

February 14, 2026 - Université du Québec à Montréal

Quebec Model United Nations

Background Guide

Impacts of technological development on workers

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Ensuring equal rights in the workplace

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Committee Overview

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was created in 1919 as part of the *Treaty of Versailles*, following World War I, with the aim of resolving issues of justice and inequality in the world of work.¹ It became a specialized agency of the United Nations not long after its creation, in 1946. Today, the ILO counts 187 Member States, each governed by the *ILO Constitution*² and the *Declaration of Philadelphia*.³

The ILO is unique among United Nations bodies as it is a tripartite organization, meaning it includes representatives of governments, employers, and workers in its decision-making processes. These representatives operate through three main bodies: the International Labour Conference, which serves as the ILO's main decision-making body and meets annually in Geneva, the Governing Body, and the International Labour Office, controlled by the Governing Body.⁴ Many committees also assist the work of the Governing Body and of the Office, as well as panels of experts and regional meetings which are held periodically when a special matter arises.⁵ The ILO is also supported by a supervisory system that validates if its Member States respect the ratified conventions regarding work standards.⁶ The membership is open to all United Nations Member States, as well as other States by approval of the General Conference.⁷

The ILO's mandate is to promote decent work for all and ensure the protection of workers' rights worldwide.⁸ In order to achieve this goal, the ILO can, amongst other things, set international labour standards, develop policies to improve work conditions and employment opportunities for all, help with the cooperation between governments, employers, and workers and put in place social security measures regarding income and health issues.⁹

The ILO's mandate is primarily achieved through Conventions, which are binding, and Recommendations, that are only advisory.¹⁰ The ILO then provides assistance to member states in implementing standards and policies. Annually, each Member State has to submit a report to the ILO regarding the measures "taken to give effect to the provisions of Conventions to which it is a party".¹¹

¹ International Labour Organization, 'History of the ILO' <https://www.ilo.org/about-ilo/history-ilo>, accessed 30 November 2025.

² Constitution of the International Labour Organisation (Part XIII Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany) (signed 28 June 1919, entered into force 10 January 1920, as amended 20 April 1948) 15 UNTS 35 (ILO Constitution).

³ ILO Declaration concerning the Aims and Purposes of the International Labour Organization (done 10 May 1944) 15 UNTS 104.

⁴ International Labour Organization, Constitution of the International Labour Organization art 2.

⁵ International Labour Organization, 'How the ILO Works' <https://www.ilo.org/about-ilo/how-ilo-works>, accessed 30 November 2025.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ International Labour Organization, Constitution of the International Labour Organization art 1.

⁸ International Labour Organization, Constitution of the International Labour Organization (Preamble).

⁹ International Labour Organization, Declaration concerning the Aims and Purposes of the International Labour Organisation (Declaration of Philadelphia), art 3 (10 May 1944).

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, Constitution of the International Labour Organization, art 19.

¹¹ ILO Constitution, art. 22.

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The Impacts of Technological Development on Workers

Introduction

Recent acceleration in technological developments will inevitably lead to fundamental changes to the core of workers' lives.¹² Whether it comes from the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance or replace workers' capabilities, or the growing importance of digital tools in every workplace, the impact of technological development has to be harnessed by Member States to ensure a sustainable and beneficial growth.¹³ Technological development in the workplace is deemed to be able to help achieve various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*¹⁴, such as SDG 1 on ending poverty, SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive growth, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities.¹⁵ However, the implementation and development of technology in the workplace will produce those beneficial effects only if Member States, with the help of the United Nations, are able to develop a human-centred approach through policies and programs. Such an approach would inevitably have impacts that would result in reduced inequalities regarding access to technology and digital skills education, and cooperation with other Member States to share knowledge and create a sustainable economy.¹⁶

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have implemented various frameworks and initiatives to address the challenges and opportunities of technological development in the workplace. A key initiative is the ILO's Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019), endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in Resolution A/73/L.117,¹⁷ which aims to "emphasize the need for a human-centred approach to the future of work", especially regarding technological development.¹⁸ Additionally, different international bodies have presented policy guidelines to help Member States adapt their internal legislation to navigate the rapid evolution of the workplace and to foster sustainable technological implementation in the workplace for all.¹⁹

¹² United Nation System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, 'United Nations system strategy on the future of work' (CEB/2019/add.2, Geneva, 2019) 19.

¹³ ibid.

¹⁴ UNGA Res 70/1 (2015) UN Doc A/70/1.

¹⁵ United Nation System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (n 1).

¹⁶ ibid 36.

¹⁷ UNGA Res 73/L.117 (2024) UN Doc A/73/L.117.

¹⁸ ibid.

¹⁹ International Labour Organization, 'Meeting of Experts to Adopt Policy Guidelines for the Promotion of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Targeting the Agro-food Sectors' (Geneva, 2016); International Labour Organization, 'Artificial intelligence adoption and its impact on jobs' (G20 Technical Paper, South Africa, 2025); Salvi del Pero, A., P. Wyckoff and A. Vourc'h , 'Using Artificial Intelligence in the workplace: What are the main ethical risks?', (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper, 273, 2022); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'AI principles' (2019) <<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/ai-principles.html>>.

