

Call for Abstracts

The 9th Conference of the *Regulating for Decent Work* Network

Organized by the *International Labour Office* (ILO)

In collaboration with:

Centre for Employment and Labour Relations Law (CELRL) – University of Melbourne, Australia

Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources (CIRHR) – University of Toronto, Canada

Centre for Informal Sector and Labour Studies (CISLS) – Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Decent Work Regulation Project – University of Durham, UK

Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) School – Cornell University, USA

Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation (IAQ) – University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), Brasilia, Brazil

Korea Labor Institute (KLI) – Seoul, Republic of Korea

Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) – University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

University of Amsterdam's Institute for Labour Studies / Hugo Sinzheimer Instituut voor

Arbeidsrecht en Sociaal recht (AIAS-HSI), Netherlands

Work and Equalities Institute (WEI) – University of Manchester, UK

***Strengthening labour institutions and worker voice to deliver
decent employment***

International Labour Office

Geneva, Switzerland

2-4 July 2025

2025 Conference Homepage: www.ilo.org/rdw2025

Regulating for Decent Work Network Homepage: www.ilo.org/rdw

The global labour market is facing a period of unprecedented transformation that is driven by technological innovation, environmental shifts, and demographic changes. While we celebrate the potential of technological advancements to boost productivity and connect workers across borders, these changes also raise profound challenges to achieving decent work for all. As automation transforms industries, climate change disrupts livelihoods, and the demographics of populations shift, questions around equitable access to employment opportunities, adequate compensation, and worker representation becomes increasingly urgent.

The changing nature of work demands a rethinking of labour market institutions and regulations. Traditional models, often designed for a different era, are struggling to keep pace with the rapid rise of digital platforms, globalized supply chains, and the increasing vulnerability of workers to climate change and political instability. There is a crucial need for building, revitalizing, and adapting labour market institutions to address the complexities of the contemporary world of work. How can we ensure that these institutions provide effective protection for all workers, including those in the informal sector and self-employment, and address the growing need for skill development and lifelong learning? How can social protection systems be strengthened to provide adequate protection to workers in all types of employment, and the population at large?

Despite a growing call for more effective policies that can deliver “decent employment now,” policies based on standard growth and development models have not responded adequately, particularly in the context of recent global crises. The lack of robust worker representation and the failure of existing structures to effectively translate aspirations for decent work into reality add to these complexities. As we grapple with the impact of technological disruption, climate change, and demographic shifts, the need for innovative approaches to build equitable and inclusive labour markets has never been greater. While challenges abound, the evolving world of work also presents immense opportunities to harness new technologies, rethink work-life balance, rebalance the unequal global economic order, and reimagine the relationship between workers, governments, and businesses.

The 9th RDW conference in 2025 aims to explore these multifaceted issues and propose innovative solutions, engaging with critical themes like the pursuit of “decent employment now,” the strengthening of worker agency, and the development of robust labour institutions. While we strive for more and better employment in a rapidly evolving global economy, we must simultaneously grapple with fundamental questions of fairness, equity, and inclusivity.

The conference aims to bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from across the world to discuss key challenges and opportunities related to a changing world of work. Track I: “Decent employment now: Can the standard growth and development models deliver?” critically examines the adequacy of current economic models to achieve a fair and equitable distribution of work. This includes examining the impacts of the pandemic and inflation on labour markets and exploring alternative approaches that prioritize social well-being and worker rights. Track II: “Worker agency and voice in transition” examines the vital role of workers in shaping labour market policies and navigating the challenges presented by emerging technologies, climate change, and broader political and economic shifts. It seeks to strengthen the voices of those often marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. Track III: “Institutions for a changing World of Work” analyses the essential role of institutions in ensuring effective and inclusive labour market and social protection systems, considering the evolving needs of a diverse and increasingly global workforce. Finally, Track IV: “Good Ideas, no impact?: Implementing labour regulation” explores the often challenging gap between policy ambitions and real-world effectiveness of labour rights, encouraging an evidence-based approach to policy development and reform. Together, these four tracks call for collaboration, innovative thinking, and a renewed commitment to building a world of work that is truly equitable, sustainable, and inclusive for all.

Track I. Decent employment now: Can the standard growth and development models deliver?

