GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2019

Artificial intelligence:
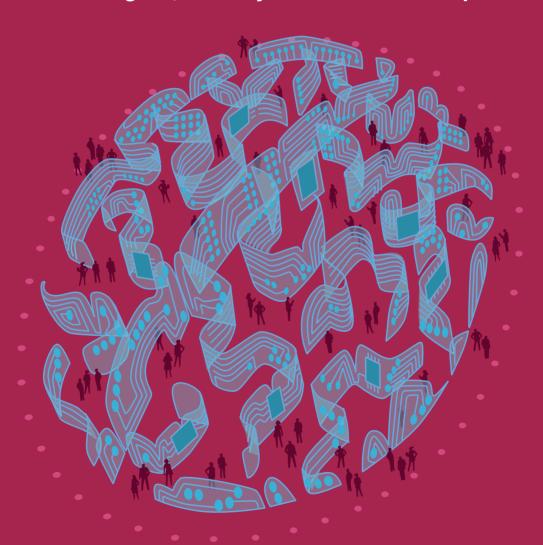## *Human rights, social justice and development*

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Artificial intelligence: Human rights, social justice and development

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Introduction

How will work be reconfigured with the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace? This is a question that several actors are now asking. Governments, academics, civil society, educationalists and the private sector are all trying to analyse and predict the possible changes in work relations.

Unions are at the forefront of the fight for better labour conditions, and while their battle is mostly to do with the economy, the technological environment has an impact too. In the so-called "Fourth Industrial Revolution", the automation of processes and the use of robotics and algorithms are changing work processes and also impacting on employment statistics.

How are unions addressing this reality in Argentina? Do they consider the impact of AI on labour conditions and rights? Is this issue discussed by business owners? And are unions evaluating the potential positive impact of AI on the welfare of workers?

Context

According to the International Labour Organization, in 2018 Argentina had the third highest unemployment rate in the region, with an indicator of 9.5%, only surpassed by Guyana (12.2%) and Brazil (12.5%). A recent official survey of labour and employment showed a negative movement of 2.8% in the last year, with companies forecasting a worsening of the situation.[1] In this context, the government has implemented institutional reform and restructured ministries. Work and Science are no longer ministries, and the Ministries of Education and Health have been restructured substantially, evidence of the new policy direction of the government.

In late 2018 the government launched the Digital Agenda 2030,[2] coordinated by the Secretariat of Science and Technology, which includes a National Plan for Artificial Intelligence.[3] The agenda deals with issues such as the digital economy, education and infrastructure, which have been discussed in meetings to define frameworks for private companies working in these areas. The objective, according to the government, is the creation of a "country brand" in order for Argentina to become a leader in the region, a role that no country has clearly assumed at the moment. However, the government does not mention developing common strategies with other governments in the region.

Meanwhile, the private sector is looking at AI as strategic for its development. The Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) was commissioned by Microsoft to analyse the impact of AI on economic growth in Latin America.[4] Its report considered three scenarios with different levels of application of AI, and forecast that Argentina could reach the status of a "developed" country in 20 years if AI is applied extensively. It also warned of economic stagnation if this did not happen.

The report listed "three key qualities" in jobs for the future: "perception and manipulation of complex contexts, creativity and social intelligence."[5] Workers in Argentina whose occupations are intensive in these qualities are 1.9 million out of a total of 11.9 million workers – or 16% of employed workers. The other 84% will require human capital reskilling. "Occupations that have these qualities are related to education, health, psychology and coordination of people," the report states, "and the kinds of workers who will need reskilling are data entry clerks, those doing telesales and machine operators."

