Commission/Forum: Labour
Subject: Empowering the youth to drive / thrive / embrace and match the requirements of the future labour market
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Introduction

Work has never been just a means of survival; it has long shaped how societies function, how individuals define their sense of worth, and how economies rise or fall. Yet work is not a fixed reality. Who performs it, how it is valued, the protections surrounding it, and the demands it places on people have always evolved. These changes are driven by technological innovation, migration patterns, political choices, and the shifting expectations of each new generation entering the labour market. What sets the present apart is not change itself, but the unprecedented pace and scale at which these transformations are unfolding simultaneously.

The global labour force today stands at approximately 3.5 billion people. Women make up roughly 40% of that figure, and men 60%, a gap that is not random but reflects deep, persistent barriers to employment that exist across every region of the world. Behind that number lies an enormous range of realities. In much of the Global South, and even in some wealthier European countries like Spain and Greece, job insecurity and informality are not edge cases. They are the default. Worldwide, over 2 billion people work without a formal contract, guaranteed income, or any social protection whatsoever. In the Global South, nearly half the labour force works in the informal economy. Youth unemployment makes this worse: in many affected countries, young people are unemployed at two to three times the national average, leaving an entire generation without the stable starting point their parents could count on.

Gender and regional inequalities shape not just who finds work, but who is paid fairly for it and who has any legal recourse when something goes wrong. Demographic pressures add another layer: ageing populations in wealthier nations and very young ones in lower-income countries are creating a growing mismatch between where workers are and where they are actually needed.

Then there is technology. The rise of artificial intelligence is transforming entire industries at a pace that most education systems and governments were simply not built to handle. The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2030, 85 million jobs may disappear, while 97 million new ones emerge. But this is not just about jobs vanishing and new ones appearing. Even the roles that survive will be shaped by AI, with more people working exclusively on screens, making the traditional idea of showing up to a fixed workplace increasingly irrelevant.

Global shocks and transitions, such as economic crises, pandemics, climate change, and geopolitical tensions have all shown how quickly labour markets can be destabilised. At the same time, the shift toward greener economies is opening up new jobs in energy, agriculture, and construction, while displacing workers in traditional industries and demanding retraining at a scale most systems are nowhere near ready to provide.

These changes aren't happening on their own. They're happening alongside rising inequality, political instability, and growing distrust in institutions. For young people especially, the old promise, of working hard and having a stable future, just doesn't feel true anymore. The rules are changing fast, and not everyone can keep up with them.

Definitions and key terms

Labour force / Economically active population: The portion of the population that is either employed or actively seeking employment. It includes both formal and informal workers and is used as the primary measure of a country's available human capital for economic production.

Unemployment: The condition of being without paid work while actively seeking it. Unemployment rates vary significantly by region, age, and gender, with youth unemployment consistently higher than the overall rate in most economies.

Gig economy: A labour market characterised by short-term contracts and freelance work rather than permanent employment. While it offers flexibility, it typically comes without social protections such as pensions, sick pay, or legal recourse, leaving workers in a structurally precarious position.

Informal and formal sector: The informal sector consists of workers employed in unregulated conditions or unregistered enterprises, such as street vendors or unlicensed construction workers, as opposed to the formal sector, which includes regulated professions such as lawyers or bankers. For workers, informality means no legal protection, no healthcare coverage, no pension, and no guaranteed income. For governments, it means reduced tax revenue and a lack of reliable data on the workforce, making it extremely difficult to design effective policy or intervene where needed.

Automation/Artificial Intelligence (AI): Technologies enabling machines to perform tasks requiring human intelligence, pattern recognition, text generation, decision-making. AI systems learn from data and are now embedded in everyday tools used in schools and workplaces worldwide.

Cognitive offloading: Delegating mental tasks, reasoning, writing, problem-solving, to an external tool. In education, this raises the question of whether students are genuinely learning or outsourcing their thinking entirely to AI.

Algorithmic bias: Systematic, unfair discrimination produced by an AI system that reflects prejudices already present in its training data. This can disadvantage people along lines of gender, race, disability, or socioeconomic background in hiring, grading, and access to services.

Formalisation: Adapting the informal sector to turn it to formal one by creating a framework to do the transition

Key Ideas

1. Formalising the informal sector

The informal sector is a pressing and complex matter. Mostly present in low or middleincome countries, the number of people working in this sector increases due to population growth or displacement, the latter happening for reasons such as war, climate change, and international or rural-to-urban migration. This is partly due to those populations having more difficulty accessing the level of education required to integrate into the formal sector, as well as the political and technical challenges governments face in setting up the necessary reforms. In cities such as Daka, informal employment accounts for 80% of nonagricultural employment. One of the main issues this creates is that, because the work is completely undocumented, governments do not receive the tax revenue they should, and they also lack the data needed to properly structure or intervene in the issue, making it very difficult to adapt policies to actually help the population.

