. Negotiating with local government was widespread; WIEGO and Streetnet, understanding the power that worker control brings to organizing, provided assistance once the organizational capacity of informal worker associations had been assessed. “This is why we’re ahead as bargaining partners. We work with what people know but also see limitations and this is where we can help. There is something going on organically, but street traders are competing and conducting parallel negotiations, and this is a divide and rule situation for municipalities. We streamline, coordinate and discuss how to sustain unity for follow-up negotiations, and how to record and monitor agreements, and improve the quality of negotiations,” explained Streetnet’s International Coordinator Pat Horn (interview 8 Mar. 2019). In this process workers’ agency was encouraged through self-representation and independence.

Such coordination had a direct impact. SAITA launched in April 2013 and intended to register as an NPO. However, five months later it had not opened a bank account and had no membership records. In Johannesburg street traders were fragmented and SAITA “was being hampered by Council officials, especially in Pretoria, Westonaria and Randfontein” (COSATU VWTT, Minutes: 6 Feb. 2014; 26 June 2014; 8 Oct. 2014). However, through working with Streetnet and WIEGO, by 2018 SAITA had united eight of South Africa’s regions. In the ninth region, Gauteng, SAITA’s gate-keeping was preventing traders from representing themselves. In 2018 a small Alexandra-based organization, Jowedet, applying Streetnet’s principles and ways of operating, called Johannesburg trader organizations together to construct solidarity. This united challenge, or Johannesburg platform as it is known, has now permitted Gauteng traders to represent themselves locally and nationally. The umbrella body has appointed trader representatives to handle marketing, public relations, safety and security, recruitment and so on, together with regular meetings where mandates and report-backs are given (Mali, interview 8 Mar. 2019). Joint Streetnet and WIEGO workshops have also brought wastepickers and street traders together so that they can more powerfully make their demands to the municipality.

Both WIEGO and Streetnet played the role that a trade union education department would traditionally perform. Informal workers learnt about their rights, labour and administration law, negotiation skills, and how to access useful organizations such as Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) to assist in defending against attacks on vendors, and other needs. Streetnet and WIEGO, acknowledging the need for unity and the vulnerability of the sector, worked widely with other actors in their sectors such as Groundwork, KZN Fishersperson’s Forum, KZN community health-care workers, South African National Civic Organisation, SA Self-Employed Women’s Association, South African Domestic Services Union, and FAWU, as well as the ILO, for the National Dialogue on the Informal Economy and the Future of Work, 26–28 March 2018. They also work nationally with organizations such as SAITA and the South African Wastepickers Association (SAWPA) with an eye to national negotiations and building the voice and power of the sector. WIEGO, SAWPA and Groundwork are currently driving the Waste Integration (WISA) project to strengthen waste reclaimers’ organizations in places such as Johannesburg, Sasolburg and Tshwane, and to demand their formalization and integration into municipal cleaning services. Local governments frequently complain about the lack of negotiating partners in the informal sector, so the combining and strengthening of organizations to speak with one voice has been an important organizational thrust (Pillay, 2017).

None of these forms of representation in the process of building power in the informal sector are new to traditional union organization. However, they have been innovatively applied to the informal economy allowing for

some significant victories for workers to be won, and for the emergence of a much stronger informal worker presence in municipal planning and consultation. But until recently, an informal traders' voice was mainly being built at a local level. The following section looks at how the sector is building representational power at a national level in tandem with ongoing local initiatives.

National engagement with ILO Recommendation No. 204

In a significant moment in 2015, the ILO adopted the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation (No. 204). In essence, the Recommendation acknowledges that most people enter the informal economy owing to a lack of opportunities in the formal economy and the absence of other means of livelihood. It recognizes that workers in the informal economy are neglected in terms of their rights as workers, including rights at work, social protection, decent working conditions, inclusive development and the rule of law. It further recognizes that the sector suffers from a lack of governance and from other structural issues, and that public policies could speed up the process of transition to the formal economy in a context of social dialogue.

South Africa, through its Department of Labour (DOL), had been active in framing Recommendation No. 204. It gave input into its content and pushed hard for its adoption at the ILO's 104th International Labour Conference in June 2015. Subsequently it established a task team to promote the Recommendation with the intention of engaging in its National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) Decent Work Country Programme. The DOL's task team is supporting a National Dialogue through NEDLAC which has already facilitated two national dialogues, in February 2017 and March 2018, in order to develop a road map for transitioning from the informal to the formal economy. The DOL has identified four pillars in achieving this goal: a legal strategy to reform legislation; strengthening local government to deal with issues of the informal sector; developing a road map for a transition; and developing a national poverty reduction strategy (Tinyani, 2018).

However, it is informal trader representation that is ahead of the game. "In the early days we engaged mainly with campaigns and tried to improve traders' conditions at a local level," observed Horn, the informal worker representative at NEDLAC (Horn, interview 8 Mar. 2019). Chief amongst these campaigns was the ILO's Decent Work Country Programme campaign and more latterly its Future of Work campaign. More recently, however, still using the ILO campaign themes as an organizing tool, Streetnet has begun to work on a strategy which has implications for raising informal workers' conditions nationally. The focus has been on engaging in a national tripartite social dialogue in NEDLAC's labour market policy area where organized business,

government, organized labour and community chambers meet. Bizarrely, the informal sector is not permitted to sit in the labour chamber but is represented in the community chamber, unlike at the ILO where informal workers are represented in the labour sector. NEDLAC is a by-product of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) campaign waged in the 1980s by COSATU, and is a forum to co-determine economic and social policies. The various parties convene in the Development Chamber to reach consensus on matters pertaining to social and economic policy and development programmes. The informal sector is looking to repurpose this institution to make gains for informal workers.

The tripartite NEDLAC structure, with a community where informal workers are represented as the Cinderella sector, has given the traditional unions the voice and the power to negotiate special privileges for standard employees (most recently the national minimum wage was co-determined here), but has historically excluded the voice of workers in the informal economy. Workers in the informal sector are also excluded from the major laws providing protection and rights to workers – most notably the LRA. Recognition as workers, and representation in labour law, is thus a major organizational thrust for informal traders who will engage the various NEDLAC partners on its reform. The LRA, negotiated at NEDLAC and adopted in 1995, is considered one of the most progressive pieces of labour legislation in the world. The law however defines workers as “employees” and in so doing excludes many in the informal sector who are own-account workers. This definition of a “worker” renders many other clauses of the LRA inapplicable to informal sector workers. The LRA, and its partner the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, permit access to a range of rights and benefits which are denied informal workers. These include unemployment, old-age and maternity benefits; compensation for workplace-related injury and ill-health; prohibition of child labour; the right to bargain collectively, and access to bargaining and dispute resolution and conciliation institutions; access to government training institutions; codes of good practice and so on. Redefining the LRA is complex, as informal workers may be both own-account workers and micro-employers, yet such “small economic units” (so-called in Recommendation No. 204) can in Barrett’s view “be considered workers as the power of the authorities is loaded against them. Historically government has tended to view them as entrepreneurs, capitalist units which will grow rich and employ labour in their own right. A tiny minority who have succeeded in doing this get access to government grants. But most of these workers will never achieve this. So making their lives more decent and giving them access to infrastructure, benefits, and rights is important to improving their daily lives and increasing their margins” (Barrett, interview 22 Mar. 2019).

Organizing informal workers is a complex strategy of combining struggles from both above and below, nationally and locally. Mali, an own-account

worker, stressed the difference that infrastructural provision from local government would make in her life: “We have to use public toilets, which get blocked, and we wait in long queues, and all the time I’m worrying about my store. I’m losing customers and I’m worried things will get stolen ... There’s no proper overnight storage. It’s a bit better than before because we can now store at the top of a building. But stuff gets wet, and rots out in the open. We have to pay two boys to look after our stuff and carry it up and down to our stores on the street. If you leave your stuff in illegal places the JMPD quickly confiscates it. I also need a small safe space under my table to restock. Now I have to go upstairs to the roof to fetch more things” (Mali, interview 8 Mar. 2019). Mali sells bracelets, necklaces, armbands, hats and scarves so her margins are small and every penny matters.

Mali is clear on what local government needs to provide, and with the help of WIEGO recently submitted a document on traders’ needs to a Johannesburg Integrated Development Plan (IDP) meeting. “We need training, we need skills, we need facilities. We need a building for storage, a crèche, with a day-care centre for little kids so our kids can be with us and we can also work. We want a lunch and soup kitchen, a small canteen for a cup of coffee and *vetkoek* in the morning, and a post-school supervised homework centre. We want a building with two floors with lockers to store our stuff but also rooms to meet in, a hall with chairs and tables, fridges for water, ice and food. And a few beds so if you have to you can sleep over. A couple of offices for Johannesburg Informal Traders Platform to work from. We can use the hall for functions and make some money to maintain the building and create work for people. We are willing to contribute but we need the city as partners. We strategize, we are dreamers. We have not had any department on our side to transform our sector but we have a turnaround strategy” (ibid.).

Mali is keen to negotiate with the municipality in a sustainable forum where traders are taken seriously. “Government pays lip service. They invite you to meetings to make your lives better but nothing will be implemented. The Department of Small Business Development has a budget for the informal sector. But we never see its benefits. It’s just promises and officials change all the time.” But she is optimistic: “At the IDP meeting they were interested in the proposal. They were happy to have a negotiating partner in the Johannesburg Platform. They said, ‘You are organised so we will work with you as a collective’” (ibid.).

A national impetus through negotiations at NEDLAC is essential if local government is to implement at least some of Mali’s dreams. The national treasury needs to allocate funds and send the message that street traders are an asset to the economy and essential to livelihoods and the economic stability of South Africa. This differs from the trade union struggles of the 1970s and 1980s where power was built incrementally from the workplace or factory upwards, until sufficient strength was mustered to achieve national negotiations in various sectors and ultimately at NEDLAC to plan

the economy. But NEDLAC is now a source of strength for the informal economy, where its voice can finally be heard.

Horn comments, “The informal sector is way in advance of other sectors at NEDLAC in terms of thinking through possibilities and how this could happen. The ILO takes us seriously and in whatever forums we are in, we are lead contributors” (Horn, interview 8 Mar. 2019). The sector’s advanced thinking, however, has frustrated it in negotiations as its bargaining partners at NEDLAC are weak. Although the South African Government has played a role internationally, it has few ideas about the informal sector and even less knowledge of it. Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) is also weak although it is keen to learn from informal representatives at NEDLAC, and has engaged its affiliates in capacity building on formalization issues concerning laws and tax contributions. The traditional unions have little interest in representing informal workers and have largely blocked them from combining in the labour chamber (Horn, interview 8 Mar. 2019). NEDLAC affords protection and special privileges to standard employment and so there is little impetus for these traditional unions to cross the formal/informal divide. The informal sector will inevitably have to play a large role in educating its bargaining partners, a role it has already assumed.

“South Africa, and perhaps Senegal, are the only countries which have successfully engaged with the idea of formalizing informal workers and which have stopped working in silos,” commented Horn. Although South Africa has fewer informal workers than other African countries with large informal sectors (see figure 1), its informal workers have more potential to be absorbed into the formal labour relations system. Labour institutions built over years of struggle in Africa’s most industrialized economy are allowing informal workers to access national corridors of power. Street traders are experimenting with new forms of representation at both national and local levels, and as the formal economy falters it will become more urgent for these institutions to align standard employment benefits and rights with those of informal workers.

The study on street traders holds lessons for both traditional trade unions in South Africa and for unorganized vulnerable and informal workers. Trade unions are faced with growing retrenchments and unemployment whilst redundant workers turn to own-account survival activities. If the established unions do not adapt their role in working people’s lives they will become increasingly irrelevant. Engagement with the informal sector and the growing numbers of vulnerable workers is key to fulfilling unions’ historical role, and moving from obsolescence into renewed relevance, as the Ugandan AGTWU study illustrates. In turn, informal worker organizations would receive a huge boost from the established unions’ power, experience and strategic approaches. While these organizations cannot rely on traditional unions to fight their battles, they simultaneously need to engage them and demonstrate new ways of organizing and bargaining which involve the State. In the South

African case, precarious workers need to continuously insert their voice and ideas into labour laws and institutions in order to demonstrate to established unions that labour solidarity is the only way to build the power of *all* workers in order to deliver changes in their conditions.

Conclusion

Two initiatives in experimenting with new forms of representation amongst precarious workers have been analysed: COSATU'S VWTT and its attempts to develop a campaign to organize vulnerable workers; and the efforts by informal traders to build representational power in local and national government. Both these studies are about new ways of organizing and representing the most vulnerable workers in South Africa. The VWTT's deliberations provide a valuable record, while the study on street traders demonstrates how these workers experimented with strategic ways of getting their voices heard and acted upon.

What emerges from the VWTT analysis of traditional unions' attempts to organize precarious workers is that they have largely failed, and that these workers remain largely unorganized. The VWTT nevertheless provided a forum where organizers could share their experiences of new models of organizing precarious workers. Migrant workers have not established a traditional union but an NPO, and their central demands are around citizenship rights rather than wages and working conditions. The weak bargaining position of domestic workers and the distinctive nature of their work means that they have to target the State as an ally rather than individual employers to win rights. The failure of traditional unions, such as FAWU and farmworkers, and SAMWU and street traders, to facilitate organization lies in the model of organizing and bargaining that they continue to rely on.

As Theron argues in a paper to the VWTT, "There is a need for tolerance and support on the part of trade unions toward other forms of organization which are, in some sectors, organizing workers in non-standard employment, or in sectors which are difficult for trade unions to organize in such as agriculture and domestic work. Examples are cooperatives and associations bringing together self-employed workers, and NGOs" (Theron, 2014, p. 12). In arguing for an experimental approach he suggests establishing workplace forums that "would provide representation to workers who currently have no voice in the labour relations system" (ibid., p. 13). There is also a need "to re-conceive the workplace, by focusing for example on the retail mall, or a transport hub such as O R Tambo" (ibid., pp. 13–14).

The study on informal traders demonstrates that outside the traditional unions experimentation in organizing vulnerable workers is under way. This is not however through established trade union structures but through associations, platforms, umbrella organizations, NGOs and so on. Their demands

too are not those associated with formal unions. They are not demanding higher wages, but a secure space, infrastructure and facilities which will allow them to earn a living income. Their demands are not to an employer but to local and national state authorities. Shifting the attitude to informal street workers at a national level is crucial for transforming local government attitudes and acceptance of street traders as a permanent feature of working life.

Vendors are demanding too that they be considered as both traders and workers. This is a radical assertion with which unions and state authorities are still grappling. It entails new ways of viewing vendors with implications for the amendment of a range of labour and other laws, and the implementation of rights and responsibilities which assert the dignity of informal work, in the way ILO Recommendation No. 204 frames it. Bargaining is a two-way process with benefits for both sides. In acknowledging the needs and rights of informal workers, municipalities will create a stable economic environment in a society riven by high unemployment, and will also benefit from local taxation and payment for services.

Informal traders as workers see the traditional unions as their natural allies. They believe that crossing the divide, breaking down the silos between formal and informal work, is critical in the process of changing laws and policies which will benefit *all* workers. Building an alliance is also important in preventing the established unions from resisting changes to the status quo where they now comfortably reside.

There is great danger that traditional unions, instead of opening up to experimentation and the protection of informal workers, will simply defend the interests of permanent workers and abandon precarious workers. In doing so they would become increasingly dependent on the institutions established by the new labour regime of the post-apartheid order. These include political connections through the Triple Alliance (Paret, 2015), and the LRA's sectoral bargaining system that de facto excludes precarious workers. As a result of their dependency, they would defend the existing order, becoming allies of employers in guaranteeing industrial peace and stability.⁶

Yet established unions stand to benefit from lending solidarity to precarious workers. The earlier example of the Ugandan ATGWU demonstrates how a union under pressure, through experimentation and incorporating informal workers, was able to rebuild power to win considerable victories for its membership. Traditional unions in South Africa are rapidly losing members as the formal economy weakens. Combining with the informal economy will ensure their survival while strengthening the hand of all workers.

If the established union movement is to overcome the representation gap, our research suggests that it needs to begin by gathering information

6. This is described in the study of labour broker workers organizing at Heineken breweries, where FAWU defends permanent workers at the expense of many precarious workers without representation (Webster and Englert, 2018).

on the nature and magnitude of precarious work in South Africa. Instead of assuming that every worker will get a full-time job with benefits, established labour needs to acknowledge that the world of work has irrevocably changed, and that adopting an experimental approach to representation and bargaining is the only way in which it can secure a future.

We conclude with five recommendations on how traditional unions can support the organization of vulnerable workers:

- Create a forum within the union (or federation) which includes precarious worker delegates, where the representation of informal /vulnerable workers can be discussed; and ensure widespread education within the union on what organizing such workers entails. Demonstrate that such organization will augment the unions' power and resources especially in the light of widespread company closures and retrenchment.
- Reference the union's constitution and its commitment to organizing and representing workers within its sector and discuss the incorporation of informal workers within these goals. Develop a thorough understanding of the provisions of Recommendation No. 204 and the ILO's fundamental Conventions regarding freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to organize (Nos. 87 and 98).
- Undertake practical horizontal mapping through face-to-face interviews with workers, using questionnaires. Through research, the conditions faced by vulnerable workers and their sources of power can be identified. This would allow unions to recruit new constituencies and create action plans, or organizing plans, based on research. Sufficient financial and human resources should be allocated for carrying out the plan in order to address practical issues such as the payment of union subscriptions in a non-standard workplace.
- Form partnerships with NGOs and faith-based organizations to run campaigns around the five decent work demands: the right to make or earn a decent living, work security, comprehensive social protection, full organizational rights for all workers, and safe and healthy workplaces. Some categories of vulnerable workers, such as street traders, are not demanding higher wages, but want a secure space, infrastructure and facilities which will allow them to earn a living income. Their demands are not to an employer but to local and national state authorities.
- Ensure that where tripartite institutions exist (business, labour, government), precarious workers are represented in the labour constituency and that negotiations cover their demands.

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Transformation of trade unions in Latin America: Contexts, ideas and agendas

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Introduction

It is maintained that, in the context of neoliberal globalization, the fourth industrial revolution, and the emergence of highly competitive labour markets, traditional instruments offer limited possibilities for the protection of workers in new employment areas. Trade unions' capacity for renewal and extension of their structures, as well as their perimeter of representation to encompass new contingents of workers with atypical jobs – lacking rights and access to social security – has especially been called into question. It is also argued that unions and collective bargaining, with very few exceptions, have been weakened to the point of helplessness and lost political influence. There is also little evidence that unions are changing to enhance their capacities, at a time when a large percentage of jobs are threatened by accelerated robotization and it is difficult to forge a common identity between those that have been spared (under flexible work schemes or other regimes).

Despite these considerations, which reflect marked structural and technological determinism, studies on the revitalization of unions argue that they have means to confront globalization and take strategic action. They therefore are able to respond to new situations by reviving their historical power resources and bases, recruiting members and adopting new repertoires of collective action, while establishing alliances with larger social movements (Murray, 2017).

Accordingly, one possible – though not necessarily the most probable – scenario has unions rising once again to their feet and reclaiming their former status as labour champions. This would require that unions adapt by making the necessary internal changes, as they have been doing since the first industrial revolution, to recover their role in the fight against poverty and inequality historically arising in labour markets. In summary, from this perspective the ideal would be transformation, rather than eradication, of the traditional forms of organization and collective action, so that they are adapted to the new context (Hyman, 2015).

It is hypothesized that, in light of differences in the situation of unionism between countries and the depth of transformation in labour markets, meeting the new challenges demands in each case an evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the socio-political orders that form the matrix of organizations' relationships with their bases, political parties, the State and society as a whole. If, like Murray (2017), we understand union revitalization to be a process of democratic experimentation that can lead to the renewal of union structures, practices and repertoires of action, it would be necessary to identify which historical forms would be helpful and which counterproductive for this renewal in the present environment. We are focusing on these factors because of our belief that the wider institutional setting and labour standards both shape the identity and activity of unions, the organizational problems they must face, and workers' expectations and

willingness to join. They also influence the responses and behaviour of employers (Godard, 2008).

To develop these arguments, the following section presents the setting within which unions must effectively represent the interests of workers in the near future. The second section presents evidence of the importance of unions and collective bargaining in the reduction of social inequality. In the third section we will analyse what a focus on revitalizing union power sources can offer, by considering some Latin American examples. Conclusions are given in the final section.

Highly competitive labour markets and unions in the globalized economy

Latin America, which continues to be the most unequal region in the world, experienced premature de-industrialization (starting in the 1980s) that made it difficult to overcome the historical exclusion of millions of workers from productive, protected employment. Today, in a near-majority of the region's countries, on average at least a half of the workforce is engaged in informal labour and roughly a quarter of workers are self-employed. This situation gives a different connotation to the problem of precarious employment that may be the result of new forms of work associated with the digital economy.¹ Furthermore, women, youth, seniors, rural workers and the least educated are more closely concerned by informal work and precarious employment (ILO, 2018). Generally speaking, these groups frequently remain off the union radar.

Competition derived from the scarcity of typical, protected jobs together with high job turnover and mobility rates have weakened solidarity between the various groups of jobseekers (a great many of whom are youth), favouring unilateral determination of work conditions by employers. In addition, it would seem that a process of worker self-regulation is strengthening employers' power to generally impose atypical or nonstandard employment (Drache, LeMesurier and Noiseux, 2015, pp. 10–11).²

Unions in the region face two challenges. First, in many cases, instruments for formulating suitable alternatives that foster inclusion through the labour market within the new context are lacking or weakened. Collective bargaining is an example. Secondly, coverage of the population by systems

1. For more about premature de-industrialization in developing countries, see UNCTAD, 2016, pp. 76–82. For the makeup of the self-employed population in Latin America, see Beltranou and Mauricio, 2011.

2. In the United States, only 6.7% of private establishments are unionized, while 18.1% are in Germany (versus 24.6% in 2000), 26.4% in Canada (28.2% in 2000), and 25% in the United Kingdom (30.2% in 2000). Unionization rates are at their lowest (Bensusán, 2016), and many consider this trend irreversible in the current setting (Drache, LeMesurier and Noiseux, 2015).

of protection has fundamentally depended on access to formal employment (Beccaria and Maurizio, 2014). Thus, the problematic association between atypical employment and precariousness and the segmentation arising from the typical/atypical divide result not only from the absence of labour rights for millions of workers in new and old employment areas, but also from characteristics of the welfare system that exclude these workers from the main benefits, constituting one of the largest deficits of social justice (Adams and Deakin, 2014). In light of the above, a central theme of union programmes should be progress towards universal systems of protection ensuring health coverage, retirement benefits, job security, and lifelong training for the entire population. Besides being urgently needed for the reduction of social inequality, such a programme would give unions greater legitimacy in the eyes of society and require them to transcend defensive union strategies. It must be taken into account that the crisis of representation in Latin America affects political parties just as much as unions, which suffer from low levels of trust among citizens and are associated with the deterioration of democracy (Latinobarómetro, 2018).

The context within which unions must transform themselves to gain legitimacy in the eyes of society is extremely complex. It is marked by growth fluctuations like those occasioned by the 2008–09 crisis, the subsequent slow recovery, and the weakening of the major economies from 2012–13 onwards, due to the end of the boom in commodities, which has seriously impacted the labour markets. For example, starting in 2012, the proportion of wage earners in the region tended to shrink due to less activity, while from 2017 to 2018 in all countries the number of self-employed workers grew at a faster rate than the numbers of wage earners and all workers combined. Nevertheless, the net number of waged or salaried jobs created (59.8 per cent of all jobs) exceeded that of new self-employed positions (only 22.8 per cent of all jobs) (ILO, 2018). These data show that wage earners (both public and private) continue to dominate the labour structure, although there are very significant differences between countries. For example, though there have been major reductions in the amount of non-agricultural informal labour in the five countries considered in this article, such employment still accounted for 33 per cent of labour in Uruguay in 2013 and 37 per cent in Brazil, while in Mexico the figure reached approximately 57 per cent in 2018 (see ILO Programme for the Promotion of Formalization in Latin America and the Caribbean – FORLAC). In recent years, the rate of formal waged or salaried employment shrunk in Brazil (2016 and 2017) and Uruguay (2016 and 2018), where there had previously been major progress, but rose in Argentina, Chile and Mexico (ILO, 2018).

Though increasing such employment is essential, because it gives workers rights, there is a trend towards greater precariousness in this category, which is threatened by various factors. The reorganization of value chains on the world stage, accelerated technological transformation, and the return to protectionist policies in countries that were the main drivers of neoliberal globalization – or “hyperglobalization”, as the Economic Commission for Latin

America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016) has described it – may endanger jobs related to exports, especially where domestic markets have been neglected, as is the case in Mexico and Central American countries. At the same time, the existence of highly competitive markets resulting from economic restructuring, greater recourse to subcontracting, and the use of labour-saving technologies are pushing wages down and worsening work conditions (Drache, LeMesurier and Noiseux, 2015).

Nevertheless, after a recovery in formalization that began in the mid-2000s and a rise in incomes, and despite an economic slowdown starting in 2012–13, average real wages in the public and private sectors continued to grow in the region, though at a slower pace from 2017 on (ILO, 2018). This could be a sign that the power of association of unions continues to carry weight in spite of political shifts to the right and economic instability, or that, in some countries at least, it is harder to offload the full cost of adjustment onto workers.³

Yet there are structural limits to what unions can do to reduce the segmentation of labour markets in the region, which means that, to enjoy any success at all, they would have to focus not just on influencing the labour policy of governments or employers, but on public policy in all domains, including macroeconomics, education, social dimensions, industry and innovation (Berg, 2016). This is due to the fact that productivity levels are much more heterogeneous for Latin American micro and small enterprises – which may employ roughly half or more of the workforce, depending on the case – than for large enterprises, leaving little room to improve the quality of jobs created by the former (Weller and Roethlisberger, 2011).

Additionally, it is becoming harder to recruit new members because digital labour platforms (where jobs are being created) tend to blur social relations, weakening solidarity between different groups of workers, while self-employed workers are taking over traditional service industry jobs formerly held by wage earners. Within this setting, old power resources may prove obsolete or difficult to wield in the service of a union revitalization strategy.

Transformation of ideas and collective action

Despite the existence of adverse economic and political factors, the role of collective action and unions in the fight against poverty and inequality is again receiving due recognition, both in the field of research and through the ideas expressed by international organizations. For example, two investigations considering quantitative data – one concerning countries in the Organisation

3. These regional averages concern Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the other with developing countries – have shown that policy and the institutional environment have a greater effect on the development of unions and collective bargaining than does technological change, which indicates that a deterministic approach should be rejected (Schmitt and Mitukiewicz, 2012; Hessami and Baskaran, 2013). A study that received a prize from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concludes that, along with unemployment and erosion of the welfare state, the increase in inequality is due to the growing gap between the lowest and highest wages, which is itself a result of diminished union power, among other factors. It suggests that the vehicle used in wage negotiations is important since centralized, coordinated bargaining is associated with higher incomes for workers (Francese and Mulas-Granados, 2015). And in a 2013 study, the World Bank maintained that unions and collective bargaining are mechanisms of expression and participation that can help equalize wages. They may also remedy information deficits and increase productivity by creating incentives for skill development and technological innovation while providing job and income security, offering mechanisms for conflict resolution, and reducing job turnover. Collective bargaining is also recognized as a means of decreasing power asymmetry in companies, which, if not corrected, may lead them to impose wages and working conditions inferior to those under competitive conditions (World Bank, 2013).

On the basis of these arguments, a 2014 report jointly prepared by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the OECD and the World Bank highlighted that shrinking aggregate demand is the result of unemployment and the disjunction between wages and productivity in most G20 countries. Thus, it is maintained that economic growth depends on demand, and demand on job creation and better wages. Based on all of the above, ILO global reports on minimum wages insist that inequality begins in the labour market and that collective bargaining has historically been recognized as a critical tool for reducing it.

However, these arguments and observations have not stopped many governments – in both developed and developing countries – from pursuing strategies that oppose unions and collective bargaining, to impose drastic adjustments or attract investment. Hence, after decades of policies aimed at weakening or obstructing collective action, barring a few exceptions during relatively short periods under progressive governments, most unions in the region can adopt only defensive strategies.

Union revitalization would be a prerequisite for moving these ideas to the centre of public initiatives. In general terms, it would involve bolstering diverse power resources, including political alliances that would permit the voice and interests of workers to enter the public arena, and forging more bonds with other social movements, while simultaneously enhancing the discursive capacity of unions (in other words, gaining societal power), as we shall see below.

Dimensions of union power: Different starting points for revitalization

The state of union power varies between the cases considered, to the extent that it is the result of the external pressures and labour market changes just presented as well as the specific characteristics of the economic context (production situation), political system (stable or deficient democracies, incomplete political transitions, alliances between unions and parties with or without subordination), and the system of labour relations (inherited liberal or authoritarian organizational or institutional structures, socio-political arrangements based on social corporatism vs state corporatism or pluralist systems). The characteristics and strategies of unions and their counterparts are also important in so far as we understand power as a relative concept (considering different degrees of asymmetry between labour and capital).

The question is to what extent, given their characteristics and specific contexts, unions will be able to operate effectively in highly competitive labour markets, go further than collective bargaining controlled by regulations and traditional organizations (Wulandari, 2011; Webster, 2015), and extend their coverage to those engaged in coworking (ETUI/ETUC, 2016). Also lacking are flexible organizations with fluid leadership, use of new technology, and integration into communities. Accordingly, more than ever before, unions must take a proactive role in relation to all interested parties – that is, a “cooperative turn” is needed in labour–management relations (IG Metall, 2016).

Nevertheless, the starting point for revitalization differs between countries, even though they share certain trends and requirements. This may be understood in the light of the various dimensions of union power. Power resource theory, developed in the 2000s through dialogue between unionists and academics, proposes that unions evaluate said resources and capacities, selecting those which will permit their transformation and the achievement of their objectives (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018). Expanding on Wright’s vision (2000), Schmalz specifically identifies four categories of union power resources: structural, associational, institutional and social.

Structural power refers to the position wage earners occupy in the economic structure. Given the large amount of informality and precarious employment in the region, this sort of power is relatively scarce (barring exceptions already mentioned), but it has, in certain phases, been compensated by other power resources such as workers’ associational power. Excepting Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, this type of power is very weak regionally, including in Mexico and Chile: levels of unionization and bargaining coverage do not exceed 10–15 per cent (Hayter and Weimberg, 2011). Nonetheless, through political alliances, unions have managed to secure roles as political protagonists that are much larger than their capacities for social representation, as seen in Mexico. The problem is that the advantages of alliances

between unions and political parties have depended on the political and economic environments in which they operate (for example, growth through the domestic market or exports). Consequently, they have shown a tendency to become weak or yield poor results in a context of market economic reforms and, more recently, a political shift to the right. Furthermore, associational power must today be strengthened through new regulations that promote unionization of workers associated with digital labour platforms and new jobs.

Institutional power is a third power resource. For Wright (2000), it is in fact an aspect of associational power. This power is expressed in the early adoption of worker-friendly labour legislation in the countries analysed, which is, generally speaking, a legacy of the initial phase of integration of workers into the political arena, through alliances with parties or the State. Despite the undemocratic developments and neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, this legislation retained or later recovered its main features. The recent experiences in Argentina and especially Brazil, marked by great retrogression (2017 labour reform), show that no victory or loss in this field is permanent. Still, this legislation made it possible to win recognition of individual and collective rights when dealing with employers, more easily than through direct action. Yet these inherited institutional concessions were often forged in contexts marked by authoritarianism or weak democracy that either enabled or restricted collective action independent of employers and the State. And institutions beneficial to workers could be optionally activated or deactivated, depending on other factors such as the strength or weakness of the wider institutional environment (Murillo and Levitsky, 2012). Some examples of deactivation date back to the 1990s or earlier, under neoliberal policies when tripartite bargaining spaces ceased to function, as was the case for wage councils in Argentina and Uruguay, and when wage reduction policies took advantage of these bargaining spaces to create comparative advantages for exports, as in Mexico. On the other hand, all three of these countries provided examples of institutional reactivation with the arrival of progressive governments (Bensusán and Cerdas, forthcoming). Yet reactivation today seems insufficient because new rules are needed to rein in subcontracting, regulate digital labour platforms, and loosen criteria for the recognition of a relationship of subordination between workers and the beneficiaries of said platforms. In other words, it is necessary to expand the reach of institutions, guarantee compliance with them, and adopt innovations needed to ensure protection.

Unions should be less reliant on alliances with parties or a presence in institutionalized forums for dialogue, and should develop other resources, such as societal power, that are not dependent on state will. Thus recognition of labour rights should be promoted through a strengthening of the state of law and democracy in unions, in order to limit the need for discretionary backing from the executive power and opportunistic support from leadership. Paradoxically, those countries ranked most democratic still exhibit such

restrictions in the exercise of collective rights derived from institutional legacies we might call “toxic”, due to their impact on collective action by workers. This is the case for provisions in Chilean legislation issuing from the Code of 1979, imposed by Pinochet, which atomize collective bargaining and restrict the right to strike. However, corporatist and authoritarian legislative relics that eroded unions under former neoliberal policies are headed for extinction in Mexico, due to the modification of secondary legislation governing the application of an important constitutional reform dated February 2017 and focused on liberty, union democracy and access to independent labour justice (see Government of Mexico, 2017).

A fourth dimension of union power is societal power, which is based on *coalitional power* and *discursive power*, and refers to room to manoeuvre offered through cooperation with other social organizations and groups and through support for union demands from society as a whole. This involves sustained cooperation with student and other social movements, NGOs and churches. Social corporatist arrangements, as observed in Uruguay, may be more favourable to an increase in societal power, and union experiences in the political transition to democracy have helped develop closer relations with various segments of society, as was seen in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay.

Increasing societal power means overcoming discredit due to the maintenance of failed political alliances or to passivity in the face of authoritarian relics that either become straitjackets or discourage the pursuit of wider support among the most vulnerable groups. To these we may add the dishonourable gains secured through a lack of democracy or accountability when organizations have indisputable monopolies, when the scope of collective bargaining is limited, when fictitious majorities are imposed, and when authoritarian or permanent leaderships are kept in place.

In summary, when old power resources are inadequate or obsolete, lack of legitimacy and credibility for the union movement becomes the worst obstacle to its revitalization, even if those resources continue to benefit the leadership and a reduced number of union members.

Finally, one must bear in mind the role of collective bargaining, which is “a cornerstone of industrial democracy” and a “universally acclaimed human right [that] should be considered a minimum condition for everyone employed under standardized conditions of work” (Hayter, 2011). Yet very few Latin American countries have collective bargaining coverage exceeding 15 per cent of wage earners, which means that an essential tool to counter inequality in the labour market is not being put to use (Hayter and Weimberg, 2011). At a time when subcontracting and precarious employment within value chains and through digital labour platforms are on the rise, as we saw in previous sections, the expansion of sectoral collective bargaining would generate benefits for society as a whole, and not only formal wage earners.

It should be pointed out that the impact of collective bargaining on inequality at an aggregate level is much greater where bargaining coverage

is extensive, where bargaining takes place in sectors of major economic importance, and where effects spill over into the informal sector (*ibid.*).

In the short and medium terms, institutional and organizational alternatives should centre on the defence of workers excluded from collective bargaining (whether or not they are wage earners). As we have seen, the need for institutional and social innovation is greater in some cases than in others, but collective bargaining beyond the scope of typical waged or salaried work must in all cases be considered.

Accordingly, regional governments should put the bolstering of sectoral collective bargaining systems at the heart of their programmes, following the examples of Argentina and Uruguay, as major restrictions obstruct or atomize collective bargaining in Chile, Mexico and to a lesser extent Brazil (at the municipal level), potentially preventing countries from reaping its main benefits.

The most distinctive case among the countries analysed here is Uruguay (Hayter, 2011), where coverage is extremely broad (nearly 90 per cent of wage earners). Yet Argentina and Uruguay have still seen variation in levels of unionization and bargaining coverage. In both cases, only with the arrival of worker-friendly governments in the 2000s did sectoral bargaining recover its power, which had been weakened under neoliberal policies (Senén González and Haidar, 2011).

Collective bargaining in the other countries – Chile and Mexico, alongside Central American countries – encompasses only a minority of wage earners. This is due to a combination of factors affecting workers' structural power (determined by the characteristics of the labour market) and associational power (the result of the institutional setting and standards): large percentages of workers with informal jobs or who are not covered by labour legislation and social security (where it exists); unremunerated rural work; predominance of small productive units; scarce observance of union and collective bargaining rights; weak administrations lacking the resources or political will to ensure that workers' rights are honoured; excessive pluralism that leads to union fragmentation, or organizational monopolies imposed from above that have barely any incentives to expand union coverage; and in extreme cases, political or even physical persecution of union leaders (in some Central American countries, for example).

Several strategies may be deduced from what precedes. Where there is already union presence and collective bargaining, there is an urgent need to act within distinct domains, embracing new categories of workers (such as subcontracted, temporary and part-time workers), since in only a minority of cases does union action play out at a sectoral (and exceptionally, intersectoral) level. In contrast, in the vast majority of countries in the region, there is a need to establish the institutional conditions required for workers' voices to be heard, and to seek alternative forms of organization and protection for the most vulnerable. The elimination of authoritarian dispositions and

corporatist restrictions, where they exist, is a precondition for envisaging collective bargaining as broad in scope as the force of workers will allow, which is the best tool for freezing the expansion of subcontracting and other means of evading employer responsibilities.

Mexico offers the example of a recent reform affecting unions and collective bargaining that promises to improve the representativeness of those bargaining on behalf of workers. Nevertheless, results will in large part depend on unions' capacity to extend the reach of bargaining beyond company walls, which is legally possible under the aegis of standard contracts (*contratos ley*), although the associated requirements are difficult to fulfil. In the case of Chile, it is also necessary to remove restrictions on strikes that affect bargaining power and prohibit parallel bargaining routes controlled by employers (Durán, 2011).

Briefly stated, there is still much to do in the region if benefit is to be drawn from collective bargaining as an essential arm to fight inequality (such as gender discrimination in pay) originating in the labour markets, and include workers engaged in new forms of employment.

Conclusions

Given the strategies this article presents for union transformation with the aim of improving representativeness and shaping public policies, there is no doubt that the challenges are enormous. Putting a stop to precarious employment in the context of the fourth industrial revolution, the emergence of the digital economy, and the reorganization of value chains will in large part depend on unions' ability to overcome these challenges, as was the case at other stages of capitalism.