One of the most crucial elements for Member States regarding the future of work is navigating the implementation of AI in the workplace. Finding a balance between ensuring competitiveness and economic growth and ensuring that workers are not ultimately replaced by AI is a complex issue. Indeed, the implementation of AI across various sectors, both private and public, to increase efficiency could, if poorly executed, undermine the stability of certain categories of employment and jeopardize the livelihoods of many.²⁰ Thus, even though ILO does not see a “job apocalypse” occurring in the coming years, international initiatives will be required to ensure that the potential of AI regarding productivity, improved working conditions and job creation is not overruled by the risks inevitably associated with it, such as automation and exacerbation of economic disparities (between regions, gender, etc.).²¹

International and Regional Framework

Technological development has always been a fundamental concern for the United Nations, as it is seen as a way to achieve sustainable development for Member States.²²

The SDG relies heavily on the promotion of technological innovation. For example, SDG 8, regarding decent work and economic growth, promotes technological innovation for achieving “higher levels of economic productivity”²³ (target 8.2), while reaffirming the importance of ensuring full employment and decent working conditions in the process (target 8.5).²⁴ Moreover, to achieve SDG 9 and 12 regarding sustainable production, one of the main focuses of the United Nations is to ensure diversified investments in the technological capabilities of Member States, in particular developing ones, in order “to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production” (see target 9.5, 9.a and 12.a).²⁵

Different bodies of the United Nations have developed a framework regarding the use of technologies to ensure economic growth.²⁶ These resolutions promote equitable access to new technologies, encourage investments and provide policy guidelines for Member States. Regarding the promotion of artificial intelligence from a development perspective, the UNGA adopted a resolution in 2024 inviting Member States to cooperate in ensuring

²⁰ Janine Berg, ‘Minimizing the negative effects of AI-induced technological unemployment’(ILO 2024), <<https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/minimizing-negative-effects-ai-induced-technological-unemployment>>.

²¹ United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, ‘Artificial intelligence and the future of work: Will AI replace our jobs?’ (2025) <<https://unric.org/en/artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-work-will-ai-replace-our-jobs/>>.

²² UNGA Res 2626(XXV) (1970) UN Doc A/RES/2626(XXV); UNGA Res 35/56 (1980) UN Doc A/RES/35/56; UNGA Res 45/199 (1990) UN Doc A/RES/45/199; UNGA Res 55/2 (2000) UN Doc A/RES/55/2.

²³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘The 17 Goals’ (2015) <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>> accessed 28 August 2025.

²⁴ ibid.

²⁵ ibid.

²⁶ UNGA Res 34/218 (1979) UN Doc A/RES/34/218; ECOSOC Res 2023/4 (2023) UN Doc E/RES/2023/4; UNGA Res 76/213 (2023) UN Doc A/RES/76/213. ILO favourable

equitable access to new technologies and sustainable economic, social and environmental development, while acknowledging the risks that may arise from the deployment of AI in the employment market.²⁷

The impact of technological innovation on workers' conditions and rights is specifically addressed by the ILO in its *Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work*.²⁸ Indeed, the ILO put to the forefront of their action the importance of harnessing the potential of technological progress to achieve decent work conditions and sustainable development. This declaration has been adopted by the 187 ILO Member States and recognized by the UNGA.²⁹

This declaration also reaffirms the importance of workers acquiring technological skills in order to secure their place in the labour market today and in the future³⁰. This was also an important component of the *Paid Educational Leave Convention* adopted by the ILO.³¹

The right to work and to favorable working conditions is embedded in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.³² As stated in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the role of the United Nations is to ensure full and productive employment and decent work³³ for all in order to eradicate poverty and promote an overall improvement of working conditions.

Role of the International System

Aligned with the United Nations's goals of technological innovation, the ILO has worked towards improving workers' conditions. In this regard, numerous standards, named International Labour Standards (ILS), have been developed, and some have seen their importance be reminded. Taking different forms, such as legally binding treaties (Conventions or Protocols) or non-binding guidelines (Recommendations), those standards aim at promoting equal rights and opportunity in workplaces and ensure "that the growth of the global economy benefits to all".³⁴ In a 2019 publication, the ILO provides a brief overview of its various standards, dividing them into different topics.³⁵ For example, in the theme "Port workers," ILO standards contribute to technological development to improve, in

²⁷ UNGA Res 78/L.49 (2024) UN Doc A/78/L.49.

²⁸ International Labour Organization, 'ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work' (2019), 3.

²⁹ UNGA Res 73/L.117 (2019) UN Doc A/73/L.117.

³⁰ ibid.

³¹ Paid Educational Leave Convention (adopted 24 June 1974, entered into force 23 September 1976) 1023 UNTS 243.

³² UNGA 217 (III) (1948) UN Docs A/RES/217 (III).

³³ ECOSOC Res 2007/2 (2007) UN Doc E/RES/2007/2; ECOSOC Res 2008/18 (2008) UN Doc E/RES/2008/18.

³⁴ International Labour Organization, 'International Labour Standards'

<<https://www.ilo.org/international-labour-standards>> accessed 28 July 2025.

³⁵ International Labour Organization, 'Rules of the game : An introduction to the standards-related work of the International Labour Organization' <wcms_672549.pdf> accessed 29 November 2025.

particular, safety at work.³⁶ The agricultural sector is also regulated by many standards, from the right to association to safety and health.³⁷

Under ILO mandates, regional and sectoral meetings are organized throughout the years. Regional meetings exist to support the global activities of the ILO and help the implementation of the ILO's strategies, for example, by adapting them to regional contexts, and promoting knowledge sharing.³⁸ The *Meeting of Experts to Adopt Policy Guidelines for the Promotion of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Targeting the Agro-food Sectors* is a great example, highlighting, in its final report, that access to new technologies notably helps with productivity, diversification of activities and standardization of operations.³⁹

Another United Nations organ that promotes technological development is the UNDP. With the goal of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, the UNDP complements the ILO's mission by promoting development in the labour field.⁴⁰ For example, they propose three Enablers to maximize development impact; the first one being "Digitalization".⁴¹ With the "SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda", this Enabler emphasizes the importance of digital technologies for development by showcasing digital ways of achieving the SDGs.⁴² Many of these solutions apply to the ILO's program, such as the setting up of a platform able to "monitor and optimize the use and distribution of resources".⁴³ Another example is the partnership between the ILO and the UNDP on different topics. In 2022, the "Global Call to Action for a Human-centred Recovery", promoted by both the ILO and the UNDP, was put in place as a way to manage the rising inequalities provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁴ The promotion of decent employment, the acceleration of labour market formalization and the advancement of social protection for all are part of this partnership.⁴⁵

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the subsidiary organ responsible for the promotion and implementation of a globalized economy, also complements the ILO's work by hosting the secretariat of, and providing substantive support to, the United Nations

³⁶ Ibid., 98.