Global employment has been recovering from the significant losses experienced during the pandemic and the subsequent period of high inflation. However, this recovery is uneven across countries, with many developing countries still confronting with high levels of unemployment, under-employment and inactivity. This recovery means in many cases a return to the pre-pandemic situation, where deficits in decent employment, including informality and inequality, remained considerably high. In addition, global real wages have declined in the context of rapidly increasing energy and food prices, further exacerbating this situation. As a result, the past five years of global turbulence represent “lost opportunities” in the global pursuit for more and better employment, particularly in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8.

Structural transformation has also been accelerating in many parts of the world. Technological innovations such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence, climate change, and demographic shifts have dramatically reshaped the landscape for employment. Yet again, studies show that while these transformations have the potential to create decent employment, this potential is often not fully realized. Often, large productivity gains from technological change have not always translated into significant employment and income gains for workers. Similarly, such gains have not effectively reached small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are major sources of employment. Moreover, large green infrastructure investments often face skill shortages, limiting decent employment opportunities. The significant employment-creation potential of the care economy in ageing society remains under-utilized. In developing countries, particularly low-income countries, difficult macroeconomic environments often constrain fiscal space, making it challenging to invest in inclusive structural transformation. These issues raise questions about the role of industrial policies, especially how to develop and finance inclusive and employment-rich industrial strategies.

It is thus not surprising, that there is a growing demand for more effective approaches that can deliver more decent employment here and now. The question is how well the standard growth and development model can respond to this call for “decent employment now”, particularly considering the lagging progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation. Against this backdrop, this track invites papers that address the following questions:

- What are the lessons learned from economic and employment policies during the pandemic and the recovery process in terms of quantity and quality of employment?
- How are technological innovations and climate change impacting the structure of employment, including both direct and indirect effects on various sectors? What policy measures are needed for better decent employment outcomes?
- How are aging populations, migration patterns, and demographic changes reshaping labour markets and creating new challenges? What are the policy implications?
- What are the implications of increasingly complex global supply chains for labour markets, particularly the persistence of informal work, especially in developing countries?

- What measures and policies are necessary to overcome the macroeconomic and fiscal constraints to implement policy packages needed to improve wages and employment conditions?
- How can politics be proactive in placing decent employment as the centre of economic and social policies given the difficult macroeconomic environments and fiscal constraints?
- What are the alternative economic models or policy packages that can address employment issues and prioritize social well-being and worker rights more effectively? How can they overcome macroeconomic and fiscal pressures in order to be effective?

This track will have a **special session** on “**Human-centred economics and sustainable development**” that critically examine the limitations of current macroeconomic models in addressing fundamental economic challenges and explore alternative economic thinking. There is a need for a paradigm shift in how we conceive of economic growth and development, moving beyond GDP-centric approaches towards human-centered models. We invite submissions that propose new conceptual, empirical, and policy frameworks that integrate social and environmental considerations, address distributional justice, and offer pathways toward a more sustainable and equitable future. We particularly encourage innovative approaches that reimagine the "source code" of our economic system and offer practical solutions for achieving the sustainable development goals.

Track coordinators: Sangheon Lee, Uma Rani, Dorothea Schmidt-Klau, Imraan Valodia, Ekkehard Ernst, Felipe Vella Pateo

Track II. Worker agency and voice in transition

The evolving world of work is not only reshaping employment creation and destruction, changing the way work is done, and transforming the labour laws and institutions that govern it, but is also affecting the way workers' interests are represented. Rapid technological advances, particularly in artificial intelligence and digital tools, are increasing employers' surveillance and control over workers, blurring boundaries, challenging labour law protections, and dispersing the workforce, making it harder for workers to voice their concerns.

Vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters poses significant challenges to decent work. In many cases, the transition to green employment is being driven by governments and capital without meaningful worker participation, raising concerns about the erosion of worker representation in the green transition. In some regions of the world, authoritarianism and escalating military conflicts are destroying the lives and fundamental rights of workers and their families. They are accelerating the crisis of democracy and social justice.

While trade unions remain one of the most effective channels for workers to make their voices heard, unionisation rates are stagnating or falling in many developed countries, indicating a crisis in worker representation. A challenge unions face is also representing informal workers in several parts of the world. Conversely, unionisation is on the rise in some regions, and alternative

grassroots groups are emerging. The significant changes facing the world demand a strengthening of workers' rights to be informed about decisions that affect them, so that they can participate in the decision-making process, and collectively determine the outcomes. The Philadelphia Declaration, adopted by the ILO in 1944, distinguishes itself from previous human rights declarations by recognising that human dignity encompasses both material well-being and spiritual development. It emphasises that fighting poverty requires active worker participation and recognizes the importance of freedom of expression and association for sustained progress. Ultimately, the Declaration stresses that solidarity and the collective freedom of workers are essential to achieving prosperity for all.