From this perspective, the problem is the scarcity of qualified labour. This analysis takes "technological development as an innate process, necessary

1   Ministerio de Producción y Trabajo. (2019). *Encuesta de indicadores laborales*. www.trabajo.gob.ar/downloads/ estadisticas/eil/eil_1905_gacetilla.pdf

2   Casa Rosada. (2018, 6 November). El gobierno presentó nueva agenda digital. https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/ actividad-oficial/9-noticias/44081-el-gobierno-presento-la-nueva-agenda-digital-2030

3   Catalano, A. (2019, 22 March). El Gobierno impulsa un plan nacional para liderar el desarrollo de inteligencia artificial en la región. *iProfesional*. https://www.iprofesional.com/ tecnologia/288670-banda-ancha-ciberseguridad-computadora-Argentina-busca-liderar-la-inteligencia-artificial-en-la-region

4   Albrieu, R., Rapetti, M., Brest López, C., Larroulet, P., & Sorrentino, A. (2018). *Inteligencia artificial y crecimiento económico. Oportunidades y desafíos para Argentina*. Buenos Aires. CIPPEC. https://www.cippec. org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ADE-ARG-vf.pdf

5   Ibid.

for economic growth and neutral with respect to the policies that promote it."[6] But there is another point of view which states that "focusing the analysis of AI on its effects, such as job losses and the need to adapt, conceives of technological development as a fatal and unchangeable good." This counter-analysis underlines the "urgency of assessing AI in terms of the socialising nature of work and its moral connotations, not restricting it to quantitative factors to do with growth and not accepting *prima facie* technologies that reduce production costs."[7]

Do unions dream or have nightmares about robots?

Several kinds of work will be replaced by machines in the near future. Arguing that this forecast should be good news for our countries and economies, what changes can we expect in the workplace? And, more precisely, what happens to workers?

Although in Argentina several actors are leading this debate, the voice of unions is not being heard. This report is based on interviews with respondents from the unions representing workers in commerce, public services at the municipal level, media workers and journalists, and the banking sector.[8]

The deputy secretary of the Union of Public Service Workers defines AI as "self-managing tools that require little intervention by people." In 1995, when public information was digitised, the municipal government started to incorporate computers into its operations. "Then workers did not receive adequate training. Nobody should be excluded, so the union worked in that gap for reskilling."

Procedures that used to take time, were manual and involved two or three people, are nowadays solved online. "However, the number of workers was not reduced. Some jobs no longer exist, but there are new ones related to digitisation, for example, in IT or informatics divisions. This change [introducing AI in public services] allows us to dedicate more time to creative work and meeting the needs of citizens. That is what we are pointing out."

This union respondent mentioned "privacy as an issue to take into account in the digitisation of human resources, the control of front-desk assistants, institutional relationships and even ideological differences [that can be monitored on personal digital devices]." They have no complaints at the moment about the potential introduction of AI in public services; however, they do consider it a sensitive field.

The Bank Workers Union is the organisation that fights for the rights of workers in the face of financial power. "Innovation [in the financial sector] is one of its key characteristics, encouraged by public policies that allow for the unfettered adoption of technology." The union says AI will simply result in a reduction of employees. "Our union is not opposed to technology. We can improve the way we work, but we cannot lose our jobs."

ATMs are a good example in this field. The CIPPEC report claims that although ATMs automatised a wide range of tasks, "the number of employees tended to increase due to the reduction of costs in opening branches and freeing employees from transactional tasks, dedicating them to more productive ones." The union representative we interviewed contradicts this statement. "The positions that ATMs replaced, together with those of retiring employees, are not being filled again." She said other innovations in the sector that have resulted in job losses include the automation of administrative checks and controls, cryptocurrency, the use of QR codes, and home banking. "Even tasks related to the processing of information are automatised."

New trends that also affect labour conditions are banks offering 24/7 assistance, and telecommuting. "Some banks implement a work-from-home policy two days a week, providing a computer, an ergonomic chair and a fire extinguisher. We warn about the level of control they will experience, that will result in increased pressure on workers and illness. If work moves out of work, it will be very difficult to take care of working conditions," she said.