Old instruments for ensuring workers' protection, like collective bargaining, might not always have been successful for all involved; may have been the subject of deactivation or reform; or could, to a certain extent, be ill suited to the present conjuncture – but where they do work, they have notably enhanced the quality of jobs. This is clearly illustrated by advances made in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay after revival of labour institutions and increases in unionization and collective bargaining coverage during the last decade. However, while inherited institutional power resources and current ties between majority unions and political parties may be useful for tackling the new challenges, they might also prove obsolete, stymieing union transformation and democratization or alienating large swathes of society when they maintain long-standing abuses, betray union constituencies, or fail to defend the interests of workers in the new economy.

It is necessary to recognize that frequent ideological reorientations and economic fluctuations may be Achilles' heels for unions when power resources essentially depend on the State, as is true of tripartite wage bargaining

forums or authorized union monopolies. Thus, strengthening capacity for mobilization against adverse policies and in support of those more hospitable for social inclusion within the new context, gaining the trust of society, and convincing large segments of the population that collective bargaining is an important element in the fight against poverty and inequality, have become imperatives for unions.

In addition to the crisis of representation that translates into the loss of public trust in parties and unions, what is at stake in the region today is the future not just of work and unions but of democracy, which is hard to sustain without progress in the battle against inequality. If unions and allied social movements cannot rise to defend the rights of all workers in this new context, the battle is already lost.

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Youth in trade unions in Africa

*Toward a youth-led economic
structural transformation agenda*

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Introduction

Demographically, Africa is a young continent with an average age of 19, the youngest population in the world. The population aged between 15 and 24 is expected to be more than three times the current size by 2055 (UNDESA, 2019). Africa, therefore, has the second largest workforce in the world (after Asia) and this workforce is predicted to continue to grow (AUC and OECD, 2018).

But Africa's young people are challenged on the social, economic, political and environmental fronts. They are threatened by serious political and environmental cataclysms and high levels of unemployment, forced to eke out a living in the informal economy characterized by major decent work deficits including a chronic absence of basic social protection and low access to quality public services. The lived realities of the majority of young people in Africa, therefore, are that of systematic marginalization in access to economic and employment opportunities, as entrenched in their absence in policy discussions and spaces of governance.

The question of youth inclusion and/or participation – or even fair, just and equal representation of the young in decision-making in trade unions – is difficult to isolate from the broader questions around why African economies do not grow enough to create sustainable employment for their burgeoning youth populations. Youth exclusion from trade unions can also hardly be isolated from the broader struggles of equality and social justice within societies and in the workplace. This is, essentially, because what goes on in trade unions at a particular point in time is a reflection of what goes on in the broader societal, economic and political landscape at the national, regional or global level.

Thus, while the internal challenges facing young people in trade unions should not be downplayed, the profound structural nature of African economies plays a major role: most economic sectors can be described (for lack of better phrasing) as rudimentary agricultural and mining enclaves with low diversification. They also have poor back and forward linkages between the various sectors of national economies and overall low regional economic integration. Such economic structures prevent countries from creating enough wealth and from redistributing the level of wealth created equitably. It is these structures that reinforce the distance between young people and trade unions and should be fundamentally addressed.

This article explores the case for securing a more firmly established commitment to greater participation for young people in trade unions in Africa. The fundamental reasons that prevent young people from participating actively in trade union activities are emphasized. To reflect on the above, the article answers three questions: What are the fundamental reasons why young people remain on the margins of trade unions? What kind of strategies should be devised and actions taken to ensure a youth-inclusive future

for African trade unions? How can young people drive the change they seek in trade unions?

No one single factor prevents young people from joining trade unions in Africa. Rather, a combination of intertwined factors accounts for their not joining trade unions in the first place and why their presence is too marginal. I focus here only on three factors: (i) the structurally deficient nature of African economies; (ii) the consequent high levels of unemployment and informality; and (iii) the “band-aid” approach to youth work in trade unions. The article ends by suggesting a transformative agenda for youth in trade unions.

The structurally deficient nature of African economies

After almost six decades of political independence, the economies of most African countries can at best be described as narrowly diversified, and at worst nothing but rudimentary agricultural and mining enclaves. The nature of the economic systems and their management has for the most part failed either to bring about structural change to African economies or to address their key structural constraints. As a result, the majority of African countries have “barely diversified their narrow-based, commodity-dependent economies and have hardly changed their socio-economic structures” (UNECA, 2016, p. 1). Rather, the prevailing socio-economic structures have intensified the primary commodity export-dependence that Africa inherited from colonialism, and has increased vulnerabilities to volatile world primary commodities prices.

Remaining heavily dependent on oil and minerals, the continent’s resource-rich economies are severely handicapped in advancing an inclusive developmental agenda. The “resource curse” or “Dutch disease” literature extensively discusses the political-economy issues of managing distributional conflicts over resource rents, or the demanding tasks of macroeconomic management across several commodity price cycles. They are also disadvantaged because the resource sectors often form an enclave and fail to create secure jobs economy-wide through spontaneously generated linkages and spillovers on a large scale. Fundamentally, owing to the high capital intensity of the technology employed, resource sectors do not provide many jobs, and so could not contribute much to accumulation and formation of productive human capital. (ibid., p. 9)

Moreover, the open trade, investment and financial regimes and policies have had little impact on wealth creation. Premature trade liberalization has exposed the few indigenous industries to unfair competition from outside the

continent, leading to de-industrialization and loss of high-quality manufacturing sector jobs, coupled with the erosion of domestic productive capacity.

The wholesale privatization of public assets, followed by the massive retrenchment of public sector workers in the 1980s, has had two major devastating effects. First, it has led to the substantial accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few corporations and individuals outside the continent and some local elites, deepening inequalities in access to wealth. Second, it has exacerbated the rate of informalization and joblessness, deepening income inequalities.

In the agricultural sector, which ought to be the backbone of African economies, things have been turning from bad to worse. Agricultural trade liberalization has not been good for Africa because of African governments' low capacities to provide subsidies to support farmers to raise productivity, compared to their counterparts in the global North. Overall, agricultural commodity prices have been dropping due to their intrinsic low market value. Most African producers therefore have little bargaining power and do not get the best deals for their produce, both locally and internationally. As a result, Africa has turned from being a net exporter of food in the 1980s to a net importer of food since the 2000s, destroying any chance of becoming food-secure.

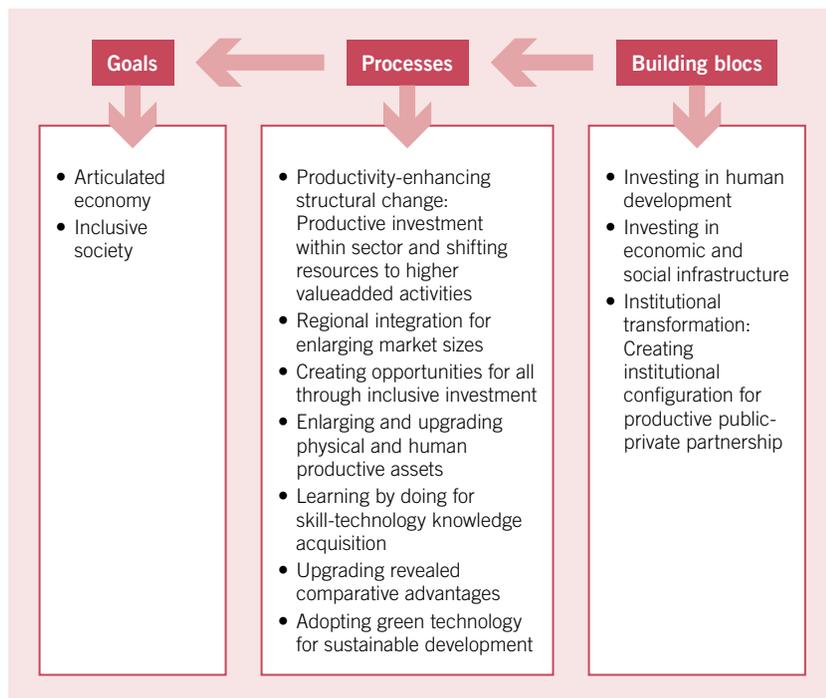
With regard to minerals, prices rose steadily in the ten years before the global financial crises, but have fallen since then. There has been in recent times a huge increase in exports from mining, due to increases in both prices and quantities. This has not necessarily translated into improved livelihoods, however, because of poor redistributive economic and social policies. Many African countries receive negative net returns from their mining activities, due, amongst other reasons, to excessive concessions given to foreign mining corporations including exemptions from paying legislated minimum wages in some countries.

These trends cannot be explained by economics alone; politics and political economy account for much of this. It is thus crucial for African economies to structurally transform. A structurally transformed economy, according to UNECA (2016, p. 11) is one that has

an overarching economic goal of an articulated economy, in which economic activities are closely tied to each other in a coordinated manner ... The strength of such a structure lies in its ability to generate demand locally on a self-sustained basis, reducing dependence on foreign demand.

Transformation of the economic structure would entail reallocation of resources from low- to high-productivity activities both within and across sectors. With a much more diversified structure encompassing a plethora of activities generating local demand in a self-sustaining loop, an articulated economy is more capable of producing secure jobs and providing a growing population with employment, creative activities and learning opportunities than a narrowly based, mono-economy dominated by an enclave structure or fragmented economic activities.

Figure 1. Africa's structural transformation in the 21st century



Source: UNECA, 2016, p. 12, figure 2.1.

Figure 1 delineates what this would mean for Africa.

From the above depiction, it is clear that for Africa to embark on a sustainable path of economic structural transformation, the key indicator of progress should not be just GDP growth, but productive growth. Such growth should be able to transform the economies for labour to move more strategically from subsistence low-productivity sectors to sectors with high employment intensity. Such a shift should not only involve a move to modern agriculture, industry and services, but must be accompanied by policies that empower the rural and urban poor, especially low-skilled youth.

The African Development Bank proposes that governments should pursue policies and programmes to modernize the agricultural sector, where most employment is located, as the first step toward industrialization. This should be accompanied by huge investments in youth entrepreneurial skills (AfDB, 2016). But in addition, I would add that national education, training and skills policies and programmes must proactively respond to the needs of such a transformation.

Consequent high levels of unemployment and growing informality

Resulting from the structural nature of African economies are two distinct economies: one is formal and small whose operators are dominantly foreign multinationals and small local elites; the other is informal, huge and dominated by local small entrepreneurs and own-account workers who are mostly engaged in survival activities. Both these patterns subsist alongside abnormal levels of open unemployment and despicable levels of job and income insecurity in the informal economy where most young people are located. Commenting on the state of youth employment, the African Development Bank states “the majority of youth in Africa do not have stable economic opportunities”:

There are 420 million youth aged 15–35 in Africa. Of those who are not students, one-third are unemployed and discouraged, another third are vulnerably employed, and only one in six is in wage employment. Youth face roughly double the unemployment rate of adults, with significant variation by country. The problem is not just unemployment but underemployment, which peaks at just over half of youth in the labor force in low-income countries. (AfDB, 2016, pp. 12–13)

The employment patterns in Africa mimic economic production and growth, as most of the shifts in employment are from agriculture and manufacturing to informal trading. Moreover, the informal economy continues to expand because the formal private sector is too small and does not expand enough to absorb the millions of young people who graduate each year or those who are retrenched on a regular basis.

Young people on the African continent, as elsewhere in the world, are the most adversely affected by unemployment. ILO data show that across all regions of the world, young people between the ages 15 and 24 constitute the highest levels of the unemployed, with younger women in slightly more precarious situations than young men (ILO, 2019). There are very high levels of informality in some countries, where jobs are low-paid and there is little or no social security to compensate for this.

Ordinarily, one would expect that informal economic enterprises will over time build up sufficient productive assets and grow into robust formal businesses. This does not happen often in Africa. Rather, informal activities tend to become the new normal and the backbone of most African economies:

Informal employment is the main source of employment in Africa, accounting for 85.8 per cent of all employment, or 71.9 per cent, excluding agriculture . . . Within sub-Saharan Africa, informal employment is the main source of employment in Central Africa (91.0 per cent), Eastern Africa

(91.6 per cent) and Western Africa (92.4 per cent). If agriculture is excluded, informal employment continues to dominate employment with a 78.8 per cent share in Central Africa, 76.6 per cent in Eastern Africa and 87.0 per cent in Western Africa. Southern Africa is the only subregion with less than half of the employed population in informal employment at 40.2 per cent and 36.1 per cent excluding agriculture. (ILO, 2018a, p. 27)

These negative employment trends cannot be explained through the supply and demand side of jobs and skills alone; what is actually at the core of this challenge is the structurally unresponsive nature of African economies.

It is for this reason that the question of marginalization of young people in trade unions cannot be divorced from the broader and systematic economic challenges that most countries in Africa are facing; the issues confronting youth in trade unions are a reflection of the specific social and economic position of youth in the broader society. Thus the reasons can be located in the nature of the economic structures of most African countries and their inability to expand and transform in order to secure broad equitable access to job opportunities for their youth.

The “band-aid” approach to youth work in trade unions

Considerable work on youth is taking place at present in trade unions, but such work does not address the structural and systemic issues that prevent young people from participating on an equal footing with older workers in trade union activities. Rather, much of the focus is on youth representation, which in itself is not a problem; however, if left at that, it will not help to address the real economic and social policy gaps that keep young people marginalized through the prevailing and dominant African economic systems and structures, including youth-blind employment and social protection policies and programmes. So while trade unions do a lot of work on youth, they tend to engage around the symptoms and offer “band-aid” solutions. For example, in the area of employment creation there is a tendency for trade unions to speak about more jobs “for youth” or the skills mismatch. This is doubtless important, but if left at that level, it opens up the possibility of such work being at the service of the very structures of youth subordination. Many examples abound where neoliberal policy-makers have simply kept their policies in place, and sought to address the youth gaps on the surface.

The obvious limitation of the work of trade unions around youth empowerment has been the narrow preoccupation with youth representation in the workplace and/or in leadership positions in trade unions. However, the centrepiece that is hardly ever addressed, and which is the cause and consequence of youth exclusion, is the fundamental, structural and systematic

structures of power over the means of production and reproduction that keep the young out of work and consequently out of trade unions in the first place.

As long as young people continue to be underrepresented in the formal economy, their representation in trade unions and union activities will remain low. Likewise, as long as trade unions do not begin to assertively organize workers in the informal economy, especially in sectors in which young people dominate such as agriculture, information technology and telecommunications, call centres, retail, textile and the platform economy in general, youth participation in trade unions will remain low.

Toward a youth-led structural economic transformation agenda

Trade unions should engage in advocacy work that not only acknowledges that the earlier young people are provided with opportunities to participate in economic activities, the greater the benefit will be to themselves, the trade unions and the wider society. An active recognition is needed that trade unions cannot attract more young people if the predominant economic structures remain in place. Trade unions will also not be able to attract younger people by simply pushing for their equal representation in trade union leadership structures. Trade unions have to deal with the fundamental questions of socio-economic transformation. It is not a matter of either/or.

At the policy level, serious work on youth should challenge the very structures that keep young people economically subordinate in society. It should address the questions of youth subordination in economic processes; and how these structures and processes can be reorganized so as to contribute to structural transformations. It should emphatically address the relations of production and reproduction, which oppress young people, especially young women.

At the practical level, activism work including research and policy analysis should frame trade and investment policy for the transformation of the structures of young people's socio-economic subordination, but as part and parcel of the structural transformation of society as a whole. Work that can provide a meaningful interface between the efforts of trade unions and youth movements should include a critical analysis of regional and national trade and investment policies, and the extent to which they make youth a central focus and are working to change or reinforce age-blind perspectives and divisions of trade, and their impact on young women and men.

In Africa this would mean, in particular, shaping trade policies that transform the primary commodity dependence of African economies simultaneously with the transformation of the gender-based structures of power over the means of production that keep young people's, and particularly young women's, economic lives subordinate and overburdened, and their contribution to economies unrecognized. Undoubtedly, the prevailing

economic, social, political and demographic conditions in Africa require that trade policies and systems respond to the systematic vulnerabilities of young people, if the region is to fulfil the productive potential of its vast numbers of young people, the majority of whom are women.

At the level of policy and programme design and implementation, the approach must be sensitive to the specific vulnerabilities of both young men and women. At the very least, policies should avoid the further exclusion of youth who belong to vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, indigenous communities and those living in rural areas.

Without addressing the intersections between the structural nature of Africa's economies and the subordination of young people in economic and social processes, we shall continue to deal with the symptoms and not the root causes of youth injustice in the world of work and in trade unions. Youth issues should be mainstreamed into the activities of unions rather than treated as side issues. There is a need for deeper analysis of how trade unions are organized, so as to discern whether the dominant structures operate in favour or against the welfare of young people both in and outside trade unions.

Overall, the desired state of youth inclusion and active participation in trade unions cannot be realized through lamentations or through the efforts of trade unions alone, or of youth alone. It requires the mobilization of social forces behind a new structural economic paradigm, which ensures access to opportunities for decent work for young people. At the centre of that change should be the youth themselves reaching out from their trade unions to others in universities and youth movements, mobilizing and organizing into a formidable force strong enough to advance the agenda of overall structural economic transformation in Africa with youth employment as an objective outcome.

Young people as activists

To move from band-aid approaches to actual work that will bring about structural social and economic transformation, young people in trade unions should lobby and advocate for the changes discussed below.

Economic transformation of the structures, ownership and management of African economies

It is imperative that trade unions work hand-in-hand with youth movements to lobby and advocate for trade and investment policies and strategies that promote industrialization and structural transformation of African economies in ways that advance decent work. An example could be a development strategy:

- that recognizes the place of industrial transformation and agrarian change (agricultural sector transformation) as the twin challenges in Africa's development;
- that promotes decent jobs and means of livelihood;
- that shows the constraints of young people's access to finance, technology, and other productive resources as a key dynamic; and
- that sets out deliberate policy in areas of finance, intellectual property and technology, trade, agriculture, and macroeconomic policy to meet this.

As long as trade unions continue to be spectators in the export of agricultural commodities and minerals in raw form from the continent, they are doing no more than contributing to the creation of employment on other continents and fuelling dependency, poverty and unemployment on the African continent. Tenacious work is needed with governments to reform national and regional trade and investment, as well as employment policy frameworks to make job creation and employment outcomes for youth a central goal.

Livable minimum wages and transitions from the informal to formal economy, essential to distribution of economic gains and reducing broader inequalities

Too many young workers are paid too low to make ends meet. Linked to structural transformations should be policy advocacy work, analysis and campaigns not only on minimum wages but on the implementation of *livable* minimum wages.

In addition, the gender wage gap persists in most countries, with too many young women still paid below their male counterparts despite doing the same work. Women globally receive lower wages than men, with a 20 per cent pay gap, according to the *ILO Global Wage Report 2018/2019* (ILO, 2018b). Young women are also often the first to lose their jobs when an economic crisis hits. Female workers and especially female-headed households need wages that enable them to raise healthy, educated children with opportunities for social mobility. Accordingly, "closing this gap is key to achieving social justice for working women and achieving the 2030 sustainable development goals" (Vazquez-Alvarez, 2018).

But while gender wage gaps must be addressed, in the context of Africa this must be done in tandem with an overall effort to structurally transform African economies, to raise the labour share of national income and minimize decent work deficits in the informal economy. This is part of what it means to put decent work at the heart of employment development outcomes.

Universal social protection, adequate parental leave and paid care work

Similarly, social protection floors drive social transformation by creating the necessary structural conditions for young people to enter and stay in the labour market. Unemployment insurance and social security are particularly vital in reducing the early exit of young women in particular from the labour market.

Adequate parental leave for young female and male parents is also crucial to enabling young women to be successful in the labour market. Hence, the increase in unpaid care work for women and girls must be addressed through the provision of social care support programmes such as child-care services and support for elderly people and people with disabilities. Since women and girls take up a large share of the unpaid care of children and sick family members, their choices of what paid work they are able to take on and their bargaining power within these paid positions are often compromised.

Networking and mobilization with other progressive youth groups outside the trade unions

Youth in trade unions must collaborate with other social groups and widen the scope of their activities within their own countries and within their subregions. In particular, it is important for them to engage with youth in the informal economy, which accounts for the largest share of the working population.

It is also crucial for the young people in trade unions to network with youth groups in tertiary institutions as well as in the broader civic and religious communities. Such mobilization should include organizing and educating their peers about the expanded role of trade unions and the challenges they face in trying to carry out their mandates with the broader aim of forming strategic alliances and gaining support for their efforts.

Political mobilization and alliance building should thus be included into what trade unions seek to achieve. At present there are contradictions in the work of trade unions: the more than four decades of the neoliberal agenda partially reflects inadequacies in their functioning. Moreover, trade unions have not shown great appreciation of the fundamental basis for their demands regarding jobs, social protection and minimum wages that are crucial for effective political mobilization.

Promoting labour research on thematic areas of concern to youth

There exists no comprehensive review from a trade union perspective on the challenges facing young workers in the formal economy. There is also a lack of empirical evidence on how young workers in the informal economy are faring. We also do not have a good understanding of the frustrations of young people in trade unions, apart from anecdotal evidence. It is important that such studies are conducted so that trade unions may come to understand young people better and be enabled to assist them from an informed perspective.

Thematic questions through research focusing on young people could include the following five areas:

1. **Structural economic transformation:** In the context of the future of work, what are the systemic challenges that need to be addressed in order for African countries to transform their economies from primary commodity export dependence toward sustainable employment creation?
2. **Specific economic sectors:** In the specific economic sectors, what policies or types of programmes are needed to address these systemic issues?
3. **Location and constraints of youth in the labour market:** In which sectors of the economy are young people mostly employed? What are the specific constraints that youth face in those sectors?
4. **Collective bargaining:** What is the effect of the current bargaining systems on the conditions of young workers? Are the bargaining institutions serving their purpose, especially for youth in the informal economy? And is the Collective Bargaining Agenda (CBA) responsive to the wishes and aspirations of young people?
5. **Workplace and trade union governance and democracy:** What needs to be changed in terms of workplace and trade union governance, and how can young people effectively contribute to that change?

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Watching the watchers: Surveillance at work and notes for trade unionists

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Introduction

Workers have always faced the tension of capital versus labour, where an overarching business profit motive dominates the terms of the employment relationship, and workers want a decent and enjoyable life, paid for by their work and commitment to their employer and wage provider. Today, however, the employment relationship is changing, and there is a new type of actor in the workplace. While machines, both analogue and digital, have been used over time to help workplace designers calculate outputs of work and increasingly to replace work through automation, now, with the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and applications, some machines are being given new responsibilities and a level of autonomy as well as being expected to display various forms of intelligence.

Figure 1 shows where and how new technologies are being implemented in workplaces; the types of “intelligence” expected from these technologies; and the ways that management uses the data produced by such technological processes with the assumptions of respective types of intelligence. In this sense, there are a number of ways that the newest technologies, with AI-influenced competences, are being used by management. Data has been and is being accumulated from job candidates’ and workers’ activities over time, from telephone and computer terminal use to physical movements and social media use. Called “big data” when reaching large enough volume, collections of data are being used to train algorithms that predict job candidates’ and

Figure 1. Technologies in workplaces

Technology:	Platforms (algorithms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine learning (ML))	People analytics, chatbots (filming interviews, software, AI, ML, emotion coding)	Cobots, wearables (RFID, dashboards, tablets, GPS, data glasses/hololense)
Type of intelligence	Predictive, prescriptive, descriptive	Affective, assistive, predictive, descriptive	Assistive, collaborative
Where/what	Home, street (gig work)	Office, call centre (service work)	Factory, warehouse (manual work)
Decision-making	Human resource (HR), performance monitoring (PM), micro-management (MM)	HR, PM, MM	HR, PM, MM

workers' talents and capabilities; monitor, gauge and encourage performance; set and assess work outputs; link workers to clients; judge states of being and emotions; provide modular training on the factory floor; look for patterns across workforces of, for example, sickness; and many more.

This article outlines how AI is increasingly part of the process of decision-making and identifies the key factors that trade unions and worker representatives should be aware of.

While human resource (HR) practices may appear to benefit from machine assistance, leading to more efficiency and to more reliable information than could be achieved by qualitative judgements of managers on their own, technology is never a neutral force. Workplace quantification, while perhaps good for overall business performance, can have a direct impact on job quality. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the empirical and lived experiences of workers and those trying to create some forms of protection against the worst applications of such practices in the new domains of worker tracking. Governments and social partners are involved to some extent, but there is room for much more activity and response to rising technological integration. Thus, this short article is designed to raise awareness in the area of workplace technological activity, outlining the trends in HR and robotics processes where AI is being experimented with and new forms of machine intelligence are being introduced, and in each section, identifying where occupational safety and health (OSH) risks arise. These are necessary to inform workers' negotiations and collective bargaining for worker protections.

People analytics: Human capital management and performance monitoring

AI is touted as the most innovative and promising arena for workplace and workforce management; 40 per cent of HR functions in international companies are using AI-augmented applications. These companies are mostly based in the United States, but some European and Asian organizations are also coming on board. A survey from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC, 2018) shows that more and more global businesses are beginning to see the value of AI in supporting workforce management. Another report shows that 32 per cent of personnel departments in tech companies and others are redesigning organizations with the help of AI to optimize for adaptability and learning to best integrate the insights garnered from employee feedback and technology (Kar, 2018). A recent IBM report (2018) shows that half of chief HR officers identified for the study anticipate and recognize the potentials for technology in HR surrounding operations and the acquisition and development of talent. A Deloitte report (Collins, Fineman and Tsuchida, 2017) shows that 71 per cent of international companies consider people analytics a high priority for their organizations because it should allow organizations to not

only provide good business insights but also deal with what has been called the “people problem”.

“People problems”, also called “people risks”, have several dimensions, outlined in a report (Houghton and Green, 2018) from the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) as involving:

- talent management
- health and safety
- employee ethics
- diversity and equality
- employee relations
- business continuity
- reputational risk

“People analytics” are an increasingly popular HR practice, where big data and digital tools are used to “measure, report and understand employee performance, aspects of workforce planning, talent management and operational management” (Collins, Fineman and Tsuchida, 2017, para. 1). Every sector and organization requires some level of HR, which is responsible for everything from recruitment activity to preparing employment contracts and managing the relationship between workers and employers. Clearly there is some discrepancy in the role of HR, where some argue its function is only bureaucratic, but others, that it should play a prominent role in business operations and execution. People analytics practices are part of both levels of HR, where computerization, data gathering and monitoring tools allow organizations to conduct “real-time analytics at the point of need in the business process ... [and allow] for a deeper understanding of issues and actionable insights for the business” (ibid., Introduction). Prediction algorithms applied for these processes often reside in a “black box” (Pasquale, 2015), where people do not fully understand how they work, but even so, computer programmes are given the authority to make “prediction by exception” (Agarwal, Gans and Goldfarb, 2018). “Prediction by exception” refers to processes whereby computers deal with large data sets and are able to make reliable predictions based on routine and regular data, but also to spot outliers and even send notifications “telling” the user that checks should be done, or whether human assistance or intervention should be provided.

Also called “human analytics”, “talent analytics”, and “human resource analytics”, people analytics are defined broadly as the use of individualized data about people to help management and HR professionals make decisions about recruitment, i.e. who to hire; in worker appraisals and promotion considerations; to identify when people are likely to leave their jobs; and to select future leaders. People analytics are also used to manage workers’ performance. First, this section looks at the human capital management aspects of people analytics, where recruitment and talent prediction occur. Secondly, performance management with the use of people analytics is outlined.

Human capital management

AI-enhanced HR practices can help managers obtain seemingly objective wisdom about people even before they hire them, so long as management has access to data about prospective workers, which has significant implications for tailoring worker protections and preventing OSH risks at the individual level. Ideally, people analytics tools can aid employers to “measure, report and understand employee performance, aspects of workforce planning, talent management and operational management” (Collins, Fineman and Tsuchida, 2017, para. 1). Indeed, algorithmic decision-making in people analytics could be used to support workforces by aligning employee performance feedback and performance pay, and workforce costs, with business strategy and support for specific workers (Aral et al., 2012, cited in Houghton and Green, 2018, p. 5). Workers should be personally empowered through having access to new forms of data that help them to identify areas of improvement, stimulate personal development and achieve higher engagement.

Another form of people analytics involves filmed job interviews, where AI is used to judge both verbal and non-verbal cues. One such product is made by a group called HireVue and is used by over 600 companies. This practice is carried out by organizations including Nike, Unilever and Atlantic Public Schools who are using products that allow employers to interview candidates on camera. The aim is to reduce bias that can come about if, for example, an interviewee’s energy levels are low, or if the hiring manager has more affinity to the interviewee based on similar demographics such as age, race, or others. However, evidence has already emerged that preferences from previous hiring managers are reflected in hiring, and heterosexual white men are, a report by Business Insider reveals, the hiring preference *ceteris paribus* (Feloni, 2017). If data provided to an algorithm reflect the dominant bias over time, then it may score someone with “in group” facial expressions higher, and rate as lower other cues tied to sexual orientation, age and gender that do not resemble a white male.

Performance management

While performance management (PM) is seen in most workplaces, there are hundreds of methods that have been tried and tested over many years. Perhaps the best-known era where performance management began to use technology to make decisions about workers’ performance in the industrializing world is the period of scientific management. The well-known industrialists Taylor and the Gilbreths devised schemes to understand workplace productivity as linked to specific, measured human actions in the workplace. They searched for scientific methods to identify and depict perfect bodily movements for ideal productive behaviours through technologically informed work designs.

In 1927, the League of Nations published documentation from the 1927 International Economic Conference called *Scientific Management in Europe*, a yellowing copy of which I found at the Trade Union Congress archives at London Metropolitan University in 2016. This report was printed in the interwar period, when nations were furiously seeking to set up interdependent organizations and establish a climate of cooperation to reduce the chances of any further wars. The document interestingly advocates standardization of industrial practices, and scientific management is heralded as a field “*par excellence* for international cooperation”. Indeed, scientific management was defined at the League of Nations’ International Labour Office Conference on Scientific Management in Geneva in 1927 as:

...the science which studies the relations between the different factors in production, and especially those between the human and the mechanical factors. Its object is to obtain, by the rational utilisation of these various factors, the optimum output.

So, Taylorism was not only a project of worker performance management, but had a larger remit and ideology. The Office reported that scientific management had already “overflowed the limits within which it was originally applied by Taylor” and its recommendations and practices “now cover all departments of the factory, all forms of manufacture, all forms of economic activity, banking, commerce, agriculture and the administration of public services”.

Looking at micro-movements by using a series of technological devices including a spring-driven camera, an electric motor-driven camera, and a microchronometer, which was an instrument for measuring very small intervals of time, these scientists looked for the hoped “best way” to carry out work in bricklaying and in steel factories. The Gilbreths also measured workers’ heart rate using a stethoscope and a stopwatch – a foreshadowing of the heart rate measures seen in fitness armbands that are increasingly being used in workplace initiatives today (Moore, 2018).

There is a large literature on performance management, perhaps beginning with scientific management, that emerged from various disciplines such as Organizational Psychology, Sociology, Sociology of Work and Critical Management Studies, where researchers have looked at the ways organizations try to balance productivity with the management of workers’ activities and to organize various mechanisms that surround these processes.

The school of Human Relations followed Scientific Management, followed by Systems Rationalism where “operations research” dominated, followed by Organizational Culture and Quality and now one I have called Agility Management Systems. Each period of work design history involves attempts to identify the “best” logic of calculation, where PM is a calculative practice that is also institutionally embedded and socially transformative.

Increasingly, ways to calculate workers' behaviours are founded in a neoliberal economic rationality.

Economic practices of calculation create markets (Porter, 1995) and enter organizations with a logic of value calculation which in turn shapes the organization as well as requiring "responsibility from individuals rendered calculable and comparable" (Miller and O'Leary, 1987, pp. 261–262). Through quantification, the designer of a PM system decides what will be considered calculable and comparable. While there are assumptions of the "bottom line", productivity and efficiency do not hold an automatic link to workers' safety and health, contract and livelihood protections. Any time there is a method designed to characterize a person, i.e. the ideal worker with the best performance scores, we are "making people up" (Hacking, 1986). The enumeration of characteristics then allows for the generation of statistics which function as specified calculations that are seemingly neutral, docile and immune to query. Desrosières (2001) indicates that "placing acts, diseases and achievements in classes of of equivalence ... then shape how the bearer is treated" (p. 246). Rose stated that "numbers, like other 'inscription devices', actually constitute the domains they appear to represent; they render them representable in a docile form – a form amenable to the application of calculation and deliberation" (1999, p. 198, cited in Redden, 2019, pp. 40–41). Despite the range of arguments about what should be measured, too little research has focused on how decisions are taken in determining what work characteristics and factories are seen as worthy of measure.

OSH risks

If processes of algorithmic decision-making in people analytics and performance management do not involve human intervention and ethical considerations, these human resource tools could expose workers to heightened structural, physical and psychosocial risks and stress. How can workers be sure decisions are being made fairly, accurately and honestly, if they do not have access to the data that is held and used by their employer? OSH risks of stress and anxiety arise if workers feel that decisions are being made based on numbers and data which they have no access to, nor power over. This is particularly worrying if people analytics data lead to workplace restructuring, job replacement, job description changes and the like. People analytics are likely to increase workers' stress if data is used in appraisals and performance management without due diligence in process and implementation, leading to questions about micromanagement and feeling "spied on". If workers know their data is being read for talent spotting or for deciding possible layoffs, they may feel pressured to advance their work performance, and begin to overwork, posing OSH risks. Another risk arises with liability, where companies' claims about predictive capacities may

later be queried for accuracy or personnel departments held accountable for discrimination.

One worker liaison expert has indicated¹ that worker data collection for decision-making such as seen in people analytics has created the most urgent issues arising with AI in workplaces. Often, works councils are not aware of the possible uses of such management tools. Or, systems are being put into place without consultation with works councils and workers. Even more OSH risks arise, such as worker stress and job losses, when the implementation of technologies is done in haste and without appropriate consultation and training, or communication. In this context it is interesting to mention a project run at the headquarters of IG Metall, in which the workplace training curricula are being reviewed in 2019 in the context of *Industrie 4.0*.² Findings demonstrate that training needs updating not only to prepare workers for physical risks, as has been standard in heavy industry OSH training, but also for mental and psychosocial risks introduced by digitalization at work, which includes people analytics applications.³

Cobots

Having visited several car factories and technology centres, I have seen the huge orange robot arms in factories whirring away in expansive warehouses in industrial landscapes, building car parts and assembling cars where conveyor belts lined with humans once stood. Robots have directly replaced workers on the assembly line in factories. In many cases, and sometimes, AI is confused with automation. Automation in its pure sense involves, for example, the explicit replacement of a human's arm with a robot arm. Lower skilled, manual work has historically been most at risk and is still at a high risk of automation. Now, automation can be augmented with autonomous machine behaviour or "thinking". So, the AI dimension of automation reflects where workers' brains, as well as their limbs, may no longer be needed. Now, as one article regarding robots and

1. Dr Michael Bretschneider-Hagemes, Head of the Employees Liaison Office of the German Commission KAN, spoke to the author in an interview, 18 Sept. 2018.

2. *Industrie 4.0* is a much-debated term that originated in German manufacturing circles, designed to advance manufacturing in marketing terms. Some critics argue that it is a narrative rather than a reality today. Nonetheless it is commonly accepted that, if there is to be a trajectory of industrial revolutions, Industrie 1 is the term for the first industrial revolution and thus the invention of the steam engine. The second is linked to science advancements and the third to digitalized inventions as incorporated into production. Today, the "Internet of Things" where machines technically communicate with one another, advanced robotics, and increased capacity for memory and processing power are seen as the driving forces for the concept of *Industrie 4.0*.

3. Antje Utecht, who works in the training and policy department at the headquarters of IG Metall in Frankfurt, Germany, shared these insights with the author during an interview, 16 Oct. 2018.

work for an EU-OSHA review on the future of work indicates, while robots were at first built to carry out simple tasks, they are increasingly enhanced with AI capabilities and are being “built to think, using AI” (Kaivo-oja, 2015).

Now, cobots are now being integrated into factories and warehouses where they work alongside people in a collaborative way. They assist with an increasing range of tasks rather than necessarily automating entire jobs. Amazon has 100,000 AI-augmented cobots, which has shortened the need for training workers to less than two days. Airbus and Nissan are using cobots to speed up production and increase efficiency.

Chatbots

Chatbots are another AI-enhanced tool which can deal with a high percentage of basic customer service queries, freeing up humans working in call centres to deal with more complex questions. Chatbots work alongside people, not only in the physical sense but within the back end of systems; they are implemented to deal with customer queries over the phone.

For example, Dixons Carphone uses a conversational chatbot now named Cami which can respond to first-level consumer questions on the Curry website and through Facebook Messenger. The insurance company Nuance launched a chatbot named Nina to respond to questions and access documentation in 2017. Morgan Stanley have provided 16,000 financial advisors with machine learning algorithms to automate routine tasks. Call centre workers already face extensive OSH risks because of the nature of their work, which is repetitive, demanding and subject to high rates of micro-surveillance and extreme forms of measure (Woodcock, 2016).

An increasing number of activities are already recorded and measured in call centres. Words used in emails or stated vocally can be data-mined to determine workers’ moods, a process called “sentiment analysis”. Facial expressions likewise can be analysed to spot signs of fatigue and moods that could be used to make judgements and thus lower OSH risks emerging with overwork. But chatbots, while designed to be assistive machines, still pose psychosocial risks around fears of job loss and replacement. Workers should be trained to understand the role and function of workplace bots and to know what their collaborative and assistive contributions are.

OSH risks

Cobots can reduce OSH risks, as they allow AI systems to carry out other types of mundane and routine service tasks in factories which historically create stress, overwork, musculoskeletal difficulties and even boredom of repetitive work for people.

In the EU-OSHA report *Foresight on new and emerging occupational safety and health risks associated with digitalisation by 2025* (2018), it is indicated that robots allow people to be removed from dangerous physical work and environments with chemical and ergonomic hazards, thus reducing OSH risks for workers (p. 89).

As a recent Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) report states, there are three types of OSH risks in human–cobot–environment interactions (TNO, 2018, pp. 18–19):

- (a) robot/human collision risks, where machine learning can lead to unpredictable robot behaviour;
- (b) security risks, where robots' Internet links can affect the integrity of software programming, leading to vulnerabilities in security; and
- (c) environmental, where sensor degradation or unexpected human action in unstructured environments can lead to environmental risks.

