LESSONS LEARNED FROM TRANSNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS ADDRESSING THE FUTURE OF WORK:
Platform Labor, Migrant Labor, and Automation
Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II)

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INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Technological progress, international migration, and increasingly sophisticated production processes are among the major trends currently changing the structure of work and employment in both advanced and developing countries. At stake for much of the world’s population is the future of secure, stable, and gainful employment, as the expansion of the platform economy, cross-national labor migration, and advanced forms of automation challenge existing legal and industrial relations systems’ abilities to protect and provide for workers. Platform work, migration, and automation all increase the prevalence of nonstandard work arrangements, contributing to issues of low pay, job insecurity, erratic schedules, underemployment, obtuse contracts, lack of benefits, inadequate support, and poor working conditions.

Nevertheless, there are countervailing forces with the potential to mitigate, if not reverse, the negative effects of nonstandard work. One such force is the rise of transnational campaigns led by workers, unions, and international organizations that aim to improve working conditions and protect the rights of workers in precarious positions. The expansion and increased sophistication of transnational labor campaigns is occurring alongside a renewed urgency on the part of international labor rights organizations, which have called on national governments, transnational employers, and other stakeholders to seriously consider their role in shaping the future of work in the global economy. The International Labour Organization’s recent “Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work,” for instance, calls for greater respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining, improved workplace health and safety, adequate minimum wages, and limits on working time (Hagen, 2019), while the World Bank’s 2019 World Development Report on “The Changing Nature of Work” likewise emphasizes a “human-centered” approach to the future of work that prioritizes the rights and well-being of workers everywhere (World Bank, 2019).

How effective have transnational labor campaigns been in addressing the challenges of platform labor, migrant labor, and automation? What lessons can be learned from analyzing recent attempts by global unions and other international organizations to assist workers impacted by the major trends shaping the future of work? The purpose of this report is to begin to address these questions based on an analysis of secondary sources. While much of what has been written on these specific topics is necessarily preliminary and incomplete, given how recently certain technological advances and migration patterns have emerged, there is nonetheless now sufficient empirical information to at least suggest some next steps for future projects and programming.
KEY CONCEPTS

Before introducing the research questions and methodology, it is necessary first to define key terms used in this report. This section also provides some background information to help situate each term in the context of individual and collective labor rights.

THE PLATFORM OR “GIG” ECONOMY

Platform companies use advanced software, algorithms, and the internet to match customers’ demands for services with labor’s supply of services efficiently and on a large scale, affording customers on-demand access to labor and giving workers opportunities to accept or decline jobs at will via apps (OECD, 2017, p. 4). The platform economy (also known as the “gig” economy) consists of two main forms of work: place-based work, which is geographically bound, and crowd work, which can be done anywhere with an adequate internet connection (Stefano, 2018; Johnston, 2019). Examples of place-based platform work include personal transportation services (e.g., Uber, Lyft), food delivery (e.g., DoorDash, Deliveroo), and cleaning and other home services (e.g., Handy, TaskRabbit). Examples of crowd work include data entry, writing, editing, graphic design, translation, product reviews, and survey responses completed by individuals online using apps like ClickWork, Fiverr, Freelancer.com, and Amazon Mechanical Turk.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “reliable and internationally comparable data are currently not available” on the platform economy, and “most existing estimates suggest that the overall level of such work remains low – despite high growth rates in recent years” (OECD, 2017, p. 14). A policy brief from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) suggests platform labor is limited to between one-half and one percent of total employment. Nevertheless, the platform economy is of increasing significance for workers in developing countries. Over 43 percent of individuals in low- and middle-income countries now have internet access (World Bank, 2017), and because platform companies break up jobs into small, flexible, on-demand tasks, workers in developing countries can easily perform services on a schedule of their own making for clients in wealthier countries and earn decent wages in U.S. dollars or other hard currencies. Some countries like Malaysia and Nigeria even have campaigns to train citizens to make a living using online platforms (Semuels, 2018; Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017, p. 138). Moreover, platform-mediated crowd work creates opportunities for individuals who otherwise cannot secure regular work in their home countries because of gender, racial, ethnic, religious, or age discrimination. Digital work “means that not just capital, but also labour can compete in a global market” (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017, p. 137).

