

Committee: International Labour Organization

Issue: Does technology help or hinder working conditions?

Author : Australia, representing the government

Many people around the globe approach technological change with caution, even dread, rather than excitement : they fear new technologies may take their jobs or their children's. There is no doubt that, over the past two centuries, waves of technological change have eliminated jobs, and rendered some occupations obsolete. Yet Australia firmly believes it is essential to slowly begin the transition to a new type of industry (be it services, agricultural or manufacturing).

Sustainable development goals (SDG 8) should be achieved through the fostering of productive activities, innovation and formalization, and the Australian government has long since understood that they will remain unreachable without fully embracing the opportunities technology has to offer and accepting the change that will follow regarding working conditions. Companies that are digital leaders in their sectors have faster revenue growth and higher productivity than their less-digitized peers. Their profits and margins can increase three times as fast, and workers within these companies enjoy double the wage growth. Digitization will continue to change how companies organize work, as well as the mix of work in any given sector. All this will require ongoing adaptation and transition by workers in terms of skills, activities, companies, and even the sectors they work in.

Australia's strategy has proven to be quite efficient as the annual employment growth exceeded the one recorded since the 1980s : 1.9% in 2017. Recently, the unemployment rate has fallen to 5.1% in January 2020. Many developed countries, including Australia, have seen "job polarization", with stronger growth in both high and low skilled jobs, at the expense of mid-skill jobs. But technology also facilitated the creation of new jobs to take their place (either directly, or indirectly as a result of rising standards of living generating new demands).

Australia fully realizes that the beginning of the transition could unfold smoothly thanks to the economic stability and available means to accompany the firms in this process (for example : free online training concerning new digital aspects were suggested).

In the actual context of a global pandemic, technology was found to be of great help : thanks to online communication tools, technology enables us to work more closely in some ways even as we work remotely. Collaboration and team coordination are simpler to achieve, even when colleagues are not physically in the same place.