AI-permitted pattern and voice recognition and machine vision mean that not only non-skilled jobs are at risk of replacement, but now, a range of non-routine and non-repetitive jobs can be carried out by cobots and other applications and tools. In that light, AI-enhanced automation enables many more aspects of work to be done by computers and other machines (Frey and Osborne, 2013). One example of the protection of workplace OSH via AI-augmented tools is found in a chemicals company that makes optical parts for machines. The miniscule chips that are produced need to be scanned for mistakes. Previously, one person's job was to detect mistakes with their own eyes, sitting, immobile, in front of repeated images of chips for several hours at a time. Now, AI has fully replaced this task. The OSH risks, which have now been of course eliminated, include musculoskeletal difficulties and eye strain and damage.⁴

However, AI-augmented robots in factories and warehouses create stress and a range of serious problems if they are not implemented appropriately. Indeed, one UK-based trade unionist has indicated that digitalization, automation and algorithmic management, when “used in combination ... are toxic and are designed to strip millions of folks of basic rights”.⁵ Potential OSH issues may also include psychosocial risk factors if people are driven to work at a cobot's pace (rather than the cobot working at a person's pace); and collisions between a cobot and a person.⁶ Another cobot-related case of machine/human interaction creating new working conditions and OSH risks is where

4. Information obtained from interview with Antje Utecht as cited above.

5. Interview with Maggie Dewhurst of the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) in 2017.

6. Interview with Dr Sam Bradbrook, specialist in the Health and Safety Executive's Foresight Centre in Great Britain, Sept. 2018.

one person is assigned to “look after” one machine and is sent notifications and status updates about machines on personal devices such as a smartphone or a home laptop. This can lead to risks of overwork, where workers feel responsible to take note of notifications in out-of-work hours, disrupting work-life balance.⁷

One expert⁸ in AI and work discussed developments around the Internet of Things (IoT) in workplaces, where machine-to-machine connected systems work alongside human labour in factories and warehouses. Data-input problems, inaccuracies and faults with machine-to-machine systems create significant OSH risks as well as liability questions. Indeed, sensors, software and connectivity can be faulty and unstable, and all vulnerabilities introduce questions about who is legally responsible for any damage that emerges. Is it a cobot’s fault if it runs into a worker, the worker’s fault, the company which manufactured the cobot originally, or the company that is employing the worker and integrating the cobot? The complexities abound.

Human-robot interaction creates both OSH risks and benefits in the physical, cognitive and social realm, but cobots may some day have the competences to reason, and must make humans feel safe. To achieve this, cobots must demonstrate perception of objects versus humans, the ability to predict collisions and adapt behaviour appropriately, and demonstrate sufficient memory to facilitate machine learning and decision-making autonomy (TNO, 2018, p. 16) along the lines of the previously explained definitions of AI.

Wearable technologies

Wearable self-tracking devices are increasingly seen in workplaces. The market for wearable devices in industrial and health-care wearables has been predicted to grow from US\$21 million in 2013 to 9.2 billion by 2020 (Nield, 2014). From 2014–19, an increase of 13 million fitness devices were predicted to become incorporated into workplaces. This is already happening in warehouses and factories where GPS, RFID and now haptic sensing armbands such as the one patented by Amazon in 2018 have entirely replaced the use of clipboards and pencils.

One new feature of automation and *Industrie 4.0* processes where AI-enhanced automation is under way is in the area of lot size manufacturing.⁹ This process involves cases where workers are provided with glasses with screens and virtual reality functionality, like HoloLenses and Google glasses, or computer tablets on stands within the production line which are used to

7. Interview with Antje Utecht as cited above.

8. Interview with Dr Sam Bradbrook as cited above.

9. Interview with Dr Michael Bretschneider-Hagemes as cited above.

carry out on-the-spot tasks in production lines. The assembly line model has not disappeared completely, where a worker carries out one repeated, specific task for several hours at a time, but the lot size method is different. Used in agile manufacturing strategies, this method involves smaller orders made within specific time parameters, rather than constant bulk production that does not involve guaranteed customers.

Workers are provided with visual on-the-spot training enabled by a HoloLens screen or tablet, and carry out a new task which is learned instantly and only carried out for the period of time required to manufacture the specific order a factory receives. While at first glance, these assistance systems may appear to provide increased autonomy, personal responsibility and self-development, that is not necessarily the case (Butollo, Jürgens and Krzywdzinski, 2018).

The use of on-the-spot training devices, worn or otherwise, means that workers need less pre-existing knowledge or training because they carry out the work case by case. The risk of work intensification thus arises, as head-mounted displays or tablet computers become akin to live instructors for unskilled workers. Furthermore, workers do not learn long-term skills because they are required to perform on-the-spot, modular activities in custom assembly processes, needed to build tailor-made items at various scales. While this is good for the company's efficiency in production, lot size methods have led to significant OSH risks in that they deskill workers, where skilled labour is only needed to design the on-the-spot training programmes used by workers who no longer need to themselves specialize.

OSH risks

OSH risks can further emerge because of lack of communication, where workers are not able to comprehend the complexity of the new technology quickly enough and particularly if they are also not trained to prepare for any arising hazards. One real issue is in the area of small businesses and start-ups, which are quite experimental in the use of new technologies and often overlook ensuring that safety standards are carried out before accidents occur, when it is of course, too late.¹⁰ An interview with those involved in the IG Metall Better Work 2020 project (Bezirksleitung Nordrhein-Westfalen/NRW Projekt Arbeit 2020) revealed that trade unionists are actively speaking to companies about the ways they are introducing *Industrie 4.0* technologies into workplaces (Moore, 2018). The introduction of robots and worker monitoring, cloud computing, machine-to-machine communications

10. Prof. Dr Dietmar Reinert, PEROSH Chairman, Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the German Social Accident Insurance, indicated this in an interview with the author, 13 Sept. 2018.

and other systems, have all prompted those running the IG Metall project to ask companies:

- What impact will technological changes have on people's workloads?
- Is work going to be easier or harder?
- Will work become more or less stressful? Will there be more or less work?

The IG Metall trade unionists indicated that workers' stress levels tended to rise when technologies are implemented without enough training or worker dialogue. Expertise is often needed to mitigate risks in the dangerous circumstances that new technologies in workplaces introduce.

Gig work

Next, we turn to another arena where AI is making an impact, in "gig work" environments.

Gig work is obtained by using online applications (apps), also called platforms, made available by companies such as Uber, Upwork or Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). The work can be performed online – obtained and carried out on computers in homes, libraries and cafes, for example, and includes translation and design work – or *offline* – obtained online but carried out offline, such as taxi driving or cleaning work. Not all algorithms utilize AI, but the data produced by client-worker matching services and customer assessment of platform workers provide further data that train profiles that then result in overall higher or lower scores that then lead clients to select specific people over others for work.

Monitoring and tracking have been daily experiences for couriers and taxi drivers for many years, but the rise in offline gig workers carrying out platform-directed food delivery by bicycle, delivering orders and taxi services is relatively new. Uber and Deliveroo require workers to install a specific application onto their phones, which perch on vehicle dashboards or handlebars, and they gain clients through the use of mapping satellite technologies and by matching algorithmically operated software. The benefits of using AI in gig work could be driver and passenger protection. DiDi, a Chinese ride-hailing service, uses AI facial recognition software to identify workers as they log on to the application. DiDi uses this information to ensure the identities of drivers, which is seen as a method of crime prevention. However, there was a very serious recent failure in the use of the technology in which a driver logged in as his father one evening. Under the false identity, later in his shift, the driver killed a passenger.

Delivery gig workers are held accountable for their speed, number of deliveries per hour and customer rankings, in an intensified environment that has been proven to create OSH risks. In *Harper's* magazine a driver explains

how new digitalized tools work as a “mental whip”, noting that “people get intimidated and work faster” (as reported in *The Week*, 2015). Drivers and riders are at risk of deactivation from the app if their customer rankings are not high enough or they do not meet other requirements. This results in OSH risks including blatant unfair treatment, stress and even fear.

Algorithms are used to match clients with workers in online gig work (also called microwork). One platform called BoonTech uses IBM Watson AI Personality Insights to match clients and online gig workers, such as those gaining contracts using AMT and Upwork. Issues of discrimination have emerged that are related to women’s domestic responsibilities when carrying out online gig work at home, such as reproductive and caring activities in a traditional context. A recent survey of online gig workers in the developing world conducted by ILO researchers shows that a higher percentage of women than men tend to “prefer to work at home” (Rani and Furrer, 2017, p. 14). Rani and Furrer’s research shows that 32 per cent of female workers in African countries and 42 per cent in Latin America have small children. This results in a double burden for women, who “spend about 25.8 hours working on platforms in a week, 20 hours of which is paid work and 5.8 hours considered unpaid work” (ibid., p. 13). The survey shows that 51 per cent of women gig workers work during the night (22.00 to 05.00) and the evening (76 per cent work from 18.00 to 22.00), which are “unsocial working hours” according to the ILO’s risk categories for potential work-related violence and harassment (ILO, 2016, p. 40). Rani and Furrer (2017) further state that the global outsourcing of work through platforms has effectively led to the development of a “twenty-four hour economy ... eroding the fixed boundaries between home and work ... [which further] puts a double burden on women, since responsibilities at home are unevenly distributed between sexes” (p. 13). Working from home could already be a risky environment for women who may be subject to domestic violence alongside the lack of legal protection provided in office-based work. Indeed, “violence and harassment can occur ... via technology that blurs the lines between workplaces, ‘domestic’ places and public spaces” (ILO, 2017, p. 97).

OSH risks

Digitalizing non-standard work such as home-based online gig work, and taxi and delivery services in offline gig work, is a method of workplace governance that is based on quantification of tasks at a minutely granular level, where only explicit contact time is paid. Digitalization may appear to formalize a labour market in the ILO sense, but the risk of underemployment and underpay is very real. In terms of working time, preparatory work for reputation improvement, and necessary skills development in online gig work, is unpaid. Surveillance is normalized but stress still results. D’Cruz and Noronha (2016) present a case study of online gig workers in India, in

which “humans-as-a-service” (as articulated by Jeff Bezos, see Prassl, 2018) is critiqued for being the kind of work that dehumanizes and devalues work, facilitates casualization of workers and even informalizes the economy. Online gig work, such as work obtained and delivered using the AMT, relies on non-standard forms of employment which increase the possibilities for child labour, forced labour and discrimination. There is evidence of racism, whereby clients are reported to direct abusive and offensive comments on the platforms. Inter-worker racist behaviour is also evident: gig workers working in more advanced economies blame Indian counterparts for undercutting prices. Further, some of the work obtained on online platforms is deeply unpleasant, such as the work carried out by content moderators who sift through large sets of images and are required to eliminate offensive or disturbing images, with very little relief or protection around this. There are clear risks of OSH violations in the areas of heightened psychosocial violence and stress, discrimination, racism, bullying, unfree and under-age labour, because of the lack of basic protection in these working environments.

In gig work, workers have been forced to register as self-employed workers, losing out on the basic rights that formal workers enjoy such as guaranteed hours, sick and holiday pay and the right to join a union. Gig workers’ online reputations are very important, because a good reputation is the way to gain more work. As mentioned above, digitalized customer and client ratings and reviews are key to developing a good reputation and these ratings determine how much work gig workers obtain. Algorithms learn from customer rankings and quantity of tasks accepted, which produces specific types of profiles for workers that are usually publicly available. Customer rankings are deaf and blind to the consideration of workers’ physical health, care and domestic work responsibilities, and circumstances outside workers’ control that might affect their performance, leading to further OSH risks where people feel forced to accept more work than is healthy, or are at risk of work exclusion. Customer satisfaction rankings, and number of jobs accepted, can be used to “deactivate” taxi drivers’ use of the platform, as is done by Uber, despite the paradox and fiction that algorithms are absent of “human bias” (Frey and Osborne, 2013, p. 18).

Overall, while there are benefits of integrating AI into gig work including driver identity protection and allowing flexible hours of work, good for people’s life and work choices, these same benefits can result in rising risks, such as the case of the DiDi driver and the case of a double burden of work for women online workers. OSH protections are generally scarce in these working environments and the risks are many (Huws, 2015; Degryse, 2016) and involve low pay and long hours (Berg, 2016), endemic lack of training (CIPD, 2017) and a high level of insecurity (Taylor, 2017). Williams-Jimenez (2016) warns that labour and OSH laws have not adapted to the emergence of digitalized work, and other studies are beginning to make similar claims (Degryse, 2016). The successes of AI are also its failures.

Towards a conclusion

The difference between AI and other forms of technological development and invention for workplace usage is that because of the intelligence projected onto autonomous machines, they are increasingly treated as decision-makers and management tools themselves due to their seemingly superior capacity to calculate and measure. Where many recent reports on AI try to deal with the questions of “what can be done” or “how can AI be implemented ethically”, the issue is greater. A move to a reliance on machinic calculation for workplace intelligent decision-making actually introduces extensive problems for any discussion at all of ethics in AI implementation and use.

In Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding*, this empiricist philosopher wrote that ethics can be defined as “the seeking out [of] those Rules, and Measures of humane Actions, which lead to Happiness, and the Means to practise them” (1689, Essay IV.xxi.3). This is of course just one statement, by one ethics philosopher, but it is worth noting that the seeking out of and setting such rules, like the parameters for ethics depiction, has been carried out and conducted so far only by humans. When we introduce the machine as an agent for rule setting, as AI does, the entire concept of ethics falls under scrutiny. Rather than talking about how to implement AI without the risk of death, business collapse or legal battles, which are effectively the underlying concerns that drive ethics in AI discussions today, it would make sense to rewind the discussions and focus on the question: why implement AI at all? Will the introduction of AI into various institutions and workplaces across society really lead to prosperous, thriving societies as is being touted? Or will it deplete material conditions for workers and promote a kind of intelligence that is not oriented toward – for example – a thriving welfare state, good working conditions or qualitative experiences of work and life?

While machines have more memory and processing power than ever before, which is how they can participate in machine learning, they lack empathy and full historical knowledge or cultural context within which work happens. Machines cannot intentionally discriminate, but if workplace decisions have been discriminatory (i.e. more men or white people have been hired over time than others, more women or people of colour have been fired and not promoted than others, etc.), then the data that is collected about hiring practices will itself be discriminatory. The paradox is that if this data is used to train algorithms to make further hiring/firing decisions, then obviously, the decisions will show discrimination. Machines, regardless of what forms of intelligence management attributes to them, do not and cannot see the qualitative aspects of life, nor the surrounding context. Cathy O’Neil, author of *Weapons of math destruction: How big data increases inequality and threatens democracy* (2016) made an insightful observation in a recent interview with the author. While watching Deliveroo riders hurtle past her in the

rain, Dr O’Neil considered the platforms directing the riders’ work, which operate on the basis of efficiency and speed and thus instigate riders to cycle in unsafe weather conditions. This clearly puts riders’ very lives at risk. Dr O’Neil calls algorithms “toy models of the universe”, because these seemingly all-knowing entities actually only know what we tell them, and thus they have major blind spots.

If it is accepted that machines hold the same competences as humans, or perhaps even better competences than us, will we begin to reduce management accountability? Further questions: Can there be an ethical use for AI, given the complexity of rulemaking, when something besides an intelligent human mind is expected to make rules? Where will the final say in intelligence lie? Why do we want machines to behave as we do, given that evidence already shows that machine learning can only learn as much as already exists in the data that trains it, and if the data reflects humans’ discriminatory behaviour, then the algorithms, almost necessarily, will demonstrate or promote discrimination?

The mythical invention of E. M. Forster’s all-encompassing machine in his classical science fiction story (1928/2011) was not, of course, subject to a range of ethical and moral review panels before all of humanity began to live within it under the Earth’s crust. As we enter a new era of AI it will remain important to recall the tension points in positioning technologies into places of power in workplaces, and maintain, rather than the looming horizon where machines are in command, a “human in command” (De Stefano, 2018) approach to rolling out any new technologies into workplaces. Human responses to this trend should involve careful regulation, where human intelligence takes precedence, as the machine becomes increasingly evident in our working lives.

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New methods of governance for non-standard forms of work

*The cases of subcontracting
and digital labour platforms*

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Introduction

For 30 years – “the glorious 30”, in the words of Jean Fourastié – forms of labour and its regulation complemented each other, giving shape to a virtuous system. This extensive period, running from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1970s, yielded a system in which work was important not only as a factor of production but also as a structural component for social integration. This welfare state ensured growth, employment and redistribution in a good number of developed countries, and, to a lesser extent and with less direction, in peripheral countries. In these various situations, it became the established institutional formula for economic and social development (see Habermas, 1989; Barcellona, 1991; Luhmann, 1994; Picó, 1990; and for an empirical basis, Piketty, 2014).

The nexus between forms of labour and regulation took shape through reciprocal interaction. In parallel, it became an institutionalized, integral part of the system, a functional method serving its purposes. Although the employment relationships underpinning it were contradictory in nature, and its interventions a gradual limitation of the power one of the parties was held to wield, the resulting construction guaranteed stability and contributed to peace,¹ as the International Labour Organization (ILO) had already presaged.

The characteristics of employment relationships and the modes of their regulation influenced each other interactively: the collective action of workers, by definition, insisted on equality and this impacted employment relationships, which, associated as labour then was with vast production spaces (think Fordist factories), did not resist the inclination towards uniformity, which in turn fed back into a cycle of regulation, homogenization, stabilization and growth (see Lipietz, 1997, p. 21; Harvey, 2017, p. 147).

In other words, the application of criteria limiting a unilateral definition of employment relationships runs counter to individualization and redefines a vast regulated space where conditions of collective equality and homogeneous services and rights prevail.

The instruments of this trend towards homogenization are, on the one hand, as previously stated, the characteristic union actions of organizing, framing conflict, bargaining and securing collective agreements; and on the other, based on extension of standards such as those set forth in collective agreements, state legislation that reproduces and replicates this homogenization.

Thus we have normative actions undertaken by collective parties and the state system that aim for wide application under conditions of relative

1. Treaty of Versailles, Part XIII, Section I, “Organisation of labour”; and *Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation* (Declaration of Philadelphia), Part II.

equality, and in parallel, employment relationships governed by such regulations as *are comfortable* with this trend.

In this logic, intended to regulate labour in companies typifying Fordist production, sectoral collective agreements presented themselves as an appropriate means of ensuring generality, similar work conditions and stability of employment as well as employment relationships. And this is the case for productive units organized vertically, covering distinct segments of production, or horizontally, in an economy where capital becomes concentrated but also diversifies, involved in various manufacturing stages for a given product as well as in activities not directly related to the same product.

Hence, collective work agreements permitted regular employment relationships, predictable labour costs and stable employment for growing ranks of workers, who in turn became integrated members of democratic welfare state societies. In this context, state legislation becomes an instrument that both drives and responds to the conditions of collective relationships, and the system benefits, socially and economically, from an inclusive approach.

The link between collective action and state legislation was also forged through a virtuous, though not always peaceful, cycle. Trade unions naturally seek improved work conditions, which must extend to all workers they represent, and this cannot be ignored by the State because it fundamentally strives for social and political integration. Accordingly, the union assumes, and is granted, decision-making powers and a participatory role in the administration of the economic system. But the tensions governing this mechanism are also limited or damped by the state regime enveloping the whole.

To recapitulate, for this first description, we consider that union action and the *authorization* it receives from the State have dictated a trend towards relatively homogeneous regulation of employment relationships. At the same time, the fundamental core of this regulation would evolve under identical conditions of sameness and come to serve an economic system in which stable employment is essential not only for securing the rights of the worker, but also for an economy in which the worker is both consumer and the instrument of its reproduction.

Unionized employment, based on a standard contract valid for an indefinite period of time (until retirement one might say), within a company plugged into a production economy where the factory has pride of place, while benefiting from the safety net of social security (though not the only manner of contracting or providing labour) would become the dominant pattern.

This dominance played out not necessarily in numbers, but rather in how the pattern would serve as a model for regulation and desired coverage through state normative intervention; for universal social security; and for an established, central role of trade unions in the definition of employment relationships.

Thus the regulation of labour during the period under discussion fundamentally involved a uniform structure and two characteristic instruments at

its disposal: the collective agreement covering all workers within a vast scope, and labour legislation further extending equal rights.

Though these elements were serviceable for the 30 years in question, the restructuring of the system starting in the mid-1970s obviously changed the playing field. We will not be addressing here the economic and political conditions that prompted or enabled this restructuring. What is certain is that particular ideas took root and ultimately triumphed. Deregulation, individualization and greater flexibility went hand in hand with changes in the rationales and operational modes of States, in power relationships both in general and within companies, and in the relationship between workers and employers.

With regard to employment, a variety of alternatives to the standard contract now especially undermined the stability and continuity of work, in a context where the ideal of full-time employment gave way to structural unemployment. So we see a shift from a trend towards sameness to a mosaic of regulatory options fostering ever more fragmentation. Temporary employment and the end of regulatory homogeneity would mark the new reality of the labour market (Baglioni and Crouch, 1990; Supiot, 1999).

Time passed and the markets aligned themselves with these new visions of the capital–labour relationship. With this change, discussions about means of regulation in the face of this fragmentation, and about the roles of trade unions and the State, were partly overshadowed by consolidated productive relations that cared little for the function performed by labour and for the place occupied by the worker in both production and the overarching economic system.

After reaching this point, and experiencing the effects of its later development, the alternatives before us branch in two main directions, defined by the following questions: (a) How do we return to the previous situation characteristic of social democratic political regimes, boosting the status of trade unions and ensuring they have a role in defining the conditions of work and of the economy in general? (b) How can we redefine regulatory methods and even the role of trade unions in the face of a new economic reality and power relationships? In this setting, the task is to determine either how to adapt regulatory instruments that usefully served an inclusive, egalitarian vision, or how to redesign, replace or repurpose these instruments.

The traditional methods of regulation in the welfare state system, which we shall continue to discuss, are characteristic of a strategy – subject to a certain degree of juridification – of deployment of normative instruments that are consistently the prerogative of the State, which defines the place and scope of their application. In their absence, other forms of regulation are put forth, whose justifications or priorities are more lax and multiform, and which are of diverse origins and target diverse groups. We may imagine a regulatory spectrum that runs between the two extremes of hard law and soft law, between a single issuer of standards – the national State, within its boundaries – and

multiple sources all at once, where regulation reaches beyond national borders and is primarily issued by, and aimed at, parties on the global stage.

So there is a traditional dimension to which we repeatedly return in search of certitudes, and a current dimension, already well established, that is conspicuously marked by zeal in standing in for national States or, as the case may be, limiting them to mere executors of regulations defined by global bodies. Likewise, the environment through which norms are promulgated may vary in reach as well as nature: it may involve a certain State or have an international dimension. Instead of the aforementioned origins, we may also have a unilateral definition of obligations, either by the economic parties themselves, now global, or by organizations through which these parties – directly or through the States now at their service – may reconfigure the global legal framework with diffused linkages and protective measures serving new purposes.

In summary, we are talking about legal instruments with regulatory power within a State and the weakening of local law, which is replaced by the characteristic functions, methods and scale of a system of global governance. Given the extremes mentioned, we must rethink regulation and the function it serves in a system of laws typical of a social democracy.

At the same time, we will focus on two points – how economy and employment work today, and consequently, how to approach regulation in light of this situation – by considering two phenomena: subcontracted work (outsourcing), and digital labour platforms (backbones of the “sharing economy”). Both practices may prove useful for certain reasons: subcontracting exerts a structuring effect on the economy and the organization of work, while digital labour platforms appear novel as they embrace the future through technological innovation (Ermida Uriarte and Colotuzzo, 2009; Celis Ospina, 2012; Ermida Uriarte and Orsatti, 2011; Basualdo and Morales, 2014; European Parliament, 2017; Berg, 2016; Ginès i Fabrellas, 2018; and Todoli-Signes, 2017, among others).

Both may be presented as strategies of capital, reflecting its own organizational modes or responses to labour and union opposition, and also as challenges for collective organization, in terms of organizational approaches as well as instruments for regulation.

Hence, just as union and political action helped secure for the standard work contract, when it was dominant, a central role in the economic system, the same kind of political will is evident in the elaboration of a system where employment relationships are segmented, mediated, externalized or directly negated. A union strategy is needed to counter such economic pretexts and political complicity, with the constant aim being to group similar jobs into unified, unionized collectives having rights.

The how and where of this strategy are a function of the parties (direct or indirect employer), scopes (company- or industry-wide bargaining), and instruments (state standard, sectoral convention, international standard

or global framework convention). There are superimposed arenas (national economy and global economy) and overlapping institutions (national States, supranational organizations or global governance bodies) (Sassen, 2010).

We will therefore present a summary description of new ways work is being organized – specifically, via subcontracting and digital labour platforms – and regulatory techniques for confronting them; introduce some recent examples and experiences illustrating appropriate union strategies; and conclude with potential topics of discussion that consider new ways trade unions may apply traditional instruments while accounting for the necessary global dimension and adhering to the same goals of protection, equality, and defence of rights.

New – and not so new – forms of work organization

We will approach the organization of work as the structure and distribution of labour in terms of its ties to capital, through the type of company, the economy, the conditions under which it is provided, and how it is remunerated.

Labour may be tied directly to the entity for which it is provided. Companies may ensure execution of all tasks needed to manufacture a product, in a production economy serving a domestic or export market, under stable, long-term conditions characterized by collective agreements and social security coverage. This type of work organization is typical of Fordism (Coriat, 1991 and 1992).

Labour may also be contracted through third parties, for production – performed through successive levels of intermediation – that is organized by and serves the principal party. In this case, its value is not necessarily acquired within the national economy. Thus the phases of activity as a whole, and consequently the conditions under which labour is provided, are uprooted from the locations hosting them, because they are associated with a larger, even global, process. The functions of an employee, or union participation in their definition, on a national scale or in the case of vertical integration, now take second place: the emphasis shifts to segments that are differentiated or conditioned by a global strategy of accumulation.

The externalization of production or sales consequently seeks differentiation of work conditions via fragmentation and differentiation of secondary, direct entities intercalated by the primary, indirect entities. The valorization of such a production chain is determined not by the intermediate parties but by the end parties. This organization of labour would seem to reflect the decisions of the company that may act as an employer, but it is actually determined by an external entity whose interests are served by the aggregate structure (ECLAC and ILO, 2016; ILO, 2016).

The effects of decentralization within the structures engendering it, on a national or global stage – in terms of fragmentation, inequality and

insecurity of employment relationships and contracting entities, especially when defining union representation and collective regulation of these relationships – are well known.

Work organization may also take the most atomized form possible, through digital relationships determining when, how and how much work is provided, under conditions that vary according to the demand managed and distributed by the “platform”, an impersonal euphemism concealing the main party behind the system and this work organization.

One might suppose that this form of work organization is new, as decentralization or externalization was when it first emerged. Nevertheless, as we shall see, beyond the novel appearance of the digital system through which relationships are created and contracting flows determined, we are in reality dealing with the oldest piecework contracting practices and the same strategy of segmentation, now at an individual scale, that subcontracting originally introduced.

Next we will examine different techniques for regulation of both forms of work organization. First we will look at the traditional – and, for that very reason, insufficient – techniques, before turning to approaches that consider these realities in light of the combined conditions under which the economy is developing and that accordingly demand adequate instruments, whether new or adapted.

Regulatory techniques

The history of labour in capitalist environments may be read as a sequence in which the former attempts to free itself from the coercive nature of an unequal relationship through the establishment of forces challenging the will of those determining those relationships. These external forces have historically been collective action and representation together with state legislation.

The restriction of workers’ autonomy protects them from abuse through the unilateral contractual power of employers. Collective or state regulation increases the liberty of workers, who are compelled to work as the exclusive means of generating income.

External standards created a tightly woven safety net of rights that, as we pointed out in the beginning, brought increasing levels of equality and protection. This bridled capitalism (Harvey, 2015) gave rise to a system of guarantees of welfare and development in which the trade union – whether through its involvement in bargaining with the company or in the industry, or through its status as political player – balanced social relations. The invention of the collective, as Supiot (1996) describes, made it possible to conjugate the demands of a capitalist economy, which negated the liberty recognized as the privilege of every member of a democratic society, with the demands of equality and access to economic goods that the welfare state promised.

Thus, the instruments described, consisting in regulatory measures governing the individual employment relationship – collective standards born of union action and state standards ensuring generality and equality – commonly framed how employment relationships functioned for several decades.

To be effective, this kind of regulation demands particular conditions of regularity, continuity and authenticity. Indeed, when the parties to the relationship, and especially the party that organizes and retains the service, lack a genuine reference, collective action and the existing definition of the types of relationships to which protective legislation applies both fail. Otherwise stated, that which regulates the content of rights attributed to the employment relationship is directed, as a vehicle of equality, towards a target party which is deemed to be the counterpart in the relationship, which is accepted as such, and which makes use of this situation to facilitate transformation of the relations of production.

Nevertheless, when the said participant in the employment relationship flees, or conceals or distances itself, the indicated instruments lose their equalizing power, normative efficacy, and finally their regulatory purpose. How may we assign a legal status, entailing rights and obligations, to a party that shuns it? How may we demand uniform conditions when a mosaic of employers has taken the place of a single identifiable party responsible for organizing the whole? What union entity may intervene amidst this web, and with which instruments? These issues must all be assessed differently, reconsidering even traditional regulatory techniques and applying other modes or practices.

In the first place, some of the techniques advanced in response to the forms of work organization that are emerging or gaining force must be considered in the context of the historical process of economic globalization that the development of these forms parallels.

One may suppose that globalization – which, though an old phenomenon, developed and reached prominence at the end of the 20th century and continues to exert a similar effect in this century – lacks regulation by virtue of its context and the forces controlling it. In such a case, the market, a mechanism of self-regulation, would define the terms of exchange. But this isn't the case. Neither the market nor the agents shaping it are the sole sources of regulation (Polanyi, 1992).

Just as there is economic regulation of globalization, through which the entities behind it establish coercive mechanisms enforceable to various degrees (e.g. the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), supranational bodies and bilateral or multilateral treaties), there is also regulation in defence of rights, which we may generically call international law on human rights, upheld by universal or regional systems that ensure a baseline level of regulation whose scope extends into the economic sphere. The ILO represents the most traditional and universal regulatory mechanism with respect to employment relationships. Beyond discussions of the efficacy, enforceability and scope of application of standards,

the ILO, now a century old, has indubitably established itself as a body advancing a universally applicable system of rights.

To be effective, a normative system must be matched with institutions that verify adherence to it. In the same way that there are arenas for demanding compliance with standards for economic globalization – the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), extensions of jurisdiction for central countries, etc. – the globalization of rights has also been matched by the development of systems for guaranteeing their application. Regional tribunals such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) are characteristic examples, but again, in the area of labour rights, the ILO has long disposed of a unique mechanism, based on tripartism and relying on support from technical bodies that define the perimeter of application for obligations set forth in international labour standards and demand that violating States in turn ensure they are in application among targeted constituencies.

Thus the traditional methods of regulation, anchored in national systems, are surpassed by supranational regulation employing instruments that are constantly updated and uniformly interpreted for consistent application (Rodotà, 2012).

Public legislation coexists and is juxtaposed with other codes resulting from the phenomena of fragmentation and internationalization, creating a sort of polycentricity (Arnaud, 1981). Two novel forms illustrate this trend. The most recent is the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006, which remedies the limited efficacy of the ILO's system of rights by combining ILO control mechanisms with direct state enforcement. The other, similarly universal in reach, is a system governing enforcement of the international pacts of the United Nations that establishes parameters for their interpretation and for the assessment of their efficacy, on the basis of its general observations, which later help guide other tribunals.

In any case, the field of action of trade unions is also subject to variation. Their national base is altered by their presence and acts of representation and denouncement at the supranational level. Much of the enforceability of international standards is the result of demands made by trade unions, often through national organs now represented in international bodies, and through their participation in the definition of these standards. The development of collective bargaining at the transnational level is characteristic of how national trade unions have transferred representation to international bodies (international union federations), which have redefined the reach of obligations imposed on their natural interlocutors (multinational enterprises), first rather vaguely and generically but later, gradually, through regulations of domestic and international scope addressing problems typical of the current state of affairs in employment relationships.

In summary, globalization, considered ungoverned by standards, or self-regulating to ensure compliance with its own dictates, is actually matched by governance rooted in organizations and instruments – some already familiar, and others of more recent mint and tailored to new realities – that temper, contain or contend with the unbridled nature that has been attributed to global capitalism.

In light of the above description, which recognizes the association of traditional techniques with newer ones, let us consider the forms of work organization that we have defined as structural at this moment in the development of capitalism, as well as means of regulation.

First, the normative application of any legal instrument requires a target group or category of entities expected to comply with it. This is the origin of the first challenge in principle associated with outsourcing practices.

Subcontracting or decentralization is, by definition, a means of evasion for target groups. Let us then begin with the observation that this is a way of organizing work by which a business assigns its own activity to third-party businesses that are to execute it instead. Nevertheless, the party previously responsible formally and in practice for this work organization continues to be so in practice as the entity ultimately controlling the various phases of the business activity, but no longer formally since it has delegated legal responsibility for employment relationships to other companies at each phase.

For digital labour platforms, this evasion is even more flagrant. While outsourcing relies on mediation through other businesses, in the “sharing” economy one may no longer identify a contracting party securing labour. The platform is a virtual structure that simulates the market, matching labour supply and demand, but the labour is provided to an anonymous, ephemeral, undifferentiated counterpart. The evasive nature of platforms reaches its culmination when the worker becomes entrepreneur, dependent work becomes self-employment, and the receiver becomes the contracting party for an object: the assignment or order becomes a pizza, a box of medicine or a packet of cigarettes.

If the strategy of capital is evasive and hides the responsible parties, the counter-strategy that should be employed by the union or system for application of standards is to capture the productive, organizational and income-generating reality at the point where fragmentation and concealment of parties occurs.

In the first case, concerning outsourcing, we will note distinct methods that account for the situation described and restructure the fragmented collective, if only by an extension of standards that promotes uniformity. In the second, concerning the sharing economy, we must seek the reality governing contracting flows and, once again, pinpoint the location of the order, of the definition of transactions, and of the valorization of labour.

In both cases, traditional regulatory techniques lead us to a discussion around the equally traditional topic of relationships of dependency.

All indications provided by the reality observed (see the ILO Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198), part II, para. 13) contradict the deliberate strategy to present an employer that isn't one (or only in relative terms), or a virtual reality that asserts the absence of formal personhood. The rules of dependency, in its legal form, do not fit perfectly with either case, especially when their legal interpreters consider them from an atemporal perspective. Although an appropriate, rational approach can uncover the real structures and shift attention to the legally answerable parties, it is true that, in general, this is a matter of assessing responsibility, which is assigned extensively – recognizing joint liability, to use the legal term – but there is no re-framing, in terms of power and equality of conditions, of an existing practice having an established strategy.

Therefore, in this time of fragmentation and concealment, we need to consider more opportune and exigent contemporary means – that is, ex ante techniques (already developed in Gianibelli, 2014). Subsequent, delayed legal discussion that at most takes the form of monetization of consequences is distinct from, and does not replace, real discussion of the distribution of power and rights. For this reason, unions must present themselves as the inescapable instrument for reconstituting power that has been fragmented or diluted, by uniting phases, processes or demands where they are determined, organized or distributed.

In the following section, we shall look at some union responses to these manifestations of productive organization. We will now suggest some areas of investigation that may inspire the definition of regulatory techniques, envisaging appropriate use of legislation in combination with union empowerment. In any case, despite obvious signs of weakness and difficulty in adapting to a changing world, unions and the international union movement remain the main hope for transforming and containing a global system of accumulation that does not recognize national borders and, consequently, the traditional modes of collective action in the context of income distribution.

If, as previously discussed, decentralization processes are characterized by the involvement of additional companies where once there was only one, and given that this substitution does not necessarily reflect actual changes to the modes by which decisions are made, organization is determined, and production factors are deployed – which continue to be the prerogatives of the entity that remains in control – rules must be developed to account for this permanent nexus of power. There is no need for regulations that exclusively prohibit such business structures: all that is required is a regulatory provision that defines the context, assigns responsibilities, and defines a set of rights applicable to the whole. It is just a matter of reuniting what companies have elected to disperse. In the great and unavoidable battle between capital, set on escaping rules, and labour, which seeks to define them – a battle waged since the first labour standards were adopted – the task is to ensure the application of these rules, which must be based on minimal conditions of equality.

This technique, based on enforceability of state or collective standards and used in certain systems to extend their application to more parties than initially intended, is characteristic of the expansive nature of the sectoral collective agreement, which has normative effects beyond the circle of parties that originally adopted it. This results in a homogenization of work conditions that captures the organization in operation, independently of each employing party involved in it, and restores unions' capacity for representation, which is then exercised for the whole.²

We may observe a similar situation with digital labour platforms, where the party holding the power to contract labour and to set conditions not only surrounds itself with other parties, but even appears not to exist. Who is contracting the work? The client issuing the order? The company providing the shipped product? The Uber or Cabify passenger? This "dilution" promoted by the system no longer seems to account for anything but the apparent relationship between the worker – who, it is argued, is self-employed – and a contracting party. Nevertheless, the real relationship, in terms of valorization of work, lies with the party that offers, organizes and appropriates the profits of that work. Formal responsibility must be assigned to the centre of decision-making for the aggregate system, the centre at which the organization and distribution of work is determined, where margins and salaries are defined, if only to allow application of a set of general rules aimed at guaranteeing baseline rights beyond the formal engagements of contracts.

In this way – without having to enter into a discussion about the relation of dependency, about the existence of a work contract, about who the employer and worker are – with a mandatory framework of rules made available, either as a minimum state standard or an extension to a collective agreement regulating the totality of relationships within the perimeter of this work organization, progress toward the goal of regulating inequality may begin.

Thus, it is proposed that for the purpose of regulating fragmentation, the processes responsible for it – decentralization, denial of employee status, or uberization – and set in motion by a well-defined organization of capital be corrected by adopting a similar organization of work.

These reflections do not ignore the fact that such processes are defined on a supranational scale and therefore tend to play out globally. Production chains are, by nature, international in their reach and are found to be dominated by multinational enterprises that disperse linkages among their own subsidiaries and countless other companies within a network of contractual commercial relationships. Platforms also have the capacity for acquiring global dimensions, distributing labour to wherever a client is logged in. Consequently, approaches that better correspond to national legal systems, such as consideration of the aggregate and recognition of the obligatory

2. The normative reach (*erga omnes*) of a collective agreement will depend on state systems for collective bargaining (see Giugni, 2004).

nature of standards, as mentioned previously, must now be compounded by others that need to be integrated into global governance envisaging the same reach.