Platform work also has many downsides. Platform companies are rarely ever the legally recognized employer, so gig workers are almost always self-employed as independent contractors who do not qualify for social security or other employee benefits and must provide and maintain their own cars, bicycles, tools, computers, smart phones, or other equipment necessary for the job. At the same time, platform workers cede a great deal of control to platform companies, which use algorithms that control what workers are paid, how they carry out tasks, and (for place-based labor) where the work takes place (ITF, 2019a, p. 1). Algorithms sometimes magnify racial and gender biases that disadvantage women and minorities (Doorn, 2017). For example, an analysis of 13,500 worker profiles on freelancing platforms found that Fiverr workers who were perceived as black or Asian received significantly worse customer ratings than workers perceived as white (Hannák et al., 2017, p. 1923). Because such reviews influence the recommendation algorithms on platforms like Fiverr and TaskRabbit, racial and gender biases in customer ratings can disproportionately restrict some workers’ earning opportunities. Moreover, many
platform jobs provide no incentives for upskilling, which can inhibit human capital development in developing countries (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017, p. 152).

Additionally, platform labor puts workers at risk of underemployment because demand for labor can be inconsistent and unpredictable (OECD, 2017, p. 14). The low barriers to entry of many platform jobs (in part, due to their standardization and breaking up of tasks) allows for an oversupply of labor that puts downward pressure on wages (Graham, 2017). Because of the low pay, platform workers often put in long hours and work multiple jobs. Platform labor is also generally unregulated, or at least rarely fits into existing regulatory frameworks, which places already vulnerable populations, such as women and youth, at risk (ITF, 2019a, p. 2). Moreover, the common practice of customers reviewing and rating platform laborers creates even more competition among workers (ITUC, 2019, p. 10), who frequently suffer from feelings of isolation and fears of replaceability (Johnston, 2019, p. 4). Finally, as independent contractors, platform workers are prohibited in some countries from organizing and bargaining collectively (Johnston, 2019, p. 10), which exacerbates the race-to-the-bottom issue and the problems of overwork and low pay.

**INTERNATIONAL LABOR MIGRATION**

Another important trend in the global economy is international labor migration. In general, international migration is the movement of people out of their country of birth or citizenship to a different country for a sustained period of time. This includes people settling permanently in other countries, workers on temporary contracts, undocumented workers, international students, and refugees and asylum seekers. While it is nearly impossible to obtain fully accurate estimates of international migrant flows, the United Nations estimates that 272 million people are international migrants, comprising 3.5 percent of the total global population (UN, 2019).

Nearly three-quarters of all international migrants are between 20 and 64 years old, which is considered working age (UN, 2017, p. 17). By far the most common reason people migrate across national borders is to earn higher wages or otherwise improve their lives economically; hence, migrants frequently move from developing countries to more economically advanced countries. The United States, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, France, Canada, Australia, and Italy host around half of all international migrants (UN, 2017). Migrant-receiving countries benefit from workers who solve skills shortages, reduce labor costs, and work jobs that citizens prefer not to do. Migrants also often pay taxes and help improve worker-to-retiree ratios.

At the same time, however, international migrants are among the most vulnerable workers in nearly every country that receives them. Migrant workers are often relegated to low-paid jobs and face discrimination due to racism, xenophobia, and beliefs that migrants depress wages in the destination country. Additionally, language barriers, unfamiliarity with local and national laws and norms, separation from networks of friends and family, and limited economic resources put migrants at risk for exploitation by employers. Organizing migrants, whether into unions or other types of organizations, can greatly reduce their vulnerability to exploitation. Yet attempts so far have yielded mixed results. Temporary labor migrants are especially difficult to organize because of their impermanence and fear of employer or government retaliation, in addition to assorted legal restrictions, the antipathy of native workers, and other factors (Holgate, 2005).
AUTOMATION

Automation is defined as the execution by machines (including computers) of tasks that were previously performed by humans (Balfe, Sharples, & Wilson, 2015; Parasuraman & Riley, 1997). While automation is most common in the realm of manufacturing processes, as when robotics replace humans in automobile production, other routine tasks such as clerical work, bookkeeping, customer support, and basic paralegal work and reporting have been subject to automation as well. Moreover, with the rise of Big Data, artificial intelligence, and the “Internet of Things,” it is now possible for non-routine tasks to be automated (OECD, 2017, p. 4).