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ International Labour Organization 'Regional meetings of the International Labour Organization' <<https://www.ilo.org/meetings-and-events/regional-meetings>> accessed 28 July 2025.

³⁹ International Labour Organization, 'Meeting of Experts to Adopt Policy Guidelines for the Promotion of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Targeting the Agro-food Sectors' (Geneva, 2016) 26.

⁴⁰ United Nations Development Programme, 'About us' <<https://www.undp.org/about-us>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴¹ United Nations Development Programme, 'Expertise' <<https://www.undp.org/expertise>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴² International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Development Programme, 'SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda' (2023) <<https://www.ilo.org/resource/ilo-and-undp-partner-accelerate-job-creation-and-social-protection-and>.pdf> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴³ ibid., 22.

⁴⁴ International Labour Organization, 'ILO and UNDP partner to accelerate job creation and social protection and to foster pathways to formality' (2022)

<<https://www.ilo.org/resource/ilo-and-undp-partner-accelerate-job-creation-and-social-protection-and>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴⁵ ibid.

Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD).⁴⁶ The CSTD is a subsidiary body of the ECOSOC and is responsible for all debates on how science and technology affect the development of Member States.⁴⁷ With its annual intergovernmental forum, national governments and civil societies can participate in discussions about technological innovation.⁴⁸ The 2016-2017 Panel, which took place in Geneva, is a great example of how the ILO and the CSTD are connected.⁴⁹ In fact, this forum highlighted the importance of science and technology for a more climate-resilient and productive agriculture.⁵⁰

The Use of Technology to Improve Working Conditions in the Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector refers to the part of the economy that is involved in the production, processing and distribution of food and agricultural products.⁵¹ It covers activities such as farming, livestock raising, forestry and fishing.⁵² This sector is also recognized as the key to defeating food insecurity and hunger. In fact, with more than 673 million people facing hunger in 2024, about one in five people affected in Africa and around 2,3 billion people experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity, those issues are more than pressing.⁵³ Furthermore, agricultural workers are at higher risk of facing “high levels of working poverty, food insecurity, poor health and safety conditions and lack of labour and social protection”.⁵⁴ With approximately one billion people working in the agricultural sector worldwide, the United Nations and its specialized committees, such as the ILO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), must work together and with Member States to improve working conditions in this sector. In fact, as the ILO explained, “a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural sector with full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work at its core is essential for eradicating poverty, tackling inequalities and ending global hunger”.⁵⁵ Throughout the policies, resolutions and work of

⁴⁶ United Nation Trade and Development, ‘About UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)’<<https://unctad.org/about>> accessed 28 July 2025; United Nation Trade and Development, ‘Commission on Science and Technology for Development’<<https://unctad.org/topic/commission-on-science-and-technology-for-development>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴⁷ United Nation Trade and Development, ‘Avour the CSTD’<<https://unctad.org/topic/commission-on-science-and-technology-for-development/about>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁴⁸ United Nation Trade and Development, ‘Commission on Science and Technology for Development’ (n 26).

⁴⁹ United Nation Trade and Development, ‘How can science and technology deliver on development’ (Information note, Geneva, 2017).

⁵⁰ ibid.

⁵¹ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, ‘Overview of Canada’s agriculture and agri-food sector’<<https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/sector/overview>>, accessed 28 July 2025.

⁵² ibid.

⁵³ FAFO, IFAD, UNICEF, WEP and WHO, ‘The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 - Addressing high food price inflation for food security and nutrition (Rome, 2025) xii.

⁵⁴ International Labour Organization, ‘Agriculture; plantations; other rural sectors’<<https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/industries-and-sectors/agriculture-aquaculture-plantations-other-rural-sectors>> accessed 28 July 2025.

⁵⁵ ibid.

those organizations, a solution seems to be emerging: the increased use of technology in the agricultural sector.

With the goal of building sustainable food systems, the *Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector* was published in 2023 by the ILO.⁵⁶ As one of their sectoral guidelines, the five chapters of this policy give guidance to everyone involved in the implementation of policies and measures in the agri-food sector to achieve decent work in this area.⁵⁷ The section entitled “Improving access to new technologies” explains that “access to new technologies can help agri-food enterprises to boost productivity and crop yields, diversify into new crops, facilitate access to markets and standardize and monitor agri-food operations”.⁵⁸ As a way of improving safety and health in the agricultural sector, the ILO has published a code of practice titled *Safety and health in agriculture*, destined to all “farmers and agricultural workers”.⁵⁹ In this code, the use of technology is seen as a way of improving many aspects of the workers’ daily life, such as enhancing their ergonomics,⁶⁰ eliminating risks associated with working with chemicals and other biological products,⁶¹ and reducing exposure to noise and vibrations.⁶²

One of the biggest misconceptions about technology in the workplace is that it steals workers’ jobs. However, a paper published in 2022 by the FAO showed that while “[m]echanization reduces demand for workers performing the now automated task, [it] increases demand for workers to operate, maintain, and manage the new equipment.”⁶³ Moreover, mechanization can also create jobs in other stages of the supply chain.⁶⁴ The FAO explained that farmers who do not adapt to technologies are actually the ones who are the most penalized.⁶⁵ In fact, not only does it make their farms less competitive and unable to upgrade their production, but it was also recognized that automation and technology increase worker productivity, which has a direct effect on their wages and working conditions.⁶⁶ The ILO arrived at the same conclusions as the FAO; the *Policy Brief - Rural Youth Employment* showed that by adopting digital technologies in rural areas, it could enable access to skills development and services, and expand market opportunities, which unequivocally leads to job creation.⁶⁷ This policy brief also explained that youth, with access to modern technology,

⁵⁶ International Labour Organization, ‘Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector’ (Geneva, 2025).