To achieve this, the two tactics already indicated – internationalization of rights and transnational collective bargaining – seem appropriate. In the case of the first, even though the international system of human rights establishes basic principles of dignity that should imperatively be applied in all States, and international labour standards seek to establish baseline rights (essentially concerning labour) that are also of general application, neither of these provides an effective response to the disparity of work conditions, which in great part encourages oft-denounced social dumping.

Hence more acute forms of intervention are required. Discussions at the ILO have touched on this. For example, in 2006, when there was an opportunity to discuss a draft Convention (ILO, 1998) on the subcontracting of labour, rather than following up on it a mere Recommendation concerning the employment relationship was adopted instead. And that is where the debate halted. Instead of an international Convention, a Recommendation was issued. Instead of a perspective reflecting the reality of work organization, a technique associated with the legal structure of dependency was preferred. Despite this failed normative intervention, the ILO has since continued debating ways of effectively addressing conditions under which work is performed, especially on an international scale. The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC), to which we previously alluded, is a smart response that considers the reality of work organization on the sea and assumes that formal structures (flags of convenience) conceal what actually transpires through the decisions of capital: in this case, shipping, directly, with clear though indirect effects on the final price of merchandise by lowering associated labour costs.

Further responses relating to standards applicable to multinationals have been the *Tripartite declaration of principles concerning multinational enterprises and social policy* (ILO, 2017), recognizing the preponderant role such corporations have acquired in the global economy, and the *Guiding principles on business and human rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework* (OHCHR, 2011), acknowledging the characteristic mode of production in question.

There is clearly a desire, internationally and especially within the ILO, to provide a normative response to the phenomena of decentralization and the sharing economy. These techniques of governance fundamentally require action on the part of trade unions, whether at the national level or through international groupings, to denounce non-compliance and abuses, and especially to try to re-establish balances that formerly guaranteed the stability of national welfare states but today find no substitute in a global government marked by exploitation of the transformed regulatory space and of the difficulties in defining a global union entity with the authority and function formerly held by national trade unions.

Yet, at first hesitantly, but now more confidently, initially with a few vague declarations, but gradually by adopting clearer rules – and in both cases through discussions on means of enforcement – transnational collective bargaining has found a place, although it is solely dominated by the decisions of capital concerning global production processes. Nonetheless, power relations are starting to be disputed in this space, although at the slow pace that is to be expected when dealing with a novel approach (Gianibelli, 2010).

In this regard, precedents for international framework agreements addressing the processes of productive decentralization already exist, and they establish a perimeter within which a certain degree of uniformity prevails for the different links in the global chain. They are still very generic, but two developments stand out: first, the technique of matching the organization of capital with a similar organization of work – i.e. matching multinational enterprises with international union federations; and second, the construction of a union entity amenable to globalization, regardless of all the challenges and surprises that entails (Ales et al., 2006; Gianibelli and Orsatti, 2018; Orsatti, 2018).

The variety of examples of transnational bargaining illustrate the breadth of contractual structures:

- (a) *value chains of various forms:*
 - IndustriALL Global Union: PSA, Schibo, Electrolux
- (b) *providers and contractors/subcontractors:*
 - IndustriALL: Siemens, Thyssen, ZF, Daimler Chrysler
 - International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF): EADS, Pym, Merloni/Indesit, SKF, Bosch, Swam, Electrolux, Codesa Gea
 - International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM): Suez Group
 - Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI): Scham-Stabilo
 - UNI Global Union: Carrefour, Telefonica, Elanders
 - International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF): Danone
- (c) *licensees and contractors/subcontractors:*
 - IndustriALL: Statoil (ICEM), Lukoil (ICEM)
- (d) *outsourcing:*
 - IndustriALL: SCA
 - UNI: Danske Bank
- (e) *external workshops/factories, suppliers and subcontractors:*
 - IndustriALL: Inditex (International Textiles, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF))
- (f) *suppliers:*
 - BWI: Ikea

- (g) *retail/wholesale:*
 - UNI: Quebec
- (h) *commercial/contractual/business partners:*
 - IndustriALL: Leoni (IMF), Reinmetal (IMF)
 - BWI: Hotchief
 - UNI: Umicore, Röchling
- (i) *distribution networks, industrial associates, supplier, and subcontractors:*
 - IndustriALL: Volkswagen (IMF)

There has yet to be a global discussion of work conditions in the sharing economy, but rules governing the market and competition have been means of countering the opacity of platforms and their intent to operate without restrictions.³

Thus governance based on international standards is complemented by union action aimed at work organization processes, elaborating techniques that address the new reality and constructing a specific union response more attuned to this strategy of transnational capital. Some union experiences we cover in the following section may help elucidate what constitutes effective action in this regard.

Union experiences

Here we present an illustrative selection of union experiences, all having in common the awareness that the processes of employer concealment and evasion by the entities truly holding the power to structure a workforce need to be contested at points where such opacity arises, expanding the reach of regulation to embrace the whole and mirroring the organization of capital with a similar organization of labour and its bodies of collective representation.

As the atomized nature of outsourcing activities clearly impacts union representation (whether on the vast scale of the industry in question or limited to a single company, but in either case poorly equipped to take on the processes of outsourcing), the only form of consolidated union action uniting all workers from the distinct companies within a web would have to involve the creation of unitary bodies of representation, e.g. through the formation of inter-union committees or delegate committees, or the coordination of

3. Resolutions taken include those of (a) the California Labor Commissioner, who in June 2015 declared the existence of an employment relationship between Uber and an Uber driver; (b) Argentina's Federal Agency of Public Revenues (AFIP), which in 2019 decided that Uber owed taxes for drivers, considering them to be workers in a relationship of dependency; and (c) the London Employment Tribunal (*Aslam v. Uber*, 28 October 2016), which stated that "the notion that Uber in London is a mosaic of 30,000 small businesses linked by a common platform is to our minds faintly ridiculous".

internal commissions for each establishment or workplace. It must, however, be recalled that, in many cases there is only weak if any union presence in companies within outsourcing networks, which in some cases means representation in the main company must also take responsibility for and defend workers in contracted companies.⁴

Hence, representation in workplaces must be supplemented by the formation of collective bargaining units to unify what decentralization has scattered.⁵ This entails changes not so much to the legal system but more to the culture of bargaining, specifically with regard to the bargaining parties. On the union side, it would suffice to more or less reproduce the coordinating bodies proposed in the previous point: this demands settling on an appropriate structure. On the corporate side, there would need to be representation of both the main company – compulsory for bargaining to have any sense or viability – and the separate companies tied to it.

With their global reach, the international framework agreements mentioned above presuppose a tool with a system for collectively disputing issues linked to international outsourcing or work along production chains.

Argentina has also taken steps with respect to digital labour platforms, creating the first union of platform workers (*Asociación Personal de Plataformas –APP*),⁶ which seeks to become an instrument for the professional representation of deliverers and drivers and addresses the company administering a given platform whether it acts in the capacity of employer or is the holder of the power to contract labour and decide working conditions.

In Denmark, the first collective work agreement for home cleaning workers affiliated with the *Hilfr* digital platform has been reached. It stipulates that, past a certain number of hours, these workers cease to be self-employed and become dependent workers enjoying a minimum salary, protection from exclusion from the platform, and payments towards retirement and health benefits.

Indeed, in many countries the debate has focused on recognition of employee status, the emerging responsibilities of the entity deemed to be the employer, and obligations related to operation, taxation and registration.

4. This is what the Buenos Aires Professional Association of Subway and Premetro Workers (*AGTSyP, Metrodelegados*) did on behalf of workers in companies contracted to provide the public transport service in question.

5. Argentina provides a recent example of this cohesive bargaining involving multiple parties, in the negotiations behind the San Lorenzo port oil complex (province of Santa Fe), for which agreements were signed in 2011 and 2012. Other responses to outsourcing provided by collective bargaining range from prohibition of certain sectoral activities (paper industry workers, Collective Work Agreement (CCT) 1113/10E; beer industry workers, CCT 575/10; chemical industry workers, CCT 1235/12E) to the extension of industry-specific CCT clauses to contracted companies (television, CCT 1109/10E and CCT 1222/11E; electricity, CCT 1174/11) or the exclusion of subcontracted workers from the scope of the agreement (gambling, CCT 1084/10E; electricity, CCT 1083/10E; bakers, CCT 1238/11E).

6. Founded in 2018 and in the process of acquiring government recognition.

There has been recent union action against Uber in Madrid and Barcelona, Spain's two main cities. Beyond the characteristics of the collective party behind this action – in many cases reflecting the “self-employed” status attributed to Uber workers – what is certain is that, at least in Barcelona, the result has been regulation of the platform by consideration of the form, extent and duration of the driving service.

All in all, we are witnessing the first expressions of refusal at the real centres of contracting power. And with them, an appropriate reconfiguration of union power.

A few conclusions

The preceding lines have aimed to present a status report on the organization of productive activities, at both state and global levels, which we may briefly describe as characterized by diverse working conditions, a patchwork of companies promoting this disparity, and fragmentation that in turn erodes traditional union structures.

While union action has historically embraced collective bargaining to set working conditions, and through it uniformity of rights, decentralization (which divides operations having a single economic purpose into multiple activities) and digital labour platforms (which scatter workers one by one, and do not even accord them employee status) have wreaked havoc on classic regulatory mechanisms.

The strategy underlying these particular forms of work organization, beyond others that may come to mind, is very concretely aimed at the dissolution of parties assigned union roles and, in parallel, the disaggregation of obviously collective interests in a magma of individual units of production that would scarcely be viable were it not for their connection to the primary entity. This reveals an intent to disrupt the interface with collective representation.

Consequently, once again, the answer lies with unions. The capacity to reappropriate broad units for union action contesting an organization that creates fragmentation, and the elaboration of a structural or contingent body that articulates and directs its action towards the party actually behind the organization, both offer themselves as ways out of the labyrinth.

This also dictates the organizational forms to be adopted by trade unions⁷ and especially the ideal normative responses. To this end, the recovery of the concept of broad bargaining units, which in certain systems yield collective agreements for given activities or sectors, has always been an effective response. Amidst the growing diversity of activities, forced or real, where ever smaller numbers of companies define their activity with respect to

7. Consider, for example, the discussion process in American unionism (Trade Union Confederation of the Americas –TUCA), dubbed self-reform.

current economic concentration, the idea of a sectoral agreement is becoming less dependent on a clear notion of activity (which technological innovation makes quite variable anyway) and more reflective of the conditions of workforce appropriation; more associated with networks of general exchange and less related to a direct relationship with a given employer; and without a doubt, more focused on the centres of contracting power within the economic universe as a whole.

In the case of multinational enterprises (as entities both locally and globally present) directing normative decision-making more urgently requires definition of the arena. The multinational enterprise establishes contracting frameworks, deploys others, determines costs and profits, eludes but sets working conditions, and finally, substantively valorizes capital through this wider web. Union action and opposition through enforcement of standards need to work through corresponding structures.

This company configuration is not, however, the only way to decentralize or organize work into a piecemeal process. And the organization of work does indeed reflect a type of company organization. As Vardaro (1989) has explained, we are not dealing in such cases with a group of businesses but rather a single business structured as a group: an economic group, to which a formal status may be assigned.

Finally, in addition to union responses, national States must be urged to act, for they have the capacity to regulate labour and the development of business activities on the part of phantom companies shirking their responsibilities. Still, States have limited capacities, and so what is needed is a global perspective, transnational regulatory frameworks, the integration of transnational collective bargaining into the constellation of sources promulgating international labour law, and clearly, reformulation of the system of global governance by the adoption of new techniques and instruments that mirror the structure of capital and advance a corresponding regulatory solution.

Accordingly, the recent report (2019) by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, entitled *Work for a brighter future*, has proposed a revitalization of the institutions regulating the world of work, and with regard to new jobs through digital labour platforms it not only indicates the need for worker and employer organizations to bolster their legitimacy and representativeness to reach this population, but it also calls for a system of international governance for digital labour platforms that demands recognition of rights and provision of basic protection.

Slowly but surely, new forms of labour protection and union action are developing to match transformations in the new global and digital economy.

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The future of work defines the future of humanity and all living species

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Introduction

With the concept of climate change being replaced by many with the term “climate crisis” (see for example Carrington, 2019) and many countries, cities and towns across the globe declaring a climate emergency to signify that the time for incremental steps and small actions is over (Climate Emergency Declaration, 2019), the question of the position of labour and the labour movement towards the climate crisis and its role in solving it becomes more urgent than ever. Before we begin our discussion, we want to clarify the language we are using. We are replacing the term “environment” with the term “nature”. Environment gives the impression that what we are talking about is a space that surrounds us, that may condition how we live, but of which we are not a part. Typically, in many public discourses the environment is distinguished from people. The term nature, although often used in the sense of a space “out there”, a green space for recreation, encourages us at least to think that we are part of nature, as opposed to being outside it. In some contexts, we need to keep the term environment, as in “environmental labour studies”, since “natural labour studies” would convey a different meaning.

When we first began to explore the relationships between labour and nature in 2006, we argued that unions – and workers in general – are in a privileged position to transcend the dichotomy between an anthropocentric and an ecocentric view of development, since workplaces, as the centres of production *and* as major consumers of natural resources, are the places where nature is transformed to produce our “second nature”, the built environment, the materials we use. That is, workers are positioned at those key interfaces where nature is transformed to provide for human needs. Trade unions are social actors aiming to change the social conditions of production, and thus their contribution to challenge the threats to nature is crucial. The year 2009 marked a turning point in trade union engagements for the environment. While there had been organized engagement before, at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, it was not until that year that employment issues appeared in the negotiation text for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for COP15 (Conference of the Parties) in Copenhagen (see Rosemberg, 2017). Before and afterwards, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and the global unions conducted several research projects examining the employment effects of a green economy (see for example Poschen, 2012; Renner, Sweeney and Kubit, 2008; ITUC, 2012).

Although there is much that can be said concerning the achievements of the labour movement in developing their environmental positions, especially on the climate crisis over the past 13 years, only a few elements of these achievements will be presented in the first part of this article. In the second part we will offer a critical analysis of the way in which the term “just transition” is being translated into environmental policies, one which we hope

might support unions in developing an ambitious vision of the transformation needed in order to change our current mode of production from one that exploits workers and the earth into one that enables the thriving of workers and the earth alike.

Examples of successful environmental union policies

In order to explore and understand future possibilities for work and in particular the challenges that trade unions need to address in the face of the climate crisis, it might be worthwhile to provide a brief presentation of those policies and actions of trade unions which have struck us as being particularly useful. We draw on research projects undertaken by us between 2008 and 2015 to investigate the environmental policies of national and international trade union federations and confederations in countries of the global South and North: Brazil, India, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. During these years we concentrated our investigation on unions whose members we expected to be impacted by climate change measures: the metal workers' unions, and on those who were already impacted by the climate crisis itself: the unions of food and farm workers, as well as associations of small landowners and fishers. In the course of these projects we also included unions which we learnt had created particularly effective and far-reaching environmental policies, including the ITUC which has been an internationally significant force in bringing the issue of the environment to labour movements worldwide. We interviewed more than 100 unionists in national and international unions and analysed their policy and practice documents. We are still in the process of analysing our data, but some of our results have been published in six journals, two books and a special issue of *Globalizations* (see for example Uzzell, 2010; Rätzzel and Uzzell, 2011 and 2013; Uzzell and Rätzzel, 2013; Rätzzel, Uzzell and Elliott, 2010).

In this article we discuss three trade unions which have produced important policies and initiatives and have engaged workers on the shop floor as well as reaching out to unions across the world: Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) in Spain, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the United Kingdom, and the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA).

Pioneers of environmental trade union policies: Comisiones Obreras (Spain)

The CCOO came into being as a clandestine workers' movement during the dictatorship of Franco, with the aim to fight not only for workers' rights but to topple the dictatorship and achieve democracy and equality. Therefore, the CCOO has always had "one foot in the factory and the other foot in

society”, as one of our interviewees put it. This means they have fought for the interests of workers as workers and as citizens, engaging in questions of education, health, transport and housing, among others. Therefore, for the CCOO it was not as difficult as for other European unions to recognize the environment as a trade union issue, although its importance was and is by no means uncontested. Notwithstanding this, in 1991 the CCOO appointed what was to be the first Secretary for Environment and Health in the world.

While health and safety and thus issues of toxic work environments (asbestos, toxic chemicals, toxic emissions, etc.) have always been high on the agenda of most of the world’s unions, environmental issues which were not directly related to health and safety issues did not play such a central role. After studying environmental risks facing workers and having discussions with environmental organizations in Spain, the Secretary of the CCOO decided that there were three central areas that needed to be addressed: climate change and energy, clean production (relating particularly to chemical production), biodiversity and water.

Connecting environmental risks with risks for health and safety

The term “just transition” was not as familiar as it is today, and trade unions did not have any representatives for environmental issues. Thus, the CCOO worked to educate health and safety union representatives about the environment so that they could make links between and be responsible for both areas. The organization ended up organizing a network of 6,000 union representatives responsible for monitoring and acting upon health and environmental risks.

Having come so far, the next question was how to organize support for these representatives throughout the country. In 1995, the CCOO created the Union Institute of Work, Environment and Health (Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud – ISTAS). At its peak the Institute comprised over 120 researchers and technicians, many of whom were placed in union offices across the country. In Madrid, ISTAS had about 50 members, including technicians, researchers, lawyers, doctors, all specializing in health and environmental risks. Unionists could consult these experts if they encountered any health or environmental risks in their workplace. Staff at the Institute helped workers to analyse the problem and find solutions, and supported them in negotiations with their employers. The Institute always ensured it trained unionists about health *and* environmental risks.

Taking trade union environmental policies to the global level

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The CCOO recognized the need for trade unions to have a voice at the international level. Together with other union organizations, it created a team organizing the first international conference on trade unions and climate change, which took place in January 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya. It was significant that it was held on African soil, where the effects of the climate crisis were already felt by workers and farmers. Having interviewed environmentally engaged unionists in Brazil, Sweden and the United Kingdom, we found few who did not mention the important influence this conference had on their perception of the climate crisis, its urgency and the need to create mitigation as well as adaptation policies.

The conference was initiated by a small number of people who did not have organizational power or positions of seniority. As one of the members of the group recounts: “we were three young women, quite inexperienced concerning trade unions. So, we sat down with a map of the world and a list of all the trade unions and their addresses and we called them, asked to talk to the boss and told them there was an important conference taking place in Nairobi that they could not be missing.” In the course of the organization process members from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the ILO became involved. The event itself included participants from the trade unions and the three UN agencies. The preparatory work – both for the Assembly and the Workbook (UNEP, 2007) – included a significant number of ILO officials, who developed linkages with the ITUC and the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development (SustainLabour).

The CCOO had also played a key role in 2004 in setting up SustainLabour, with the aim of helping workers across the world identify, understand and challenge environmental threats. For over ten years SustainLabour worked with about 75 unions worldwide – from Uganda to Uruguay – supporting them in understanding and acting on climate change and chemical risks, helping waste collectors in Uruguay, truck drivers in Uganda, or farmers in East Africa.

What is exemplary in this Spanish case is the close collaboration between union representatives, engineers, researchers, political representatives and workers on the shop floor. No other union that we know of has managed to build structures ensuring this degree of synergy between different social actors. Members of SustainLabour and the CCOO were also decisive in informing the work of the ITUC, while also taking issues and ideas from the ITUC into their respective local unions. SustainLabour was responsible for developing training courses for unions on climate change in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The effect of the 2008 financial crisis on Spain took its toll on the union’s environmental achievements. High unemployment rates (up to 40 per

cent among young people) reduced the union's resources. The number of personnel was seriously reduced and SustainLabour was closed down in 2016. Spain also faced a political crisis. The centre-right Government of the Partido Popular (PP) was not committed to the mitigation of climate change and ended government support for the union's environmental activities. During the time of the centre-left government of the Partido Socialista de Obreros de España, the Socialist Party of Workers of Spain (PSOE), the CCOO had pressured the Government to create a roundtable in which employers, the Government, and environmental organizations could meet at least twice a year to discuss environmental policies. Under the PP these meetings ceased to exist.

Despite the cuts, the CCOO still features the environment on its website as one of the union's issues, and the subjects covered are broad. The demand for a just transition is centred on a just energy transition. They have now a secretariat only for the environment. Its new leadership, elected in 2017, declared that environmental policies and the reduction of the environmental impact of production needs to be at the centre of the union's struggles. The only trade union journal devoted to environmental issues and climate change in Europe, *Daphnia*, still exists.¹ This, and the fact that the PP has now been ousted due to corruption scandals, provide hope that the imaginative work of the CCOO will resume and become an inspiration for environmental trade union policies across Europe and beyond.

Taking environmental action to the workplace, the case of the Trades Union Confederation (United Kingdom)

Under the auspices of the TUC, the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) was established in 1998. After the International Trade Union Conference in Nairobi, UK trade union representatives attempted to develop more practical initiatives to reconcile jobs and livelihoods with climate mitigation and adaptation through the concept of just transition.

By 2005, the TUC had established a wide-ranging climate change strategy. Although the UK Government refuses to recognize the need in trade unions for environmental representatives, which means that unions working in this area are given no "facility time" (i.e. time within their working day to undertake environmental union work) thousands of unionists took on this role voluntarily and organized climate change activities in the workplace (TUC, 2014). Energy efficiency measures were negotiated with employers, such as the installation of solar panels, wind turbines, modifications

1. www.daphnia.es/inicio.

to heating and ventilation systems, and changes to IT systems. In addition, union representatives developed workplace green travel plans, cycle to work schemes and public transport subsidies, as well as recycling and waste reduction measures and green procurement policies (Hampton, 2015). The TUC trained more than 90 unionists on environmental issues and produced publications to advise unionists across all sectors as to how they could engage in environmental activities in their workplace. Funded by different UK institutions, they were able to develop efficient projects such as the Green Workplace project at the British Museum, which created energy savings of £700,000 (TUC, 2008). Some unions also organized agreements with employers in which the latter agreed to reduce carbon emissions with the help of union representatives (TUC, 2014). In 2011 the TUC launched a "green union" network for environmental representatives.

The TUC has also been influential in creating the Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union Group.² It developed the One Million Climate Jobs Campaign, which was then also taken up in South Africa and now includes unions across the world.³

Sadly, as in Spain, the pace has slowed down in the United Kingdom. The TUC representative for environmental issues retired and was not replaced. Reduced resources and changed priorities in a time of austerity has meant that environmental initiatives from the TUC and the unions have declined. However, support for the worldwide climate strike in September 2019 and subsequent events might be the beginning of a new engagement.

These two examples are important not only because they have made a difference in their respective countries but also because they have influenced unions in other parts of the world. However, what is also significant about both these cases is that priority given to environmental action within unions lessened when key individuals in the TUC and in the CCOO left their positions. Even though they had built structures within the unions to stabilize their environmental engagement, once the driving force of committed individuals disappeared, other considerations within the union and other individuals who had not seen the environment as a union issue in the first place became more influential and this, along with external conditions like the economic crisis, led to environmental activities dropping down the unions' agenda.

2. <https://www.cacctu.org.uk/aboutus/whoweare>.

3. <http://www.globalclimatejobs.org>.

Environmental engagement and societal transformation, the case of NUMSA in South Africa

Like many unions, the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) began its more serious engagement with climate change issues in anticipation of an international conference that was to take place in South Africa, the COP17 in 2011 held in Durban. The specific approach of NUMSA compared to all the other unions we have investigated is that, being a left-leaning union, it connected its environmental ambitions strongly to its political ambitions. Also, given its political orientation, NUMSA integrated its members into the development of its climate change policy. It developed a research and development group (RDG) bringing together workers from renewable technology production, coal-fired electricity generators and intensive energy users (Satgar, 2015). In addition, study groups were set up to inform members about climate change and to visit sites using renewable energies. NUMSA put much emphasis on developing a policy on the basis of climate justice. Its programme stated:

This resolution explicitly commits the union to finding climate justice solutions from below as part of struggling for a deep transition to a low-carbon economy based on renewable energy sources. Central to the political economy of a just transition is a political commitment to build a socially owned renewable energy sector which is made up of different forms of socialized property – cooperatives, municipal ownership and socialised parastatals. Such a sector should also ensure the promotion of locally manufactured renewable energy. (Satgar, 2015, p. 272)

NUMSA went a long way toward ensuring that its membership understood the challenges of climate change and developed environmental goals that connected with its trade union and political identity. Nevertheless, as in the two cases above, political and economic developments had an impact upon its activities. NUMSA was expelled from COSATU, South Africa's National Union Federation, because it opposed what it saw as the neoliberal politics of the African National Congress (ANC) and therefore had called for COSATU to break the alliance with the ANC-led Government: "Numsa's biggest crime has been to democratically, in its own congress, argue for the political independence of the Federation, given the worsening material conditions of the working class as a result of neo-liberal ANC policies" (NUMSA, 2014). As a result, it engaged in developing an alternative confederation and took part in developing a new socialist party. Amidst those political tensions and the ongoing economic crisis (in which the South African unemployment rate is 25–35 per cent depending on the method of measurement), the enthusiasm for and engagement with a transformative climate change policy has been all but lost. The environment no longer features as an issue on the NUMSA website.

These three examples illustrate the diversity and ingenuity of trade union engagements in respect of environmental issues,⁴ but they also show that environmental engagement is not something that is achieved and then assured for the future. In times of crisis, climate change and environmental policies are often the first fatalities. This is perhaps understandable, since it is hard to persuade members to engage in policies that focus on a problem which, from their perspective, does not impact immediately on their working conditions – or might even threaten them.

To better understand the precarious position that environmental issues have in unions' everyday existence, we present a sample from our research of the ways in which environmentally engaged unionists perceive the relationship between labour and nature. These perceptions influence how unionists evaluate the urgency of protecting not only workers but nature as well.

Unionists' perceptions of the relationship between nature and labour

The examples we present here come from a range of countries in the global North and South. However, they are not specific to those countries. While there were many differences between trade unions, depending on the historical and political contexts in which the unions had emerged, perceptions of the nature–labour relationship were quite similar, the most widespread being a separation between labour and nature. We once described this as nature being labour's “other” (Rätzkel and Uzzell, 2013). In the following we present some ways of articulating this separation.

The environment as a container

A unionist from India stated:

We are protecting the environment for whom? For the next generation. Are we going to leave the next generation hungry? So, then we have people with low mental capacities because their parents were starved, and have a wonderful environment.

4. We have left out some examples of environmental engagement by unions such as, for example, the path-breaking document of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF, 2010) – a document that is especially outstanding because it managed to outline a progressive path that connects workers' concerns for jobs with suggestions for an environmentally sound transformation of transport and mobility.

Apparently, creating a beautiful environment and feeding people are seen as mutually exclusive. At first sight, this seems like a strange conception, since we know that peoples' survival requires nature to be a resource. However, this sentence resonates with the oft-cited Brundtland intergenerational argument that we need to protect the environment "for the next generation". Such formulations assume that the effects of the climate crisis are yet to come. Even though climate change is more tangible these days than when the Brundtland concept was developed in 1987 (UN, 1987), these arguments generate the view that avoiding the climate crisis in the future has to be done at the expense of workers' lives today. Especially in India, this is an argument we heard quite often, illustrated by a unionist quoting his members as saying: "I will die quicker from unemployment than from climate change." Such statements are correct, and the question that haunts trade unions in both the global South and North is how to connect the immediate survival interests of workers with their interests to survive as a species. In an earlier article (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011) we have presented some ways in which the International Transport Workers Federation have done this in their environmental policies.

Pristine nature

Where it came from [her engagement for environmental policies in the union], I don't really know, it came from a general interest in nature, everything from horseback riding to flowers and the forest and, sort of a closeness to nature. Not so much from a social perspective, but more this other, more a romantic perspective, from a "not us" perspective. (Swedish trade unionist)

"Pristine nature" – the opposite of the city, of work, of the treadmill of production – is an image that is not only prominent with unionists but in our urbanized societies in general. The concept developed with urbanization, when people stopped living directly within nature and thus nature became the object of desire, of everything that is not part of urban life, and, as this unionist puts it quite aptly, "not us". In the countries of the global North, unionists would often trace their interest in environmental policies back to their childhood experiences with nature. Convincing as this might be, this still leaves nature outside the production process.

The environment as an add-on

Consequently, environmental policies appear as something that has to be added to the already immense in-tray of trade union tasks, as a unionist from South Africa explains:

Another challenge is the fact that the world has become so much more complicated and the issues that the trade union movement is expected to tackle, from skills through to advancing employment equity, through to dealing with much more complicated wage systems, through to the political challenges – it’s a huge range of issues. And then *you add to it environmental issues*, and it’s really hard because everybody’s already got so much on their plate.

Another South African unionist formulates the lack of connection between traditional trade union issues and the environment as a political–theoretical gap:

The [environmental] issue must be taken in its own right, in terms of its own concerns. Because sometimes I feel that it could be climate change, it could be something else tomorrow, – as long as you can make the political points ... Okay, maybe there *is* the issue about the environment, but really, it’s the political points that want to be made. So, it’s not really the environment, it’s capitalism ... And so, the issue is not really integrated into one perspective and outlook.

The failure to integrate “the environment” into a political vision, be it an understanding of the system as capitalism, or a free market, suggests that none of the ways in which the economy is perceived includes nature as an integral and indispensable part of the economic system. This is also evident in the Brundtland model where the three domains that need to be simultaneously cared for are defined as social equality, the environment, and the economy. Brundtland argued that you cannot have one without the other. In Brundtland’s Venn diagram they overlap at the margins. However, while a relationship is acknowledged, the two domains are still seen as separate. In reality though, every economic action implies a transformation of nature.

We have presented these examples because we argue that the way in which the concept of *just transition* is being translated into trade union policies in international trade union documents today perpetuates this separation of nature and labour. As a result, it constructs workers as *reacting* to developments as opposed to becoming their *creators*.

Just transition and the separation of work and nature

Just transition is a concept that the labour movement has long aimed not only to popularize but also to introduce at the highest level of climate change policies. It has been the trades unions' "big idea", their key conceptual contribution. As far as researchers have been able to trace its history, the term was used first by Canadian unionists Brian Kohler and Les Leopold. A just transition strategy was first developed by Toni Mazzochi, a unionist from the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) who claimed that caring for the environment and caring for workers should not be mutually exclusive (Stevis and Felli, 2015). Mazzochi argued that an environmentally sound production would create more jobs and that an unregulated capitalist development would shift negative externalities to workers and communities. In 1997 OCAW adopted a resolution calling for a just transition and in 2000 the Canadian Labour Congress adopted a programme under this heading (for a detailed analysis of the history and breadth of the concept and its applications see Morena, Krause and Stevis, 2019).

In the following we want to focus on two central documents published by the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) and the ITUC to discuss what we see as a problematic translation of "just transition" into trade union policies. It is not the aim of our discussion to criticize the concept, but to suggest how just transition policies might be strengthened. The achievement of the term is to connect the needs of nature with the needs of workers and vulnerable communities. However, as we will argue, in some of its translations into policies this connection does not materialize.

While just transition takes its point of departure as the need for a transition to environmentally viable production, it articulates the imminent threat to workers not as coming from environmental destruction and the climate crisis⁵ itself, but from the possible effects that *measures against* environmental destruction will have on workers and their jobs.

5. We combine the climate crisis with the notion of environmental destruction, because land grabbing, extractivism, the loss of biodiversity and sea pollution are all forms of environmental destruction caused by the way we produce and then consume, which are sometimes contributing to the climate crisis or being caused by it, but sometimes not necessarily connected to it.

Workers as recipients, not as creators of a “transition”

The future of work defines the future of humanity and all living species

Under the heading “Why should trade unions care about climate governance?” we read in a document of the ETUC (2018, p. 6):

In many ways, the transition will trigger positive effects ... To fully tap this economic potential, investment and policy stability is needed. This is certainly the first added-value that climate policy planning can bring for workers: increasing certainty about the policy framework and investment that are the key prerequisites for moving to a low-carbon economy while creating and maintaining quality jobs across sectors, including in manufacturing industries.

From a workers’ perspective, the transition will profoundly reshape the labour market in ways that creates both new risks and new opportunities for workers ... Anticipating these trends and their impact on workers is at the heart of trade unions activities. Climate governance, and related policy planning, offers an opportunity for trade unions to increase their understanding of the ongoing changes and their influence on climate policy.

This is a sound analysis of the effect of “the transition” on workers, i.e. the risks and opportunities they will be facing. But what is striking is the definition of the actor within the process: “the transition”. The transition appears as a kind of magic force coming from nowhere, bringing good and bad effects to which workers need to react. Later in the text “the transition” becomes more tangible, as “climate governance” and “policy planning”. The first section of the ETUC document describes the countries that signed the Paris Agreement as the actors, since they have committed themselves to reduce their carbon emissions. The transition, one could then conclude, will be enacted by countries, by governments. But governments are already the result of citizens’ actions. They are elected, they are pressured (lobbied) by civil society organizations and corporations. In other words, workers could be seen as actors influencing government as opposed to only *understanding* trends and *expecting* added value or risks. What we are arguing is that the language used in this (and other international and national trade union documents) does not see workers as *creators* of a transition, but instead as recipients of actions, whose initiators are not clearly discernible. Thus, our first observation of the ETUC document is that workers are constructed as reacting to processes that develop beyond their control. In addition, the process they are seen as reacting to is not the climate crisis but the measures (i.e. the transition) that might be taken by governments to confront the crisis. Nature does not appear in this scenario. The fact that “transition” is not adequately defined as either a process or a product means that it is difficult to assess how workers can relate to it.

In the same document we do find recommendations for workers' organizations to become actors. Workers' organizations are asked to promote:

- “industrial policies that are consistent with sustainable development goals”
- “technological innovation and R&D investments in clean energy, energy-saving technologies, greener and more efficient industrial processes, in particular in energy intensive industries”
- “European and national public and private investment in green technologies”
- “economic diversification in regions and industries most affected by the transition”
- “and the adoption of policies and measures that will allow a just transition for workers, favour investment in growth sectors ...”. (p. 18)

The problem with these suggestions is crystallized in the formulation: “favour investment in growth sectors”. Suggestions which concentrate *only* on green technologies and energy efficiency fail to recognize the key labour–nature issue: the limits of the natural resources on the planet. While CO² emissions, and the ways we produce energy are the most obvious sources of the climate crisis, they are not the only threats to the earth's life support system. As many scientists have argued, it is the system of relentless economic growth that threatens the existence of humans and other species on earth.

Green growth is an oxymoron

Can GDP be decoupled from material throughput?

A critical issue facing society is whether growth, as measured by an increase in GDP,⁶ can be decoupled from material throughput, that is, from the amount of resources that need to be extracted from the earth in order to produce the energy and the goods we use. In other words, can there be an ever-growing green economy that will not be just as destructive for nature as the economy we already have? One of the international institutions most doubtful of this possibility is UNEP. As Hickel and Kallis (2019) report:

UNEP acknowledges that improvements in resource efficiency will not be enough, in and of themselves, to achieve sustainability, or green growth ... Productivity gains in today's linear production system are likely to lead to increased material demand through a combination of economic growth and rebound effects ... Improving circularity could reduce the ecological impact of material throughput, but only a small fraction of total throughput has

6. For a general critique of GDP measurement see for instance Cha, 2013.

circular potential. 44 per cent is comprised of food and energy inputs, which are irreversibly degraded, and 27 per cent is net addition to stocks of buildings and infrastructure. (p. 6)⁷

Digitalization is seen as the crucial means for an increase of efficiency. But it is a factor that increases the demands for materials and energy, as researchers at the Max Planck Society (2018) argue:

Means to automate production and distribution, or to synchronize industrial flows and to fulfil on-demand/on-time production ... do not just simply increase the efficiency with which demand is met. Often overlooked is the effect that any efficiency gained in a process is likely to lead to the production of even more goods and services. This, again, directly translates to consumption of raw materials, products and energy...Information technology is the opposite of an immaterial technology. Even the smartest device needs dumb metals. At least 40 chemical elements are used in every smartphone, which means we carry around one-third of the periodic table in our pockets. What seems to be an almost immaterial business of zeros and ones makes use of more chemical elements than every previous technology in history.

Does the replacement of fossil fuels with renewables allow for sustainable growth?

The terms “energy efficiency” and “green technologies and renewable energy” give the impression that applying new technologies will allow economic growth to continue with other means. It is necessary to remember, however that renewables are made of steel, cobalt, lithium, nickel, manganese, rare earths (neodymium and dysprosium). Solar panels specifically need cadmium, indium, gallium, selenium, silver, tellurium. Aluminium and copper are used in all technologies. Dominish, Teske and Florin (2019) predict that the rising demand for energy would increase the demand for necessary minerals by 280 per cent. Even if recycling efficiency were greatly improved, demands for lithium and nickel would still surpass the existing reserves by 86 and 43 per cent respectively. Moreover, the mining of these minerals pollutes the environment and threatens the lives of workers and communities in those areas. This is why indigenous communities in Alaska, Norway, Papua New Guinea and elsewhere are fighting against the mining of copper and gold. Many of these materials are today sourced in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where child labour and workers’ abuse are widespread as well as

7. For a further analysis of the problems of a circular economy see Haas et al., 2015, pp. 770ff.

violent conflicts, not least as a consequence of the demand for these minerals. Anticipating a steep increase in demand, companies are beginning to explore another nature-threatening practice, namely sea-mining (Davidson and Doherty, 2017).

These facts should not deter environmental policies from replacing fossil fuels with renewables, but they should alert us to the need to change not just some technologies and resources, but the way we live and use energy in general. Renewables can only help us to mitigate the climate crisis if we significantly reduce our usage of energy instead of increasing it, for instance through the mass production of electric cars. Energy reduction is especially important in the global North to provide the global South with a space to tackle energy poverty. This need and the plight of workers in the mining industries in countries of the global South demonstrate the need for a globalized labour movement that forms alliances between workers of the global North and South as much as with nature.