This track will explore the urgent need to strengthen workers' voices in shaping labour market policies and navigating the changing world of work. In an era marked by the triple transition - demographics, climate change and technological development - it is crucial to ensure that the benefits are shared fairly and that no one is left behind. Active involvement of workers in the decision-making process that directly affect them is a key aspect of achieving this goal.

This track will analyse the political, economic, social, institutional, and technological factors that undermine or enhance workers' voices, exploring measures needed to strengthen workers' voice in the context of the triple transition – demographics, climate change and technological development. The track invites papers that offer new perspective and strategies at the international, regional and national level to address the following questions:

- What role can workers play in addressing the climate crisis, and how can we strengthen their voice in climate-related decision-making processes?
- Regarding new forms of labour controls and workers' voices in the digitalization context, what challenges arise from the proliferation of precarious work and invisible controls, and how can we effectively respond?
- How are workers responding to the interconnected challenges of the climate transition and the digital transition? What new tools and strategies are needed to navigate these simultaneous transformations and the resulting labour market restructuring?
- What are the various efforts to strengthen workers' voices? For example, utilising digital technology for organizing, employing digital platforms for information exchange and training, and forming alliances and joint actions with NGOs?
- What are some effective strategies for strengthening the voice of workers in the informal economy? What are some cases of successful or unsuccessful but significant attempts to create, facilitate, or enable multi-stakeholder bargaining?
- How can we ensure that worker voices are central to labour reforms and the development of effective labour institutions, particularly in developing countries?
- How can digital technologies be leveraged to enhance worker voice and solidarity, rather than undermining them?

Track coordinators: Jeong-Hee Lee, Anil Verma, Praveen Jha

Track III. Institutions for a changing world of work

The world of work is undergoing a period of dramatic changes driven by several concurrent trends. New technologies, particularly digitalization and artificial intelligence, are increasing productivity and facilitating the global interconnectedness of work. The shift towards decarbonization is leading to a comprehensive transformation in production processes. At the same time, the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. In developed countries, aging societies are leading to labour shortages, while in less developed countries, a lack of employment opportunities plagues the younger generation.

These structural changes pose significant risks for many workers. The reorganization of national and international value chains threatens employment losses. New, less protected forms of work, such as platform work, are on the rise. New types of work-related stress are emerging, often due to electronic monitoring and performance targets. Poor working conditions, including low pay, long or irregular working hours, high health and safety risks, low job stability, weak labour and social protection and insufficient training and further education for the digital and green economy, are largely attributed to non-existent, weak or unsuitable labour market institutions, social security systems and related systems. These systems are often unable to provide adequate and universal protection during this period of rapid change.

The enormous potential of new technologies to improve working conditions can only be realised through strong labour market institutions. In many countries, such institutions must first be established. In others, they must be adapted to address new conditions and challenges, such as new forms of employment, migration, climate change and the use of artificial intelligence, to effectively protect employees. To ensure decent work, these institutions must be inclusive, meaning that they not only include vulnerable employees in principle, but also develop the political will and appropriate enforcement mechanisms to limit evasion by employers. Given the high proportion of informal employees in many parts of the world, labour and social protection cannot be limited to formally employed workers.

This track seeks to explore the need for building, revitalizing and adapting labour market institutions to address the complex challenges we face globally. It will examine the conditions under which institution-building and revitalization can succeed and identify the coalitions of actors responsible for their success. Track III invites papers to stimulate dialogue between academics, policymakers and practitioners from the different disciplines and will address the following questions:

- How can we strengthen labour market institutions, social security systems, and related institutions to effectively address the impacts of informal work, climate change and decarbonisation, global supply chains, greater migration flows and new technologies like AI in the employment context?
- How can we extend collective bargaining rights and other forms of social dialogue to encompass workers who may be currently excluded from such protection both within the formal and in the informal economy?