Automation’s implications for the future of work are far from obvious. As with the rise of the platform economy, there is debate over which groups of workers in developing countries gain or lose as a consequence of technological progress that is making automation easier and more sophisticated. Adopting new technologies could allow some developing countries to “leapfrog” over advanced economies (OECD, 2017, p. 4). Robots can also improve workplace health and safety by performing labor that is difficult or dangerous for humans (Moore, 2018, p. 19). However, labor-saving automation could precipitate a process of “premature deindustrialization” in developing countries if developed countries choose to relocate production closer to domestic markets (Rodrik, 2016). Additional concerns about automation for the future of work in both advanced and developing countries include increased stress due to expectations that human laborers work at a machine pace, downward pressure on wages, and significant job losses affecting not only low-skilled but also, increasingly, high-skilled workers (Moore, 2018, p. 19).

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1 The digital infrastructure that allows everyday objects such as light fixtures, thermostats, vehicles, shipping containers, and washing machines to send and receive data through the internet (Atzori, Iera, & Morabito, 2017).
BACKGROUND

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As discussed previously, transnational labor campaigns and other initiatives backed by international organizations have the potential to improve working conditions and labor rights for workers impacted by the major trends shaping the future of work in the global economy. This literature review therefore gathers and analyzes information pursuant to the following research questions:

- To what extent have transnational labor campaigns engaged workers in the platform economy?
- To what extent have transnational labor campaigns engaged international migrant workers?
- What types of initiatives have global institutions such as the ILO launched that focus on how stakeholders will need to adapt to workplace disruptions caused by automation?
- For all three issue categories, what has been successful in these campaigns or other initiatives? What has failed? What can be learned from those successes and failures?

METHODOLOGY FOR LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant scholarly literature and gray literature was identified through searches on Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Google using varying combinations of search terms that included the names of multilateral institutions, global unions, and other international organizations, combined with variations on the wording of key terms (such as “platform economy,” “platform labor,” “platform work,” “gig economy,” “gig labor,” “gig work,” “international migrant labor,” “international labor migration,” “international migrant worker,” and so on). The author also corresponded with multilateral labor organizations via email and used the document search functions on organizational websites to identify results indicating initiatives in research, program, or policy. Searches and outreach focused on the International Labour Organization, International Trade Union Confederation, Fair Labor Association, International Center for Trade Union Rights, International Labor Rights Forum/Fund, European Trade Union Confederation, World Economic Forum, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, International Federation on Robotics, and the global unions BWI, IndustriALL, ITF, IUF, PSI, and UNI.
TRANSNATIONAL LABOR CAMPAIGNS AND THE GIG ECONOMY

Platform labor organizing generally involves either adapting existing institutions and social dialogue to accommodate platform workers (for instance, by integrating them into works councils or collective bargaining) or creating new regulatory frameworks and institutions (such as multiparty agreements or independent certification regimes) (Johnston, 2019, p. 3; Prassl, 2018, p. 19). The former strategy is more conducive to the organization of place-based workers because the workers are embedded in specific jurisdictions and industrial relations institutions (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas 2018), while the latter strategy works better for crowd workers because labor that can be performed anywhere at any time is not subject to any particular jurisdiction (Johnston, 2019, p. 15). Unions have led or assisted some of these efforts, although many attempts to mobilize platform workers have been self-organized or otherwise separate from the mainstream labor movement (Aloisi, 2019, p. 26). Regardless of approach, however, improving working conditions and labor rights in the platform economy remains challenging. To date, platform workers “have not been able to build a large-scale or effective digital labour movement” (Moore, 2018, p. 17).

Nonetheless, because platforms standardize work in ways that produce highly similar work experiences for large numbers of people, there is great potential for the mobilization of platform labor on a large scale (Johnston, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, nearly all platform workers are computer literate, internet savvy, and skilled in digital communication, making it easy for them to connect through social media, dedicated websites, and messaging software, which could be launching pads for digital campaigns (Prassl, 2018, p. 20). Most current efforts to organize platform workers are on the local or national scale; however, it is possible that international initiatives for organization, mobilization, regulation, and standard-setting will have the most encompassing and long-lasting impact on well-being of workers in the platform economy. This section thus investigates the extent to which international organizations and transnational campaigns have engaged platform workers.