"We saw this unhealthy control over productivity in call centres." In that case, she explained:

> We managed to push for regulations, and developed a code of good practice[9] that recommends times for resting, lunch, bathroom breaks. A "callcenterisation" of work may occur due to efforts to optimise time. We think human beings are not prepared for these virtual relations. Perhaps new generations can afford it and even prefer it. But now we are experiencing the transition and we are not prepared for this.

6   Puyana, A. (2019, 26 March). Inteligencia artificial y trabajo en América Latina. Nuevas pistas de la economía mundial. *América Latina en Movimiento*. https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/198957

7   Ibid.

8   The unions interviewed were the Asociación de Empleados de Comercio de Rosario, Sindicato de Trabajadores Municipales de Rosario, Asociación de Personal del Sistema Legislativo, Sindicato Bancario Rosario and Sindicato de Prensa de Rosario.

9   Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, Provincia de Santa Fe. (2011). Código de Buenas Prácticas para Call Centers. www.santafe.gov.ar/index.php/web/content/download/134922/664629/file/Resolucion318.pdf

According to the general secretary of the Union of Press Workers:

> Unions are behind in the debate on AI. In Argentina unions are disputing basic issues such as salary, health, loss of employment, with no economic stability and pendular changes of government. We started to think in terms of emerging issues such as AI, but suddenly a new government destroyed even the ministry of work.

He was also critical of media companies. "They try to send one person with a backpack to do the work of a journalist, a photographer and a camera operator. Three people are needed and they argue that half a person is enough." Not every technological process has to reduce jobs:

> If a newspaper covers an event and it needs a video for the web page, the coverage could include a camera operator, a video editor. That is not happening. They diversify their media, and include digital communication, but they do not diversify the workers involved.

The union highlights that in the field of media, the most important issue should be the quality of information, and AI could be an important resource to improve this. "In general, media owners are not interested in that. They are mainly interested in the costs of producing information." They imagine an ideal scenario with owners of newspapers and union representatives discussing the implementation of technology and the skill requirements involved. "We proposed discussions about new processes, new labour categories, but they never sit to talk about this. And neither do they build capacity in the workplace."

In 2018 the union proposed a workshop on coverage using social networks. Employers did not get involved. Their apathy is also a problem. "There is a loss of a willingness, of a motivation to work, that generates apathy. It's like a vicious cycle. Your work depends also on the value the company gives to it."

When speaking to the Union for Workers in the Retail Sector about AI, they point to online retail. The image they fear is of a shop without shoppers. "We are not opposed to technological advancement, but what is under discussion is the essence of work. Instead of promoting better working conditions, technology is worsening them."

They referred to their experience with workers employed by an online delivery service:

> Young workers are colonised by the idea of independent, contractual work; the idea that they are their own bosses, independent in their use of time and in determining their income. This is evidence of another problem we are dealing with: the cultural battle that started with the expansion of neoliberalism, that involves distrust towards unions, and discusses social legitimacy of labour rights.

"We can also see in technology a tool that strengthens our organisation," they added. The union organised a capacity-building workshop on digital communication tools and set up a network of union representatives, "to work on the circulation of information. Information is power and informed representatives can discuss the possibility of better working conditions with employees."

An economy of platforms[10]

At the end of 2018, the first union of workers from digital platforms was created under the name of APP (*Asociación de Personal de Plataformas*), mainly made up by workers from Uber, and the on-demand delivery service offered by Rappi[11] and courier service offered by Glovo.[12] This was after the workers raised issues such as income, security and transparency in the assignment of work. However, they felt that after raising their complaints, they were discriminated against in the assignment of customers and deliveries.[13] In a statement they declared:

> We have to learn from unions. But we also believe that unions have to learn from us. We, the platform workers, have to organise ourselves. If this is the economy of the future, how could it be that we work in such precarious conditions? If this is the future of the economy, we will have to build the unions of the future. If we do not do that, the thousands of workers who will come to work on platforms will have nobody to defend them.[14]