⁵⁷ ibid 42.

⁵⁸ ibid 26.

⁵⁹ International Labour Organization, ‘Safety and health in agriculture’ (ILO Code of practice, Geneva, 2011).

⁶⁰ ibid 96 -98.

⁶¹ ibid 113 and 153.

⁶² ibid 183 and 189.

⁶³ Diane Charlton, Alexandre E. Hill and J. Edward Taylor, ‘Automation and social impacts: winners and losers’ (Background paper for the State of Food and Agriculture 2022, FAO, Rome, 2022) 21.

⁶⁴ ibid.

⁶⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization, ‘The future of the agrifood workforce’

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/1c329966-521a-4277-83d7-07283273b64b/content/s_ofa-2022/future-agrifood-workforce.html> accessed 27 august 2025.

⁶⁶ ibid.

⁶⁷ International Labour Organization, ‘Elevating the potential of rural youth: Paths to Decent Jobs and Sustainable Future’ (ILO Policy Brief, Geneva, 2024).

could become the forerunners in greening the agri-food system and creating better working conditions in this sector for the generation to come.⁶⁸ With relevant technology, the productivity of value chains could also increase, generating new opportunities for youth-led enterprises and employment.⁶⁹

For technology to have this impact, it requires targeted and forward-looking policies. In fact, without infrastructure, equipment and skills, those benefits could not only never see the light of day, but also increase inequalities.⁷⁰ With almost a third of the global population not using the internet in 2024, the lack of access to technology reinforces existing inequalities, such as access to education, health and public infrastructure, “with those without digital access unable to benefit from digital information, education and job opportunities, and job-search platforms”⁷¹ Not only that, but the frequent emergence of new technologies requires constant efforts to be up to date, thus creating an opportunity to deepen inequalities between rural and urban areas.⁷²

The Potential of Artificial Intelligence in Job Creation

According to the ILO, AI plays two distinct roles in the workplace.⁷³ First, it can be used to automate tasks, and second, it can support the automation of managerial functions through what is known as algorithmic management.⁷⁴ The ILO reports that one in four jobs globally could be significantly transformed due to the implementation of AI in the workplace.

However, the ILO makes it clear that the transformation of the employment environment resulting from the integration of AI into the workplace will not necessarily lead to job losses.⁷⁵ Indeed, “the most important impact of the technology is likely to be of augmenting work – automating some tasks within an occupation while leaving time for other duties – as opposed to fully automating occupations.”⁷⁶

Therefore, there is potential for AI to serve as a tool that complements and augments human labour. For example, AI can assist workers in performing peripheral tasks more efficiently, allowing them to dedicate more time to the core activities of their occupation (e.g., geriatric

⁶⁸ ibid 4.

⁶⁹ ibid 7.

⁷⁰ International Labour Organization, ‘Digital progress without inclusion leaves workers behind’ <<https://ilostat.ilo.org/digital-progress-without-inclusion-leaves-workers-behind/>> accessed 16 November 2025.

⁷¹ ibid.

⁷² ibid.

⁷³ International Labour Organization, ‘Artificial intelligence: topic portal’ <<https://www.ilo.org/artificial-intelligence#about>> accessed 27 august 2025.

⁷⁴ ibid; International Labour Organization, ‘Artificial intelligence adoption and its impact on jobs’ (G20 Technical Paper, South Africa, 2025) 1-2.

⁷⁵ Pawel Gmyrek and others, ‘Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure’ (ILO Working paper 140, 2025) 46.

⁷⁶ Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond, ‘Generative AI and jobs: A global analysis of potential effects on job quantity and quality’ (ILO Working paper 96, 2023) 1.

care, decision-making, etc.).⁷⁷ Similarly, AI could transform and optimize how the core activities of an occupation are done by humans, through redefining the processes and the methods (e.g., maintenance, psychotherapy, etc.).⁷⁸ AI can enhance human skills by working in tandem with human intelligence, driving innovation and improving performance (e.g., radiology, advanced data analysis, etc.). In other words, when properly implemented in the workplace, AI can serve as a powerful tool to advance SDG 8 by supporting both job creation and job augmentation.⁷⁹

However, the international community acknowledges that harnessing the full potential of AI for job creation and transformation, while minimizing its potentially disruptive effects on the labour market and job quality, will require strong policies.⁸⁰

It is important to recognize that women are at greater risk of job loss due to the integration of AI in the workplace. Indeed, women are often concentrated in clerical, financial and customer service roles due to persistent occupational sex segregation – occupations more susceptible to being automated.⁸¹ However, according to the ILO, job losses in female-dominated fields could be mitigated through investment, training, and improvements in job quality in other female-dominated sectors that remain underfunded and understaffed, and that AI cannot easily replace, such as healthcare and education.⁸²

Moreover, as stated by the ILO, upskilling and reskilling initiatives are essential to ensure that workers can take on tasks that AI cannot yet perform, as well as to equip them with the competencies needed to effectively use these tools and understand their limitations.⁸³ In other words, a sustainable transformation of the labour market through AI can only be achieved by promoting digital literacy and adopting a worker-centred approach, one in which workers are actively involved in the development and implementation of these technologies.