THE ILO AND PLATFORM LABOR

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has taken a leadership position regarding the rights of platform workers in the global economy. The ILO maintains an active “Future of Work” initiative, which included a conference in Brussels in November 2016 that brought together more than 300 representatives of ILO social partners and civil society in Europe. The conference’s background documents for attendees and participants were extensively referenced and discussed the most likely trajectories of worker- and country-level employment and income based on digitalization, automation, platform work, and other trends (ILO, 2016). Conference attendees were provided historical background on the development of labor standards and framework agreements and were encouraged to think about the adequacy of current labor standards and other international agreements in light of conference learnings.

The “Future of Work” initiative also serves as an umbrella for some significant research and policy documents, such as “Digital Labour Platforms and the Future of Work: Towards Decent Work in the Online World,” an ILO report of a 3,500-respondent worker survey fielded in 75 countries in 2015 and

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This report examined platform work across the globe by focusing on the five largest globally operating “micro-tasking” systems, which function by routing assignments through an auction or other matching function, providing a “crowdsourcing” feature to organizations needing a spot market for specialized labor. Since the emergence of these platforms, the ILO and other organizations have been concerned that the workers bidding for and taking assignments may be subject to poor working conditions and exploitative platform contract terms. This is unsurprising because platform work is in many ways the opposite of labor organizing—atomizing workers and having them price-compete, generally not even recognizing them as “workers” but contractors or even “participants” receiving “rewards” rather than pay. Platform work may be operating outside normal social protection schemes, and the tax treatment of their work may inadequately fund social insurance programs. The survey looked at workers using the following major micro-tasking systems:

- U.S.-based Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), founded in 2005
- German-based Clickworker (founded in 2005; operational in 2007)
- U.S.-based CrowdFlower (founded in 2007)
- U.S.-based Microworkers (founded in 2009)
- U.K.-based Prolific (founded in 2014 as Prolific Academic)

Survey respondents (platform workers) were asked to categorize the services they provided into one of ten categories (descriptions are provided where additional context is necessary):

- Data collection
- Categorization
- Content access (paid promotion to manipulate measures of popularity, such as paid retweeting or paid visits to web sites)
- Verification or validation (confirming whether information is accurate, e.g., physical addresses)
- Content moderation (identifying whether content violates terms of service or local or international laws)
- Market research and reviews
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning (performing tasks to provide training to AI systems on pattern recognition, speech recognition, and identifying gestures)
- Transcription
- Content creation or editing
- Surveys and experiments
The survey found that platform work is often attended by complex, difficult-to-read terms of service for platform workers; that platform work is typically urban, in part owing to the connectivity requirements for performing or submitting work for evaluation and payment; and that gender balance in platform work depends on the platform in developed countries, but in developing countries only one worker in five is female. The majority of workers on these platforms were between the ages of 25 and 40, with a developing-country average age of 28, and a developed-country average age of 35. Of those surveyed, 47 percent were married or cohabitating, and 43 percent had children in the home, of which most (80 percent) were the respondent’s own. Fewer than 18 percent had a high school education or less. Roughly one-third were using platform work to supplement income from other jobs, and around 20 percent were on the platforms as a means of working from home (Berg et al., 2018).

The ILO research team calculated platform workers’ paid remuneration at $4.43 per hour in 2017, which dropped significantly to $3.31 per hour when unpaid work was taken into account (indicating the substantial share of uncompensated time these workers expend), often below local minimum wages. There is also a broad lack of social protection for platform workers—roughly 40 percent had no health insurance, 65 percent had no pension or retirement plan, and 63 percent had no access to any form of social insurance. Appeals regarding rejected piecework are onerous and slow, and communication with the platform companies themselves is frequently poor. Platform workers are considered “self-employed” but are not provided the traditional degree of latitude in completing their duties that this designation would entail. In terms of traditional labor standards, platforms range from self-regulated to unregulated. The ILO report details country-level attempts to create standards or watchdog organizations along with some successes in Germany, Austria, and Sweden involving both industrial and white-collar unions, and concludes with 18 specific policy recommendations, including those listed in the box to the right. The ILO further recommends that social insurance systems (in coverage, in the technology of payment administration, and in funding) adapt to account for the circumstances of platform workers (Berg et al., 2018).