The recent growth of online platforms in the region responds to a variety of reasons: flexibility in online payment systems, a lack of employment, immigration, overpopulation in metropolitan areas, lack of

10 Madariaga, J., Buenadicha, C., Molina, E. y Ernst, C. (2019). *Economía de plataformas y empleo ¿Cómo es trabajar para una app en Argentina?* CIPPEC-BID-OIT. Buenos Aires https://www.cippec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Como-es-trabajar-en-una-app-en-Argentina-CIPPEC-BID-LAB-OIT.pdf

11 https://www.rappi.com.ar

12 https://glovoapp.com/en

13 Rumi, M J. (2018, 18 July). Primer conflicto de trabajadores de una app. *La Nación*. https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/empleos/primer-conflicto-de-trabajadores-de-una-app-mensajeros-reclaman-cambios-en-las-condiciones-laborales-nid2154219

14 Zuazo, N. (2018, 10 October). Nace el primer sindicato de plataformas en Argentina. *Política y Tecnología*. https://guerrasdeinternet.com/nace-el-primer-sindicato-de-trabajadores-de-plataforma-de-la-argentina/

public transport and traffic chaos.[15] In 2018, 1% of people employed in Argentina were users or providers of platforms. Workers are mainly young. For every five, four are men. Only 40% receive social security and 90% are taxpayers under a simplified tax regime (*monotributistas*). Almost 90% have finished high school and 37% higher education. For highly qualified workers, platforms may mean an opportunity for professional development.

So while platforms offer formal working conditions, they are not respectful of worker rights. The CEO of the biggest platform in Argentina declared that the digital economy needs certain conditions to optimise its benefits, but pointed to "the problem of regulations and unions that are prejudicial to business."[16] Workers and unions in this environment are, as a result, worried about their rights and the future of their work.

Gender: From "gaps" back to "bias"

The access women have to technology – in all the senses of access – is relevant to understand the gaps that women experience in the exercise of their rights. In the field of AI, gender gaps also appear in the biases that reproduce prevailing concepts about gender, based on past stereotypes and experience, that discriminate against women.

A frequent example is the bias expressed by algorithms that help with the selection of personnel: women are not selected for positions mainly occupied by men. Along the same lines, a platform that offers taxi journeys assigns them more frequently to men than to women due to security concerns. These examples are influencing debates related to biases reproduced by algorithms in general.[17]

Another point to consider is whether women are benefiting from automation or not. Women should be asked this question. According to Becky Faith, a technology researcher, "unpaid care and a lack of digital access and skills are just two of the issues that we need to put on the table to get women into debates about automation."[18] Working at home also

calls for a gender perspective. It is more attractive for women than the usual job of having to balance domestic and paid work responsibilities, but working from home can result in an overburdening of both areas of responsibility.

Finally, the respondent from the Public Service Workers Union added another issue related to gender:

> Digitisation not only helps with the organisation of the gender movement, but also provides the movement with useful data sets, both at a macro level and the organisational level. A claim is strengthened if it is validated by data. A reliable record of digitised information allows us to quantify specific needs that support claims and proposals to improve the working conditions for women.

Conclusion

Unions expressed enthusiasm when invited to talk about the impact of AI on the workplace, appreciating the interview as an opportunity to explore the issues involved. The first challenge that emerged in the conversations was the definition of AI.[19] In all the interviews, respondents expressed an uncertainty over misusing the concept. AI is a concept that involves numerous points of reference, making it "a kind of moving target, changing the pace of technological obsolescence, and including computer programs, algorithms or apps."[20] Unions referred to the introduction of computers as the beginning of AI. They also mentioned digitisation and, in rare cases, algorithms and automation. This report does not capture the views of industrial unions, which would refer more specifically to robotics.