Furthermore, policymakers should ensure that AI is not used solely to enhance productivity, but also to improve working conditions and ensure that it leads to human labour augmentation and not constrain it.⁸⁴ Establishing a constructive dialogue between workers and employers, and ensuring that workers play a central role in the development and implementation of AI tools in the workplace, can help promote job augmentation instead of job automation.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ International Labour Organization, ‘Mind the AI Divide: Shaping a Global Perspective on the Future of Work’(2024) 14-16.

⁷⁸ ibid.

⁷⁹ ibid.

⁸⁰ Gmyrek and others (n 64) 46; International Labour Organization, ‘Artificial intelligence adoption and its impact on jobs (n 63) 14.

⁸¹ Gmyrek and others (n 64) 43-44; UNESCO, OECD and IDB ‘The Effects of AI on the Working Lives of Women’ (2022) 33.

⁸² Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond (n 65) 39.

⁸³ Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond (n 65) 39; International Labour Organization, ‘Artificial intelligence adoption and its impact on jobs (n 63) 15.

⁸⁴ Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond (n 65) 39; International Labour Organization, ‘Artificial intelligence adoption and its impact on jobs (n 63) 15; United Nation Trade and Development, ‘Technology and Innovation Report: Inclusive Artificial intelligence for Development’ (2025) 62.

⁸⁵ Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond (n 65) 39; UNESCO, OECD and IDB (n 70) 10 and 19.

Policymakers should also be mindful of ensuring job quality in the context of AI-driven job augmentation. While AI has the potential to enhance productivity and free up time for workers to focus on core tasks, it must not be implemented in ways that limit workers' agency or increase the intensity of their workload. Safeguarding job quality requires mechanisms that allow workers to provide feedback on the use of AI in their workplace, as well as clear regulations addressing the deployment of AI tools.⁸⁶

It is important to recognize that not all Member States possess the same capacity to develop and implement AI tools, and therefore may not equally benefit from the productivity and workplace improvements AI can offer.⁸⁷ Promoting international cooperation is therefore essential, particularly in the areas of knowledge sharing, training, technological investment, and the development of worker-centred policies.⁸⁸

Conclusion and Further Research

As technological development accelerates, Member States face both an unprecedented opportunity and a profound responsibility. Digital tools, mechanization and artificial intelligence can drive productivity, create new forms of employment and improve working conditions across sectors, from agri-food value chains to high-skilled services. Yet, without a human-centred approach, these same technologies risk deepening existing inequalities, undermining job quality and excluding those already at the margins, including rural workers, women, youth and low-wage workers. Member States now face the challenge of finding the middle ground between innovation and worker rights. Investment in digital and physical infrastructure, strong labour institutions, social dialogue, as well as targeted policies to close the digital inequalities and ensure that technological change translates into better wages, safer workplaces and more inclusive labour markets, are some of the challenges the international community will have to face in the next decade.

Many topics and questions are up for discussion by Member States, such as: how can international labour standards and the ILO *Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work* be operationalized to guide the human-centred implementation of AI and other technologies in the workplace? What concrete measures can Member States adopt to ensure that technological innovation in the agri-food sector improves working conditions and creates decent jobs, particularly for rural youth and small-scale farmers? What measures are needed to close the digital divide between and within Member States, including between urban and rural areas, so that all workers can benefit from access to technology and digital public infrastructure? How can international cooperation, including partnerships with United Nations agencies and regional organizations, be strengthened to share knowledge, regulate AI responsibly and prevent technological change from exacerbating global inequalities?

⁸⁶ Paweł Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond (n 65) 40-41.

⁸⁷ UNESCO, OECD and IDB (n 70) 16.

⁸⁸ ibid 17

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Ensuring Equal Rights in the Workplace

Introduction

The principles of parity, equity, and equality form the backbone of contemporary debates on workplace rights, yet they are often conflated or misunderstood. Equality refers to providing the same opportunities to all, while equity recognizes that different individuals face different barriers and therefore require tailored support.⁸⁹ Parity, on the other hand, emphasizes balanced representation, particularly in leadership and decision-making positions, as a condition for genuine inclusivity.⁹⁰ Despite decades of advocacy, equal rights in the workplace remain far from achieved. Persistent pay gaps, occupational differences, and systemic discrimination continue to disadvantage women and marginalized groups worldwide.

Intersectionality, a framework established to understand how overlapping social identities can create discrimination and disadvantages, is essential to this discussion, as this issue extends beyond formal employment to encompass unpaid and invisible care work, such as childcare, eldercare, household management, and domestic responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women. This unequal burden restricts professional opportunities and reinforces cycles of economic dependency. In fact, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), hundreds of millions of women worldwide are excluded from the labour market because of unpaid care responsibilities, underscoring how private household dynamics directly shape public economic outcomes.⁹¹

The economic structures of forced and child labour further complicate the path to equality. Globally, forced labour generates billions in illegal profits, often relying on children and vulnerable workers in conditions that violate their most basic human rights.⁹² In many low-income countries, the lack of access to education, decent work for adults, and adequate social protection drives families to rely on child labour for survival.⁹³ This not only robs children of their fundamental rights but also perpetuates generational cycles of poverty.

The level of economic and social development of a country, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping workplace equality. While some states have implemented policies supporting equal pay, transparency, and childcare support, others still struggle with basic enforcement against exploitation. International instruments, such as the ILO's *Forced Labour Convention*

⁸⁹ UNGEI. 2025. Your gender transformative education glossary.

<https://www.ungei.org/gender-transformative-education-glossary/gender/parity-equity-equality> . Accessed October 8th 2025.