ILO Recommendations for Improving Platform Working Conditions

- End misclassification of workers as self-employed
- Permit unionization, collective bargaining, works councils, and co-determination rights
- Make platform work subject to prevailing local minimum wage laws
- Fees should be transparent, and platforms should adhere to the ILO principle that private employment agencies should not charge fees to workers
- Platform workers should be afforded flexibility to reject taskings without prejudice to future opportunities
- Incident reporting for platform downtime or technical problems should be improved, and lost income due to platform technical problems should not be the responsibility of workers
- Any rules governing non-payment for work submitted should be clear and should be consistently enforced
- Negative worker ratings should require explicit justifications
- Workers should be able to contest negative ratings and non-payment
- Platforms should have explicit written codes of conduct and demonstrate enforcement
- Workers should be able to continue established client relationships outside the platform
- Workers are entitled to a project and reputation history that can be taken to traditional employment arrangements at any time
In August 2017, the Director-General of the ILO convened an independent Global Commission on the Future of Work, which resulted in a series of reports on roundtables. The ILO produced a related set of issue briefs for “Future of Work” as recently as the spring of 2018 and in preparation for the 100th meeting of the International Labour Conference, with half of the thematic clusters for the paper series addressing automation or digitalization to some degree. These issue briefs were current on the available platform work and universal basic income literatures as of early 2018 and represent a valuable set of background materials for policymakers. Many of the issue briefs are linked to longer research papers with country-level policy and legislative updates grouped by approach. For example, the ILO’s “Future of Work” research paper series for social protection identifies which countries have partially or fully implemented the potential policy directions it outlines and provides approximately 80 additional references (Berendt & Nguyen, 2018). The ILO’s engagement with these topics is substantive from a research standpoint and has provided a rich knowledge base, which should be useful for ongoing policy development, including in developing-country contexts.

THE GLOBAL UNIONS AND PLATFORM LABOR

Research for this report found only a few instances of active efforts by global union federations (GUFs, often also called “global unions”) to organize platform workers or otherwise campaign around the issues faced specifically by workers in the platform economy. Most outspoken among the global unions is the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF). While other global unions do make cursory mentions of platform and gig labor issues, research for the present report did not produce evidence of strong and consistent engagement with these issues.

Inspired in part by California’s Assembly Bill 5, passed in 2019 to prohibit companies’ misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors (ITF, 2019c), the ITF issued a statement arguing that “companies that pay workers to provide a service are employers and should behave like employers, paying social security, insurance, and providing sick pay and paid holidays” (ITF, 2019a, p. 1). The position paper goes on to make a case for regulating the platform economy on the international scale. Still, the mechanism by which such regulation would occur is unclear. According to the ITF, there remains an essential role for national government regulation: platform businesses “should pay taxes in each country they operate in, and access to national digital territory should be made conditional on their acceptance of local tax and labour laws. They should have agreed minimum pay rates and allow workers collective representation” (ITF, 2019a, p. 2). Yet how national governments or international regulatory bodies would enforce such rules has yet to be determined.

Somewhat more concrete is the ITF’s effort to relate labor issues in the platform economy to those faced by workers in other nonstandard forms of employment. One way to do so is to fashion platform labor regulation after existing instruments such as the ILO’s Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), which “is a laboratory of innovation designed to implement the concept of decent work for cross-border workers and employers” in the global shipping industry (Subasinghe, n.d., p. 1). The MLC covers issues such as worker recruitment, training, licensing, working hours, holidays, health, and social security protection, and

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2 Cluster 3 focuses on “Technology for social, environmental and economic development,” including impacts on job quality and employment; Cluster 4 addresses “Managing change during every phase of education,” including the skills gap and the policies needed to prevent worker displacement and reshoring of industrial activity to more technologically advanced countries; Cluster 6 is centered on “The future governance of work” and improved integration of platform workers into social protection schemes.
“effective compliance is secured through a comprehensive enforcement framework that involves the
industry’s key players: flag states, port states, labour-supplying states, and shipowners” (Subasinghe, n.d.,
p. 1). An analogous international convention for platform workers could likewise involve all key actors in
the platform economy, including platform companies, the states in which platform businesses are
registered, labor inspectors in countries in which platform workers operate, clients, and workers
themselves (Subasinghe, n.d., p. 2).