- How can we ensure that workers are able to use and develop their potential through their life course, by not only being able to access initial training and skill development opportunities but also opportunities to update their skills or even completely retrain if their skills are at risk of obsolescence?
- How can labour and social protection be extended to workers in informal employment, also with a view to facilitating transitions to the formal economy?
- How can we extend the development of a care infrastructure to support working parents in managing both care and work demands and provide for decent work conditions for those providing the care support?
- What can we learn across national borders from successful examples of the establishment and modernization of inclusive labour market institutions?
- What role do new constellations of actors play, beyond national borders, alongside the traditional actors such as the state, trade unions, employers' associations and international institutions?
- In the context of global institutional building, who should benefit from these institutions? How do we navigate questions of inclusion and exclusion, particularly in relation to global North vs. global South, formal vs. informal work, and other dividing lines?

Track coordinators: Jill Rubery, Gerhard Bosch, Kea Tjijdens, Dina Bishara, Christina Behrendt

Track IV. Good ideas, no impact?: Effective labour regulation

Across the world, labour laws continue to be adopted and reformed. Policymakers are responding to both new and longstanding challenges by revising legal texts and engaging in collective negotiations. The digitalisation of work and the subsequent rise in working from home, for example, are driving a global trend towards a legal ‘right to disconnect’. How to regulate platform work and workplace artificial intelligence are subjects of intense debate. The quest to embed labour rights across global value chains continues to produce new initiatives. Climate justice and environmental degradation are increasingly incorporated into collective bargaining agreements worldwide. Traditional labour law objectives, such as minimum wages, are emerging in new forms and contexts. Equality and work-life balance objectives are inspiring innovative approaches.

Despite ongoing efforts to establish new and recalibrate existing labour rights, application and enforcement of such rights remain profoundly challenging. The realization of rights at work remains stalled and access to labour justice and effective redress are challenging, especially for vulnerable workers. In both the global North and South, across formal and informal settings, the failure of legal and/or collectively agreed norms to transform into material improvements for workers is becoming increasingly evident. While innovative approaches to promote inclusive labour protection, including through strategic enforcement, are taking shape, there are still challenges in the effectiveness of such approaches in many countries due, among others, to limited resources (e.g. for labour inspection). At the international level, the World Bank’s new Business

Ready project is sparking renewed concerns about the risks of quantifying and comparing labour law regimes, recalling the controversy that surrounded the Bank's Doing Business agenda.

This track focuses on the challenges of translating aspirations for decent work into real-world change. We welcome a broad range of papers on both emerging regulatory trends and the application and enforcement of labour rights. We invite papers that draw on diverse interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies, that investigate countries in all regions, and address regulation through legislation, collective negotiation or other modes. In particular, this track invites papers that respond to the following questions:

- What legal, institutional and political barriers hinder the implementation of labour law reforms in developing countries? How can we address these roadblocks to create a more equitable and inclusive labour market for all workers, including those in the informal economy?
- How can we legally protect workers' rights to disconnect from work outside of working hours in an increasingly digitalized work environment? How has the right to disconnect impacted employment and labour relations, and workers' lives, in practice?
- Are the evolving laws on platform work fulfilling their objectives? What are the main challenges arising from their application and how is it possible to improve their effectiveness?
- How do access to justice and remedies feature in different legal and institutional frameworks governing and enforcing labour rights? Which policies, initiatives or practices can help making labour rights a reality for all?
- What legal and regulatory frameworks are necessary to address the challenges and opportunities presented by AI and other emerging technologies in the world of work, including in relation to access to justice?
- What legal frameworks and mechanisms are needed to ensure decent work standards throughout global supply chains, particularly for informal workers at the lower tiers?
- How can we ensure that climate justice is integrated into labour laws and regulation to protect workers from the impacts of climate change and promote a just transition?
- How can we close protective gaps for migrant workers, including temporary workers?
- How is the new generation of minimum wage laws shaping wages and collective bargaining?
- What can legal regimes on equality and work-life balance teach us about effective regulation?
- How can we accurately measure the impact of legal and policy interventions on labour market outcomes and worker well-being?

We are particularly interested in contributions that move beyond simply stating problems and suggesting vague or idealistic solutions. We welcome papers that grapple with the empirical realities and point to reforms that are both responsive to and feasible in their national contexts.