⁹⁰ ibid.

⁹¹ International Labour Organization. 2024. Unpaid care work prevents 708 million women from participating in the labour market.

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/unpaid-care-work-prevents-708-million-women-participating-labour-market> . Accessed October 8th 2025.

⁹² ibid.

⁹³ International Labour Organization. 2025. Forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons.

<https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons>. Accessed October 8th 2025.

(C029)⁹⁴ and its 2014 Protocol,⁹⁵ the *Equal Remuneration Convention* (C100),⁹⁶ and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*,⁹⁷ provide frameworks to address these challenges. In this paper, we will explore strategies to advance equal rights in the workplace by focusing on two interconnected priorities: achieving parity in formal employment and eradicating child labour.

International and Regional Framework

According to UNICEF, child labour can often be caused by poverty, leading children to be exposed to slavery in its worst form when no action is taken.⁹⁸ C029 set forth a path for the international community through its quasi-unanimous ratification among ILO members; however, the UNCRC achieved a unanimous agreement to protect children from harm. It emphasized the need for Member States to establish international standards for the protection of children by setting forth a minimum age for admission in the workplace and providing appropriate work conditions, regulations for the number of hours worked, and sanctions for those infringing the law.⁹⁹

Furthermore, while international organizations have made significant advancements towards eliminating child labour, they have also reaffirmed the importance of achieving parity in the workplace. In 1951, the ILO adopted C100, one of the earliest treaties promoting gender equality, which required every ratifying Member State to enact laws ensuring equal pay. It provided a legal basis for women claiming parity and provided governments pursuing equity with a general guideline.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* in 1979. The convention's most notable feat is the creation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which monitors the implementation of the convention by Member States and identifies different areas where Member States could take further action.¹⁰¹

In addition to these global standards, regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) have also taken action. In fact, the EU Action for Equal Pay addresses this issue from various

⁹⁴ Forced Labour Convention (adopted 28 June 1930, entered into force 1 May 1932) 39 UNTS 55.

⁹⁵ Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention (adopted 11 June 2014, entered into force 9 November 2016) 3175 UNTS 199.

⁹⁶ Equal Remuneration Convention (adopted 29 June 1951, entered into force 23 May 1953) 165 UNTS 303 (C100).

⁹⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force on 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC).

⁹⁸ UNICEF, ‘What Is Child Labour?’ (UNICEF) <<https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>> accessed 19 July 2025.

⁹⁹ UNCRC.

¹⁰⁰ C100.

¹⁰¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted on 18 December 1979, entered into force on 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13.

angles, such as the *Pay Transparency Directive*,¹⁰² to reduce the pay gap between men and women and raise awareness by implementing an Equal Pay Day in many European Member States, which has gathered significant media attention. Typically, women are unaware that they are paid less than their male counterparts, making it challenging to identify the reasons behind the pay gap. Employers are now forced, under EU law, to provide reports of pay gaps between male and female employees.¹⁰³ Additionally, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) developed the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children. While it also addresses issues such as sexual exploitation of children, child marriage and corporal abuse, it also discusses ways to end child labour.¹⁰⁴ The ILO and the SAARC also collaborate by sharing information and experience, highlighting the importance of collaboration between regional and international entities to eradicate child labour.¹⁰⁵

Role of the International System

Bodies of the United Nations that are aligned with ensuring equal rights in the workplace are vast and varied. The ILO is particularly crucial to this mission since it was established to combat unequal work rights and promote social justice.¹⁰⁶ To help minimize issues related to unequal work, the ILO created various programs run by a wide range of professional actors. These actors include trade unions, employer organizations, and government representatives, who work together to achieve goals such as the elimination of child labour.¹⁰⁷ A key example of this collaborative effort is the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

Another important forum to mention would be the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which can analyze data and make policy recommendations to help over 100 Member States build a better society.¹⁰⁸ This forum aims to guide standards for global citizens, ensuring they can live in a society with equal opportunities and a good living environment.¹⁰⁹ Through this organization, numerous bodies and sub-committees were created to address specific areas, such as the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC). The ILO, UN Women, and the OECD are all key players in the fight for gender equality in the

¹⁰² European Commission, ‘EU Action for Equal Pay - European Commission’ (8 April 2019) <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/eu-action-equal-pay_en#the-work-life-balance-directive> accessed 18 July 2025.

¹⁰³ibid.

¹⁰⁴ International Labour Organization, ‘South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) | International Labour Organization’ (ILO, 9 June 2014) <<https://www.ilo.org/resource/south-asia-initiative-end-violence-against-children-saievac>> accessed 21 July 2025.

¹⁰⁵International Labour Organization, ‘ILO-South Asia Partnerships on Child Labour’ (ILO, 28 January 2024) <<https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/asia-and-pacific/countries-covered-ilo-regional-office-asia-and-pacific/ilo-india-and-south-asia/areas-work/child-labour-south-asia-hub/ilo-south-asia-partnerships-child-labour>> accessed 22 July 2025.

¹⁰⁶ ILO. 2025. À propos de l’OIT. <https://www.ilo.org/fr/propos-de-loit> Accessed July 14 2025.

¹⁰⁷ ibid.

¹⁰⁸ OECD. 2025. How we work. <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/how-we-work.html> Accessed July 13 2025.