Beyond statements and position papers, the ITF has been influential in shaping the platform labor debate
through activism. Collaborating with the ITUC and several civil society groups, the ITF helped convince
the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) to end a
global partnership it had begun with Uber (Connell, 2015; ITF, 2015). UN Women had partnered with
Uber because the ride-booking platform promised the creation of one million new jobs for women. The
ITF and others opposed to the partnership argued, however, that those jobs would put women in
precarious positions due to inadequate wages, unpredictable earnings, and unsafe working conditions.

The ITF has also held meetings and events to coordinate actions and information-sharing by transport
workers in the platform economy. For example, in 2019 the ITF hosted a forum that included
representatives from unions and workers’ groups in Australia, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Italy, and
Sweden. Attendees represented workers delivering food for apps such as Deliveroo, Foodora, and Uber
Eats. At the forum, attendees discussed strategies for coordinating transnational actions to address
precarious labor in the platform economy (ITF, 2019b). The ITF has also held several meetings to strategize
an approach to Uber, such as the September 2016 meeting in Antwerp that brought together 37 union
representatives from 19 countries across North America, South America, Africa, and Europe (ITF, 2016).

Another event in Cape Town focused on informal and platform workers in the transport industry more
generally. ITF researchers presented on the success of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers’
Union in Uganda in organizing informal transport workers driving minibuses and boda bodas (motorcycle
taxi’s). The researchers pointed out that in Uganda and other developing countries, app-based drivers have
some similarities to non-app-based informal transport workers. Both types of workers experience long
working hours, low pay, unsafe and polluted working conditions, harassment from passengers, and police
corruption. Both also “have their own informal networks and ways of organising to try and improve their
conditions” (ITF, 2019d, p. 2), which suggests that an effective way to assist local efforts to organize
platform workers may be to tap into workers’ existing informal networks.

Other global unions have produced statements about platform workers’ rights but show little evidence of
active campaigning on this issue. UNI, the global union for various service sector industries, has a dedicated
section for “Platform and Agency Workers” posted on its website,3 though there is little evidence on this
website of UNI leading any transnational campaigns or other actions explicitly focused on platform
workers. One exception is UNI’s collaboration with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
to collect, compare, and exchange policy ideas and work with the European Parliament and the European
Economic and Social Committee to address issues related to digital labor (Aloisi, 2019, p. 27). UNI
America, a regional office, also oversaw a three-year project on decent work and union rights for those

3 Available at https://uniglobalunion.org/sectors/temp-agency-workers/news-0
employed by temporary agencies and indicated that it plans to expand the project to include platform workers in the Americas (UNI, 2013, p. 60).

IndustriALL, the global union for manufacturing workers (as well as mining, energy, and related industries), has also issued statements advocating for platform workers’ rights. “Obviously, it is futile to try to negotiate with a robot or an algorithm,” reads one IndustriALL statement. “Instead, trade unions must focus on the owners of these technologies and organize the workers they pay—whoever and wherever they are. Organizing these workers will require new approaches, as many of these workers are employed by multinational companies doing work that can be done anywhere, even in several countries. They may not even know who is paying them. Building cross-border solidarity will be critical—global unions like IndustriALL are needed now, more than ever” (2019).

IndustriALL’s vision suggests a greater role for transnational labor campaigns to promote the rights of platform workers than currently exists. In addition to building cross-border solidarity, the goal of such campaigns could be to generate global framework agreements (GFAs), which global unions negotiate with companies to establish regulatory frameworks enforced not by governments but by the global unions and employers themselves. Yet unlike the scores of existing GFAs that cover workers in non-platform industries, any GFA negotiated with a platform business would require a sophisticated understanding of the platform business’s unique practices, business strategies, and supply chains (Johnston, 2019, p. 13).

