

Committee: Organisation internationale du travail

Issue: Does technology help or hinder working conditions?

Author: Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo

In recent years, the world has experienced a new revolution in the economic sector: the digital revolution. New technology, such as new affordable communication systems, makes it possible for businesses to improve both their working conditions and their productivity, as well as their profitability. In today's world, digital infrastructure, and the understanding of it are necessary to build and preserve a well-functioning society, government, and economy, as well as to improve the working conditions of the people. This new improvement in the use of technology has also led to new economic possibilities for countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which produce around 60% of the world's cobalt. However, digitalisation has also had some negative impact and created new challenges for the world economy and the working conditions of people. In the DRC, the recently enormous demand for cobalt has led to many illegal mines and terrible working conditions in some of the cobalt mines. Our government has already introduced many programs, like the Stabilization and Recovery Funding Facility in Eastern DRC (SRFF), which has already produced promising results. However, we are aware of the challenges that we are still facing.

In general, however, working conditions have improved due to the new technologies. They make it possible to use machines instead of humans for highly dangerous jobs and allow better communication between companies and clients. Unfortunately, in many countries, like the DRC this vision is not yet a reality. Especially during the COVID-19 crises, the world's economy became more dependent on a well-functioning connection between employees and their colleagues. However, in many countries the digitalisation is not producing the benefits it could.

One problem that many less economically developed countries (LEDCs) experiences is the lack of infrastructure and financial support, without which it is impossible for them to achieve sustainable economic growth. In the DRC for example, only 19% of the population have access to the internet. To battle the inequality between industrialized and developing countries, digitalisation is a key project that, cannot be ignored.

Another problem that occurs in the labour market because of new technologies, such as industrial robots, is that the jobs that are being replaced are mostly manufacturing jobs. This could very well have a negative effect on the economy of the LEDCs. The BBC predicts that by 2042 it will be cheaper for companies to use robots than African workforce. Therefore, it is also essential to bring new markets and opportunities to Africa. In 2011 UNESCO organized forums and training events about this topic in Kenya. Similar projects could be introduced by the ILO There are currently some projects that are dedicated to help LEDCs, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, with their technological evolution, most notably the Technology Bank for the least developed countries, which describes itself as "a global organization dedicated to enhancing the contribution of science, technology and innovation for sustainable

development in the world's least developed countries“ and is currently trying to improve the technology for medical purposes in LEDCs, with its so called “Tech Access Partnership”. This is already a major step in the right direction.

Digitalization is not only essential for economic, but also for humanitarian reasons. In 2018 the government in Kinshasa launched a monitoring and tracing mechanism to fight child labour, but without a better digital infrastructure the mechanism is unlikely to produce significant results. The health system is also in need of a digital revolution to make it easier to share and access information about a patient or an illness and the government needs it to better communicate and govern.

In summary, we, the Democratic Republic of the Congo believe that technology generally improves the working conditions in most fields of the economy and that technology is essential for economic growth and the improvement of the living and working conditions of the people. Therefore there is a need for the UN to help LEDC's with the project of digitalization, which is why the DRC would support such projects if promoted by the UN.