¹⁰⁹ ibid.

workplace.¹¹⁰ EPIC is a great example of this fight, as it brings together governments, employers, and trade unions to develop public policies aimed at closing the gender pay gap worldwide.¹¹¹ It promotes data collection, best practices, and international cooperation to accelerate progress.¹¹²

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), established by the Economic and Social Council, is another key body that monitors the progress of women's rights and advocates for the participation of women in civic life.¹¹³ The CSW has published several key documents, including resolutions and recommendations, that address different aspects of women's equality. For example, in 2021, the CSW published the *Agreed Conclusions*,¹¹⁴ which targets women's participation in decision-making roles with attention given to the equality of their participation to ensure parity (point 53).¹¹⁵ Additionally, the CSW50 framework emphasizes the importance of engaging men in understanding and promoting equality in the workforce.¹¹⁶ As for CEDAW, they monitor the application of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, to ensure that Member States take the necessary steps to ensure a more equal society.¹¹⁷

Ultimately, the United Nations has established a comprehensive framework to promote its values and vision for equality. All the recommendations and efforts from the various bodies and agencies discussed are brought together and solidified in the UN System Framework for Action on Equality.¹¹⁸ This framework serves as a comprehensive guide for the entire United Nations system, ensuring a cohesive and coordinated approach to achieving equality worldwide.

¹¹⁰ EPIC. 2025. À propos de EPIC. <https://www.equalpayinternationalcoalition.org/fr/> Accessed July 13 2025.

¹¹¹ibid.

¹¹² ibid.

¹¹³ UN Women. 2025. Commission on the Status of Women.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women> Acessed July 14 2025.

¹¹⁴ E/CN.6/2021/L.3

¹¹⁵ UN Commission on the Status of Women. *Agreed conclusions on the topic of "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"*. E/CN.6/2021/L.3, 30 mars 2021.

<https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.6/2021/L.3> Accessed July 12 2025.

¹¹⁶ UN Commission on the Status of Women. *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality*. E/2004/27, mars 2004.

https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/48/CSW48a_E_FINAL.pdf Accessed July 12 2025.

¹¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights. 2025. Treaty Bodies - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw> Accessed July 13 2025.

¹¹⁸ CEB. 2025. UN System Framework for Action on Equality.

<https://unsceb.org/un-system-framework-action-equality#:~:text=The%20UN%20System%20Framework%20for,%20and%20integrated%20approach%20to%20combatting> Accessed July 15 2025.

Achieving Parity in the Workplace

Achieving parity in the workplace is a fundamental step in the fight for equal rights. It is not only a matter of fairness, but it is a necessary condition to ensure that equal rights are respected worldwide. This objective is a core component of the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to tackle gender inequality.¹¹⁹ The other SDGs at the heart of the fight for workplace parity are key drivers for building sustainable societies. These goals address inequalities at their root, particularly concerning equal rights. They include SDG 8, which promotes decent work and economic growth, and SDG 1, which seeks to eradicate poverty.¹²⁰

One of the most direct links between workplace parity and sustainable development is its profound impact on poverty reduction. Recent statistics from the ILO reveal that women remain disproportionately represented in informal and low-wage employment and are deeply underrepresented in leadership roles.¹²¹ Furthermore, a particularly striking statistical brief from the ILO highlighted the deep-rooted separation of tasks between men and women; out of the 748 million people who could not obtain paid work because of unpaid care work, 708 million of them were women.¹²² This imbalance underscores the need to recognize and address unpaid care work as a significant barrier to economic empowerment.

Care responsibilities play a significant role in understanding the fight for equal rights. Unpaid care work refers to activities such as caring for children, the elderly or other family members, doing household chores, and family responsibilities that are not compensated by money. These are not recognized by society as formal employment, meaning there is no pay associated with it.¹²³

These tasks affect women's ability to hold a highly demanding and high-paying job because these essential but uncompensated tasks place a substantial time burden and significant mental load on them.¹²⁴ This burden does not render high-demanding and high-paying jobs physically impossible, but it severely strains women's time and energy, limiting their professional mobility and pursuit of such opportunities. All of these obstacles, combined with the persistent pay gaps, the barriers to access formal employment and other systemic obstacles, exacerbate the cycles of poverty for women and their families.¹²⁵ Therefore, eradicating poverty, as SDG 1 provides, is a necessity for achieving parity in the workplace.

¹¹⁹ United Nations. Sustainable Development Goal.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> Accessed 22 August 2025.

¹²⁰ United Nations. The 17 Sustainable Development Goal. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> Accessed 21 August 2025

¹²¹ ILOStats. Female share in management, employment and the working-age population compared, 2000-2023. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/> Accessed 23 August 2025

¹²² ILO. October 2024. The impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/GEDI-STAT%20brief_formatted_28.10.24_final.pdf Accessed 21 August 2025

¹²³ ibid.

¹²⁴ UN Women. Progress of the world's women 2019-2020: Families in a changing world. 2019.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/06/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-2020>

Accessed 28 August 2025.

¹²⁵ ibid.

Beyond the fundamental principles of fairness, ensuring equal access to formal labour markets for women is a strategy that helps states expand their productive capacity, encourage innovation and strengthen their resilience, because parity fosters economic growth.¹²⁶ Indeed, greater gender equality in employment has a direct positive impact on a country's productive capacity, as it allows the full utilization of available human capital.¹²⁷ When women are excluded from higher-paying, formal, or leadership roles, economies lose out on innovation, creativity, and diverse perspectives that strengthen resilience in the face of global challenges.

The presence of equal representation in leadership roles and decision-making positions is crucial for creating a better interconnected world.¹²⁸ Moreover, achieving genuine parity in the workplace extends beyond mere numerical representation in employment titles. It is fundamentally about establishing a culture of respect and recognition for women in leadership positions. Once this inclusive environment is established, it enables a more robust and equitable decision-making process essential for effectively addressing global challenges.