OTHER TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS ON PLATFORM LABOR RIGHTS

Another set of efforts to advocate for platform workers’ rights comes from national-level unions cooperating directly with other national unions. For example, in July 2019, the United Food and Commercial Workers union in Canada (UFCW Canada) met with representatives of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) in Toronto to discuss common challenges faced by platform workers in Canada and China and each union’s efforts to organize workers in the platform economy. The event included HKCTU delegates’ participation in the Canadian Labour Congress’s Ontario Region Summer School, which teaches attendees about collective bargaining, union member engagement, and human rights legislation (UFCW, 2019).

A wider-reaching initiative came from several unions in Europe and the U.S., which collectively endorsed the Frankfurt Declaration. This declaration encourages platform companies, workers, unions, clients, researchers, and regulators to support workplace democracy in the platform economy. According to the Frankfurt Declaration, this means ensuring companies’ compliance with national laws and international conventions, clarifying the employment status of platform workers, upholding workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively, guaranteeing platform workers minimum wages and access to social protections regardless of employment status, and increasing transparency and accountability in resolving disputes between clients and workers and between workers and platform companies (Fair Crowd Work, 2016).

One initiative that goes beyond rhetoric to provide useful information for platform workers is Fair Crowd Work, a website launched through a collaboration of the German Metalworkers' Union IG Metall, the Austrian Chamber of Labour, the Austrian Trade Union Confederation, and Sweden’s largest union,
Fair Crowd Work conducts surveys of workers and unions and publishes their ratings of various platforms’ working conditions (Moore, 2018, p. 17). This rating system has the potential to give collective voice to app-based workers otherwise separated by location, occupation, and industry (ILO, 2019a, p. 42). A similar initiative is Fairwork, which scores platforms based on pay, conditions, contracts, management, and representation (Fairwork, n.d.-b). These five principles were developed through tripartite workshops in South Africa, India, and Germany that brought together workers, unions, platform businesses, governments, donors, and academics in partnership with the ILO (Fairwork, n.d.-a). Yet another tool for platform workers to share their experiences is Turkopticon, a browser plugin with which Mechanical Turk workers can rate clients and make their reviews visible to other MTurk workers (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017, p. 154).

Platform labor campaigns in developing countries

Researchers have found less enthusiasm for collective action among platform workers in the Global South in part because informal labor is already very common in many developing countries, so poor working conditions due to a lack of employee rights are not by themselves a sufficient rallying point (Moore, 2018, p. 23). Nevertheless, there is evidence of some platform labor mobilization in the form of protests, strikes, media campaigns, and the creation of informal unions. In Ukraine, for instance, drivers for the food delivery app Glovo were driving scooters or riding bicycles for up to 14 hours per day, six days a week, in order to earn enough to survive. Building on a legal judgement in the U.K., Ukraine Glovo workers won their case and became the first platform workers in the country to form a union (Connell, 2019). In Indonesia, over one million people work as drivers using transport apps, and many of these drivers have joined self-organized community groups. These organizations “operate on a mutual aid logic, characterised by horizontal networks and strong social commitment, …[that] has facilitated high levels of membership and member participation in small, geographically based driver communities” (Ford & Honan, 2019, p. 528). In South Africa, nearly 500 Uber drivers joined the South African Transport and Allied Workers’ Union (SATAWU) in an effort to confront Uber over the 25 percent cut the company takes out of drivers’ earnings (Kazeem, 2016). Large numbers of developing-country Uber drivers also participated in the global Uber strikes in May 2019, “which exhibited heightened levels of coordination as workers conducted simultaneous job actions in the United States, United Kingdom, Chile, Panama, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and more” (Johnston, 2019, p. 6).

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4 http://faircrowd.work/
TRANSNATIONAL LABOR CAMPAIGNS AND MIGRANT LABOR

This section considers the extent to which transnational labor campaigns and related initiatives led by the ILO and the global unions have engaged migrant workers in recent years. Many of the global unions’ initiatives focus on labor migrating from countries in Asia, a region with enormous economic significance not only as a hub of global value chains that have facilitated international trade on an unprecedented scale, but also as the region of origin for the majority of international migrants worldwide. According to the UN, “Asia is the origin of the largest number of persons who are living outside their region of birth. In 2017, there were 42 million international migrants born in Asia but living elsewhere. Of these, most international migrants were living in Europe (20 million), followed by Northern America (17 million) and Oceania (3 million)” (UN, 2017, p. 12).