Automation effectively replaces jobs but, in some cases, also generates new ones. However, unions insisted on the responsibility of employers in this change. The lack of dialogue to collectively analyse this technological transformation is a reality. As technology for change expert Becky Faith affirms: "If businesses profiting from automation aren't able to understand and mitigate the impacts of their activities we need social dialogue to hold them to account."[21]

It also must be underlined that while the private sector points to the lack of qualifications of workers in an AI-driven workspace, there are new jobs created that are then performed by overqualified workers under precarious working conditions. Regulation, in this sense, is necessary to promote policies and to

15   Iproup. (2019, 30 January). Rappi, Glovo and Orders Now: how do they divide the business and why they are a "time bomb". https://www.iproup.com/economia-digital/2394-nueva-economia-e-business-e-commerce-Rappi-Glovo-and-Pedidos-Ya-bussiness-division-and-why-they-are-a-time-bomb

16   Del Río, J. (2018, 14 October). Del B2o a los sindicatos: definiciones en voz alta de Marcos Galperin. *La Nación*. https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/del-b2o-a-los-sindicatos-definiciones-en-voz-alta-nid2181413

17   Seminar on Social Impacts of Artificial Intelligence, University of Buenos Aires. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p--EKd-D9og

18   Faith, B. (2017, 24 October). Automation and the future of work: Bringing women into the debate. *GenderIT.org*. https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/automation-and-future-work-bringing-women-debate

19   Puyana, A. (2019, 26 March). Op. cit.

20   Ibid.

21   Faith, B. (2017, 24 October). Op. cit.

prevent vulnerable working conditions. Platforms and call centres are good examples of how unregulated spheres can result in the violation of rights.

In this context the role of unions also needs to be raised. Although they are still the main actor in the representation of employees, membership is low. In a context characterised by a cultural battle against arguments that question the legitimacy of union demands, some voices are proposing that unions should create new channels for organising new jobs,[22] search for young people as members, incorporating groups that have decided not to be formally employed and also consider new types of contractual relations. AI and new trends in the workplace are definitely a challenge for unions in these revolutionary times.

Action steps

In Argentina there is a need to:

- Properly define and analyse the specific areas of work in different sectors that will be impacted by AI in order to inform policy proposals.

- Promote the debate around training and reskilling. Unions should be consulted regularly about skills and the government should promote training in AI technologies in the education system.

- Unions should create a meeting space to follow the latest debates on AI, to share strategies, evaluate trends and political contexts as well as the potential of AI.

- Promote a regional perspective on how AI is affecting the workplace.

- Work on understanding the potential of AI to improve working conditions, through the analysis of data sets related to labour and AI. "What do unions need AI for?" could be a good starting point.

- Raise public awareness of worker layoffs that are the result of technological innovation, and encourage discussion of the impact of job losses.

22 Wisskirchen, G., et al. (2017). *Artificial Intelligence and Robotics and Their Impact on the Workplace*. IBA Global Employment Institute. https://www.ibanet.org/Document/Default. aspx?DocumentUid=c06aa1a3-d355-4866-beda-9a3a8779ba6e

Artificial intelligence:
Human rights, social justice and development

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now receiving unprecedented global attention as it finds widespread practical application in multiple spheres of activity. But what are the human rights, social justice and development implications of AI when used in areas such as health, education and social services, or in building "smart cities"? How does algorithmic decision making impact on marginalised people and the poor?

This edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) provides a perspective from the global South on the application of AI to our everyday lives. It includes 40 country reports from countries as diverse as Benin, Argentina, India, Russia and Ukraine, as well as three regional reports. These are framed by eight thematic reports dealing with topics such as data governance, food sovereignty, AI in the workplace, and so-called "killer robots".

While pointing to the positive use of AI to enable rights in ways that were not easily possible before, this edition of GISWatch highlights the real threats that we need to pay attention to if we are going to build an AI-embedded future that enables human dignity.

APC   ARTICLE¹⁹   Sida