An alternative pathway to a just transition: Reconciling nature and labour

What we are arguing here is that suggestions for a just transition that come in the shape of technological fixes do not consider the ways in which humans and workers are inseparable from nature. The technological fix and growth approach is still acting *upon* rather than *with* nature. If trade unions are to break this cycle and challenge the destructive forces of our present growth system, they need to formulate policies which treat nature as an indispensable ally of labour. If they fail to do this, their politics will invariably be subordinated to the interests of what the ITUC report (2019) calls “corporate greed that has captured governments” (p. 5). Their policies and actions will remain restricted to trying to repair the worst effects on workers of a “transition” that happens essentially *to* them rather than *with* them. Arguments like the following are an example of this: “Every government must raise its ambition and determine national development plans including *Just Transition measures to protect workers, their families and their communities*” (ibid. p. 14). [our emphasis]

Demanding that governments and employers protect workers and their families and communities leaves the fate of workers in “the hands of the corporate greed that has captured governments such that they act against the rights and the interests of people” (ibid. p. 5), and denies workers the power, capacity and ingenuity to formulate their own, alternative visions for a just and equal society living and working in alliance with and in nature. It constructs workers as victims as opposed to masters of their fate.

However, there are examples of workers understanding the close relationship between labour and nature which lead them to other kinds of

strategies. Their understanding develops through their daily working practices, as a fisher in Kerala explained:

Now recently, wherever the men fish, they get the plastic waste. It affects the fish wealth also. The pesticides they also finally come to the sea. See, this is why we are collaborating with other groups ... We need to protect Adivasis [indigenous groups]. Then we need to protect the forest. Otherwise you will not get rain timely, then you will not have sea wealth. So, this is the chain. We need to protect the environment, we are part of this environment.⁸

It is easy to understand why for this fisher it is impossible not to see work, nature and life as inseparable. The question whether it is more or less important to protect jobs or the environment cannot even occur.

However, the way in which nature and work are interwoven is not as tangible for workers in the metal industry, for instance. But there are other ways to appreciate this connection, as one metal worker in Brazil describes:

Then my friendship with ----- and the study of ecology led me to think that there was something supreme, subtle, that couldn't simply be physical reactions ... I have been a Protestant Christian for six years and today I frequently go to the Anglican Church. It's a very progressive church, very open and one of the pillars of the church which was defining for me is the defence of all creation ... The Bible says ... all creation has to be redeemed with the presence of God on Earth. In other words, it's all a relationship between man and nature.

What we find here is what the South African unionist we quoted above was missing, a comprehensive worldview that can make the connection between humans as part of nature palpable and thus enable workers to understand our relationship to nature as mediated through labour. Expressed differently, labour has always been an activity enabled by nature, transforming nature, and being shaped by nature.

If we consider these examples as ways to understand how nature and labour are inseparably interconnected, what they tell us is that either the character of work itself, the experiences of connectivity or a comprehensive worldview (which need not be religious) is necessary in order to overcome the perception of nature as labour's "other". How to develop this consciousness would have to be part of a comprehensive environmental strategy of trade unions.

8. An example of insight into the inseparable relationship between nature and humans is Chico Mendes, a rubber tapper and unionist, who in the 1970s said: "At first, I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rain forest. Now I realize I am fighting for humanity."

Five suggestions for a global environmental labour movement

What our research and that of other colleagues shows is that it might be useful for trade unions to consider the following points for an innovative trade union programme that connects labour and nature:

Learning as research

There is much discussion in the just transition literature about the need to educate workers, to re-skill them, to improve their qualifications. While this will be necessary, we think it has to be qualified. First of all, workers are already qualified and have knowledge and skills which enable them to develop new transformative modes of production. The problem is that instead of making use of this knowledge that would allow workers to act, as opposed to being acted upon, workers are told that their knowledge is superfluous.

While workers have qualifications that allow them to develop alternative and environmentally sound forms of production, what is often missing is a consciousness of the ways in which they are connected to nature and to other workers across the globe. How could workers develop the kind of consciousness that the fisher we quoted derives from working experience or the metal worker from a religious worldview? What other kinds of experiences and other kinds of worldviews would enable such insights? It might not be enough to attend a seminar or listen to lectures. Methods of learning are needed which position workers as researchers of their own working context, including their relation to nature and to the global value chain.

The point of departure for such an alternative learning process is that any kind of work today is not only a transformation of nature, but, due to the processes of globalization and digitalization, is based on connection and cooperation between workers across the globe. However, as with the connection of labour and nature, the connection between workers along the value chain is not necessarily obvious in workers' everyday experiences. A method used in history workshops in Europe in the 1980s might be a useful tool to create the consciousness of connections that are already practised. The method went by the name *Dig where you stand*. Sven Lindqvist intended this to be a process through which workers could gain power by researching the history of their factories:

Until workers understand where they stand ... and how to use the resources/ tools available to dig with ... they will be forever in the background of the "official" version of events ... every worker in every country has the power and potential to create a new image for labor, one "that puts workers and their work in the foreground". (Lindqvist, 1980)

From researching the history of their jobs, workers can continue to trace back the materials they use, thereby finding out where these come from, how nature is transformed and how other workers (for example, in poor or dangerous environmental and working conditions) are used in extracting and transporting them. In the same way research could be undertaken on the afterlife of a product: who is recovering the minerals used in a smartphone, for example, and what are the hazards for the workers who do that work? Such research could be accompanied by visits to working places down the value chain, or other kinds of direct or indirect communication between workers who extract and transport materials and those who create the products. The same research process could be developed from the point of extraction to the point of the end-product and its afterlife. This could give workers a sense of their position in a globalizing economy and in relation to their fellow workers worldwide.

In one of our research projects we learned how such connections can make a difference. When workers in India working in a transnational corporation contacted workers in factories of the same corporation in the global North, they were able to compare pay, working conditions and lifestyles; it was the first time that those in the North learned that their company did not pay living wages to their colleagues in the global South. They began a process of questioning their management about the working lives of their colleagues *within their own transnational corporation* across the world (Räthzel, Mulinari and Tollefsen, 2014). Such “education as research from where you stand” could be the basis for developing an insight into the need for a globalized labour movement without North-South hierarchies and into the limits of growth because of its destructive effects on nature *and* workers. It would also further strengthen the abilities of workers (not just their trade union representatives) to develop alternative plans for the transformation of the current modes of production and the specific ways of producing.

Democratizing the global trade union movement

It is clear for everyone who is not in denial of the climate crisis that, while local actions are needed, we are dealing with a global problem that presents itself in different ways, not the least of which in that production in the global North disproportionately affects those in the global South. Our research has shown that this not only engenders different kinds of policy interests in the unions of the global North and South, but also exacerbates the power relations between them (Uzzell and Räthzel, 2013). Suggestions such as border adjustments to protect industries (usually) of the North from products of more polluting industries (usually) of the South do not constitute a solution for the relationship between justice for nature and justice for workers. Instead, it aggravates the already existing unequal ecological

exchange between the North and the South (Oulu, 2016). What this means is that companies of the global North (but now also increasingly of China and India) extract the natural resources of the South to produce material goods, which create wealth for those companies but almost no wealth for the workers and communities in the South itself.

The global networks of corporations are dense and effective, while those of trade unions are reduced to meetings of officials and exchange programmes where, as the unionists we talked to in Brazil, India and South Africa all explained, it is the unions of the North who determine the agendas and the ways in which decisions are taken: “They have the money, they control the meeting, they control the agenda.” It was once a slogan of the labour movement that knowledge is power. This can still be the case if knowledge includes a global process of encounters and mutual recognition.

Including the workforce into designing the transformation of production

In the early 1970s the management of Lucas Aerospace, at the time Europe’s largest producer of aircraft systems and equipment, of which 50 per cent was for military purposes, decided to restructure the company because the Labour Government had reduced their military budget, and as an answer to international competition. They proposed closing 15 factories resulting in the loss of 18,000 jobs. Instead of just fighting for the protection of their jobs, blue- and white-collar unionists developed the Lucas Plan, a plan which advocated shifting production from military weapons to “socially useful products”. The workforce put forward 150 suggestions including heat pumps which were efficient in saving waste heat; solar cells and fuel cells; a road/rail public transportation vehicle which would be lightweight, using pneumatic tyres on rails and electric vehicles; and a combined internal combustion engine/battery-powered car which could give up to 50 per cent fuel savings while reducing toxic emissions (Wainwright and Elliott, 1982; Räthzel, Uzzell and Elliott, 2010). The management rejected the plan, the TUC did not support the unions and the workers were ultimately made redundant. Forty years later the urgency of profoundly transforming our ways of producing and consuming gives such a process new legitimacy. One example of how such experiences of the past can travel into the present and provide a new perspective for labour and nature in the future is that of the Harland and Wolff shipyard workers in Belfast. In an attempt to save their jobs they have not only called for the nationalization of the shipyard but are also “addressing the substantive issue of production itself, envisaging a future based not on the fantasy of a return to the grand Titanic style liners of the past but on producing the infrastructure and inner working of equipment for generating renewable energy through harnessing the power of the wind and the waves” (Wainwright, 2019).

It is not sufficient that workers' representatives sit at the table and discuss a "just transition" *for* workers. If the unions internationally, nationally and locally involved workers in the development of a transformation to environmentally viable forms of production, they could use their skills and ingenuity and would not have to remain passive, expecting to be protected and fearing for their future. In a similar perspective Ferreras (2019) argues for the democratization of companies to include workers, not only their representatives in corporate governing.

Creating a production model that enables an alliance between nature and labour

Since all production leads not only to the transformation but also to the destruction of natural habitats, the incorporation of nature into any production process needs to include a consideration of how what is taken from nature can be restored. The circular economy, reusing materials when their original usage has finished, is one way of doing this. However, this has its limits. For all other kinds of products, reduction is the way out of the vicious circle into which we are locked. As Jackson (2018) argues: "You know that the most fundamental strategy in the circular economy is not to recycle or to reuse, it is to rethink the product itself and ask the questions: is this product really necessary? Does it contribute to welfare and human wellbeing? Is it a service that we actually want? Is it an effective way of delivering that service?"

We need a production system that leaves the earth at least in the same, if not in better shape than before the production processes. A number of suggestions exist in the public debate: decentralized production systems (Mangoyana and Smith, 2011), consumption of local production, products with a longer life, different forms of mobility based on public transport as John Samuelson, the head of Transport Workers International, argues (Samuelson, 2018). All these suggestions lead ultimately to a departure from the growth model.

Departing from the growth model

This is the most central and most challenging proposition. There is the fear of workers and their organizations that if there is no growth, the economy will falter and there will be no jobs. However, as unions argue "there are no jobs on a dead planet" either. How can it be possible to depart from the growth model without creating massive unemployment? There is by now a large amount of literature suggesting that we can "prosper without growth" (Jackson, 2011; Schor, 2010; Czech, 2013; Victor, 2017; D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2015). A basic necessity to balance work and environmental

viability is the reduction of working hours in paid employment, which would make it possible to share the remaining work among all workers (Jackson and Victor, 2011; King and van den Bergh, 2017). This is not only necessary in order to reduce production but also to deal with the upcoming replacement of jobs through artificial intelligence. However, as again many researchers have shown, there is no automatic effect of work reduction on the reduction of the ecological footprint. There are also problems with financing such a reduction of working hours that is socially just and does not deprive workers of necessary income. Kasser (2002) has shown that from a certain threshold on, additional material wealth does not make people happier – on the contrary. However, this threshold has to be reached. It has also been argued that a reduction in working hours can lead to an increase in consumption, which would outdo the benefits of producing less materials (Aall et al., 2011).

Departing from the growth model, reducing hours in paid employment in order to share it with all workers, would need to be accompanied by different ways of remuneration. A transformation of ways of life and ways of working is also necessary. While those advocating just transition argue for decent and safe jobs, work is more than this. Work needs to provide intellectual and emotional satisfaction. This comes from it being meaningful, that it enhances people’s capabilities and enables them to develop a “producer’s pride”, a satisfaction with their ways of producing and the kind of products they create (Sennett, 2008; Rätzzel, Mulinari and Tollefsen, 2014). As sociologists and psychologists have found in numerous studies, “individuals perceive their relationship to their work in expressive terms of meaning: it provides social inclusion, a sense of usefulness, a sense of independence, a sense of service provided, or a sense of mastery; that is, satisfaction with tasks performed combined with some form of autonomy” (Ferrerias, 2019, p. 6).

For many workers, their identities are intimately tied to their work and professions. Threatening particular industrial sectors (e.g. coalmining) with carbon-reducing legislation will threaten jobs which in turn may threaten identities (Uzzell, 2010). If identities are based on acquiring a source of pride in doing a particular job that is related to an individual’s position in the society and social world in which they live (e.g. a truck driver, a steel worker), alternative values that generate pride such as caring for the environment and one’s local community and one’s family are also part of workers’ identities and could form the basis of an interest in alternative jobs. Satisfactory work that supports people’s identities as producers can also be found in areas that are not “productive” in the manufacturing sense: social work, care and education, refurbishment of housing, creative work that can be opened up for many more people than we find there now. These are not just work issues but societal issues. Trade unions promoting these kinds of issues would define themselves as social movements, developing the interests of their members not only as workers, but as citizens as well.

In addition, there would be space to develop other forms of satisfaction outside work: social relations, sharing goods and time, caring for people in need. Fewer hours of paid employment could help to realize gender equality, since both parents would have more time to care for children and the elderly. It would also enable people to develop their full capacities, engage in the improvement of society and, not least, create a balanced relation to nature and to the earth system and enjoy leisure activities that do not increase CO² emissions (Druckman, 2019).

None of this will happen automatically. A reduction of paid employment would need to be accompanied not only by a form of guaranteed basic income, but also by free access to quality public services including health, education, and care for the elderly.

The question that will immediately be asked here is: who will pay for this? This is a central question and would need an in-depth analysis once the need for a profound transformation is acknowledged. “Taxing the rich” is always a popular answer but one would have to go further than this. A different concept of consumption is also necessary (Soper, 2007). A departure from the growth model requires a different relation to nature, a change from seeing nature as an object to conquer, to seeing it as an ally. Unionists value solidarity with fellow unionists; solidarity with nature is equally necessary. There is a need to reconsider prosperity in terms of social relations as opposed to material wealth.

Some of these changes are already happening, although at the margins of our “Northern” societies. There is the sharing economy, the development of worker-owned cooperatives which work not for profit but to produce socially useful goods and a good working environment. In countries of the global South, the notion of “*buen vivir*”, the good life, centred on inclusion into a broader community, which comprises nature, has been gaining importance beyond the indigenous communities which have developed it (Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano, 2017).

Indigenous communities in Latin America and elsewhere are a source of knowledge from which unionists can learn the necessity to think of humans in nature and nature in humans – that is, to develop a comprehensive worldview of the labour–human –nature relationship. Other sources are Marx (1875), who once criticized the German Social Democratic programme which claimed that labour is the source of all wealth, by insisting: “Labour is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values ... as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power.” Today, one of the most prolific researchers who is re-writing the history of our present economic system in the light of an approach that integrates society and nature is Jason Moore (see Patel and Moore, 2018).

None of the marginal movements of transformation are without its contradictions and problems. For instance, some initiatives that started as a

“sharing economy” like Airbnb and Uber have become parts of a predatory economy (Schor and Attwood-Charles, 2017). Any alternative, developing in our real world of conflict, power and exploitation, is bound to carry the character of these conflicts as well. However, they are pathways to alternatives – alternatives that the labour movement has largely ignored. In order to be able to build a different future that ends the exploitation of the earth and the worker, labour movements need to ally with and learn from the fisher in Kerala that we are part of the environment, from the metal worker in Brazil that the defence of all creation is needed, from the engineer in India that technological efficiency needs to be used to “save your resources without compromising your comfort”. In short, labour movements, peasant movements, indigenous movements and blue- and white-collar workers have to come together to prevent that the climate crisis ends in catastrophe.

This might seem utopian, and it might go against the grain of the “nitty-gritty” everyday work of trade unionists trying to prevent job losses and to protect workers. But if we look back at the effects of hard union work across the globe since the development of neoliberal politics – what has been really achieved by policies which have sought only to defend once gained rights and regulations instead of creating a new agenda for new times? The gap between rich and poor has widened worldwide. In the OECD countries, in spite of a (slowly) growing economy, wages have been going down; informal work, outsourcing, (involuntary) part-time work, badly paid work in service sectors have all been increasing; trade union membership and thus their organizational capacity has been shrinking; and growth is declining anyway. Bertolt Brecht coined the phrase, “transformations take place in dead-ends”.

The world is in a dead-end in terms of our natural life-support system, in terms of the decreasing power of labour movements around the world, in terms of the rising number of ruling “strong men” who care neither for workers nor for the earth, in terms of the ever-shrinking credibility of democratic, progressive organizations, including trade unions. Should this not be the time in which unions fundamentally rethink the way in which we need to work, consume and organize our relations to nature and to our co-humans? Trade unions’ support of the global climate strike in September 2019 creates a hope that new initiatives will develop from unions. Workers have changed the world before; rising to do this again can produce the much-needed transformative power that no other social movement can create.

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Drivers of development and transformation*

*A Latin American
and Caribbean perspective*

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Introduction

Weak economic activity, pronounced social and economic inequality within and between countries, and the threat of an environmental crisis of huge proportions all highlight the unsustainable nature of the current development model and the urgent need to change it.

Faced with this challenge, the international community has reached consensus around a new development model that emphasizes the fundamental role of efforts to eliminate inequality and halt environmental destruction. This consensus is expressed through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, approved by the United Nations in September 2015. The Agenda is a leap forward in the definition of a new development model, in part due to the comprehensive nature of the objectives it sets forth, covering a wide range of issues to consider in order to progress towards sustainable development. It is a major step forward with respect to the agenda of the previously defined Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2030 Agenda represents political progress because it is the fruit of thorough discussions between governments and the various societal players, and because it embraces the principle of shared environmental, economic and social responsibilities, while differentiating how countries meet them. It also constitutes a theoretical advance, because it coherently embodies a range of objectives wider than that presented in the MDGs. In addition to including a more ambitious objective with regard to poverty – namely, to eradicate it wherever and in whatever form it is found – the 2030 Agenda adopts as its main axes equality and environmental protection, and it addresses issues ignored by the MDGs, such as the right to social protection, productive employment and decent work; transparency; and a new balance between State, market and society.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is occurring against the backdrop of far-reaching economic, political, social, demographic and environmental changes that are creating new opportunities, but also major hurdles adding to the structural challenges that have long faced developing countries, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean. As these new challenges are global in nature, a multilateral approach to governance is required. However, in many policy areas, within certain countries, multilateralism is under fire from groups adopting a nationalist stance that call into question the lessons and advances of the post-war period. This article reviews the main global economic and social trends affecting progress in the achievement of the SDGs.

Challenges for progressive structural transformation

The production structure of developing countries, and specifically those in Latin America and the Caribbean, is characterized by great heterogeneity, and a significant part of the labour force is engaged in informal work or subsistence activities (ECLAC, 2012). This heterogeneity plays out in major differences in productivity levels between production sectors. Such differences are even evident between formal businesses. Hence, average productivity of Latin American micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in 2016 was, respectively, only 6, 23 and 46 per cent that of large companies. In contrast, by way of example, productivity gaps in Europe during the same period were much narrower: 42, 58 and 76 per cent respectively (Correa, Leiva and Stumpo, 2018, p. 24).

Excepting contexts marked by very favourable external conditions, the dominant production structure in this region is incapable of yielding the levels of economic growth required to sustainably generate productive employment and decent work, and to overcome poverty, which remains at high levels despite recent advances.

Closing these productivity gaps and addressing the associated inequalities require a structural transformation that ensures that technological advances and growing demand benefit not only a cluster of large companies in the export sector but the economy as a whole, through backward and forward linkages along productive chains. Though a detailed description of public policy components that would foster progressive structural transformation in this direction is beyond the scope of this article, important elements include a macroeconomic policy supporting development, a trade policy promoting diversification, the expansion and overhaul of infrastructure, encouragement for research and technological development, a production development policy that does not neglect digitalization, the transformation of education and professional training, and a major focus on the environment.

Nonetheless, given the current production structure, world economic growth remains a key factor in the evolution of the Latin American and Caribbean economy. The financial/economic crisis of the end of the last decade and its aftershocks, in Europe especially, have demonstrated the fragility of growth, while Chinese economic activity is gradually decelerating. Specifically, the most recent 2019–20 projections for global growth reveal a widespread slowdown. In addition, there is a sequence of trends in international trade, financial market activity and technological changes that are constantly changing and demand globally coordinated public policies as well as national and regional strategies for transformation.

Growth of the global trade in goods fell significantly after the 2008–09 world economic crisis: from +6.3 per cent annually between 2000 and 2007 to only +2.2 per cent annually between 2012 and 2016.¹ The year 2017 saw

1. Excluded from this analysis are 2008–09 (crisis) and 2010–11 (short-term recovery) data.

some increase in world trade, which grew by 4.7 per cent, but the following year witnessed a new downturn (3.9 per cent), and, in April this year, the World Trade Organization (WTO) lowered its projection for 2019 growth in trade to 2.6 per cent.

Feeble global economic growth is the main factor behind sluggish trade. According to International Monetary Fund estimates (IMF, 2016), approximately 75 per cent of the fall in growth of global imports of goods during the 2003–07 and 2012–15 periods is due to diminished economic growth. The impact of weak economic activity on trade was increased by the fact that, following the crisis, investment – which is usually greater for imports than for other components of aggregate demand – was especially flagging. Either phenomenon accentuates the other: feeble trade affects aggregate demand in each country, limiting access to wider markets and the potential for cutting costs, which negatively impacts investment and consumption decisions.

Beyond these aspects of the current conjuncture tied to lower growth in world trade, a series of essentially structural factors also stymie activity: in particular, a slowdown in the creation of global and regional value chains; resistance to – and occasionally, reversal of – processes of global trade liberalization; and far-reaching technological changes on the horizon or already under way.

Expansion of global and regional value chains has slowed for various reasons (see, for example, Auboin and Borino, 2017). One factor is the maturity of these chains: the benefits of increased efficiency reaped since their establishment in the 90s may be petering out.

A second factor is continual advances in the area of automation, especially in advanced countries, which, in the future, will sap global trade as there tends to be a lesser incentive to relocate production to developing countries to reduce labour costs.

Greater local production of manufacturing inputs, especially in China, is a third factor. This change is illustrated by the 9-point drop (from 57 to 48 per cent) in the proportion of parts and components imports (excluding oil industry goods) since 2000.

The fourth factor to mention is restrained trade liberalization. For example, the enforcement of local content requirements in various developed and developing countries drives businesses to manufacture and source their inputs locally rather than importing them (ECB, 2016). Contributing to this factor is resistance to the processes of intense trade liberalization and direct foreign investment on a global scale, processes that have led to a string of regional and global agreements – the European Single Market Act, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the 1994 WTO agreements – as well as extension of WTO membership to China. The expansion of the European Union and the opening up of many developing countries as early as the 1990s partly explain the vigour of global trade during the two decades preceding the crisis.

This vigour dwindled, however, with the onset of the crisis. The reversal of US trade policy under the current administration has also had a role, impacting negotiations in progress for two major trade agreements: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). TTIP negotiations were suspended in October 2016. Following US withdrawal from the TPP in January 2017, the other 11 countries participating in negotiations agreed on a slightly modified version adopted in March 2018 as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).² In light of the complexity of the current world trade conjuncture, the CPTPP is a major achievement. Yet, due to the US pull-out, the agreement carries much less economic and geopolitical weight than the original TPP, and any impact it could have on the development of new global standards would be limited. Furthermore, the new US administration imposed a renegotiation of NAFTA and has implemented or announced a series of bilateral tariff measures affecting trade with China, the European Union and Canada that have been challenged by similar measures, maintaining trade tensions whose impact on global trade is hard to predict. Added to this complex tableau are the difficulties now experienced by the WTO and the uncertainty generated by Brexit as well as the conditions under which it will occur.

In any case, there is no consensus on the impact that depressed trade liberalization (or increased protectionism) has had on global trade over the last years, or will have in upcoming ones, largely due to the difficulty of defining precise, quantifiable metrics. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) has concluded that the slower pace of trade liberalization should account for roughly 25 per cent of the drop in trade growth during the 2011–15 period relative to the 1991–2007 period, and that tariff measures have already had real effects on trade in and prices of the products they affect, such as iron and aluminium (see also OECD, 2018). In contrast, Auboin and Borino (2017) maintain that the contribution of greater protectionism is slight, and statistically insignificant.

Finally, it should be pointed out that there are increasing limitations associated with available statistics for measuring trade. For example, digital platforms allow even cross-border sales of a wide range of services not previously considered tradable, or not associated with commercial transactions, and of digital goods such as electronic books, video games and downloadable films and music. Digital goods in some categories have almost entirely replaced their physical equivalents. In such cases, though physical cross-border trade may be declining, the decline is at least partly due to the rise in e-commerce, which available statistics do not precisely account for. Consequently, new methods for measuring digital trade in goods and services are needed.

2. The main difference between the TPP and this agreement is that the latter suspends application of 22 measures detailed in the former that mainly reflect US demands regarding intellectual property and investments that other participants did not approve.

In addition to a global conjuncture marked by a slowdown in global trade, developing countries – and specifically Latin American and Caribbean nations – are ever more dependent on external credit. This increases both the exposure of their economies to international liquidity cycles and their external vulnerability, which is reflected in rising financial globalization, or *financialization*.

There are various definitions of financialization. All of them have in common a focus on the increasing disjunction between the real economy and the financial sector, and on the growing – often dominant – role played by the financial sector, financial motives, and financial institutions and agents in relation to the real economy (see for example Sawyer, 2013; Epstein, 2005; Krippner, 2005; Palley, 2013). The divorce of finance and macroeconomics, alongside other factors, facilitated the emergence of financial systems that are at once extremely complex in terms of institutional structure and very fragile. At the same time, it served the dominant paradigm in economic theory as the empirical basis for justifying financial deregulation (since the financial sector and the real economy reflected distinctly different determinants), conferring greater strength on financialization.

Though financialization may not be a new phenomenon, what is new are the specific dimensions it has taken in both developed and developing countries, and its generalization among all agents and transactions of their economies, whether in the “real” or financial sectors.³ We may single out the following dimensions of financialization in particular.

In the first place, we are seeing higher growth in the financial sector relative to the real economy. This phenomenon is reflected in various indicators, such as the vertiginous spike in financial deepening on the global stage. In 1980, the worldwide sum of financial assets, including derivatives, was a little higher (+29 per cent) than the global GDP. In 1990, it was nearly three times higher, and by 2007 it was over ten times higher (291 per cent of global GDP).

This rise is due to average growth of the financial sector, between 1980 and 2007, of 8 per cent in developed countries and 9.5 per cent in developing ones – compared to real economic growth of 2.7 and 3.6 per cent respectively. In Latin America, average growth of the financial sector was 18.3 per cent, six times higher than real economic growth (3 per cent).

Echoing this first observation, a second mark of financialization is the rising proportion of financial sector revenues in total revenues. Between 1950

3. Minsky (1982), writing in the 1970s and 80s, assumed that financially unstable positions basically compromised the financial sector and, to a lesser extent, non-financial corporations. Households were not affected by the progressive movement towards financial instability. Today, high levels of debt among non-financial corporations and households in developed countries as well as some developing countries, including Latin American nations, are precisely a reflection of the current process of financialization.

and 2006, in the most developed countries this proportion rose from 2 to 8 per cent. In the case of the United Kingdom, the proportion of financial sector revenues increased from 5 to 8 per cent between 1970 and 2007.

Behind this rise in revenues is a higher rate of return for capital and labour factors in the financial sector. In the United Kingdom, this is shown by the fact that returns for financial companies leaped from 7 per cent during the 1921–61 period to over 20 per cent for the 1981–2007 period. Still, employment has also risen in the financial sector, along with the salaries of financial sector employees, relative to the rest of the economy (Bertocco, 2017). The same phenomenon has been observed in Latin America. These processes are very closely related to rising inequality in both the functional distribution of revenues – which, since the 1980s, have tended to increase profits rather than salaries – and in personal incomes, as witnessed in most countries again since the 1980s.

The increase in profitability in the financial sector has led companies to further orient their activities towards it. Indeed, it is clear that, for a certain group of companies in Latin America, those which are listed on the stock exchange use the international capital market as a means of refinancing to meet financial goals, more than as a mechanism for increasing levels of investment or productivity (Pérez-Caldentey, Favreau Negront and Méndez Lobos, 2018). Similarly, income derived from international debt issuance is held as cash flow, instead of being directed towards investment. The rise in profitability has been accompanied by higher debt for the non-financial corporate sector and for households.

Financialization has substantial macroeconomic effects. It entails greater financial fragility and instability and is an obstacle to long-term economic growth.

The trend towards financialization is not a consequence of distorted financial intermediation. It is much rather the consequence of free market forces. The essential characteristics of the financial system are its endogeneity, its growing capacity to generate liquidity and instruments, and its potential for permeating all other economic activities. In this sense, financial regulation is pivotal not only as a policy framework that dynamically adjusts regulatory parameters to bolster the financial system as desired in order to minimize systemic risk, but also as a means of boosting growth potential for activities in the real economy.

The technological dimension is also marked by major uncertainties concerning its development, as well as the effects it may have on traditional “analogue” or offline activities. Yet, in contrast to the macroeconomic reality, where uncertainty is the result of a decade of slow growth and doubts regarding the interpretive model on which policies are based, uncertainty in the digital arena is the result of its success. The pace of development and adoption of new technology has quickened, and its effects cut across both the economy and society.

The increase in processing, transfer and storage capacities has not been affected by problems impacting the creation of capital, growth and employment at an aggregate level. Acceleration of technological transformation is reflected, for example, in data flows, as measured by installed cross-border broadband capacity. The latter began growing exponentially in 2007, at a time when international flows of traded goods and services, direct foreign investment and financing were greatly fluctuating, especially following the global financial crisis (Manyika et al., 2016).

The speed of digital transformation may also be gauged by Internet access and mobile phone usage levels. In 2017, the worldwide footprint of these technologies had grown to five billion unique mobile phone service subscribers, 3.58 billion Internet users (48 per cent of the world population), and over 5.1 billion fixed and mobile broadband service subscribers, accounting for over 100 exabytes of Internet protocol traffic per month. At the same time, around 180 billion applications (roughly 26 per person on the planet) were downloaded. The spread of application use has accelerated, and it is increasingly difficult to predict which applications people will be using in, say, five years, and thus what skills and resources will be needed to maintain them (ITU and UNESCO, 2017).

Use of the most advanced technologies has also mushroomed. In under a decade, “technological packages” including access to cloud computing capacity and tools for digital analysis of big data were quickly and widely adopted by consumers and businesses (especially medium- and large-sized companies). And in less than two years, new fields for the application for robotics and artificial intelligence have opened up, which, though the fruit of decades of development, are now common topics of political discussion due to their potential impacts. Blockchain technology has created new industries and altered the systems through which goods and services are produced.⁴

The convergence of transfer, computational and storage capacities; their exponentially increasing power; steadily shrinking costs; and the intermeshing of digital technology with economic activities have spawned a period of technological disruption based on “smart” machines and objects and data analysis, and driven by global digital platforms undergirding sectoral activities (see figure 1).

These technological advances have greatly altered the business landscape, which is now marked by the consolidation of global digital platforms whose activities dominate the online world and are increasingly impacting the offline one. These worldwide platforms have developed over the last 15 years and mostly belong to companies from the United States (Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) and China (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent).

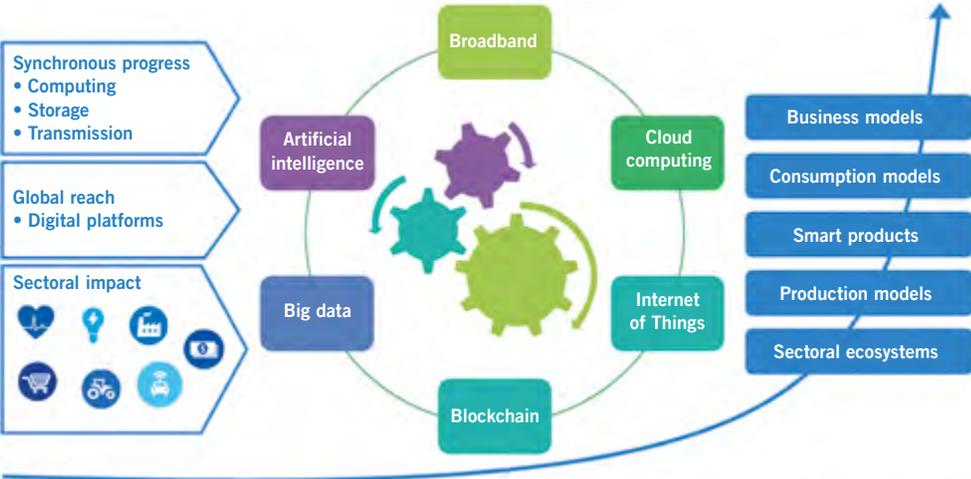
4. A blockchain is an encryption protocol that allows different users (computers) to validate and update transactions involving digital objects. Blockchain technology consists of a set of algorithms allowing cryptocurrencies (including the bitcoin) to be traded and electronically verified by a computer network, without recourse to a centralized ledger.

The new landscape demands government responses in regulatory (security, privacy, labour) and fiscal areas that are still not clearly defined. This increases global uncertainty because these platforms are the most active players in the areas of investment and provision of digital goods and services, although their practices may conflict with national norms.

The effects of digitalization are complex, but three in particular that are key to formulating policies should be highlighted. First, the expansion of digital technology is blurring the line between the production of goods and the production of services. The use of “smart connected products” has made it difficult to distinguish the costs and profits of physical production and use from those associated with the digital dimension. Second, the fact that the most technologically developed countries have barely registered any increase in productivity has brought Solow’s paradox (“You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics”) back into the debate. Specifically, definite conclusions have yet to be drawn regarding the effects of the digital platform economy on productivity. Among those aspects requiring further analysis, we may cite challenges of measurement, delays in implementation of these new technologies, and ways in which these technologies work together (McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2017).

The third factor is the most pertinent for political decisions and the well-being of workers, and is possibly the one associated with the greatest uncertainty. The impact of new technologies on the level and characteristics of employment demands political measures in many areas, including compensation for regions, sectors and workers that have suffered from the transformations under way; and the identification and anticipation of required new skills to revise academic curricula and professional training programmes accordingly.

Figure 1. Digital disruption



Source: ECLAC, 2018, p. 49.

Though assessments of the risks of substitution and technological transformation of human labour have yielded widely divergent results, the effects are in any case substantial, especially where there is slow growth in employment. Figuring prominently in this context are the challenges of adopting policies to address the risks of growing labour market polarization and segmentation.

Social challenges

Inequality in the distribution of income, and poverty

Globalization and booming economies in certain developing areas (especially in East Asia) have significantly narrowed income gaps between countries. However, globalization has not benefited all equally. Despite economic growth, in many countries inequality in income distribution grew between the early 1980s and the middle of the present decade (UNU-WIDER (WIID 3.4)). This inequality and its possible causes and impacts have stirred growing concerns about the concentration of income and wealth, and these issues occupy conspicuous positions in international debate.⁵ Noteworthy is Oxfam International's conclusion that the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is indeed increasing. It found that while in 2017 the wealth of 43 individuals equalled that of the poorest 3.8 billion, the same amount was in possession of only 26 multimillionaires in 2018 (Oxfam GB, 2019, p. 28).

Despite the flattening of inequality between nations, domestic inequality in the most developed regions is today at its highest in decades, and the Gini coefficient (the most widely used measure of inequality) is rising in nearly all regions of the world. In OECD Member States, the Gini coefficient hit 0.32 in 2014, its highest value since the 1980s, while in China it rose from 0.286 in the 1980s to 0.48 in 2012 (the last year for which data are available).

Data from the 2018 *World Inequality Report* (Alvaredo et al., 2018) show that globalization and the opening of markets has led to a significant increase in real income per capita. Nonetheless, global income levels have climbed at different speeds, leaving winners and losers.⁶ This analysis clearly

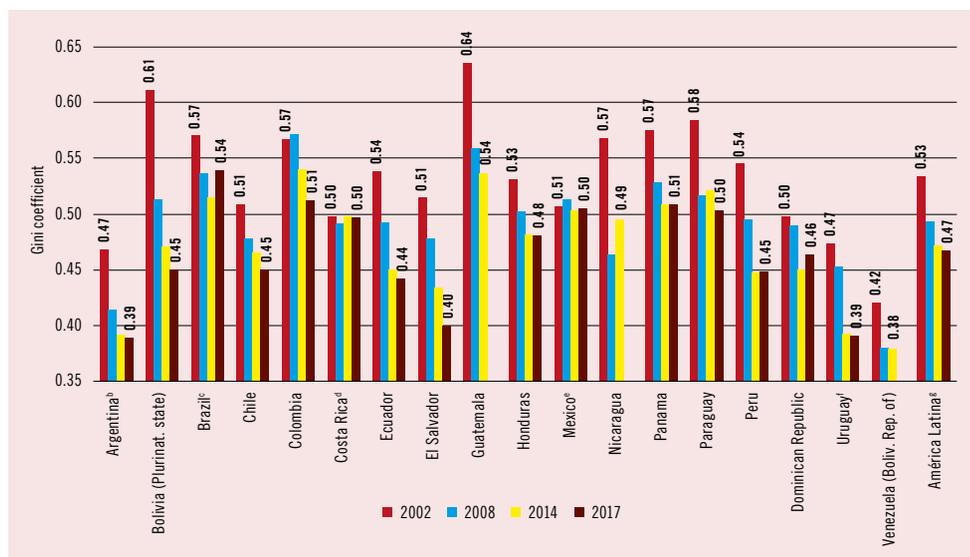
5. The annual number of publications in the fields of social science and economics that addressed inequality and social justice grew from just under 1,000 in 1991 to 6,000 in 2014. Economic researchers publish the greatest number of articles on inequality. The rate of publication of such articles began accelerating in 2007 and 2008 (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO, 2016).

6. The winners in terms of real per-capita income growth might be defined as those individuals with an average income roughly in the 20th and 60th percentiles – who are mostly in China or India, countries whose economies have grown at unprecedented rates over the last 30 years – or the 99th percentile, who make up the richest 1 per cent of the world population. Those left behind, relatively speaking, were people with average incomes between the 70th and 90th percentiles of the global distribution, who mostly belong to (old) middle classes in the most advanced countries, as well as the top percentiles (Alvaredo et al., 2018).

reveals the polarization of the fruits of globalization in favour of the wealthiest. The world's top 1 per cent amassed 27 per cent of the total wealth generated by income growth between 1980 and 2016, while 50 per cent of the lowest income bracket reaped only 12 per cent (Alvaredo et al., 2018).

