

Transitions & Futures

Discussion paper



Future World of Work: Setting the context

This discussion paper, drafted by the ETI secretariat, aims to introduce the future world of work (FWoW) and the need for responsible business to understand the risks and opportunities it presents. By stimulating member discussion, in conjunction with an established working group, develop the steps needed to ensure a digital and technological transition that is grounded in human rights due diligence.

This document outlines the FWoW concept, the scope and scale of what this may look like, and some of the questions necessary to better understand the potential risks and opportunities it poses to workers in global supply chains. Additional discussion papers will consider the intersection of social dialogue and the potential gender implications.

The questions we are asking

We recognise that accelerating digital transformation and technological innovation plays a significant role in the changing business landscape and the management of supply chain operations, among other things. What is less clear is the impact this change will have on workers along the supply chain. To move ahead we need to answer the follow:

1. What are the drivers of technological and digital innovation?
2. What are the potential impacts on workers? What existing vulnerabilities could be exacerbated?
3. What implications will this have for human rights due diligence (HRDD)?
4. How can we prevent and mitigate against the potential adverse human rights impacts?
5. As whether what this means for companies, their human rights and environmental commitments, future due diligence, and risk assessments.
6. Are there members already dealing with these transformative changes? Are there examples of good practice that we can learn from?

What is the Future World of Work?

FWoW was first codified and recognised as a term by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2013 and [launched as an initiative in 2015](#), resulting in a series of National Dialogues. This led to the adoption of the Centenary [Declaration on the Future of Work](#) at the 108th International Labour Conference in 2019.

The declaration focuses on technological and digital innovation and their influence on the changing nature of work. It urges us ‘to seize the opportunities and address the challenges to shape a fair, inclusive and secure future of work with full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all’ (See Figure 1).

So how do we seize these opportunities and address challenges both existing and emerging?

Technology also presents the opportunity to deliver positive change as it provides the potential for new levels of engagement for worker participation and dialogue - these examples include:

- gathering worker opinions through online surveys,
- managing global grievance mechanisms through dedicated online portals,
- communicating with suppliers via dedicated online spaces,
- scaling up worker learning and development on a range of topics, and
- gathering audit data for supply chain operations.

Figure 1 New forces are transforming the world of work. The transitions involved create urgent challenges. Technological advances – artificial intelligence, automation, and robotics – will create new jobs, but those who lose their jobs in this transition may be the least equipped to seize the new job opportunities. The skills of today will not match the jobs of tomorrow and newly acquired skills may quickly become obsolete. **ILO Global Commission on the future of work**

Multifaceted elements of FWoW



Understanding the scope of FWoW is the first step in our journey towards seizing its opportunities and addressing potential implications. FWoW is multifaceted and has implications for company operations at every level

The ‘people element’ in all this change – how people working in supply chains are affected – needs thorough investigation to determine whether and how this change undermines or supports worker’s rights and protections. Ultimately enhanced due diligence needs to be conducted to ensure businesses understand potential impacts and take the time for careful consideration and strategic planning to mitigate against abuse.

Additional sources of information

All links accurate as of January 2022

- United Nations: The United Nations Secretary-General's [Roadmap for digital cooperation](#): Ensuring the protection of human rights
- United Nations: Resource hub - [human rights and digital technology](#)
- OECD briefing: [What is the future of work?](#)
- OECD [Artificial Intelligence Principles](#)
- OECD briefing: [Digitisation of the agriculture and food system](#)
- The Global Deal: [The impact of Artificial Intelligence on the labour market](#) and the workplace: What role for social dialogue?
- UNI Global Union: [top ten principles for workers' data privacy and protection](#)
- International Labour Organisation, Future World of Work:
 - [Research papers index](#)
 - [Publications and briefing notes](#)