Workers in the informal sector generally work without legal protection, formal contracts, and stable income. Instead, they rely on daily payments, usually in cash. The lack of legal revenue has consequences not only on fiscal fees but also on the workers themselves: without a proper source of income, they are unable to take out bank loans to pay for personal assets such as houses and cars or have savings accounts that offer long-term security. The informal sector thus traps its employees in a cycle that becomes hard to get out of, yet this sector also fills gaps that formal labour markets fail to address. It creates opportunities for those unable to acquire diplomas or certified qualifications and who require immediate income, hence many migrants enter the informal sector rather than the formal one. This is also due to the possibility of having multiple jobs simultaneously, allowing them to have more control over how they want to work and especially having a slightly more stable income.

Formalization consists of extending legal frameworks to informal workers to address the vulnerabilities they are currently open to. Regulated contracts would provide job security, workers would finally have access to a pension and healthcare, and complying with tax regulations would allow the funding of public services, such as education. The latter would then, of course, help the populations to learn more, get more diplomas and recognised certificates, and succeed even better in the formal sector.

From this perspective, formalisation is the ideal solution to create long-term opportunities for those still working informally. However, poorly designed formalisation results in significant risks. Applying the same regulatory standards to large formal enterprises and small-scale family-owned businesses could raise the cost of keeping the latter. They could then be tempted to quietly leave the formal sector to avoid costs they cannot afford.

The question is therefore not simply whether to formalise, but how to do so to preserve accessibility whilst being regulated and protected. This committee will need to find a way to address this challenge, keeping in mind both sides of this debate, the workers and the government.

2. AI regulation in education and the workforce

Artificial intelligence has entered almost every corner of modern life, and two of the spaces where its impact is most consequential are education and the workplace. Every person, at some point in their life, is either a student or a worker, often both at once. The decisions made now about how AI is governed in these spaces will shape the opportunities, rights, and cognitive development of entire generations.

The central tension is not simply whether AI is "good" or "bad." It is a question of who benefits, who is harmed, and who decides.

AI in Education

Tools like Khan Academy's AI tutor guide students step by step through problems, correct mistakes, and adapt to individual pace and level, a form of personalised one-on-one tutoring that was previously a privilege of the wealthy. In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, cheap access to AI tools has given students learning support that under-resourced schools simply cannot provide. As some educators have argued, AI could help a good student become an exceptional one at a scale even the best human teachers cannot match.

Yet AI in education has also exposed a flaw that was already there: systems built around grades, not understanding. As Charlie Gedeon put it, "the biggest revolution AI is bringing to education is highlighting the system's failed incentives." If the goal of studying is to earn a grade and an AI can produce an essay in seconds, why would a stressed student not use it? The result is cognitive offloading: rather than developing critical thinking, students effectively hand their reasoning to a machine. Unlike a search engine, which offers multiple sources to compare, a tool like ChatGPT delivers one confident, personalised answer that requires no critical engagement at all.

A critical example would be when OpenAI offered free ChatGPT access in the months leading up to major exam periods. Millions of students, many of them desperate and under pressure, were handed a powerful, completely unregulated tool with no guidance on how to use it appropriately. This further deepens the flaw, as many students are not just worried about getting caught, but are truly anxious about what over-reliance on AI will mean for their ability to think for themselves as adults.

AI in the workplace

The numbers are significant. The IMF estimates 40% of jobs globally face meaningful AI exposure, rising to 60% in high-income economies, and the World Economic Forum projects 92 million roles displaced by 2030. New jobs will emerge, but not for the same people, in the same places, or requiring the same skills. Entry-level workers are absorbing the earliest impact: 66% of enterprises are already cutting entry-level hiring because of AI, and Big Tech reduced new graduate hiring by 25% in 2024 alone. The central labour rights question remains unanswered in most countries: who is responsible for retraining the workers whose jobs are automated?

AI has made it possible to monitor people more closely at school and at work. For example, it can track what you type on your keyboard (keystroke tracking) and analyse how you communicate with others, like how often you send emails or messages, how quickly you reply, or the tone of your messages (known as communication patterns). It can also use webcams to watch students during exams and give workers “productivity scores” based on their activity.

A large amount of personal data is collected this way, and it is often stored by outside companies that are not always well supervised. If an AI system makes a mistake, such as wrongly accusing a student of cheating or judging a worker as not doing their job properly, there is usually no clear way to challenge or fix that decision. This is why the EU AI Act requires that a human must still be involved in important decisions, so that errors can be checked and corrected.