The only exception to the global trend of rising inequality is the Latin American and Caribbean region, where, during the last decade, income disparity has been at its historically lowest level, even though inequality in the region is still the highest worldwide. Between 2002 and 2017, the average Gini coefficient for 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries fell significantly, from 0.53 to 0.47, although the rate of decrease began to slow starting in 2014. The reduction in income inequality during this period is associated with greater growth in income in the lowest end of the distribution, that is to say, the increase in income for the first quintile was relatively greater than that for the fifth quintile. This extra income mostly came from paid work – whether as a salaried employee or independent professional – accounting for 72 per cent of household incomes on average. Still, retirement payments and transfer payments for the poorest households (including payments associated with poverty reduction strategies) also contributed greatly to these figures (ECLAC, 2019). Poverty and extreme poverty rates fell significantly between 2002 and 2014, from 44.5 to 27.8 and from 11.2 to 7.8 per cent respectively. Yet by 2015 the averages for these rates had begun to rise, reaching 30.2 and 10.2 per cent respectively that year, as shown in figures 2 and 3 (ECLAC, 2019).

Figure 2. Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries): Gini coefficients,^a 2002–17



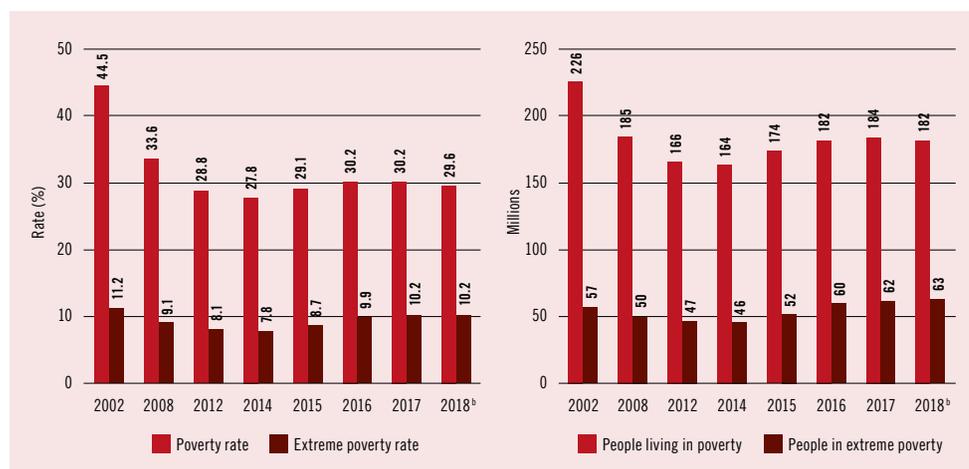
Notes: (a) To calculate the Gini coefficient, zero income was assumed; (b) Urban total; (c) 2017 figures not comparable with those for preceding years; (d) Figures from 2010 on are not comparable with those for preceding years; (e) 2016 figures estimated using the 2016 MCS-ENIGH continuity statistical model; (f) 2002 figures correspond to urban area; (g) For each country, average calculated using figures for closest year for which data were available.

Source: ECLAC, 2019.

Since the mid-2000s, functional income distribution has also improved in Latin America and the Caribbean: the proportion of total income attributed to the total wage bill rose in 8 out of 15 countries in the region (by 4 per cent on average), reversing the downward trend that had been observed since the 1970s (also observed in developed countries, though from considerably higher starting levels). Much of this change may be explained by what had been occurring in South American countries. By 2014, the average increase for the region had again retreated, though there was much variation between countries. Given the configuration of labour markets in the region, it is crucial to also account for income from unsalaried work, i.e. performed by independent contractors and employers. In doing so, the average proportion of total income attributed to work (salaried and unsalaried) is nearly 25 per cent higher than values traditionally published in national accounts (corresponding to salaried work). In spite of this progress, the region still lags far behind developed countries. The contribution of the total wage bill to GDP is 10 per cent lower than the average for OECD countries and nearly 17 per cent lower than that for G7 countries (2016 data), and the distribution across countries in the region is also much wider (ECLAC, 2019).

The encouraging figures recorded between 2002 and 2014 are linked to economic growth associated with rising prices of raw materials, expansion of fiscal space, and the adoption of countercyclical policies in various countries within the region in response to the 2008–09 crisis. Yet they cannot be explained without considering the political context. Various countries in the region were prioritizing, to an unprecedented degree, the reduction of

Figure 3. Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries):^a Poverty and extreme poverty rates, and number of people living in poverty and extreme poverty, 2012–18 (in percentages and millions of people respectively)



Notes: (a) Estimate for 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries; (b) 2018 figures are projections.

Source: ECLAC, 2019.

poverty and inequality and the promotion of social inclusion. Governments were also making greater commitments to implementing a programme of rights. In addition, active political measures were being taken in two spheres: social (income transfer policies benefiting impoverished families; more contributive and non-contributive social protection; greater access to education, health, housing and basic services; and affirmative action policies targeting groups and areas most subject to exclusion and discrimination, including women, people of African descent, and towns populated by indigenous communities) and labour (increasing the minimum wage; formalizing work; conferring greater job protection; combating child labour; and bolstering the institutional labour structure) (ECLAC, 2016b). Starting in 2015, fiscal space began to shrink and important labour indicators worsen: unemployment was on the rise and the labour formalization process various countries had been engaged in over the previous years was coming to a halt. In this context, the social safety nets that had been extended and reinforced in the region since the early 2000s have played a key role in containing erosion to income distributions and preventing further decreases in rates of poverty, extreme poverty and income inequality (ECLAC, 2019).

Population ageing and migration

Falling fertility rates and longer life spans have led to gradual ageing of the world's population. Changes in four major age brackets (youth, ≤ 19 years; young adults, 20–39 years; adults, 40–59 years; seniors, ≥ 60 years) illustrate this process.

Thirty years ago the world was clearly divided between young societies (where youth constitute the largest demographic group) in the southern hemisphere and young adult societies (where young adults constitute the largest group) in the northern hemisphere. Now the situation is more heterogeneous, due to the appearance of the first senior societies (where seniors predominate) in Japan and Sweden, and adult societies (where adults between 40 and 59 years of age make up the largest group) in Europe, Canada, and the Republic of Korea, as well as the development of young adult societies in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. This heterogeneity will characterize the SDG period: until 2030 population ageing will figure prominently in Europe and North America, and by 2060 most countries there will have senior populations. In Latin America and the Caribbean it is estimated that the number of seniors will exceed the number of youth under 15 years old for the first time ever in 2036, and will continue to grow until 2080 (UNDESA, 2017a).

The changing age structure has substantial effects on economic growth, consumption patterns and the sustainability of transfer systems. At an initial stage, to the extent that conditions for ensuring adequate demand for labour

prevail, the rising proportion of people of working age (20–64) tends to boost the economy. This is the “demographic dividend”. The transition from predominantly young to predominantly senior societies transforms the structure of demand and of the social and economic contributions of their populations. This necessitates redistribution of economic resources, so that the priorities of youth (education) are overshadowed by those of the older population (medical and other care, and retirement).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, in spite of heterogeneity between nations – some of which are much further along than others in the demographic transition (for detailed analysis of these trends, see ECLAC, 2016a and 2017) – the shrinking of the infant population reduces, to a certain extent, the demand for education and health-care services for mothers and infants, a large proportion being of working age (15–59), while seniors (76 million people in 2017) still account for a relatively moderate proportion of the population as a whole. The number of seniors will have tripled by 2060, reaching 266 million by the end of this century. In light of the situation, governments must take proactive measures to prevent the effects that a rapidly ageing population may have on health systems and social protection, and especially on retirement programmes (ECLAC, 2017).

Another characteristic is the increasing magnitude of international migration. In 2017, international migrants made up 3.4 per cent (about 258 million people) of the world population (UNDESA, 2016).⁷ Until 2010, there were approximately 30 million people from Latin America and the Caribbean living in countries they were not born in, which corresponds to about 5 per cent of the total population of the Latin American and Caribbean region (a decade earlier, there were 26 million people in this situation). This figure is now very likely higher, and might reach 38 million (UNDESA, 2017b).

In 2010, the foreign population living in Latin American and Caribbean countries totalled about 7.6 million, which is roughly a quarter of the number of emigrants and 1.3 per cent of the total population in the region.

As international migrants tend to be of working age, positive net migration can lower the senior dependency ratio (number of people ≥ 65 years old over number of people 15–64 years old, multiplied by 100), which is commonly used to evaluate the potential social and economic costs associated with population ageing. According to United Nations projections, from 2015 to 2050 this ratio will have increased by 71 per cent in developed regions. In the absence of migration, there would be an 87 per cent increase.

These trends make it clear that international migration is a subject of global interest and major political importance. When we also consider falling, sub-replacement fertility rates and consequent demographic ageing, concerns

7. International migrants are here defined as people born in a country other than their place of residence or who consider themselves foreign citizens.

about the future of the population acquire great importance. A major result of these demographic and migrational trends is increasing political preoccupation with excessively low fertility, excessively high immigration, and population ageing (Lee and Mason, 2014). This growing political apprehension is especially worrisome because it may increase xenophobia: faced with low fertility, nationalist groups associate national identity with birth on national soil and consider immigrants to be a threat.

The normative framework for international migration includes instruments related to the defence of human rights for migrants, rights of migrant labourers, and protection for refugees, as well as instruments designed to fight migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

In light of this situation, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration represents the first effort to comprehensively manage migrant flows on an international scale. Doubts expressed by a small group of UN Member States regarding adoption of the compact reflect growing pressure against multilateral proposals that is informed by nationalist positions. Nevertheless, the vast majority of nations support this initiative and plan new talks on governance of migration in the 21st century. On 19 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly approved the draft resolution, 152 voting for it, 5 against, and 12 abstaining. This is the first global agreement aimed at reaping the advantages of migration while reducing associated vulnerability.

Yet the institutional structures of most countries in the region are far from providing comprehensive responses to the needs and vulnerability of migrants at the different stages of the migration cycle. Policies developed through these structures must be able to guarantee rights and ensure basic levels of well-being, whether the nation in question is a country of transit, destination, origin, return, or a combination of any of these, as is the case for Mexico and the Northern Triangle of Central America (Maldonado Valera, Martínez Pizarro and Martínez, 2018; Sabates-Wheeler and Koettl, 2010).

The question of migration is destined to become a permanent focus of public programmes in countries around the world, and especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are not dealing with a transitory phenomenon or crisis requiring temporary or emergency measures. Faced with the interplay of traditional and emerging forms of discrimination – which are associated with xenophobia and racism, require deep understanding of inequality and the means of its perpetuation, and may concern gender, age, socio-economic level, or ethnic/racial identity (ECLAC, 2016a) – countries will be driven, in one way or another, to address the need for ensuring the inclusion, well-being and rights of migrants.

Challenges of the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy

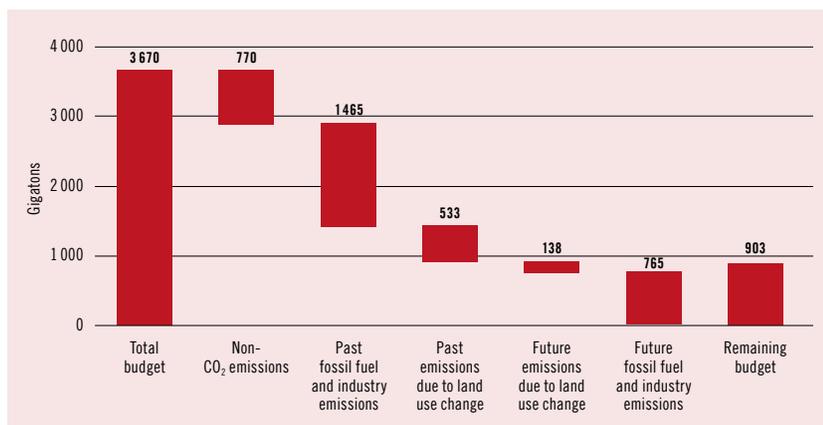
The last decades have seen the development of global environmental pressures through loss of biodiversity, chemical contamination of soil and water, damage to the ozone layer, and global warming. With recognition of the increasing deterioration of world natural heritage, the focus has shifted from traditional development to *sustainable* development. The concept of sustainable development was central to the formulation of the modern environment governance structure, which was formalized through agreements reached at the 1992 Earth Summit, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Agenda 21 action plan, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which sets forth 27 principles for governance. These would later be followed by the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The force of global environmental governance has been aimed at protecting not only society but also economies from threats to the resources sustaining them. The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda employ a comprehensive, integrated approach addressing the various fields of development from the perspective of sustainability.

Despite advances in the elaboration of environmental governance, progress towards more sustainable development has been slow, and scarce. Advancing regeneration of the ozone layer is a notable success. In other areas there has been little improvement or outright exacerbation of the situation: witness the collapse of fisheries, ocean pollution, mass extinction of species, deterioration of soils, and uncontrolled global warming.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) illustrates the problem of global environmental governance. The transition to a virtuous cycle depends in large part on honouring the Paris Agreement, approved in 2015, which recognizes a 2°C threshold to ensure climate security and asks parties to make the necessary effort to cap warming at 1.5°C. However, the planet has already warmed by over 1.0°C since 2015, and the carbon budget for limiting warming to 1.5°C is already being exceeded. What's more, at the current rate of emissions, only 20 years or so remain if we are to avoid crossing the 2° limit. Even if all nations achieve their objectives, there would still be an alarmingly big gap to close in order to limit warming to 2°C, as shown in figure 4 (see UNEP, 2017).

Latin American and Caribbean countries have still failed to make progress towards these goals. To be precise, they are moving further away from environmentally desirable outcomes: between 1990 and 2014, regional emissions rose 0.6 per cent annually. Regional per-capita emissions are 4.6 tonnes – almost equal to EU levels, except that Europe is narrowing

Figure 4. Carbon budget (cumulative carbon dioxide emissions, in gigatons)



Source: UNEP, 2017.

the gap between emissions and growth by -0.9 per cent annually. To hit the target of two tonnes per capita, there is a need for considerable extension and improvement of urban public services such as mass transit, waste management and public lighting; greater development of renewable energies (which today, on average, account for 24 per cent of energy on the grid); and conservation measures for the agricultural and forestry sectors. In addition, there are the challenges of adaptation for rising sea levels, water stress and changes in agriculture. In Latin America and the Caribbean, very unequal income distribution is an obstacle to meeting these goals: sectors with the highest incomes are responsible for disproportionately high emission volumes.

Technological deficiencies and weak production capacities slow change in the right direction. Better environmental management is beyond the reach of an economy with very low technological capacities and little human capital, which will always be inclined to sustain growth through intensive use of natural resources and reliance on cheap labour, the sources of its international competitiveness.

Shifting to a growth model that combines technical advances, their greater dissemination across social strata, equality and environmental sustainability requires development of the capacity for innovation that eliminates disparities between growth, well-being and emissions. In this regard, the region should seize opportunities, preferably in areas of high potential for sustainable development – which stimulate its economy, enhance social inclusion, and reduce its ecological footprint – such as production of renewable energy, transformation of public transportation and waste management systems, and bioeconomics.

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the link between human well-being and human rights, environmental quality, and peace. Given that no one should be left behind, adopting a rights-based perspective demands public policies

that reduce inequality in all its forms. In this regard, Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development is a central focus of the 2030 Agenda. Its effective application guarantees that the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals are taken into account by environmental governance, so that they may exercise their rights under egalitarian not discriminatory conditions. The use of our natural heritage, which includes reliance on the environmental capacity for absorption of pollutants, must likewise be the topic of an informed, democratic, participatory discussion. The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is the result of successful regional negotiations motivated by Principle 10, formalizes commitments and stands out as an example for the world.

Conclusions

The global economy is in a complex phase marked by restrained investment, productivity and trade, the main drivers of economic growth; greater debt; and the opacity of financial instruments. To these factors must be added greater uncertainty regarding new technological advances whose potential for enabling progress towards attainment of the SDGs stands in contrast to the present global business landscape, in which a handful of digital companies control a large part of the digital economy and are even having an increasingly large impact on the traditional “analogue” economy. Though the effect this will have on future employment figures is highly uncertain, the risks of segmentation, job insecurity, polarized labour markets and widening inequality between capital and labour, as well as between workers, pose clear challenges to public policy. Recently Latin America reached its lowest level of inequality ever, in terms of concentration of income, but the region still comes in last worldwide for equality.

These economic and social trends are compounded with political concerns about excessively low fertility rates, population ageing and migration. Finally, these last decades have witnessed the emergence of global environmental pressures from loss of biodiversity, soil and water contamination by chemical pollutants, ozone layer depletion and global warming.

These trends underscore the need to transform our development model. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are the expression of a new consensus recognizing the need for deep change nationally, regionally and worldwide. Latin America and the Caribbean must reduce structural heterogeneity in the area of production and advance in the definition and application of policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. In parallel, meeting the 2030 Agenda SDGs will require profound changes to means of implementation – and especially to the global commercial and financial structures – and to the conditions under which developed countries transfer

knowledge and technology to developing ones. This demands new global governance, and towards this end, given the current political conjuncture, it is necessary to defend and reinforce multilateral approaches amid the resurgence of political and economic nationalism.

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Women's future at work

*Gender and equality
in the Ghanaian informal economy*

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Studies on the future of work (FoW) predict bleak conditions for many workers despite the limited gains to specialized sections of the global workforce (Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018; Casey, Harvey and Hughes, 2018). Their observations are derived from the projected reduction in employment options associated with human-replacing technologies such as automation and digitalization associated with the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). The discourse, undertaken largely within the framework of capitalist standard employment relations, has been noted as ignoring production contexts where the largest proportion of the world's workers are located. As a result, this dominant framing of the FoW inadequately accounts for gendered labour markets and workplaces as well as highly informalized forms of employment.

Recently, a growing number of authors have called for a widening of the debates on 4IR and FoW to cover the reality of economies that are heavily informalized (Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018). The informal economy is where the majority of workers, and more so women in countries such as Ghana, are located and make their living (Britwum, 2017; Pillay, 2016; CSW, 2017). Again, informality is an outcome of the changing nature of work, and present trends suggest that it will feature significantly in the global labour market of the future (Ulrichs, 2016). As automation, digitalization and de-industrialization shrink jobs, the recourse to survivalist strategies that have been the hallmark of informal employment will enlarge. New entrants and those rendered unemployable from dwindling labour markets will continue to search for jobs.

In developing countries such as Ghana, the informal economy has always provided the needed response for people with no formal employment options. Patriarchal structures at places of work around the globe deepen gender inequality. Gender as a persistent form of inequality, therefore, sits firmly at the core of the future direction of jobs and is set to exacerbate the poor quality of women's experiences at work. Yet attempts to deal with missing points of the informal in the debate on the FoW often fail to connect adequately with the gendered dimension of informality in the world of work.

The concerns raised above point to the need for shifting the debates to focus on the realities of the world's working people. This article sets out to examine a selection of studies on the FoW to determine their core debate and the lessons they hold for explaining the shape of work in the informal economy and Ghanaian women's place within it. They include landmark publications on the subject by global and regional entities such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the UN Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) and the International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC). The article is structured in four parts, with the first setting the background for the discussion and outlining core discussions on the current drivers of the FoW as provided in selected reports. The second covers the shape of informal labour markets under the FoW, while the third charts the current nature of women's work and how the drivers of the FoW impact women's work in the informal economy; it also details how the

4IR and other drivers of the FoW interconnect with patriarchy to shape how women experience work in the informal economy. The fourth section examines the profile of Ghana's informal economy and what the implications are for the work of the future. This final section will attempt to provide lessons that can be used to direct the debate on informality in the work of the future for a gender-equal society. For it is only by addressing the way in which patriarchy structures the workplace that we can begin to effectively transform societies by harnessing the productive potential of the drivers of the FoW to benefit humanity, especially working women within the informal economy.

Discussing the work of the future

Occupying major world bodies and institutions such as the CSW, ILO, ITUC and WEF are concerns about production-altering technological, economic and social processes worldwide, changing existing occupations and creating new ones. Advancement in technology, or the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), is couched as consisting of significant breakthroughs in genetics, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology and 3D printing (CSW, 2017). In fact, many emerging new forms of work are related to the platform economy, such as app-mediated work and crowd-working websites. These technological advances are accompanied by demographic changes, where most countries in the world are expected to age while African nations remain youthful. Following on are the environmental crises confronting humanity. The new technologies of the 4IR, we are told, promise to increase productivity and job opportunities, and improve living standards, only for those favourably positioned (Holmes and Scott, 2016; ILO, 2019a; ITUC, 2017; WEF, 2016 and 2017).

As is usual with socio-economic events, the discourses surrounding the exact impact of the 4IR and accompanying demographic and environmental developments diverge between those who emphasize opportunities and those who predict the intensification of exploitative tendencies of global capital, deepening poverty and widening existing inequalities. On one side are those who foresee limitless new opportunities, and on the other, those who forecast massive job dislocation. Here we position, at the two ends of the debate, the WEF and ITUC, and in between them UNWomen (through the CSW) and the ILO's two reports. All agree that beneficial outcomes are not a given, without some form of positioning to realize opportunities. The problems most identify as worth paying attention to are the distribution of benefits accompanying the changes, and the requirements that individuals and nations need to bring on board in order to derive the benefits that the work of the future might bring. The various positions all agree that work will be a most contested arena.

The reports selected here note the potential of the 4IR and digitization to improve the performance of home, factory and farm-based activities. These

technological advances hold the solution to major challenges confronting humanity such as climate change, demographic alterations, unemployment and poverty. But much as the developments might offer the occasion to transform society for the better, an absence of dedicated attention to harnessing their combined impact will be negative for the vast majority of the global population, deepening existing inequalities and introducing new forms. The 4IR is corporate-driven, motivated by the expectation that technology will lead to a reduction in workforce and hence production cost by 2022 (ILO, 2019a). Thus the potential of the 4IR to ensure improved standards of living, reduce decent work deficits, narrow inequality and, more importantly for our purposes, ensure a gender-equal society will be lost unless concerted efforts are deployed to direct its goals (ibid.). The ITUC and CSW reports note that the direct beneficiaries, due to factors driving patterns of production relations, will remain the minority – the owners of global capital.

The reports under review highlight the threats that technological changes pose to the global workforce, noting their varying intensities for different regions around the globe – variations largely on account of population dynamics such as age and skills set, as well as levels of industrialization and technological uptake. The specific challenges identified are skills shortages in the face of massive unemployment and inequality, and uneven rates of technological penetration for countries and marginalized populations such as women. That globalization and its associated 4IR and digitization are accompanied by atypical jobs that do not submit easily to labour legislative control is an additional challenge captured in the reports.

Overall, it is perhaps the skills challenge that attracts most attention, especially as emerging jobs of the future are expected to intensify the use of digital technologies (WEF, 2017). This skills challenge is presented as the ability of “businesses, governments and individuals to anticipate and prepare for future skills requirements, job content ... to fully seize the opportunities presented ... and to mitigate undesirable outcomes” (p. 3). The WEF report goes on to introduce the term “skills stability” to assist in quantifying the extent to which existing skills will be disrupted within occupations, industry or households, and to focus attention on its resolution with both short- and long-term strategies. The concern for Africa is the adequacy of its available potential skills base, especially for use in high-end industry. The report notes that Africa, as a continent with the youngest population, is able to utilize only a little over half of its human resource potential. Predicting about a 66 per cent increase in the African labour force in the next decade and a half, the report notes that, qualitative increase in education notwithstanding, it is only a concerted skills development programme that can leverage the continent to benefit from its youthful human resource base.

The concerns of the CSW and ITUC expressed in their reports are directed at the unevenness in capacities for the current and future workforce to take up new occupational openings. They explain that this will only

aggravate existing class and gender inequalities, because the emerging jobs will displace labour force, especially lower-end skilled labour force areas where women dominate (ITUC, 2017; CSW, 2017). Existing curricula, some of the reports note, provide limited opportunities for upgrading digital, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in Africa – a situation worsened by the existence of structural barriers that hinder women's and other marginal groups' access to the skills acquisition needed to transition into high-end jobs. Skill sets for future jobs are yet to influence current educational training on offer in most African countries, a situation largely resulting from the uncertainty in the kinds of jobs that will be created in the coming decades.

The reports under review agree that the penetration of automation will be uneven for countries and enterprises. The ILO Global Commission's report, for example, quotes the view from McKinsey that only 5 per cent of existing jobs will be completely taken over by machines, and only 30 per cent of operations in 60 per cent of current jobs will be automated (ILO, 2019a, table 1). Countries in the global South, especially sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, continue to offer cheap labour, thus rendering automation uneconomical. The absence of infrastructure in some countries to support automation will deepen the costs of its introduction. Most automated alternatives for individual and domestic use remain out of reach for low-income households. Thus, the pace of automation in countries such as Ghana is predicted to be slow, raising questions about the total takeover of jobs by technology in the foreseeable future in countries such as Ghana.

Job opportunities in Africa are generally limited, a fact arising out of globalization rather than 4IR and digitization. Employment expansion in Africa's formal sector is unable to match the rate of growth in its labour force, leaving the vast majority of African workers in the informal economy. In fact, some of the reports under review note that the limited opportunities in the formal sector tend to be in small-sized firms that have inadequate investment capacity for skills expansion, whether for up- or re-skilling (WEF, 2017). According to the WEF report, the economic sectors set to provide jobs in the sub-Saharan African labour market are not restricted to those riding on technological transformation. The job-creating sectors identified are those associated with the hard economy of closing the African infrastructure deficit, such as road and transport; and in addition, the soft infrastructure of child and elder care as well as education and going green. The problem now becomes how African countries position themselves to benefit from the changes, especially in terms of skills acquisition strategies in their education sector.

The ITUC's report (2017) mentions findings from a global survey that indicate a general acceptance everywhere of new technology, with deep concern from most, however, about the security of existing jobs. The emerging occupations facilitated by digitization, for example, all bear the characteristic hallmarks of informality, no employment contracts, irregular working

schedules and absence of social security. Digitally-based enterprises, in particular, are noted to operate outside formalized procedures such as registration and tax compliance. Digital workers face new forms of insecurity derived from the irregularity and unpredictable nature of their work supply. The report notes how major deficits in the regulatory environment for ensuring decent work are occurring, together with dwindling income for workers (ITUC, 2017). These observations lead the CSW's report to characterize technologies with these negative impacts as disruptive. Such jobs diminish the bargaining power of workers, rendering them unable to demand their basic working rights and pushing them to assume the full costs associated with their production and reproduction.

The reports of the ILO and ITUC, while attesting to all the above concerns, insist however that addressing worsening working conditions accompanying the 4IR and globalization is a social justice requirement and the only basis for ensuring lasting global peace and stability. For the ILO, work serves material and economic as well as emotional purposes for individuals and communities, helping to forge social cohesion (ILO, 2019a). The ITUC, in its publication on the FoW, notes that its concern stems from the importance of labour to individuals, their immediate communities and the entire global economy. This fact is ignored by the present capitalist system, leading to trends that are undermining the right to and dignity of work, workers' shrinking incomes and rising corporate profits, and exacerbating global inequality (ITUC, 2017). This situation leads the ILO and ITUC to recommend the reining-in of global capital's power in the work of the future.

Informality and the work of the future

Since the Ghanaian-based anthropological study by Keith Hart as well as the Singer Jolly team's Kenyan report brought to policy-making and academic attention the survivalist activities of the urban poor in developing countries, the conceptual understanding of such economic activities and their social and economic impact has deepened (Chen, 2012). Several theoretical orientations have informed the conceptualization of the operations and specific employment activities covered. These varying definitions have directed policy. Earlier renderings, according to Hassmanns (2004), focused on production units or the informal sector. Later conceptions extended the debate from how people made a living to the conditions under which they worked, or the informal economy – thus shifting the debate from production to labour-based informality to bring attention to labour forms within the formal enterprises, and capturing in essence labour types in all economies from highly industrialized, transition and emerging, to developing economies (Britwum, 2017; Chen, 2012).

For the purposes of discussion in this article I use the term “informality” to refer to a range of employment forms that fall outside the application of existing labour legislation, whether waged or non-waged (Chen, 2012; Hassmanns, 2004). This ILO-based definition is in addition informed by the notion that informal work is an integral part of the mainstream economy. According to Gillespie (2017, p. 1), an important component of capitalism in the 21st century is the “expulsion of people whose labour is not required”. Gillespie would rather, dwelling on Marxist analysis of labour under capitalist labour relations, identify informal economy workers as surplus labour who are surplus to the “functioning of capitalism”, because dispossession and proletarianization, he contends, have not led to their absorption into the capitalist production process – a position, I maintain, is far from the reality. I assume, rather, in agreement with Inverardi-Ferri (2017) that such dualist separations, irrespective of their categorization either as non-formal or non-industrial or even as external to capitalism, tend to mask the conceptual and actual association of the informal with capitalist production. By situating informal work as part of the mainstream economy, it becomes possible to explain present developments in the formal economy and how it is increasingly beginning to assume the characteristics of the traditional informal economy. In fact, these features of informality, as Gallin explained, characterized work at the emergence of the capitalist mode of production (Gallin, 2011). Celebrated characteristics of the formal workplace used to differentiate the informal did not emerge automatically with capitalism; they are rather the outcomes of intense, often violent, workers’ struggles. Thus the informalizing trends that the FoW is assuming come as no surprise.

Predicted to decline in the 1950s and 60s, today the informal economy is expanding at an unprecedented pace and is set to grow even faster as drivers of the FoW intensify under corporate capture. Current labour market work forms show increasing levels of labour force insecurity, with extreme low wages as their hallmark (Britwum, 2016). According to Pillay (2016), the existing world of work is marked by the majority of the global workforce as either non-waged in the global South or waged in atypical work in the global North, such as part-time, casual, contract or outsourced work. The era of life-long secure employment in permanent jobs is effectively a thing of the past. A situation dubbed the “new world of work” in the global North, Pillay notes, has always been the norm in the global South, largely in agreement with Gallin (2011) that work informalization is a return to the original state at the dawn of capitalism.

Globalization, on whose back 4IR rides, is accompanied by the urge to reduce production costs through strategies such as de-industrialization, enterprise fragmentation and work flexibilization (ITUC, 2017) – either to decrease the human component of production, or place workers in spaces that cut out the commitment of employers to certain costs associated with the social reproduction of labour (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017). The *World*

Employment Social Outlook: Trends 2019 (ILO, 2019b) states that about 61 per cent of the global workforce is in informal employment. The causes for the expansion of informality include work deregulation, casualization, outsourcing and subcontracting which create “triangular employment relationships” (Holmes and Scott, 2016). Situations that separate the legal employer from those workers directly work for are present in the drivers of FoW. In some sectors and countries, the introduction of high-end technologies into some production chains has been accompanied by de-industrialization and a recourse to low levels of production (CSW, 2017). Examples can be found in plantation agriculture and mining, where enterprise expansion with the introduction of new technology is accompanied by labour retrenchment and the de-linking of certain enterprise tasks to contractors, outgrowers and smallholders who, mainly self-employed, rely on household labour (Britwum and Akorsu, 2017).

Automation, for example, is predicted to reduce core workforce, and digitalization serves to blur employment status to produce workers who, seemingly self-employed, are to all intents and purposes in employment relationships with app-regulating corporations. A case in point is Uber drivers and other app-mediated service delivery workers. But perhaps it is the implication for employment regulation that has been central to all discussions on these emerging economic activities. Most of the digital service providers that these activities of the platform economy ride on insist that they are not employers and therefore have no obligation for digital service workers’ legal entitlements. Such situations and others lead Hurrell (2015) to predict increased precariousness of modern employment, encouraging exploitation and uncertainty.

The reports acknowledge the fact that work formality is set to decline, and informality expand. The factors can be found in the fact that the main drivers of the FoW, as the WEF report states, are stimulants of informality. Technological advances are driving flexible work forms and, as mentioned earlier, the employers’ push is for automation to reduce the workforce and cut production costs (WEF, 2016). Disappearing jobs drive the displaced into self-employment. Coupled with flexible employment, there appears a situation of increasing atypical work forms marked by spatial and temporal impermanence (Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018). Thus, irregular and informal employment will characterize the labour market of the future, marked by increasingly insecure working conditions as female labour force participation expands, a situation that, for Ulrichs, “shows that informality is here to stay” (2016, p. 7).

Existing research expresses dissatisfaction with the absence of social protection coverage for informal workers. While this is of genuine concern it tends to deflect attention from the real issue, which is the trend that generates such working conditions. The problem is not the informal workers, but those who are benefiting from the low social security coverage, when its poverty reduction potential has been hailed in several spaces (Holmes and Scott, 2016).

Women and the labour market

The labour market, like all social institutions, reproduces the gender discrimination that persists globally. Some labour market trends, which show women's problematic labour force participation, include the female/male employment gap: women's overwhelming presence at the lower end of the labour market while simultaneous absence from certain occupational sectors and workplace decision-making (Holmes and Scott, 2016). Such gender-specific labour market constraints faced by women are, according to writers such as Holmes and Scott (2016) as well as Rubery (2013), derived from stereotypic constructions of femininity and masculinity, and universal prescriptions that assign women to reproductive or caring roles and men to productive functions following an established trend of female carer and male breadwinner (Holmes and Scott, 2016). Women, unlike men, therefore carry a care burden differentiated by the levels of social provisioning in their countries as well as locally operating social norms. These factors determine levels of social acceptance for women's work outside the home and the existing supporting systems set up to aid the successful combination of reproductive and productive work. Other stereotypes include the association of women with ritual impurity and their supposed lack of physical and intellectual capacity to undertake certain tasks (Holmes and Scott, 2016).

The fact of extreme differences in women's and men's labour market experiences has generated concerns from several angles. This situation attracted the attention of the ILO at its founding, leading to a set of strategies for addressing some of the principal barriers that women face in the world of work (ILO, 2019c). The ILO's motivation stemmed largely from its founding principle that rejects the consideration of labour as a commodity and its insistence that freedom and dignity, economic security and equal opportunity should be the conditions under which humans everywhere pursue economic activities (ILO, 2019a). Again, in 2017 UNWomen devoted its discussions at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women to women and work of the future, noting employment as a major requirement for women's empowerment (CSW, 2017).

The ILO's *World Employment Social Outlook* for 2019 and the 61st CSW report observe a slowing down of the reduction in the gap between women and men's global labour force participation. Variations in regional trends show a faster rise in female participation in low-income countries, more from necessity which pushes women into survivalist income-earning activities. The nature of women's labour force participation accounts for the widening pay gap with men. The ILO's Global Commission of the Future of Work (ILO, 2019a) reports that in 2018 women were paid 20 per cent less than men, a pay gap resulting from where they work and the conditions under which they work.

Some of the challenges posed by the drivers and trends directing the FoW reveal a gendered dimension. First, the drivers are accentuating existing

social and economic systemic structures that uphold labour market gender discrimination. Thus, the current technological and digital divide between women and men is set to widen unless specific interventions are planned to address it. Second, in so far as the socio-economic and political systems that push women into low-ranking and low-paying jobs prevail, technological advancement will continue to exclude them (Dicks, 2019). Market-driven technological advancement is highly exclusionary; the current economic orientation driving the FoW remains hostile to public leadership in technological advancement for the public good as distinct from the logic of profit (ITUC, 2017). This situation leaves those without means – both nations and individuals – out of the reach of whatever benefits such advances might hold (Dicks, 2019).

The ILO document dedicated to discussing women and work of the future (ILO, 2019c) focuses on existing barriers to women's employment and how changes in the world of work can offer reprieve. The CSW, holding a similar orientation, arrives at the conclusion that globalization-induced expansion in women's paid employment notwithstanding, women's jobs are still concentrated in the lowest-paying, decent-work-deficient jobs (CSW, 2017). The concerns of both these reports focus on the fact that gendered barriers to employment and women's work, both productive and reproductive, are set to be exacerbated in the work of the future.

Women, informality and the work of the future

I have noted above, in agreement with Gallin (2011), that work informality was the status quo at the dawn of capitalism, and formalization the result of workers' struggles. He traces the division between the formal and informal workplace to the male-dominated workers' organizations which have directed these struggles. Women workers have therefore faced a double struggle: one for recognition within the workers' movement and the other in the labour market as workers with unique interests – a situation that capital continuously exploits to its own advantage (Gallin, 2011).

Irrespective of the sector of operations, women's labour market challenges remain the same. Informal economy occupations are segregated by sex, with wage gaps as well as "unequal access to resources and social protection" (CSW, 2017, p. 11). Gendered earning patterns, according to Ulrichs (2016), mimic the formal with women earning less than men. The earnings gap in the informal economy is however higher than in the formal (CSW, 2017). Thus labour markets are gendered, and the factors that lead to gendered patterns of labour market participation, be they gender-specific or institutionalized patterns of social exclusion, are set to intensify in future places of work (Ulrichs, 2016). Far from implying that men will as a social group benefit from the future forms of work, the fallout will only intensify women's existing labour

market disadvantage. But perhaps its intensification for women, and measures to address it, constitute an effective way of harnessing the FoW for the benefit for working people rather than capital.

As noted in the ILO's *World Employment Social Outlook*, the female global rate of informality, even though lower than the male rate, is more intense in that women in low and lower-middle income countries are more likely to be in informal employment. In developing countries, micro and small enterprises tend to be owned by women. Again, women are "three times more likely than men to work as contributing family workers", a condition dictated by cultural prescriptions that assign men greater control over production resources, mainly land (ILO, 2019b, p. 13).

Women's overwhelming presence in the informal economy in Ghana and other countries of the global South rides on the back of colonial disruptions of production, mainly from subsistence and petty commodity production into extractive concerns such as mining and cash crop agriculture to feed its home-based industries. The colonial State created waged work for a predominantly male workforce in its administration, construction and extractive industries, either mining or commercial agriculture (Scully and Britwum, 2019). Women who accompanied men were forced to create their own income-earning activities in the urban enclaves created by colonial capital. The options were few, and relying on their ingenuity they fashioned out enterprises to service low-income earners. Since production activities in the colonies excluded the needs of local populations, the provision of services for the urban waged male workers offered women an occasion to make income to take care of their colonial/economic-induced cash needs (Roberts, 1982; Hymer, 1970; Scully and Britwum, 2019).