Beyond economics and institutional strength, parity has a profound cultural and intergenerational effect. By enabling women to access and succeed in leadership positions, societies send a clear signal to young girls that their ambitions are valid and achievable.¹²⁹ This visibility reduces the psychological and social barriers that often discourage women from pursuing high-level careers. While temporary special measures, such as quotas, have led to some progress in women's representation in decision-making bodies, the Commission on the Status of Women recognizes that gender inequality continues to be reflected in imbalances of power, stressing that progress towards genuine gender balance remains insufficient.¹³⁰

To achieve this vision, we must confront and overcome the systemic barriers that exist. This requires an approach that includes both national reforms and the strengthening of international frameworks. Governments must enforce policies that mandate equal pay, protect against discrimination, and provide support for unpaid care work, like paid parental leave and subsidized childcare. This is reinforced by CEDAW, which mandates states to submit periodic reports on progress, and issues recommendations when disparities persist. As it has been demonstrated previously, several international instruments are available to help overcome these barriers.

¹²⁶ OECD. 2024. *Gender equality and economic growth : Past progress and future potential*. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/03/gender-equality-and-economic-growth-7d0c8365/fb0a0a93-en.pdf> Accessed 22 August 2025

¹²⁷ OECD. 2025. How we work. <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/how-we-work.html> Accessed 22 August 2025

¹²⁸ UN Commission on the Status of Women. *Agreed conclusions on the topic of "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"*. E/CN.6/2021/L.3, 30 mars 2021.

<https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.6/2021/L.3> Accessed 19 August 2025

¹²⁹ ibid.

¹³⁰ ibid.

Rights of Children in the Workplace

Eradicating child labour requires international legal frameworks and the cooperation of Member States. However, it also requires actions that will lift families out of poverty. Eliminating poverty will improve the lives of millions and is tied to SDG 1, which calls for ensuring appropriate financial services and access to basic services.¹³¹ According to the ILO, one in four children in low-income Member States are forced to work to support their families.¹³² The ILO also highlighted that Member States with a low Human Development Index show high levels of child labour, which ties in with target 8.7 of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), aiming to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2025.¹³³ This commitment is reinforced by SDG 4 (Quality Education), which highlights the necessity of free, compulsory and quality primary education as the most sustainable path to prevention.¹³⁴ However, those commitments cannot be achieved without addressing their root causes, as poverty and the predominance of informal economies drive families to rely on children's earnings, making international standards ineffective unless paired with broader social and economic reforms.

As shown in the 2024 global estimates of child labour, 61% of all reported child labourers aged 5 to 17 are from the agricultural sector.¹³⁵ Indeed, families in rural sectors often rely on children's earnings to survive.¹³⁶ A lack of investment in social protection, such as universal child benefits or sustainable household support, frequently leads to reliance on children. The report also showed improvement over the years; however, it also showed that parents with no access to decent work and support from the state cannot afford their education, thus hindering their well-being.¹³⁷ The threats of reduced investments also put at risk data collection, making it difficult to comprehensively address the issue, especially for topics such as caregiving and chores that are done mainly by girls and are informal.¹³⁸ Indeed, following the adoption of the *Domestic Workers Convention*,¹³⁹ the ILO defined child labour in domestic work as a situation where a child below the minimum age performs domestic tasks in

¹³¹ United Nations, 'Goal 1 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (*sdgs.un.org*2024) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1#targets_and_indicators> accessed 30 August 2025.

¹³² International Labour Organization, '2024 Global Estimates of Child Labour: Frequently Asked Questions' (ILO, 28 May 2025) <<https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/2024-global-estimates-child-labour-frequently-asked-questions>> accessed 30 August 2025.

¹³³ ibid.

¹³⁴ United Nations, 'Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (*United Nations*2015) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators> accessed 30 August 2025.

¹³⁵ ILO, '2024 Global Estimates of Child Labour in Figures' (ILO, June 2025) <<https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/2024-global-estimates-child-labour-figures>> accessed 28 August 2025.

¹³⁶ibid.

¹³⁷ Suzanne Wooster, 'Despite Progress, Child Labour Still Affects 138 Million Children Globally' (*Unicef*, 12 June 2025) <<https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/press-releases/despite-progress-child-labour-still-affects-138-million-children-globally-ilo-unicef>> accessed 30 August 2025.

¹³⁸ibid.

¹³⁹ Domestic Workers Convention (adopted 16 June 2011, entered into force 5 September 2013) 2955 UNTS 407.

slavery-like conditions or in a hazardous environment.¹⁴⁰ More than 17.2 million children are in unpaid or paid domestic work, and a majority of them are girls.¹⁴¹ According to the ILO, it may be one of the worst forms of child labour because of its long hours, use of dangerous chemicals, and degrading treatment such as verbal and physical abuse.¹⁴²

Conclusion and Further Research

In conclusion, working towards the goals set out by SDGs 1, 5, and 8 will help achieve parity in the workplace and protect the rights of children in the workplace. Women and children share the commonality that most of the SDGs are focused on them. Indeed, both issues are rooted in economic dependency and systemic inequality. Emphasizing the need for international cooperation, Member States should explore various avenues to tackle this issue. How can Member States promote an innovative, cost-effective social protection model while also formally recognizing and reducing unpaid care work? Additionally, how can the ILO establish a partnership with other international bodies, such as EPIC, to enhance a standardized framework for pay transparency? Furthermore, eradicating child labour stems from a need to formalize the informal economy, where children are most likely to be used as cheap labour. Policies that encompass international cooperation and communication between institutions are also important for creating coordinated international action plans.

¹⁴⁰ ILO, ‘Child Labour and Domestic Work’ (ILO, 28 January 2024)

<<https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/sectors-and-topics/child-labour-and-domestic-work?%>> accessed 30 August 2025.

¹⁴¹ibid.

¹⁴²ibid.

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