Because AI systems learn from historical data, and historical data reflects historical injustice, these systems can encode discrimination in ways that appear objective but are not. UN Women has documented cases of AI hiring tools systematically downranking applications from women. In high-income countries, 9.6% of women's jobs face the highest AI automation risk, compared to 3.2% for men. Automated grading tools may similarly disadvantage students who write in non-standard dialects or whose work reflects cultural contexts the system was never trained to recognise.

Some people think stronger rules are necessary because students and workers do not always fully understand how AI is used on them, and they are not always in a position to refuse it. The EU AI Act is the main example of this approach, it bans emotion recognition in schools and workplaces from February 2025, treats these areas as high risk, and requires companies to be transparent and to keep humans involved in important decisions.

Others believe that too many rules can cause problems, strict regulation can make AI expensive and difficult to use, which means only large and wealthy companies can afford it. This could reduce access for smaller organisations and for poorer countries, where AI might be one of the only affordable ways to improve education. It could also benefit people who ignore the rules and continue using AI without restrictions.

In the end, the debate is about a balance between protecting people from harm and allowing innovation and equal access to AI, both sides have strong arguments, which is why the issue is difficult to resolve.

3. Next generation redefining traditional labour models

Work has remained largely unchanged since nearly an entire century, keeping the five-day 40-hour work week. However, with rapid changes in education models, economy and work demands, it was not designed to accommodate a generation that grew up entirely online. Gen Z, now the fastest growing cohort in the global workface, are projected to represent 30% of it by 2030. Their relationship with work represents an economic reality that labour markets must keep up with.

This shift is rooted in experience. Gen Z watched the 2008 financial crisis destroy the savings of people who had done everything right. They entered adulthood during COVID19, a period that demonstrated, at a global scale, that rigid working structures were a design choice, one that could be undone in a matter of weeks when circumstances demanded it. The result is a generation that does not distrust work, but rather the institutions built around it. They job-hop, with an average tenure of just 1.1 years, not out of lack of commitment but out of a refusal to stay where they feel undervalued. They freelance, prioritise mental health openly, and increasingly define success by purpose and autonomy rather than title and salary. Where previous generations silently endured burnout as an unavoidable cost of professional life, Gen Z treats it as a design flaw, one that they expect employers to fix.

The most advocated model to address the situation is the four-day work week, which has been argued to allow workers to focus on productive output rather than the time put in. Studies consistently show that workers are not genuinely productive for the entire 8 hours of their workday. The 100:80:100 model aims to achieve the same level of productivity, with workers getting paid the same salary, but the hours needed to put in are cut down by 8, put differently, 80% of the traditional 40-hour work week. This improves the work-life balance in Gen Z’s lives, prioritises mental health well-being, and decreases work-related stress and burnout. The latter has been defined by the WHO as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion due to sustained pressure, lack of autonomy, and insufficient recovery time. Working from home has also given workers greater control over their environment, although it risks making it harder for them to properly separate their work and private life.

The traditional model exists for reasons that do not disappear simply because a generation dislikes them. Sectors like healthcare, manufacturing, and education depend on consistent, predictable human presence. A nurse, a factory worker or a teacher cannot simply opt for a shorter week without consequences for the people relying on them. There is also something real at stake when workers move on after little more than a year: institutional knowledge, continuity, and the kind of deep expertise that only sustained commitment can build are not easily replaced.

The flexibility Gen Z advocates for often comes with a hidden cost. Gig work and freelancing offer no pension, no sick pay and no legal protection. Nearly half of Gen Z already report feeling financially insecure, which raises an uncomfortable question: in stepping away from the traditional model, is this generation finding freedom, or simply exchanging one form of precarity for another?

The tension here is between two legitimate priorities: worker wellbeing and economic productivity. A four-day week may be entirely viable for a software developer in Amsterdam and completely unworkable for a nurse in Nairobi. These differences make a universal answer complicated, and this committee should be wary of solutions that only serve the already privileged.

The redefinition of labour models does not only concern how and when people work, but increasingly what kinds of work will exist. The transition toward greener economies is already creating new employment opportunities in sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and green construction and industry. These are roles that did not exist, or barely existed, a generation ago, and they are expanding rapidly. For Gen Z, entering the workforce at precisely this moment of transition, these sectors represent a genuine opening: jobs that align with the values this generation has consistently said matter to them, environmental responsibility, purpose, and long-term thinking. However, accessing these opportunities requires specialised training and investment that is far from universally available. Without deliberate policy effort to make green economy pathways accessible across regions and income levels, this transition risks benefiting only those already wellpositioned to take advantage of it.