African rural transformation has been uneven. While some countries such as those of southern Africa experienced higher levels of transformation of peasant subsistence economies, in Ghana and elsewhere in West Africa, it was more of a process of drafting peasants into commodity production, a situation that left cash crop producers outside established formal labour regulations (Scully and Britwum, 2019). The military takeover and subsequent imposition of neoliberalism failed to sustain the transformative agenda of the nationalist government of Kwame Nkrumah, so that the expected demise of the informal economy failed to materialize. Independence rather saw a massive growth of the formal economy due in part to expansion in infrastructure and educational enrolment, as well as massive import substitution industrialization (Britwum, 2017). Expansion in Ghana's informal economy can be attributed to the same factors outlined by Reddy (2007), Cooke (2006) and Overton (2000): a change in the capitalist economic model emphasizing the superior power of private capital to rescue failing-state-dominated economies and the need to discipline labour in order to reduce production costs and make nations investment-friendly.

Informality and future work in Ghana

That Ghana's labour market is informal is an understatement. In fact, over 67 per cent of the labour force is located in the sectors known for their high levels of informality: trade and agriculture (Britwum, 2017). The latest figures drawn from the sixth round of Ghana's Living Standards Survey (GLSS 6) reveal that formal sector employment engages 12 per cent of the labour force, with the remaining 88 per cent in the informal economy. These statistics do not include informal employment in the formal sector (GSS, 2014).

The Ghanaian labour market is marked by increasing unemployment even during years when the country has recorded significant economic growth – a fact attributed to the levels of automation characterizing the high-growth sectors (mining, oil extraction and finance) with low labour absorption and a decline in high-capacity sectors (Baah-Boateng, 2013). Thus, despite the high increase in education, the capacity of the economy to absorb school-leavers from secondary and tertiary institutions keeps dwindling (Britwum, 2017). This rapid rate of rising educational background notwithstanding, the proportion of the labour force with skills for formal employment remains low, covering only about one quarter of the potential working population (Baah-Boateng, 2013).

The fact that automation is characterizing new growth sectors shows that the Ghanaian labour market is not impervious to automation. Neither has it been to digitization. Despite the scepticism of the reviewed reports on the potential of digitization, there has been tremendous digital uptake in Africa. For levels of infrastructure development, the rate of penetration is remarkable: Ghana stands as one of the countries where acceptance is on record as being high. Areas seeing high levels of uptake include mobile money transfers and communication between business partners, as well as transport ride-share enterprises such as Uber. With an estimated population of a little over 30 million persons, 10 million are Internet subscribers. The latest statistics on Ghana reported by the Internet World Stats (IWS) (2019) states that the 38 per cent digitization had increased by 37,902 per cent since the year 2000 when users stood at 30,000 persons. This increase has been facilitated by the use of smartphones. Sabutey (2017), commenting on smartphone and Internet use in Ghana, believes that digital technology is helping to facilitate not only social interactions but businesses as well. Quoting statistics from the Geo Poll he singles out Ghana as one of the five major markets in Africa, standing at 51 per cent Internet access via mobile phones as against 47 and 40 per cent in Nigeria and South Africa respectively.

In fact, from 2016 when the ride-hailing service Uber was launched in Ghana, it has expanded in use and attracted other competitors. Various Internet postings reveal the extent of uptake per population and service providers entering the Ghanaian market. Uber, for example, is having to contend with other competitors such as Taxify, with inDriver waiting to take

up its share of the Ghanaian market. The other dimension is how these companies are adapting to local situations looking to penetrate the private transport systems used by the majority of the travelling public: motorbikes and tricycles as well as minibuses. This is an indication of how mobile phone penetration is set to include informal income-earning activities, showing that the 4IR and digitization are not limited to formal enterprises. But the threat to existing operators has meant that their introduction to the scene has not been without problems. Although Uber and other ride-hailing systems have brought into the transport sector a new set of drivers, they also threaten the jobs of existing ones, especially taxi drivers. As Dahir (2017) notes for Ghana, there has been greater tolerance for Uber because of official protection. The transport sector, noted for high digital uptake that is facilitating new occupations, is however male-dominated.

Women in Ghana's labour market

The Ghanaian informal labour market mirrors the various gendered gaps in terms of wages and occupational segregation. Women tend to be in fewer employment sectors than men; most working men (over 80 per cent) can be found in seven employment sectors while the same percentage of women workers in just four (Britwum, 2017). Women dominate in the informal economy; about 91 per cent of working women in Ghana are in informal employment as against 81 per cent of working men (GSS, 2013). Women's share of formal employment is recorded as being on the decline (Baah-Boateng, 2013). There are rural urban variations: while rural women are more likely to be engaged as own-account or contributing family workers in agriculture, in Ghana's urban spaces women are more likely to be self-employed traders without employees (Anuwa-Amarh, 2015).

Working conditions generally carry high levels of decent work deficits for both males and females. Men tend to cluster in sections of the labour market that have better returns and face fewer vulnerabilities. Having better access to productive resources – especially land, credit and information – as well as alternative employable skills, men are spread through a wider range of industries than women and have higher earnings. The female average hourly earning reported in 2016 was GHS 0.50, lower than the male average which stood at GHS 0.61 (GSS, 2013). Women in the Ghanaian informal economy are likely to be traders (about 25 per cent of the female labour force) with the rest in manufacturing as processors of agricultural produce for the Ghanaian market providing food services and accommodation (GSS, 2014).

An additional constraint for women in the informal economy is the fact that working relations tend to be shaped by socio-cultural norms and practices, since the sector escapes formal regulation and legislative cover. Dispute resolution and employment relations, in general, are governed by the specific

cultural practices of the given community in which a particular vocation is practised. Studies have noted how such traditional norms can be paternalistic, giving owners of enterprises or productive resources (especially land) unquestionable authority over all who work for them. Paternalistic attitudes are even more complicated for women in marital unions (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016). Given that most adult women spend their lives in marriage, sometimes working in household enterprises, their working life is regulated by tradition and their entitlements located in traditional inheritance practices. This leaves the basis for rewarding household labour to the dictates of the household head. Recent legislation, such as on intestate succession (Law PNDCL 111) has attempted to shore up women's claims to self-acquired properties of husbands during the subsistence of marriage, but studies show that the effectiveness of this law is marred by ignorance and by lack of access to legal services for those who are aware of the law and want to access its provisions (Britwum, 2019; Minkah-Premo and Dwuona-Hammond, 2005).

The gender digital divide notwithstanding, Ghanaian women in the informal economy, especially traders, have made significant inroads in having access to mobile phones for information, connecting with clients, and making and receiving payments. Increasingly, women with secondary and tertiary education are also utilizing digital platforms for trading their wares, with marked results. Mobile banking and payment systems via mobile phones have seen high uptake by women in Ghana and are used generally by traders to facilitate information transmission on price movements as well as to make payments. Access remains uneven for women with low or no formal educational background, and for those based in rural areas whose access might be constrained by cultural norms that require husbands' permission and by lack of resources to acquire and maintain such devices. Studies in Ghana comparing women's uptake of agriculture interventions have observed the benefits of mobile phones in facilitating access to other agricultural resources. Women's use of mobile phones in some communities has been restricted by patriarchal norms (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016). Levels of penetration and potential to address some gendered barriers however require further study.

The question we are faced with is the form patriarchy will assume in the work of the future and what this will portend for women. Other questions relate to the nature and forms of work that drivers of the FoW will generate in Africa, and specifically in Ghana. We are aware that even capitalist penetration under colonial rule was uneven, leaving almost untouched the traditional economy when it was clear that it was capable of delivering extracted agricultural and mineral products to metropolitan capitals (Scully and Britwum, 2019).

I turn at this point to examine women as informal workers in the Ghanaian labour market in my attempt to distil possible implications of the future of work for them as part of the workforce. What are the implications for women's work of the future in the informal economies such as exist in

Ghana? As shown, the extent of automation is said to be minimal, and most of the sectors where women dominate in the informal economy are set to remain untouched by the 4IR, either because these sectors promise attractive economic returns directly, or the infrastructure cost for their adoption in Ghana remains high even where such automation has proven successful in other countries. A good example is local agro-processing.

Making work of the future responsive to female informal workers

The main issues, as Crystal Dicks (2019) explains in her paper *Feminist visions for the future of work*, is how to ensure that the future of work is the future for workers, especially women workers.¹ What are the hallmarks of women's employment and how are they set to change in the future? I have noted questions about where women work and how they work, both underscored by social and cultural conditions that bring with them gender structures that set women into the labour market disadvantaged. The degrees of their disadvantage, I contend, are marked by the economic conditions of their nations.

For the ILO, the main solution in redirecting current trends in the FoW is to shift from the profit ethos to putting the interests of people as the central driving force. The ILO Global Commission report shows that the organization's protective instruments and interventions targeting special workers such as women, children and those located in the informal economy have led to enhancing their working conditions. In line with this observation, the ILO is convinced that legal instruments and dedicated targeting can be used to address challenges identified in the FoW (ILO, 2019a). The ILO document dedicated to women workers by the Women at Work Centenary Initiative (ILO, 2019c) demands that gender equality be put at the core of women's labour force participation and expresses dissatisfaction with what gains have been made for women's labour rights compared with what is attainable (ILO, 2019c).

In terms of specific interventions, the Global Commission proposes a three-pillar agenda to put people at the centre of the FoW. The three-pronged corrective interventions proposed are: investments in the capabilities of people; institutions that secure desirable future work types; and legislation to spur the development of future jobs that will not compromise the environment and will secure greater benefits for working people everywhere

1. Prepared for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) international conference on "Feminist Visions for the Future of Work" involving experts from trade unions, social movements and progressive feminist academics from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The highlight of this and subsequent events was the feminist analysis on the impacts of the changing world of work from diverse perspectives. I am grateful to the FES Maputo office for the permission to quote from Dicks's paper in this article.

(ILO, 2019a). This agenda has a number of specific targets; here I single out for mention the target on the informal economy, which identifies formalization as the tool for dealing with informal work and ending poverty (ibid.). The Women at Work Centenary Initiative proposes four “mutually reinforcing paths” (ILO, 2019c). The first focuses on creating equal opportunities by targeting workplace discrimination, violence and work balance; the second targets the infrastructure for care and social protection; the third proposes strategies for assisting women through transitioning into the 4IR with requisite vocational and entrepreneurial skills; and the fourth looks to strategies that can bring women into decision-making.

The ITUC insists that corporate capital should take responsibility for all who work to provide them with their profit, whether directly employed or as contractors in supply chains, and demands that the State hold such corporations to account (ITUC, 2017). As a result, it points to the need to shift discussion away from new technology. The problem is a system which it contends has already failed working people. The only way secure and decent jobs can be ensured is by reining in the power of global corporations and the finance sector. Thus, the ITUC places the problem at the doorstep of capital and believes that action should be directed at that power base which is driving the work of the future. In establishing conditions for what it describes as “a just transition to the future of work”, the report structures demands around the economy such as wages, social protection, gender participation and pay gaps, tax avoidance, investments infrastructure, the care economy, and using technology to address climate change, as well as demanding greater state control over the regulation of digitalization through tripartite social dialogue (ITUC, 2017, p. 7). A second area is regulation, where the ITUC’s main concern derives from its Global Rights Indexes of 2016 and 2017 which note a systematic state capture by capital and a weakening of protective legislation coverage and enforcement. Recommendations here point to the need for governments to strengthen their ability to regulate and protect workers, especially in supply chains, to stand against conditions of modern slavery and reclassification of work – ensuring that corporations do not escape their responsibility to workers as the source of their capital by wrongly classifying them. The ITUC links these demands to decent wages, safe jobs, social protection and the right to collective bargaining – demands which on the surface point to formal workers (ITUC, 2019).

Just like the ITUC, the WEF points to the positive transformation that the 4IR can bring in terms of new jobs and bettering of existing ones. The realization of this potential, it cautions, is contingent on how the various players – governments, corporations, communities and individuals – position themselves to derive benefits. Thus the 4IR holds the promise of new and better jobs; in reaction to the impending socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic changes new forms of work will emerge to replace or alter existing jobs, requiring new skill sets and bringing profound alterations to how

and where work is performed. This emerging situation demands new management and regulations to protect labour.

Addressing the gendered dimensions of the work of the future will call for policies far removed from existing women-focused strategies, such as capacity-building interventions or micro-credit schemes. Such approaches, far from questioning mainstream societal structures, appear to position women as responsible for the existing patriarchal system that leads to their lower status. First, the main drivers of the FoW and what lies behind them must be continually questioned, particularly the capitalist “for profit” ethos, for it is herein where the intensification of precarity and insecurity lie. While labour and feminists as well as other social groups work to institute alternative forms of production, there is a need in the short term to look for measures that can reduce the negative gendered impact of the work of the future. Such measures will first have to target the discourses that place the primary responsibility for citizens’ welfare on the State and its institutions, and to point to corporate responsibility also. In addition, there will be the need to reposition social reproduction away from the household into the public space, with specific demands on capital to pick up costs. This will, for example, demand the devolution of public child and eldercare policies, with public provisioning of care institutions that all can access. Other policies would include universal provision of various forms of non-contributory social security schemes financed through taxes, with corporate capital making the largest contributions. Legislative reforms to labour instruments will also be needed that recognize own-account workers and those who are otherwise self-employed.

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The impact of trade and investment on labour standards in the MENA region

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Introduction

The world of work is changing at a faster pace than ever before. Major drivers such as globalization, technological innovation, demographic changes and climate change are affecting the organization of work and production on an unprecedented scale. In this context, trade and investment are among the biggest drivers of change. The International Labour Organization's Future of Work Initiative (ILO, 2019a) aims to find pathways to seize the opportunities these changes pose, to consolidate improvements in economic security and social justice. For this, a deeper insight is needed in how aspects of trade and investment are affecting economic, social and environmental development throughout the globe and how these are connected.

The main objective of this article is to:

- Assess how issues around trade and investment, such as technological change, trade liberalization, foreign investment and structural transformation, affect workers and working conditions (according to international labour standards) in developing countries, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.
- Reinforce the engagement of workers' organizations in the discussions on the future of work.
- Contribute recommendations on approaches to overcoming/managing these impacts and utilizing them for positive change in labour conditions.

The article assesses impacts of trade and investment in developing countries, while taking the MENA region as a case study. This is achieved through extensive desk research with all relevant literature, documents and statistics for global, regional and country level data.

Impacts

This section explores how dynamics in trade and investment impact jobs and working conditions in developing countries, especially the MENA region. These dynamics provide important drivers of change and are of importance for economic growth and the job creation that ensues – but the quality of these new jobs needs to be examined.

Trade liberalization

The increase in industrial jobs in lower-middle income countries may stem from the interplay of open trade and rising incomes, which generates more demand for goods, services and technology. This also increases the demand

for industrial products and therefore the demand for labour in the industrial sector. In many countries, the falling costs of connectivity are leading to global value chains with more capital-intensive exports from advanced economies and more labour-intensive exports from emerging economies, which reduces wages in the latter and increases wages in the former. However, this is not the case everywhere; there are some main structural differences between developing countries.

Recent studies have proved that a shift from agriculture into modern economic activities, where overall productivity is expected to rise and incomes to expand, has typically been growth-reducing, especially in those countries with a relatively large share of natural resources in exports such as sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser degree, South America. This of course contradicts some of the most central insights of the classical literature on economic development, which is based on the assumption that development necessarily entails structural change and consequently enhances productivity. Even though these economies have experienced structural change during this period, switching from manufacturing to service industries, this has made little difference to productivity overall (McMillan and Rodrik, 2011).

In addition to these endogenous structural differences between developing countries, the impact of liberalization is complex also because of variations in protection across sectors, preferential agreements, and the imperfect mobility of factors. In particular, if trade liberalization reduces protection in a labour-intensive sector such as agriculture, agricultural labour demand could decline (Minot et al., 2010). In the case of the CEPA free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union and Indonesia, CSOs were expecting a deterioration in Indonesian legislation and international standards regarding labour rights, health care and the environment, specifically due to the issues related to palm oil, which according to the CSOs should not be solved within the parameters of FTAs (CNV Internationaal, 2018). The circumstances in which it can be confidently be predicted that human rights violations are likely to flow directly from a trade agreement are very few (Zerk, 2019). Even for other possible adverse impacts that might be predicted (which may lead to a deterioration in the ability of people to enjoy their human rights over time), the facts, contingencies and causal links between them will in many cases be too unclear at the time of negotiation of the agreement to allow for a detailed and bespoke set of safeguards to be written into the text of the agreement itself, which makes due diligence and human rights impact assessment all the more pertinent.

More open markets in goods and services can contribute to creating jobs and increasing incomes. Where there is significant involuntary unemployment, reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers can help in the short run by reducing costs of imported products for consumers and by providing new market opportunities for exporters (OECD, 2011). Generally, World Trade Organization (WTO) membership is found to negatively affect the

exports of MENA countries, while free trade agreements have a positive impact on them (Cestepe, Yildirim and Bahtiyar, 2015). However, while globalization helps in opening new markets and generating new jobs, many of these jobs are fragile, and the new outlets are not accessible to small and marginalized producers (ANDD, 2016). Therefore, this indicates the necessity for trade unions to be involved during FTA negotiations because of the significant impact of these agreements on their members. For example, Jordan underwent extensive fiscal and monetary policy changes in the 1990s aimed at trade liberalization. Though the policies implemented concerned each and every aspect of the national economy, Jordan's overall economic performance in the second half of that decade did not meet the hopes and expectations tied to the reforms. In fact, such reforms seemingly disregarded a number of socio-economic factors, namely those related to the costs of dislocation – higher cost of living, poverty and unemployment. The structural economic policies that were implemented brought employment in the public sector – which had previously welcomed the bulk of the unqualified workforce – to a standstill. Ultimately, the privatization process vastly reduced the number of employment opportunities available to the poor, as trade liberalization and FTAs led to the inability of some local labour-intensive productive sectors to compete with the reduced costs of imported products, which in turn weakened the ability of the Jordanian economy to generate new job opportunities in these sectors, which contributed to the increase in unemployment.

The influence of IMF measures

Studies of trade liberalization suggest that most of the benefits to a given country from trade liberalization are the result of reforms within the country (Minot et al., 2010). However, research indicates that labour market policy measures mandated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) significantly reduce both individual and collective labour rights. IMF conditionality frequently includes measures requiring countries to reform labour market policies to be more flexible, and these policy conditions effectively reduce labour rights. For example, in Jordan the recent amendments to the Labour Law have increased restrictions on trade union formation, and the minimum wage has not been reviewed since March 2017. In particular, non-unionized labour has the most to lose when their government borrows from the IMF, regardless of whether or not an IMF programme includes labour conditionality. As mentioned earlier, unionization is weak in the MENA region so this aspect of financing poses a challenge.

For example, in Jordan available data indicate that the IMF's pressure on the Jordanian Government to pass an unfair income tax bill would threaten the political and social stability of Jordan, weaken the country's political life

at all levels and hinder the ongoing process of democratization. These pressures are prompting citizens to take to the streets on a regular basis with many protesters demanding an end to IMF interference in Jordan's political and economic affairs (Awad, 2018).

In Lebanon the IMF, in its quest to guide the Lebanese authorities on preserving macro-financial stability and debt reduction, calls for reforming the electricity sector and public sector in general as well as reforming private and public sector pension systems. These two sets of recommendations would highly weaken both informal and formal social protection systems in Lebanon, increase unemployment and reinforce vulnerabilities, and could not be seen as reinforcing the already flawed social safety nets programmes. Essentially, the IMF proposes to reallocate funds from one form of social spending to another without approaching the shares of profit, thus placing its costs on labour (Abdo, 2018).

In its *2018 Regional Economic Outlook*, the IMF admits that its previous policies and recommendations to the MENA region's countries were not effective and that inequality is increasing in the region. The IMF's new policy recommendations focus on inclusive growth, promoted by two channels: fiscal policy and private investment. It is worth mentioning that the IMF imposed a currency flotation in Egypt and Morocco, which turned out to be not effective, harmful to the economy, socially unjust, and also contradicted their own recommendations on fiscal policy (ANDD, 2019).

Foreign investment

A 2015 ILO report found that the number of trade agreements that include labour provisions has increased significantly over the past two decades, and this trend has influenced labour standards positively (ILO, 2015, rev. ed.). However, generally the influence of business and foreign investors, including the Foreign Investors Council and American Chamber of Commerce, in the adoption of regressive changes to labour laws continues to increase. In 2018, in many countries tripartite social dialogue has been undercut and workers' rights severely undermined (ITUC, 2018).

The international financial institutions (IFI) are large players in this field in the MENA region. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is in its own words aimed at actively developing open and sustainable market economies in six MENA countries, with a focus on making their economies more competitive and resilient (EBRD, 2019). For example, in 2018 the EBRD announced a US\$3.3 billion multi-year investment programme in infrastructure projects in multiple sectors in Jordan (*Daily Star*, 2018). Similarly, the European Investment Bank's (EIB) umbrella programme FEMIP in the MENA region is aimed at supporting the private sector and creating an investment-friendly environment, with a total

of €1.585 billion in loans signed for 16 operations up to 2016 (EIB, 2019). These investments in the form of loans result in some MENA countries having substantial debt burdens. For example, in Jordan the public debt reached US\$39.9 billion in December 2018, accounting for 94 per cent of GDP (Middle East Monitor, 2019), which the IMF has demanded be cut.

For workers in developing countries, the relatively higher-waged jobs created by foreign investments may lead to better living standards, but to do so, it is necessary that investors respect human rights, rather than focus only on profits. For example, a case study in Uganda found general disregard for human rights and workers' rights in foreign investors' projects (Deniva, 2008). In its 2003 report, the Uganda Human Rights Commission concluded that successive governments "have sacrificed the rights of workers in favour of foreign investment and the liberal economy" (p. 129). Well-managed investments, observant of human rights, are more likely to contribute significantly to a country's economic development (Deniva, 2008). For example, where economies are highly dependent on a single commodity or sector, foreign investment can enhance resilience by supporting economic diversification (MENA–OECD, 2018). Reducing barriers to foreign direct investment (FDI) in services is found to particularly increase demand for higher-skilled labour, while the offshoring of services is not found to shift jobs abroad (OECD, 2011). But FDI is not necessarily conducive to job creation, productivity growth and skills development. For example, in Egypt the sectors that account for the largest amounts of FDI, real estate and oil and gas, generate relatively limited long-term local employment beyond the initial construction boom. Moreover, they are not tightly integrated into global production chains, and therefore do little to support the technological and skills upgrading of Egyptian workers and companies (MENA–OECD, 2018).

Thus, the impact of FDI on the economy is ambiguous. Countries should be careful regarding this issue and design the proper policies and regulations so that FDI can achieve the expected benefits needed (ANDD, 2019). For this, numerous international human rights standards have been established which provide governments with the framework to regulate and assess FDI. These include amongst others the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (2017) and the United Nation's basic Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011).

Technological change

Thanks to a greater integration with the world economy and to the fast pace of technological change, the environment in which the enterprises and companies of developing countries create and use technology has become much more complex. To cope with these challenges, it is increasingly important

for enterprises to build internal technological capabilities, to monitor, assess and forecast technology trends and be part of global networks (Siddharthan and Rajan, 2002).

In recent years more attention has been paid by economists to aspects such as technological education and change. A relevant vehicle of transmission of technological know-how is related to FDI; in fact, while capital accumulation and movement seems to have become the least important ingredient of FDI, technology and managerial talent have become the key ingredient (Redor and Saadi, 2011).

Due to all the factors described above, technological developments are reshaping the skills needed for work in developing countries, regardless of what level of innovation is endogenous and what is, on the contrary, imported. Therefore, due to the influx of new technologies, the demand for less advanced skills that can be replaced by automation is declining. Both low- and medium-skilled jobs will be at risk of automation in the coming years and decades, and negative effects will be evident in all occupations except for managerial positions and those jobs that require a high level of education and an advanced set of skills. Not surprisingly, large decreases will affect especially blue-collar jobs that have routine manual operations, such as assembly workers, machinists and transportation workers. The negative impacts will diminish as the workers' education levels increase, and almost no impact will exist for workers with graduate degrees (Works, 2017). At the same time, the demand for advanced cognitive skills, socio-behavioural skills, and skill combinations associated with greater adaptability is rising. Already evident in developed countries, this pattern is starting to emerge in some developing countries as well. These changes show up not just through new jobs replacing old jobs, but also through the changing skills profiles of existing jobs and the creation of new jobs.

Technology is blurring the boundaries of the company, as evident in the rise of digital labour platforms. Using digital technologies, entrepreneurs are creating global platform-based businesses that differ from the traditional production process. Digital platforms create instant business opportunities for entrepreneurs, thereby expanding job opportunities in the service sector. In 2018 the service sector accounted for most jobs in several countries: its share of total employment was more than 70 per cent in Saudi Arabia and above 80 per cent in Jordan. The proliferation of platforms is allowing freelancers to have simultaneous access to multiple platforms at low entry costs. However, these developments also have as consequence that the informal employment sector expands. Moreover, due to the nature of the digital platforms, workers in this economy are often subject to lower wages and lack of social security (Berg et al., 2018). This is most prevalent in the microtask platforms or the gig economy in general, where employers often seek to hire workers as "independent contractors" who are not entitled to any of the benefits available to a regular employee (*ibid.*).

Informal labour

Informality worldwide has remained remarkably stable notwithstanding economic growth or the changing nature of work. In upper-middle income countries such as in the MENA region, on average 46 per cent of workers have informal jobs. In Morocco, only one out of five workers is in the formal sector. The evidence reveals that there are many different drivers of informality, including the inability of the economy to create enough formal jobs, weak enforcement systems, lack of transparency and accountability of public institutions, and low productivity as well as lack of worker voice and representation. The common view that informal labour results from excessive regulation and bureaucracy, which creates incentives for economic activity to operate outside the purview of regulations, has been disproven in numerous studies (ANDD, 2016).

According to the conventional view on the matter, trade liberalization also causes a rise in informality. Trade liberalization is generally perceived as a force of greater competition for domestic producers and is generally expected to lead to a rise in informality. Developing countries expose themselves to this risky scenario by signing free trade agreements which do not protect their domestic market in their best interests. What normally happens in this case is that local firms shed formal workers in order to cut costs and therefore survive the external competitors (Fugazza and Fiess, 2010).

The 2016 report from the Arab Watch on Economic and Social Rights (ANDD, 2016) on informal employment identifies some main causes of the expansion of informal labour outside the agricultural sector in the MENA region. Against the background of “openness” and neoliberal policies which began in the 1970s, some significant phenomena contributed to very high growth rates of the urban labour force while overall population growth rates were declining. These include a youth wave due to baby-boom generations entering the labour market, and large labour and asylum migration. The unrest that followed the Arab Spring and wars have exacerbated informality in recent years as well.

Some platforms expand the supply of labour by increasing opportunities for new, flexible types of work that complement traditional forms of employment. The flexibility inherent in platform work also enables more women to participate in the labour force. But these features blur the line between formal and casual employment. Although flexibility is a benefit in some cases, it also raises concerns around income instability and protections connected with standard employer–employee relationships, including pension plans, health insurance and paid leave.

Creating formal jobs is the best policy, consistent with the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda, to seize the benefits of technological change. In many developing countries, most workers remain in low-productivity employment, often in the informal sector with little access to technology. Lack of quality

private sector jobs leaves talented young people with few pathways to wage employment. Highly skilled university graduates currently make up almost 30 per cent of the unemployed pool of labour in the MENA region. Better adult learning opportunities enable those who have left school to reskill according to changing labour market demands (World Bank, 2019).

In developing countries, where there is high informality, unions and collective bargaining tend to face many obstacles in strengthening their presence and expanding their influence, especially due to the growing importance of the informal economy sector. Changes in legal frameworks, together with changes in the organization of work and the persistence of informal employment, make it harder for workers to organize and represent their collective interests (ILO, 2019). Except in Tunisia, unionization rates are low in the MENA region – Palestine 28.4 per cent, Jordan 34 per cent, Tunisia 53 per cent and Egypt 16 per cent in official unions and 8 per cent in independent unions (Slaiby, 2018), taking into account that in some unions the high rate of membership is due to automatic affiliation of workers rather than actual choice.

ILO research suggests while some workers may benefit from more dynamic labour markets, others face greater insecurity of employment and income, or have increased difficulties in reconciling work with family and other personal responsibilities (ILO, 2018).

Opportunities

This section explores ways to manage the impacts analysed in the previous section and identifies different approaches to strengthening labour conditions through utilizing the identified changes and impacts. Overall, investing in human capital is the priority to make the most of the opportunities provided by the economic changes.

Areas of opportunity

Informal labour

There are many different drivers of informality, including the inability of the economy to create enough formal jobs, weak enforcement systems, lack of transparency and accountability of public institutions, low productivity, and lack of worker voice and representation. To counter informality, institutions of work, which include laws, regulations, employment contracts, employers' and workers' organizations, collective agreements and labour administration and inspection systems, need to be strengthened. They forge pathways to formalization, reduce working poverty and secure a future of work with dignity, economic security and equality (ILO, 2019a). The role of the main

stakeholders is discussed in the next section, while this section focuses on the implications of informality for social security and labour rights and on the opportunities that are available in such areas.

Adequate minimum wages. Well-designed labour market institutions are useful tools for labour protection. Adequate minimum wages,¹ for example, remain a useful instrument of labour protection and ensure that workers are paid at least a minimally decent living wage (ILO, 2018). In principle, adequate minimum wages should offer adequate protection to all workers in an employment relationship, regardless of their contractual arrangements. Exclusions should be minimum, particularly with reference to vulnerable categories of workers. However, even in advanced economies, the payroll-based insurance model is increasingly challenged by working arrangements outside standard employment contracts. According to the ILO's recently adopted Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), minimum wage protections should also be progressively extended to informal workers. Therefore, minimum wages should also apply to workers engaged in the informal labour market and in non-standard forms of employment, including workers on fixed-term contracts or other models of temporary work such as temporary agency work or other contractual arrangements involving multiple parties, as well as part-time work.

Social insurance. Generally, individual savings mechanisms such as unemployment savings accounts have historically not led to expected results, as adequate levels of protection are achieved only for those with the lowest risks of unemployment while those who are most exposed to the risks are left behind – particularly women with non-linear working lives and disadvantaged workers, who are not in a position to build up sufficient savings to ensure adequate levels of protection (ILO, 2018). Thus, collectively financed mechanisms have to be provided for, with a social protection floor complemented by schemes that provide an adequate level of protection to large groups of the population, including the middle classes.

This is usually achieved through social insurance schemes. Evidence also shows that it is possible to implement successful extension of social protection coverage in middle- and low-income countries with high levels of informality, such as Algeria, Jordan and Morocco, including significant innovations in extending this coverage to those in the informal economy and facilitating their transition to the formal economy (*ibid.*).

1. As per the definition contained in the ILO Centenary Declaration, 21 June 2019 (ILO, 2019b).

Life-long learning

Companies have the greatest incentive to invest in their workers when those workers remain with them over a long period of time. However, the identified trend towards greater demand for advanced cognitive skills and greater adaptability of workers to fit the changing skills profiles of existing jobs and creation of new jobs is at odds with the second trend of growing numbers of workers in the platform economy and workers who switch companies often.

As workers' possibilities of developing their abilities and skills are crucial in order for them to maintain their position in the labour market, the ILO suggests that life-long learning (LLL) is a way to counter the effects of a more volatile labour market where fewer employees stay with the same company for a lifetime. Trade unions have been faced globally with unprecedented challenges caused by changing economic, social and cultural circumstances that have led them to review their methods of working and the range of services which they offer. Bargaining on behalf of groups of employees and offering legal and personal support to members in dispute with their employer are not sufficient strategies to ensure the respect of workers' rights in today's complex labour market. In this light, it has been argued that life-long learning can be seen as a way of seeking to achieve trade union objectives (Payne, 2001). For example, in Denmark, as well as in many other European countries, trade unions are very important players in connecting Danish workers with continuous and supplementary training and LLL opportunities (Vind et al., 2004).

In the specific case of the MENA region, investing in trade unions' involvement in promoting and facilitating life-long learning can be part of the Power Resources Approach, through strengthening the structural power of wage-earners as well as the societal power of trade unions.

Suggestions for stakeholders

The role of unions

The collective representation of workers and employers through social dialogue is a public good that lies at the heart of democracy. It should be encouraged and promoted through public policies. By broadening and localizing decision-making, collective representation improves the quality and legitimacy of decisions and strengthens commitment to their implementation. This in turn strengthens the adaptability, agility and resilience of companies, labour markets and economies. Collective representation and social dialogue provide the institutional capabilities needed to navigate future of work transitions (ILO, 2019a). Collective bargaining is a fundamental right and a powerful tool for economic success and social equity, not least in times of transformational change. The 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work states four principles and rights, which include freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective

bargaining. All workers and employers must enjoy these two rights, with the State as the guarantor of these rights. Workers' organizations must strengthen their representative legitimacy through innovative organizing techniques that reach those who are engaged in the platform economy and informal sectors, including through the use of technology, for example through establishing an (inter)national governance system for digital labour platforms to require platforms (and their clients) to respect certain minimum rights and protections. Workers' organizations must aim to use their convening power to bring diverse interests to the table (ILO, 2019a).

Improvements in the situation of informal workers cannot be achieved without a mobilization of such workers and campaigning for collective bargaining with employers and governments. One of the main issues in the MENA countries is that the unions inherited from previous eras are mostly composed of formal workers, most of whom work in the public sector (ANDD, 2016). The role of workers' organizations in countering the adverse effects of informality can be supported through, for example, adopting innovative organizing techniques – including the use of digital technology to organize labour. Workers across diverse workplaces and countries can be organized through digital means and engage in new forms of connected action. Digital technology provides workers' organizations with the potential to connect with workers outside traditional workplaces, such as self-employed women in the informal economy, rural workers or workers on digital labour platforms. Workers in the informal economy have often improved their situation through organizing, working together with cooperatives and community-based organizations. Workers' organizations must adopt inclusive organizing strategies, expanding membership to informal workers. This is both a pathway to formalization and a tool for inclusion.

However, as mentioned earlier, unionization is generally weak in the MENA region. In the region, workers' organizations such as trade unions face difficulties dealing either with globalization or with local factors. These difficulties arise especially in connection with membership, freedom of association, and effectiveness in defending their rights and asserting their demands. Many governments in the MENA region impose restrictions on the freedom of association. In Jordan, the establishment of workers' organizations is controlled by the Labour Law, which prohibits the establishment of new trade unions, even though the Constitution provides for this and Jordan has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Jordan Labor Watch, 2019). In the Gulf countries, the vast majority of workers, namely migrant workers, are still excluded from labour laws under the *kafala* system (ITUC, 2018). The situation for workers' rights in Egypt has deteriorated to such an extent that it was labelled one of the world's worst countries for workers in 2018 by the ITUC (ibid.), as state repression against independent trade unions intensified with crackdowns on peaceful strikes and arbitrary arrests of union leaders.

A recent study on trade unions in the MENA Region (Slaiby, 2018) identifies the potential for their strengthening and revitalization through the power resources approach, which is founded on the basic premise that the workforce can successfully defend its interests by collective mobilization of power resources.

The power resources approach considers the possibility for trade unions to use four different kind of power resources, separately or jointly: associational power (arising from workers' unity to form trade union workers' associations), structural power (referring to the position of wage-earners in the economic system), institutional power (institutions arising from struggles and negotiation, based on structural and associational power) and societal power (arising from cooperation with other social groups, as well as society's support for trade union demands). For example, in Jordan, the majority of recent labour protests (from 2011 to 2018) were carried out by workers who are not organized by unions, or by workers who went outside their union frameworks and replaced these with self-organized bodies to defend their interests and demands. This is an indication of the weakness or the absence of channels for dialogue and negotiation between various classes of workers with management and with employers, which has fuelled an increase in protests (Jordan Labor Watch, 2019). This indicates a large potential and urgent need for revitalizing unions to increase associational power and through that, the other powers. However, this wider problem has to be addressed through cooperation among trade unions and other actors, keeping in mind that "revitalization" – in contrast to "development" – has to be a more "deliberate, organized and conscious effort", requiring changes in energy and attitudes in addition to knowledge (Slaiby, 2018).

In addition to what has been mentioned above, there is another key function of trade unions which is very often underused, due to the inherent weakness that characterizes them within the MENA region. The number of bilateral and regional trade agreements, which have a substantial impact on national economies, employment, gender and development, has increased enormously over the last decades. However, at the same time, the involvement of trade unions through monitoring, consultation and engagement in these free trade agreements is often lacking. Because of their ability to bring diverse interests to the table, strengthening trade unions would be a key step towards ensuring more negotiating power in FTAs and could be one of the most effective mechanisms for ensuring the adoption of international labour standards (ILS).

For example, an FTA was signed in 2000 between Jordan and the United States which includes provisions on enforcement of domestic labour legislation in the body of the agreement. The agreement also guarantees the respect of core labour standards, with specific attention given to the non-lowering of national standards. The agreement also includes a sort of review process based on consultations that can ultimately lead to fines or

the withdrawal of trade benefits. However, some main mechanisms to guarantee the lawful enforcement of the agreement are missing. For example, the right for the public to submit complaints about labour rights violations is not included in the text, so that its effectiveness depends solely on the readiness of the governments to pursue enforcement (Greven, 2005). In such cases, the intervention of trade unions in the negotiation process would further ensure a more comprehensive and effective protection of workers' rights (ITUC, 2008).

The role of government

The role of government in mitigating the adverse impacts of the changes in the world of work as well as utilizing these changes for the betterment of labour rights revolves around investing in human capital. This is achieved mainly through improving education and health to increase the capacity of workers to face the challenges expected in the world of work. The World Bank (2019) highlights the link between investments in health and education and the productivity of future workers. Early childhood education is particularly key, to develop high-order cognitive and socio-behavioural skills in addition to foundational skills, coupled with a solid guaranteed social minimum and strengthened social insurance, complemented by reforms in labour market rules in some emerging economies.

To compare, average spending on energy subsidies for consumption in the MENA region is currently three times higher than public spending on social assistance. Substantial fiscal gains could be made from dismantling energy subsidies, but this would require a poverty impact analysis, especially for the fuel sources used most intensively by poor households. In Jordan, this was part of the Second Programmatic Energy and Water Sector Reforms, which aimed to improve the financial viability of the sector through increases in the electricity tariffs that increased the cost of the service for consumers.

With regard to international labour standards and their implementation in the region, taking a closer look at the specific situation of single countries could be helpful. For example, Jordan has ratified 26 ILO Conventions, including seven of the eight fundamental Conventions which address key human rights issues. Despite this, according to the ILO's regional Desk Officer for the Arab Region (see *The Jordan Times*, 2018), the file of complaints against the Jordanian Government concerning workers' freedom of association is very large. In fact, Jordan has failed to ratify Convention No. 87 on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, which came into force in 1950 after being approved by the UN General Assembly in 1948. In addition to this, article 98 of the Labour Law designates the professions and sectors in which workers are allowed to form unions, therefore violating workers' rights to freedom of association. In the

case of Lebanon, a country that has ratified 50 ILO Conventions, including seven of the eight fundamental Conventions, the real situation is far from what appears on paper. Social security remains limited in scope and coverage, approximately half of those in informal employment earn less than the legal minimum wage, child labour is a re-emerging issue after some progress, and a significant part of the labour market is composed of non-Lebanese and vulnerable workers, indicating high levels of exclusion (Ajluni and Kawar, 2015).

