

# International Labour Review

SPECIAL ISSUE

## FUTURE OF WORK (Part I): TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS AND INEQUALITY

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- 577 [Introduction: What does the future promise for work, employment and society?](#) Uma RANI and Damian GRIMSHAW

In introducing this double Special Issue, the authors draw on the articles contained therein to highlight the main areas for consideration in research on the future of work. They present the fast-paced changes affecting the world of work as offering an opportunity to move towards equality-inducing growth, while warning of the dangers posed by mismanaged technological change, inequalities (highlighting the persistent and intersectional nature of gender inequality), global supply chains and opportunities for social dialogue. In this light, they also propose policy recommendations focusing on strengthening worker protection and representative institutions, rethinking regulatory frameworks and taxation systems, and ensuring just transitions.

KEYWORDS: FUTURE OF WORK, TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, GENDER EQUALITY, SOCIAL DIALOGUE, DEVELOPMENT POLICY.

- 593 [Whither the evolution of the contemporary social fabric? New technologies and old socio-economic trends](#) Giovanni DOSI and Maria Enrica VIRGILLITO

This article considers whether societies are witnessing another industrial revolution in the light of an assessment of the impact of technological change on today's socio-economic fabric, especially with respect to employment, income distribution, working conditions and labour relations. The authors argue that the processes of innovation and the spread of what they term "intelligent automation" are likely to

exacerbate incumbent patterns of uneven income distribution and power, some of which existed well before the arrival of the technologies concerned, while others have emerged over the past 30 to 40 years. They venture to consider policy implications on the basis of such developments.

KEYWORDS: EMPLOYMENT SECURITY, TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS, INCOME DISTRIBUTION, JOB INSECURITY.

627 **Three scenarios for the future of work** Dominique MÉDA

After presenting a historical overview of the concept of work and the different meanings that it has acquired over the centuries, the author analyses the value it holds for Europeans, and the impact on work and employment of the popular rhetoric about a technological revolution and its “inevitable” consequences. She then considers the future of work in the light of three scenarios: a “dismantling of labour law”, a “technological revolution” (where automation brings an end to employment), and an “environmental transition”. She argues that the latter is compatible with the imperative to take action on climate change and the expectations placed in work and employment.

KEYWORDS: DECENT WORK, FUTURE OF WORK, PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR LAW, TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, EU COUNTRIES.

653 **Keynes’s grandchildren and Marx’s gig workers: Why human labour still matters** Hamid R. EKBIA and Bonnie A. NARDI

The current anxiety around the globe regarding automation and “the future of work”, the irrelevance of human labour and the superfluity of humans is based on recurring ideas about technology, work and economic value. Not quite novel, the debate on these ideas dates back to prominent thinkers, such as Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes. To grasp the present moment, therefore, the authors revisit this debate within the broader history of capitalism. With a focus on labour and technology, they bring attention to the hidden forms of value creation in the current economy and to the blind spots of the historical debate, and envision various possible scenarios for the future.

KEYWORDS: FUTURE OF WORK, TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, CAPITALISM, AUTOMATION, THEORY.

677 **The link between economic and social upgrading in global supply chains: Experiences from the Southern Cone** Gerhard REINECKE and Anne POSTHUMA

This article uses nine case studies of global supply chains (GSC) in Southern Cone countries to explore the extent to which economic and social upgrading are linked and spread from lead firms to their supply chain. While economic and social upgrading are found in lead firm segments throughout the case studies, the impacts on suppliers are varied. Pattern groupings enable the authors to develop a three-part typology of development in GSCs, in the light of which they consider the roles of public policies, company behaviour and social actors in addressing developmental outcomes for GSC lead firms and suppliers.

KEYWORDS: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, VALUE CHAINS, DEVELOPMENT POLICY, CASE STUDY, SOUTH AMERICA.

705 **Predatory purchasing practices in global apparel supply chains and the employment relations squeeze in the Indian garment export industry** Mark ANNER

While the literature has long acknowledged worker rights abuses in global apparel supply chains, less attention has been paid to the recent worsening of certain decent work deficits and its causes, which this article links to predatory purchasing practices arising from growing power asymmetries. These practices, illustrated here by the garment export industry in India, exert downward pressure on wages and incite non-standard forms of employment and greater verbal and physical abuse as productivity demands rise. They can be addressed through pricing mechanisms that cover the cost of decent work, appropriate State regulation and worker involvement.

KEYWORDS: DECENT WORK, WORKERS RIGHTS, CLOTHING INDUSTRY, CLOTHING WORKER, HAZARDOUS WORK, VALUE CHAINS, INDIA.

729 **Gender and governance of global value chains:  
Promoting the rights of women workers**

Stephanie BARRIENTOS, Lara BIANCHI and Cindy BERMAN

Private governance channelled through social compliance programmes and gender initiatives of multinational companies have had limited impact in tackling gender discrimination in global value chains (GVCs). The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) provide a public–private governance framework to address human rights globally, including gender equality. This article considers whether the UNGPs can provide a more effective governance framework for addressing women workers' rights in GVCs. It argues that interlayered forms of governance (involving public, private and social actors) are critical in addressing gender discrimination in GVCs and advancing a gendered approach to human rights due diligence.

KEYWORDS: GENDER MAINSTREAMING, WOMEN WORKERS, GOVERNANCE, PRIVATE SECTOR, PUBLIC SECTOR, VALUE CHAINS.

Communications

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