Track coordinators: Deirdre McCann, Sean Cooney, Valerie Van Goethem, Kroum Markov, Aristeia Koukiadaki, Lisa Tortell, Arianna Rossi, Fabiola Mieres

This track will have a **special session** on "**Normative Frameworks for Social Justice**," which will be held under the auspices of the Global Coalition for Social Justice and in light of the Second World Summit for Social Development. This session invites evidence-based papers examining the economic impact of new normative frameworks that establish labour rights as human rights, reduce inequalities, and promote social justice. The session seeks to understand how, and the conditions under which, labour regulation promotes inclusive economic development and ensures a fair distribution of the fruits of economic progress. Furthermore, it will explore reforms to the International Financial Architecture that promote a human rights-based economy and the role of fair taxation and participatory budgeting in reducing inequality.

DAY 1: KEYNOTE ADDRESS

TBD

DAY 2: PLENARY ON

TBD

DAY 3: CLOSING PLENARY ON

TBD

DEADLINES

Abstract submission (RDW Fellowship applicants)	20 January 2025
Abstract submission (General and special session proposals) Extended	17 February 2025
Communication of acceptance (RDW Fellowship applicants)	28 February 2025
Communication of acceptance (General and Special Session proposals)	7 April 2025
Full paper submission	30 June 2025

Registration for the Conference will open on Monday, 14 April 2025

SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS

The organizing committee invites you to submit abstracts for the 2025 RDW Conference:

- Abstracts should be in English.
- Abstracts should have a maximum of 400 words, containing the following elements: introduction, research question(s), methodology, contribution to literature and findings.

- Abstracts must be submitted on the conference website, via the link to submissions: www.conftool.org/rdw2025
- The author(s) must indicate their preferred conference track.
- **Deadline for abstract submission (General) Extended: 17 February 2025.**
- **Deadline for abstract submission (RDW Fellowship applicants): 20 January 2025.**

The abstracts will be selected on the basis of a double-blind peer-review process. The selection will be based on (i) thematic fit (15 per cent), (ii) innovative nature (25 per cent), (iii) policy relevance (10 per cent), (iv) contribution to the literature and body of knowledge in general (15 per cent); and (v) quality of methodology and analytical rigour (35 per cent).

Authors can submit more than one abstract but can present only one paper at the Conference.

Guidelines for final papers can be found on the conference website. It is expected that a Special issue for a Journal will be produced, drawing on selected conference papers.

PROPOSALS FOR SPECIAL SESSIONS

Special Sessions devoted to existing research projects or specific themes with an international content are encouraged. They will be 90 minutes in length and involve at least three presenters. The proposals:

- should be in English;
- should describe the session as a whole (maximum of 800 words), including the names and affiliations of the presenters, the chair and the discussant, if applicable;
- must also include brief descriptions of the individual papers (maximum 150 words each) proposed for the session; and
- must be submitted on the conference website via the link to submissions: www.conftool.org/rdw2025.

Deadline for submission of Special Session proposals (Extended): 17 February 2025

Deadline for submission of Special Session proposals (Extended): 17 February 2025
Human-centred economics and sustainable development
New Normative Frameworks for Social Justice

The proposals will be selected on the basis of a double-blind peer-review process. The selection will be based on (i) thematic fit (15 per cent), (ii) innovative nature (25 per cent), (iii) policy relevance (10 per cent), (iv) contribution to the literature and body of knowledge in general (15 per cent); and (v) quality of methodology and analytical rigor (35 per cent).

Guidelines for final papers can be found on the conference website.

FEES AND EXPENSES

There will be no fee for conference participants. Travel costs must be met from participants' own resources, although limited funds will be available for authors of selected papers who are from and reside in developing or emerging countries (see "RDW Fellowships" below).

RDW FELLOWSHIPS

A unique aspect of the RDW Conference is the commitment to creating an environment for global research dialogue, especially between developed and developing countries. In this respect, a RDW Fellowship fund has been established to support **researchers from and residing in [developing or emerging countries](#) who may otherwise be prevented from attending**. Interested researchers **who have not been awarded**

a RDW Fellowship grant before are strongly encouraged to submit their abstracts no later than 20 January 2025 (please note that this deadline for submission is two weeks earlier than the general deadline). Successful applicants will receive RDW Fellowship grants of an amount determined by the estimated cost of travel and other expenses. In the case of multiple authors, only one author will be granted the fellowship.

COMMITTEES, NETWORK AND SECRETARIAT

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Further details are available at the RDW website: www.ilo.org/rdw2025

For any queries, please contact the Conference Organizing Committee at: rdw@ilo.org