In general, legal social security coverage remains low in the whole region, especially among women. Similar trends are also observed in North Africa (ILO, 2019c).

With regard to mitigating the risk of FDI, it is necessary to identify gaps in governmental analysis of the terms of employment in foreign investment proposals. Care must be taken that governments do not sacrifice the rights of workers in favour of foreign investment and the liberal economy.

Governments can also utilize international and bilateral partnership and cooperation pathways to strengthen workers' resilience to labour market changes. For example, the EUROMED European-Mediterranean Partnership operates a regional initiative (Med4Jobs) that aims to improve youth employability (Maharat MED) and inclusive growth. The specific focus on youth employability is in line with EUROMED's aim of reinforcing human capital in the region, which is a key issue for stability and security. The project also includes programmes aimed at higher education, although none of the programmes focuses on life-long learning, indicating a gap after formal education.

Conclusion

Emerging economies are in the midst of change, brought about by impacts of trade and investment that are bringing changes to the nature of work. Overall, these changes do not impact negatively on job creation – they provide opportunities, especially through technological advancements (ILO, 2019a). Some manufacturing jobs can be lost to automation, but through innovation, technology generates new sectors and tasks. However, for societies to benefit from the potential that these changes offer, the negative impacts should be minimized through larger investments in human capital and universal social protection.

This implies including those who have historically remained excluded from social justice and decent work, notably those working in the informal economy. It equally implies innovative action to address the growing diversity of situations in which work is performed, in particular the emerging phenomenon of digitally mediated work in the platform economy (*ibid.*). The situation of informal workers cannot improve without collective bargaining and its mechanisms. Collective bargaining is a fundamental right and a powerful

tool for economic success and social equity, not least in times of transformational change. To this purpose, trade unions in the MENA region need to be revitalized and strengthened to increase their effectiveness and ability to deal with difficulties in connection with membership, freedom of association, and effectiveness in defending their rights and asserting their demands. For example in Jordan, the majority of recent labour protests were carried out by workers outside traditional union-based representation, indicating the weakness or absence of channels for dialogue and negotiation between various classes of workers with employers. Strengthening the role of trade unions would increase their effectiveness in bargaining for adequate minimum wages and respect for international labour standards when negotiating FTAs and discussing possibilities of FDI.

In this light, some recommendations for trade unions include:

- mobilizing informal workers through the adoption of innovative organizing techniques, including the use of digital technology to organize labour;
- adopting the power resource approach, which provides a promising approach to realizing the most urgently required changes in trade unions;
- involving trade unions in FTA negotiations, which will offer a strategy to improve positive outcomes for workers, as well as a way to reaffirm and strengthen the role of trade unions nationally; and
- investing in life-long learning as a way of seeking to achieve trade unions' objectives.

The role of governments in mitigating the adverse impacts of the coming changes in the world of work, as well as utilizing them for the betterment of labour rights, revolves around investing in human capital, especially education and health. Investing in human capital is the priority to make the most of this evolving economic opportunity. Automation raises the premium on high-order cognitive skills in advanced and emerging economies (World Bank, 2019). The demand in labour markets for advanced cognitive skills, socio-behavioural skills, and skill combinations associated with greater adaptability is rising. Building these skills requires strong human capital foundations and life-long learning, where there is also an opportunity for trade unions to strengthen their mandate. Governments also play a role in ensuring that foreign direct investments are observant of human and labour rights, to unlock the potentially significant contribution to their country's economic development. However, the impact of FDI on the economy is ambiguous. Thus, as described above, governments should be careful regarding this issue and design the proper policies and regulations with full participation of the social partners so that FDI achieves the expected benefits needed. Ultimately, governments that strengthen their core labour standards can increase economic growth and efficiency by raising skill levels in the workforce and by

creating an environment which encourages innovation and higher productivity (OECD, 2000).

In conclusion, investing in human capital and the provision of decent work based on inclusive labour regulations and robust social protection, founded on international trade and core labour standards (ILO, 2018), provide the framework for sustainable development and inclusive growth in the future of work.

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Bridging inequalities for decent work in South Asia

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Introduction

Poverty, informality and inequality are dominant features uniting eight countries in South Asia.¹ Informality is the overall character of the region, with over 90 per cent of enterprises – as well as the workforce – concentrated in the informal economy. Poverty is intense and widespread: about 14 per cent of the world's poor live in the region. Various studies have characterized South Asia as having the worst forms of inequality in the world, all the more so after the post-1980s liberalization, with India in the lead for inequalities in general (Gini index 83 per cent). Women's participation in the labour market is among the lowest in the region, which also has the widest human development index (HDI) gap (16.3 per cent) between men and women.

The region accounts for about 3.5 per cent of the world's and 11.71 per cent of Asia's land surface. Its current population is about 1.90 billion, i.e. about one-fourth of world population. It is thus one of the most densely populated regions of the world, with India alone accounting for 1.36 billion. On average the urban population, according to United Nations (UN) estimates, accounts for no more than 25 per cent. And the region, in particular India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, is home to a young population, i.e. nearly 40 per cent aged 25–54 years. Amongst them, Pakistan is one of the younger countries, with an average age of 23.8 years, followed by Bangladesh at 26.7 years, India at 27.9 years and Sri Lanka at 32.8 years. The region is also encouraging outmigration, especially to countries in Europe and North America.

South Asia is a politically and religiously volatile region. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are passing through a phase of political instability; Pakistan is facing economic crises; India has recently held its general election; and Nepal's political scenario too is not very stable. Further, the longstanding conflict between India and Pakistan has been hijacking all initiatives to bring about understanding among nations and has made the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) almost non-functional. The South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)² signed in January 2004 at Islamabad also faces challenges, primarily due to long-standing inter-country disputes. Consequently there is limited intra-regional cooperation, which has adversely impacted the movement of people and goods across the countries within the South Asia region.

1. The South Asia region has been defined differently by various organizations. The countries included in the region include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This article, however, considers only five prominent countries of the region: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. These countries, except Nepal, were the core of the British Empire from 1857 to 1947.

2. SAFTA signatory countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAFTA recognizes the need for special and differential treatment for LDCs in its preamble.

Table 1. Sectoral contributions to GDP, selected countries, comparing 1966–70 with 2011–15

Country	Agriculture		Services		Manufacturing	
	1966–70	2011–15	1966–70	2011–15	1966–70	2011–15
Bangladesh	54.7	16.5	09.1	27.3	5.9	17.2
India	44.6	18.2	23.6	31.0	15.6	16.8
Nepal	68.2	35.5	10.3	15.5	3.6	6.5
Pakistan	38.0	25.1	20.8	21.1	15.3	14.1
Sri Lanka	29.7	8.6	21.8	30.8	16.1	19.2

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report*.

The South Asia region’s combined gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 was US\$ three trillion. It has been growing at a decent rate of about 6 per cent. The primary sector, including agriculture, fishery and forestry, is the largest single contributor to its GDP, followed by the services sector (table 1). However, most of the workers in the region are undocumented, and as such are not covered by the large number of protective laws.

The region’s legal past is connected with the colonial period: most of its legal framework has been borrowed from the British period. Although in the last six decades individual nations have brought amendments in the laws so as to meet the compulsions of emerging development, the laws, in character, remain the same. As such, there are contradictions between the intent and the content of laws, in particular those regulating world of work. The complications thus created, together with a lethargic and expensive judiciary, have resulted in delayed justice and piling up of litigations. It is not uncommon in the region to come across cases that have dragged on for decades without a judgement.

The first industrial revolution gave South Asian labour a separate identity as workers. Concerns about inhumane conditions in factories were raised by the socially minded. It was, however, the Indian National Congress (INC), which spearheaded India’s independence movement, that became the conduit for the establishment of the first all-India body of factory or industrial workers, i.e. the All India-Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The AITUC was also a founding member of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Till 1947, when India secured its independence, the AITUC was the sole body representing industrial workers of the region and had delegate status at the ILO. However, as new political parties emerged during the post-1947 era, new trade union organizations linked to political parties were also established in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and, later, in Bangladesh. The trade unions in South Asia, however, were focused on the concerns of industrial workers, while major labour and human rights violations were taking place among the non-industrial workers.

The national trade union movements could do little to check growing labour rights violations, inequalities in conditions of work (particularly between formal and informal workers) and rigid approaches on the part of

employers as well as governments. Capital-supportive policies were introduced that were detrimental to labour, resulting in wider inequalities in returns to management and worker. Inequitable income distribution is a principal problem of economics, and that is so in the case of countries under reference. Economic inequality refers to the ways economic variables are distributed – among individuals in a group, among groups in a population, or among countries. Inequalities rise with economic growth and then decline as people become rich (Kuznets, 1955). In the case of South Asia, economic growth has led to wider inequalities – inequality of opportunities through unequal access to employment and /or education: and inequality of outcomes such as level of income, educational attainment, health status and so on.

The growing inequalities and exclusion of larger sections of population are unsatisfactory as well as unacceptable outcomes of the present form of globalization. This compelled the UN to examine global growth trends, leading to the introduction in the year 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for fairer globalization. The MDGs' objective was to achieve development that is equitable and just. However, as the 15th anniversary of the MDGs approached it was observed that many of the seven goals had remained unachieved, particularly in countries of the global South. Among many reasons, the non-involvement of the public at large in the implementation of the MDGs contributed to the insufficient achievement of the set targets. A need was felt for setting new goals that would be inclusive and achievable. In formulating new goals for the following period, therefore, the UN proposed to engage national governments through its specialized agencies, including the ILO. Wider consultations were held with the social partners, including workers' organizations such as trade unions, and their perspectives were incorporated in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, a set of 17 new goals and 169 targets thereunder were set as components of the SDGs with a time frame of the next 15 years, i.e. 2015–30. The overall aim of the SDGs is to "leave no one behind", with a focus on bridging the decent work deficit (SDG 8), on reducing inequality (SDG 10) and on gender equality (SDG 5).

In his report to the 104th Session of the ILO's International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2015, the ILO Director-General Guy Ryder introduced the Future of Work Centenary Initiative to commemorate a century of the establishment of the ILO. The Initiative entails effective engagement of the wider society to address all the implications of "transformational change".

This article focuses on the engagement of trade unions in five countries of the region as a contribution to the process of understanding and addressing the challenges of transformational change and to better achieve the goal of "social justice and decent work for all".

Economic growth and trade

The South Asia region's economic growth during the early years of the post-British Raj period was limited due to historical reasons. During the pre-independence period, the region served the interests of its colonizer and thus acted as a supplier of resources to companies in Europe. Faced with double exploitation, the INC, with the active involvement of the AITUC, launched the non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) who was later designated as India's "Father of the Nation". During World War II, industrial activities were more directed towards meeting the needs of a war economy and consequently the growth of non-agricultural industries was rather limited and also mono-focused. Nevertheless, agriculture was and has remained a dominant sector, both as a provider of much-needed jobs and as a contributor to national GDP. Later, most of the countries in the region adopted import substitution policies in the development of their industrial sectors. Gandhi promoted the concept of "constructive cooperation" in the world of work based on his philosophy of "trusteeship" so as to secure uninterrupted economic activities. The philosophy of constructive cooperation led to India encouraging worker's participation in management by incorporating necessary provisions in the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947. In 1976 India brought about a constitutional amendment so as to boost the concept of workers' participation in management (WPM). Article 43A of the Constitution of India's 42nd (Amendment) Act, 1976 as quoted by Bakshi (2013) reads:

The State shall take steps, by suitable legislation or in any other way, to secure the participation of workers in the management of undertakings, establishments or other organisations engaged in any industry.

During the post-1947 era the countries in the region saw higher industrial growth, but widespread poverty and high unemployment remained major challenges facing the region. Accordingly, the countries in the region went for labour-intensive models of production. The governments, with a view to achieving regional balance in industrial/economic growth, became active players in promoting the establishment of industrial enterprises under government/public control, i.e. public sector undertakings (PSUs). Consequently, sectors such as mining, railways, defence, electricity, steel and textiles received major support from the governments and their institutions. It was also their intention to have these establishments serve as centres of excellence in so far as workplace conditions were concerned. Government-led economic policies and active engagement with the growth of industry did create much-needed jobs, but economic growth hovered around 3 to 4 per cent per annum, what in India is called a *bindu* rate of growth. Such a low rate of economic growth was insufficient to meet the requirements of an industrially underdeveloped region.

As the 1980s began, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) influenced economic growth in the context of the balance of payments crisis. The IMF policy initiatives led many countries to shift focus to the growth of the private sector, liberalization of trade, and a reduction in public services. The growth of the private sector led to a dilution of government control with a view to encouraging investment, both internal and foreign. The resultant introduction of capital-intensive modes of production led to an increase in demand for skilled workers but pushed unskilled and semi-skilled workers into jobs in the low-paid informal sector. The trade liberalization policy also led to increased outsourcing, subcontracting of production functions and/or jobs and then to increasing demands for the dilution of labour laws by undertaking reforms.

Nevertheless, countries in the region achieved impressive rates of economic growth following the economic or industrial reforms of the 1980s. Output for Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka grew more rapidly and by 2008 almost touched double-digit figures, for example in India. Shortly before the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, India's growth rate was a huge 9 per cent and those of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were around 7 per cent.

On the trade front, however, the record of the region is not very impressive, as most of its external trade is from outside the region. Intra-regional trade accounts for no more than 5 per cent of total international trade. As against minimal intra-regional trade in South Asia, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)³ accounts for 25 per cent of intra-regional trade. As such, South Asia is defined as one of the least integrated regions of the world. There exists a high level of trust deficit among nations, in particular between India and Pakistan.

Movement of people within the region is also restricted. Although there is free movement of people between India and Nepal, this is not the case in the other countries under reference. The movement of people from one country to another in the region, particularly for employment purposes, is strictly regulated, causing skills shortages in some countries and surpluses in others. The region's record in terms of human development is also not very impressive. The World Economic Forum's Global Human Capital Index (WEF, 2017) ranks 130 countries "on how well they develop their human capital". According to the index the two regions with the highest human capital development gap were South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In South Asia, Sri Lanka (rank 70) was the top performer of the region followed by Nepal (98), India (103), Bangladesh (111) and Pakistan (125).

3. ASEAN is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries in South-East Asia. It promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational and sociocultural integration among members and other countries in Asia.

Economic development and inequality

South Asia is viewed as the fastest growing region of the world. According to the World Bank (2018), the economic development of the region is likely to grow up to 7.0 per cent on average in 2019, then 7.1 per cent in 2020 and 2021 (see table 2). These projections, however, seem to be rather ambitious in the context of the economic slowdown the region is currently facing. India's actual growth in GDP is currently around 5.5 against the projected 7.5 per cent.

Table 2. Real GDP growth in South Asian countries, 2018–21

	2018	2019 (estimate)	2020 (forecast)	2021 (forecast)
Afghanistan (CY)	1.0	2.5	3.2	3.5
Bangladesh (FY)	7.9	7.3	7.4	7.3
Bhutan (FY)	5.7	5.4	5.4	5.2
India (FY)	7.2	7.5	7.5	7.5
Maldives (CY)	7.9	5.7	5.2	5.3
Nepal (FY)	6.3	6.0	6.1	6.2
Pakistan (FY, factor prices)	5.8	3.4	2.7	4.0
Sri Lanka (CY)	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.7

Note: CY: Calendar year; FY: Fiscal year.
Source: World Bank, 2018.

Although GDP is the best way to measure economic growth, it is economic development that is the process by which a nation improves the economic, political and social well-being of its people. The term “well-being” is used frequently by economists, politicians and others. Whereas economic development is a policy intervention endeavour with aims of improving the economic and social well-being of people, economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and rise in GDP. Consequently, as economists point out, economic growth is only one aspect of the process of economic development.

Social and economic inequalities have been primary characters of neo-liberal developments. Ever since the onset of the first industrial activities, there has been a general tendency to identify means and measures for enhancing returns on capital. With the increasing pace of industrial activities and consequent expansion in the size of manufacturing activities, the mass production so achieved entailed the identification of new markets to sell the manufactured products in an increasingly competitive environment. To meet the challenge of competition, producers tried to cut costs, which invariably fell on workers in the form of longer hours of work, low wages and so on. The producing countries such as Great Britain, France and Germany ventured outside their national boundaries to locate new products as well as new markets for their products. The social implications of their actions rarely received attention on the part of those in control of resources.

On the eve of the 20th century, reports came out highlighting grave injustices being done to local populations by the colonizing powers. Longer hours of work under most challenging conditions, inadequate rewards on services rendered, physical abuse and inhumane treatment were all too common. In fact, a major contributing factor to World War I was the conflict of interests among the rulers of the colonizing countries. The report of the Royal Commission on Labour in 1931 specifically made mention of the inhumane conditions in India (that included Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) under which a worker was made to work in an manufacturing establishment. The report laid the foundation of the first legislation to regulate working conditions in factories. The colonizers were also involved in a double exploitation of the indigenous economy of local industries and promoting their own industries. India is a prime example of the kind of exploitative practices adopted. India's share of the world economy fell from 24.4 per cent in 1700 to 4.2 per cent in 1950 (Maddison, 2003). This fall was caused by exploitative policies of first the East India Company and subsequently the British Raj. These policies also caused wide inequalities between the British and those Indians who were close to Raj compared to Indians at large.

Inequality matters not just in itself, but because of its impact – positive or negative – on other development outcomes, including the provision of public goods. Inequality has been on the rise across the globe for several decades. Some countries have reduced the numbers of people living in extreme poverty, but economic gaps have continued to grow as the very richest amass unprecedented levels of wealth, particularly in the 21st century. Among industrialized nations, the United States is by far the most top-heavy, with much greater shares of national wealth and income going to the richest 1 per cent than in any other country. Income inequality has risen or remained stagnant in 20 of the 29 advanced economies, while poverty has increased in 17 economies. Although most emerging economies have improved in these respects – 84 per cent of them registered a decline in poverty – their absolute levels of inequality remain much higher. In addition, the World Economic Forum's 2018 report states, in both advanced and emerging economies wealth is significantly more unequally distributed than income: "This problem has improved little in recent years, with wealth inequality rising in 49 ... economies" (WEF, 2018, p. 4). Table 3 shows the statistics for the countries under consideration.

Going into details of inequality, a World Bank report (Rama et al., 2015) explains that

Inequality in South Asia appears to be moderate when looking at standard indicators such as the Gini index, which are based on consumption expenditures per capita. But other pieces of evidence reveal enormous gaps, from extravagant wealth at one end to lack of access to the most basic services at the other ... South Asia performs poorly in terms of opportunity. Access to basic services is partial at best, and can be traced to characteristics at

birth, including gender, location, and caste. Conversely, the region has had a robust performance in terms of geographical and occupational mobility despite its cluttered urbanization and widespread informality. Migration and jobs have served disadvantaged groups better than the rest, highlighting the importance of the urbanization and private sector development agendas. Support falls somewhere in between. Poverty alleviation programs are pervasive. But the mobilization of public resources is limited and much of it is wasted in regressive subsidies, while inter-government transfers do not do enough to mitigate spatial inequalities. (Abstract at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20395>)

Inequalities in countries of the region have grown in later years. In 2018 income inequality was highest in Sri Lanka, followed by India. Wealth inequality, on the other hand, was highest in India, followed by Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Table 3. World Economic Forum Inclusive Development Index, 2018 for South Asia

Country	Net income Gini index	Wealth Gini index	GDP per capita (US\$)	Employment rate (%)	Median daily income US\$(PPP)	Poverty rate (%)	Life expectancy, years
Bangladesh	39.50	57.90	1030	59.70	2.90	59.20	62.40
India	47.90	83.00	1861	51.90	2.90	60.40	59.60
Nepal	39.50	67.30	682	80.30	3.20	50.90	61.20
Pakistan	36.20	52.60	1182	50.90	3.70	39.70	57.80
Sri Lanka	51.40	66.50	3759	49.10	5.50	16.10	67.00

Source: World Economic Forum, 2018.

Labour market

It is generally perceived that with the increase in economic well-being of a society, the country moves towards formalization of employment relations and to decent work conditions as defined by the ILO. It is also presumed that economic upgrading brings about improvement in the social consensus of the public at large. This has not been so in the case of the South Asia region where increased income has led to increased informality, inequality and a pronounced decent work deficit. There is a wide gap between the rich and the not so rich. As a region with a healthy population size, labour supply has never been a problem. However, to find a worker with the right kind of skills has always been a challenge: there is serious skills mismatch. The workforce constitutes about 50 per cent of the regional population, but many with uncertified skills causing them to be concentrated in the agriculture, forestry and other such industries that are part of the primary sector. Employment growth since 2000 has been highest in Pakistan, followed by Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Total employment in South Asia rose from 473 million in 2000 to 568 million in 2010, creating an average of

just under 0.8 million new jobs a month. Besides, in all countries the largest share of the employed are the low-end self-employed. Nearly 33 per cent of workers in India and 20 per cent in Bangladesh and Pakistan are casual labourers. Regular wage or salaried workers represent only 20 per cent or less of total employment.

The region is however faced with some major challenges such as:

- (i) *Low female labour participation.* The lowest rates are in the three largest South Asian countries: Pakistan where about 80 per cent of women do not participate in the labour market; and Bangladesh and India, where more than 70 per cent of women do not participate. Apart from the social barriers, their concentration in the informal economy could be a reason for the lower level of reporting with regard to their presence in the labour market. According to national data, almost 90 per cent of working women are undocumented workers in both the formal and informal economies.
- (ii) *Open and disguised unemployment.* The countries are faced with surplus labour force on account of skills mismatch and insufficient employment generation. In the absence of any form of social security protection, workers can't afford to be unemployed, so that the region has low open unemployment but high rates of disguised and educated unemployed. Almost 75 per cent of the workforce is concentrated in rural areas. In India and Nepal almost 50 per cent of all employment is in agriculture. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, 20 to 27 per cent of the employed work in industry, with most of them in manufacturing but in small and micro enterprises. In recent years, most non-farm jobs in South Asia have been created in the services sector (retail shops, courier services, security guards, real estate, public administration, etc.) with commerce as a subsector employing 12 to 33 per cent of non-farm rural workers. The national governments are taking initiatives to shift focus towards manufacturing as a source of much-desired jobs, but progress is extremely slow and decent work conditions are lacking.
- (iii) *The issue of "informality".* The region is characterized by informality, since both business enterprises and workers are concentrated in the informal economy. Excepting in Sri Lanka, all the concerned countries have extremely high levels of undocumented workers and non-registered business enterprises. This has led to low earnings, fewer skills and little access to formal social protection systems. Informal workers include all workers performing informal jobs in agriculture, casual labourers, family enterprise workers and self-employed workers. This is also the section of the region's labour market where labour rights violations are the highest.
- (iv) *Unregulated informal workers/sectors.* Government labour market policies and programmes are targeted towards workers in the formal sector and employed workers. Also, the majority of the labour/

employment laws are focused on regular workers. Consequently, the huge numbers of non-regular workers (including the self-employed) are unprotected and uncared for. The protective laws on minimum wages and social security (including health insurance) are either non-existent or non-functional. The protective measures initiated by various governments in the region are so far good on paper only.

- (v) *Ineffective tripartite institutions.* All the countries in the region have ratified the ILO Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) and have laws promoting social dialogue and tripartism. Until recently the tripartite bodies had been working well. But reluctance on the part of the social partners to enter into social dialogue, and the governments' focus on promoting business under any conditions, have caused the tripartite bodies to become non-functional. The meetings of these bodies are either not held or their decisions are not implemented – for example, the last annual meeting of the Indian Labour Conference was held in 2015. Since then, electronic media are being utilized to secure comments of the social partners on the policy proposals initiated by the governments.

Precarious workers and decent working conditions

The countries in the region began their planning processes with full employment as their objective. Their planning documents spoke about issues relating to promotion of skills development and achievement of inclusive development through labour-intensive economic/industrial activities. However, this objective has remained unfulfilled. The pace of new job creation has been slow and the old jobs are primarily in the unregulated economy. Further, the workforce primarily remains with uncertified skills, resulting in workers being employed undocumented. Informality has also stood in the way of ensuring the creation of healthy and decent workplace relations. The legal instruments that would have secured decent working conditions have also proved to be inadequate as well as now obsolete.

Constitutionally, all the countries in the region are committed to the development of a just and equitable society and securing social justice. Accordingly, large numbers of laws have been enacted by the national, provincial and state governments. These laws govern both individual and collective rights. However, gaps in laws, ill-equipped regulatory machinery, and a slow as well as expensive judicial system have got in the way of effective implementation, resulting in widespread violations of workplace rights.

In South Asia the labour force is divided into three general categories: regular workers, casual and short-term contract workers, and the self-employed. Those in the regular workers category constitute a minority that is rapidly decreasing in size. It is this ever-smaller group that is the

recipient of protection under the numerous laws that have been enacted since the independence of the respective countries.

The labour policies in the region since the onset of the present globalization have also witnessed a dilution of labour law, whereby the protective laws enacted over the years are either being amended or overlooked in the interest of promoting capital. India, with a view to promoting the ease of doing business, has initiated major labour reform processes by merging 43 of the existing laws into four labour codes, i.e. the Labour Codes on wages; social security and welfare; occupational safety, health and working conditions; and industrial relations. India's initiatives are, however, being challenged by the trade unions, which see the reforms as a process of promoting the interests of capital at the expense of workers.

The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. This is seen as the synthesis of four strategic objectives: achieving universal respect for fundamental principles and rights at work; the creation of greater employment and income opportunities for women and men; extending social protection; and promoting social dialogue (see Somavia, 1999). As a follow-up the ILO developed Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) at the national level. As of May 2019, there are 46 DWCPs operational in as many number of countries. The DWCPs are developed in consultation with the social partners and are in line with national development plans. India's current DWCP started in 2018 and goes up to 2023. Similarly, the DWCP for Sri Lanka is for the period 2018–23; that for Pakistan is for the period 2016–20; for Bangladesh it is for the period 2017–20; and for Nepal it is for the years 2017–22. One of the main features of these current DWCPs is their linkage to national development plans as well as to the SDGs, with particular emphasis on Goal 8 concerning decent work and economic growth.

Trade unions and their activism

Trade unionism appeared on the South Asian scene following the first industrial revolution, although labour activism is much older. Faced with inhumane conditions of work, social activists raised objections against the excessive exploitation of the workforce, where factory workers were made to work from sunrise to sunset. In the course of about a century, the trade union movement grew to encompass all sectors of workers' engagement, more prominently among regular workers in public sector undertakings and large private sector establishments. According to various estimates, over 70 per cent of trade union membership in the South Asia region is drawn from government establishments. More recently, trade unions have penetrated among workers in the informal sector and are enlisting new members among contract and/or

casual workers, own-account workers, home-based workers, etc. Trade unions however face major hurdles in organizing informal workers, since these lack the status of “worker”. Informal or undocumented workers also face the threat of losing their jobs if their employers come to know about their association with or membership in a trade union. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) declared in its Global Rights Index Report for 2019 that Bangladesh is among the ten worst countries in the world for workers. Many of the other countries in South Asia too figure among those countries having the worst conditions of work.

Trade unions, due to their historical links with various political parties as well as with their countries’ independence movements, are seen as political entities rather than pressure groups. Such associations have, no doubt, benefited the unions in the form of a conducive environment in which to grow and secure rights for their members, but there have been setbacks in the form of disunity. The unions risk undermining workers’ interests by focusing on the agendas of the political parties. Consequently, despite huge membership, the national trade unions of the region are weak and thus ignored by both government and management. They are also linked to each other through the ITUC and Global Union Federations (GUFs), as affiliates. They often meet for various educational programmes or to campaign to promote and strengthen the trade union movement through solidarity support. At the regional level there exists the South Asia Trade Union Council (SARTUC) with its office currently stationed in Kathmandu, Nepal. One of the major areas of SARTUC’s work includes migration, in particular to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Trade unions’ association at the regional and global level has helped them to acquire prominence internationally, but they remain marginalized within their countries.

At the national level, trade unions have been opposing labour law reform initiatives. The latest in this series took place in India on 8 January 2019 when all the central trade union organizations (CTUOs), except Bhartiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), went on a two-day general strike in support of their 12-point Charter of Demands to combat the Government’s anti-labour policies. These demands include the declaration of minimum wages, universal social security, ratification of fundamental ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 (see table 4), and discontinuation of the privatization of public sector enterprises, among others. Surprisingly, there has been little or no response from the Government. A case in point is the labour law reform that India is currently undertaking: the Labour Code on Wages was placed before the Parliament and passed in July 2019 without being discussed in the national tripartite body.

The inadequate consultation with social partners and the non-use of instruments of social dialogue have led to serious differences even among the national trade union federations. Respect for the provisions of the fundamental labour Conventions is also tardy. Table 4 shows that, with the exception of India, all the countries discussed in this article have ratified most of

Table 4. Fundamental labour Conventions (CLCs) ratified by countries in South Asia (as of 2019)

CLCs	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
C.29 (1930)	1972	1954	2002	1957	1950
C.87 (1948)	1972			1951	1995
C.98 (1949)	1972		1996	1952	1972
C.100 (1951)	1998	1958	1976	2001	1993
C.105 (1957)	1972	2000	2007	1960	2003
C.111 (1958)	1972	1960	1974	1961	1998
C.138 (1973)		2017	1997	2006	2000
C.182 (1999)	2001	2017	2002	2001	2001

Source: ILO.

the fundamental Conventions, yet one finds cases of grave violations. The ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998, which is now mandatory whether ratified or not by a country, is practically ignored by the countries in the region. The ITUC Global Rights Index 2019 has highlighted the precarious conditions prevailing in these countries.

Enhanced participation of trade unions in the future of work agenda

Notwithstanding the weaknesses of the trade unions in the region, they remain the institution most acknowledged in representing the interests of all workers. But their effective engagement in the affairs of the world of work is detrimental to peace and harmony in an increasingly competitive market. To start with, there is need for a perception change about the character and role of trade unions, all the more so given the rapidly changing environment. One often comes across arguments about the relevance of trade unions in the emerging new world. Such debates are a futile exercise, since workers will still be an integral part of the emerging world of work irrespective of the level of automation and the nature of business entities. Therefore, so long as there are conflicting interests (as between workers and employers), there is a place for a body to represent the interests of workers and protect the weak and excluded. There is a need to realize that trade unions have positive roles to play, and that as such they should be seen as part of solution rather than part of the problem.

Accordingly, serious efforts need to be made to equally involve both workers' and employers' organizations in programmes relating to DWCPs as well as the SDGs. Trade unions need to be included by the national, state and provincial governments in discourses relating to the formulation of policies and programmes on issues such as job creation, employment standards, social security, women's participation in the labour market, labour

market research, identification of skills needs, skills enhancement, trade, national and budget, and so on.

SARTUC is the lone trade union body at the South Asia regional level. Despite its immense importance, it remains underutilized by national as well as regional and global trade unions. It needs to be remodelled and enlarged by drawing lessons from other regional bodies, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and others. Support from ILO/ACTRAV would also prove highly beneficial in strengthening organizations at the regional level.

Conclusion

Despite the constitutional commitments to working towards the eradication of poverty and inequality in various forms, these two issues remain major problems facing the countries in the region. Both financial and multidimensional poverty are among the highest in the world. Political instability, informal nature of functioning and caste/religious intolerance could be cited as some of the causes. In addition, ineffective engagement on the part of the public at large has turned all the well-meaning commitment and programmes into mere theory. For example in India, the introduction of democratic organizations in the form of cooperatives, trade unions, *panchayats* and so on was aimed at integrating the public into all stages of development. The Gandhi's philosophy of *Swaraj* was aimed not only at financial empowerment but also at the social, political and cultural spheres. But, as argued by Sen (1983), a development has no meaning if the people do not enjoy freedom in its varied forms.

The data on poverty and inequality show that those people in the category of worker/labourer constitute the largest majority in the region. They are not only monetarily poor but are excluded from the existing social capital, as well as from being effectively integrated into the formulation and implementation of welfare programmes and schemes. In consequence, most state policies remain non-effectively implemented and thus the results are unsatisfactory in terms of overcoming challenges.

In the South Asia region the trade unions are seen as representative of the workforce. In addition to other forms of labour organization, they represent the largest number of workers in the world for whom effective implementation of the DWCPs and SDGs are critical. The national trade union movements in the region have expanded vertically as well as horizontally, yet their influence in the world of work is marginal. The trade unions ought to be integrated into the process of achieving national development goals, the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The way forward

Human well-being is the primary objective of societal development. The prevailing informality, inequality and decent work deficit, particularly in the world of work, are not acceptable. The aim for the future ought to be to bring humans to the centre of all development initiatives. These initiatives ought to be inclusive so that the benefits reach every last person in an equitable manner. The World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization, established by the ILO, has called for bringing humane orientation to economic growth. The UN's SDGs also emphasize that sustainability of growth can be achieved only if national initiatives are inclusive.

To achieve this it is imperative that the DWCPs in the region acquire primacy in the areas of social development and social justice. According to the ILO, decent work involves opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a fair income; security in the workplace and social protection for families; better prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for people to express their concerns, to organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

In this connection, the basis for initiating action must be the comprehensive approach of “leaving no one behind”. The legalistic approach to labour must be done away with, since labour is not a commodity. A worker, who is a citizen also, is the reason for and objective of development, and therefore ought to be integrated into development processes at all levels. The principle of the “survival of the weakest” must be brought back to the centre of development.

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The future of work we want

*A brief summary
of the ACTRAV Symposium,
Geneva, 7–8 October 2019*

The Symposium on “The Future of Work We Want” held in Geneva on 7–8 October 2019 is the culmination of almost three years of ACTRAV-led activities on the future of work, providing a platform for workers’ organizations to engage with academics as well as governments and employers’ representatives on the multitude of different issues that constitute the Future of Work Initiative.

In total, ACTRAV organized two global symposia, five regional and three subregional conferences as well as a total of six regional and international trainings on the future of work. This “bottom-up approach” ensured greater regional deliberations on the key challenges that workers face around the globe. These challenges, such as technology, climate change or the increasing complexity of globalization, are fundamentally transforming the world of work at an unprecedented pace.

The effects of these drivers are widespread and pose great challenges for workers and trade unions. The growing precariousness of labour, unsustainable levels of inequality and the erosion of workers’ rights in the pursuit of more economic growth and investment are a fundamental challenge for the labour movement and display the limitations of the economic and social development of the last few decades. Achieving a more sustainable development in accordance with Agenda 2030 is therefore of utmost importance, and the full participation of workers’ representatives in the process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is paramount in improving the livelihoods of workers around the world.

The discussions throughout the Symposium demonstrated acute awareness of the challenges facing the labour movement and were further influenced by the opening remarks of the Director-General of the ILO, Guy Ryder, who restated the successes of the ILO and its constituents in the past, but emphasized that the world of tomorrow is profoundly different from the world of the past. However, he further emphasized that the impact of these drivers are by no means exogenous. The trends witnessed today not only pose challenges but also have the potential to provide great opportunities for workers and workers’ organizations.

This sense of optimism and the urge to act in the face of profound changes to workers was the spirit portrayed by all participants throughout the Symposium.

There was strong agreement that it was fundamentally important to safeguard the structures on which production and work are organized: tripartism, social dialogue, multilateralism and a normative framework providing a baseline of labour rights at both the national and international level.

However, the discussants concluded that greater efforts have to be made to expand these structures to all in society. The idea of a Universal Labour Guarantee, as proposed by the Global Commissioners in their report published in January 2019, was seen as a valuable concept ensuring that workers’

rights and decent working conditions would be expanded to all workers, regardless of their employment relationship.

Greater efforts at the international level to govern the increasingly complex aspects of globalization was another important issue discussed. More efforts to include labour provisions in free and fair labour trade agreements, as well as greater efforts at the national level to establish industrial policies that diversify the economy, were considered as key strategies for the creation of more decent, formal employment opportunities. After all, persistently high levels of informal economy as well as new and emerging forms of work are among the principal sources of inequality in the world, and increasing formalization remains one of the key challenges for both the ILO and its constituents in the years to come.

Technological change was discussed prominently, both in terms of how artificial intelligence and robotization changes and in some cases replaces jobs, and how the emergence of platform economies is blurring the definitions of both workers and employers. The misclassification of workers in the platform economy, often considered independent contractors but who in most cases are entirely dependent on a single employer, was considered one of the biggest challenges for ensuring that labour rights extend to these workers. Furthermore, greater understanding of the nature of platforms and their working conditions, and of the profound effects of artificial intelligence on income distribution, job quality and quantity as well as labour rights, was requested by most participants, and greater efforts by the ILO in that regard will be key to establishing adequate regulation of new technologies.

Another aspect discussed at the Symposium was the necessity of lifelong learning strategies that provide opportunities for workers to train and upskill throughout their working lives. There was great consensus that given the impacts of technological change, it is essential to promote skills, competences and qualifications for all workers. Participants advocated the strengthening of social dialogue at both national and sectoral levels, and urged workers' representatives to be the shapers in the successful implementation of such lifelong learning strategies that emphasize a collective approach to the acquisition of skills and competences.

Ultimately, trade unions are facing profound challenges in serving their members and standing up for peace, democracy and social justice as effectively as they have over the last 100 years. Workers' representatives need to find new and innovative ways of addressing the challenges of the future of work and attracting workers in the informal economy, as well as youth and women, in order to counter the recent reduction in unionization across the globe. Trade unions need to consider this transition as fundamental if they want to continue to be a shaping force for decent work and social justice.

Above all, workers' organizations have a key role to play in formulating answers to these challenges, in acting for effective tripartite and social dialogue processes, and in thinking about mechanisms for workplace

cooperation and representation that contribute to meeting present and future governance challenges at both the regional and international levels.

This ACTRAV Symposium on the Future of Work, as well as the ILO Centenary Year as a whole, have been highly successful in establishing key priorities for the ILO, and its constituents need to move forward. Success in achieving these relies entirely on the implementation of the commitments made in the Declaration on the Future of Work by all member States, as well as on the International Labour Office in fulfilling its mandate of achieving social justice.

The future of work: Trade unions in transformation

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