Why is the citizen’s forum the solution?

The problems this report covers, informal labour, AI in schools and workplaces, and a generation entering a job market that was not built for them, are too big and too interconnected for any one country or institution to solve on its own. That is exactly why a forum like this one is necessary.

Citizens' forums bring together people from different countries and backgrounds to work on shared problems and find solutions that go beyond any single national interest. In the world of labour, this matters more than almost anywhere else. A decision made in one country about trade, automation, or migration will inevitably affect workers somewhere else. The only way to produce solutions that are fair and workable is to build them together.

That is what this committee is here to do. Not just to name the problems, but to work toward real, concrete responses. Who protects informal workers? Who sets the rules for AI in classrooms and offices? How do labour markets adapt to what a new generation actually needs? None of these questions have simple answers, but they all have better and worse ones, and finding the better ones is exactly what this kind of multi-perspective discussion is designed to do.
The future of work will not be settled by one meeting or one document. But the frameworks and commitments that come out of spaces like this one can impact and help shape what

governments and international institutions do next. What is decided here is not abstract. It matters for the students, workers, and communities who will live with the consequences, and who deserve a labour market that was built with them in mind.

Sitography

Sources for formalizing the informal sector

https://youtu.be/YrJ455j5d2o?si=B-quMrU_l8gglxGn

UN video by Cardiff University: overall presentation of the informal sector (definition, challenges, government reaction, opportunities, …)
Illustrates this with definitions, figures, and many examples.

https://www.upgrad.com/blog/difference-between-formal-and-informal-sector/

If you would rather read an article than watch a video, good starting point to find advantages for each sector: read until the FAQ, some interesting points are made.

https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2021/07/28/na-072821-five-things-to-know-abouttheinformal-economy

By the Internation Monetary Fund: five points about the informal sector, some of them a little more niche and thus not addressed properly in other articles.

https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/103616/1422458_file_Ramachandran_Informal_Firms_FINAL.pdf

To Formalize or Not to Formalize? Comparisons of Microenterprise Data from Southern and East Africa
Research report from ETH Zurich university from Switzerland: long, may be useful if you know what you are looking for.

Sources for AI regulation in education and in the workforce

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJP5GqnTrNo

Sal Khan (TED): How AI Could Save (Not Destroy) Education

The case for AI as a democratizing educational tool, including the personalized. tutoring argument.

Is AI making us dumber? Maybe. | Charlie Gedeon | TEDxSherbrooke Street West - YouTube

The cognitive offloading critique and the failed incentives of grade-focused education systems.

(8663) Should we let students use ChatGPT? | Natasha Berg | TEDxSioux Falls - YouTube

Student anxiety around AI tools and the real-world question of where useful assistance ends and cheating begins.

How will artificial intelligence affect income inequality? | Julian Jacobs | TEDxBrownU Julian Jacobs (TEDxBrownU): How Will Artificial Intelligence Affect Income Inequality?

Both sides of the AI and inequality debate: democratization vs. widening the gap.
https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/interview/2025/02/how-ai-reinforces-genderbias-and-what-we-can-do-about-it

UN Women: How AI Reinforces Gender Bias and What We Can Do About It
Concrete examples of AI discrimination against women in hiring and financial. systems.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230601STO93804/eu-ai-act-firstregulation-on-artificial-intelligence

European Parliament: EU AI Act: First Regulation on Artificial Intelligence The structure, risk categories, and key measures of the EU AI Act. Essential for understanding what regulation actually requires.
https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/09/how-to-regulate-artificial-intelligence-ai/

Harvard Gazette: How to Regulate Artificial Intelligence
Academic analysis of the tension between AI innovation and regulation.

Sources for next generation defining traditional labour models

Why new college graduates are facing one of the toughest job markets in a decade From PBS NewsHour, a reliable source, useful for explaining the current entry level job crisis with supporting data.
Shows how AI and economic factors are reducing opportunities and increasing competition for graduates, giving a balanced view of the issue.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2025/04/01/gen-zs-takeover-and-redefining-theworkplace/

By Forbes: reliable and relevant source: good starting point Gives stats that could eventually be useful.
https://www.4dayweek.com/news-posts/100-80-100-rule-mwmb7

Website purely to advocate for shorter work weeks and gen z mental health.
How Generation Z is Reshaping the Future Workforce | TalentNeuron Blog a source that is a bit more general
EZA: Generation Z coming into the labour market. What will be the impact and the challenges?

By EZA, a European labour organisation, reliable but institutional, useful for a European perspective and includes stats on Gen Z job habits.
Explains how Gen Z is reshaping the workplace while also questioning generational stereotypes, but is limited to a mainly European, union-focused viewpoint.