THE ILO AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT LABOR

The International Labour Organization has maintained an explicit concern for the rights of migrant workers since its inception. The 1919 ILO Constitution’s preamble states the organization’s commitment to the "protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own" (ILO, n.d.). Section III(c) of the 1944 ILO Philadelphia Declaration also recognizes the need to provide for the safety of those engaged in "migration for employment and settlement" (ILC, 1944). ILO revisited the issue with the 1949 Migration for Employment Recommendation, the 1964 World Employment Programme and the Employment Policy Convention and Recommendation, and again in the 1975 Migrant Workers’ Convention; the last of these instruments provides for combating trafficking and exploitative practices surrounding migrant workers, and calls for legal migrant workers to be considered on an equal basis to national workers in social protections, cultural protection and trade union membership (ILC, 1975). More recently, ILO has renewed its General Survey of member states’ laws and policies relating to migrant workers, and has found compliance issues across a broad range of developed and developing countries with respect to propaganda about immigration, minimum wage laws and migrants, social protections, the confiscation of identity cards (widespread), and worker safety (widespread, particularly in maritime work) (ILC, 2016).

ILO has also studied the likely labor market impacts of climate change—either its negative consequences or the employment effects of mitigation strategies—for over a decade (GURN 2009). The report of the 92nd Session of the International Labour Conference in 2005, for example, explored the development of a “fair deal” for migrant workers in the global economy, and explicitly took into account climate change as a driver of population displacement, alongside “poverty, wars, famine, and repression” (ILO, 2005). More recently, ILO has focused on the labor policies required to transition from more environmentally harmful technologies and industries (greening), the employment opportunities that may arise from cleanup and mitigation projects, and the closely related notions that policies should be developed inclusively and with a complete understanding of the equities involved (Rosenberg, 2010). ILO’s climate change and migration research and policy efforts have global, regional, and in-country components; there is a significant focus on small island communities in the Pacific because of the existential threat posed by sea level rise (ILO, 2019b). The "Future of Work" country reports for ASEAN in 2019 explicitly focus on
country-level policies that ILO views as promising for addressing both migration, climate change, technology and demographics (ILO Regional Office, 2019).

In general, the main labor-focused international organizations – such as the ILO, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD, and the GUFs – all take climate change seriously and agree on the urgency of the issue, even if they differ somewhat on the types of policies and action plans they propose to address it (Felli, 2014, p. 378). For instance, both the TUAC and ITUC promote the concept of a “just transition,” which means incorporating workers into plans to reduce carbon emissions in order to minimize worker dislocation, invest in more “green jobs,” and ensure social protections for workers who are negatively impacted by transitions to more environmentally friendly workplaces. While TUAC concentrates their efforts more on national governments and EU institutions, the ITUC focuses more on alliances with social democratic parties, businesses, religious organizations, and NGOs (Anigstein & Wyczekier, 2019, p. 116).

THE GLOBAL UNIONS AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT LABOR

Although migrant workers are not the main focus of any of the global unions, six of the nine GUFs are relatively active on the issue of international migration. In general, the global unions engage with migrant workers by conducting advocacy work, producing and disseminating information about migrants’ wages and working conditions, helping migrants gain coverage in collective bargaining agreements, assisting in efforts to encourage migrant workers to join mainstream unions, and networking with other organizations working on similar issues (Ford, 2019, p. 75-78). While there have been some successes in organizing and mobilizing migrant workers through transnational campaigns, the evidence suggests that much more can be done to incorporate international migrants into the global unions’ core programs. Ford’s (2019) comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the global unions and international migrant labor uncovers several key factors that influence whether and how each global union includes migrant labor in their programming. These factors include funder priorities, the interests and values of regional staff, and several variables related to national and local context.

First, although the global unions have a great deal of autonomy in setting their own agendas, priorities are influenced by the union affiliates and solidarity support organizations that provide the most funding. Most of the funding for migrant outreach work comes from European unions and organizations, particularly LO-Norway, the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (Germany), FNV Mondiaal (Netherlands), SASK (Finland),5 and Union to Union (Sweden) (Ford, 2019, p. 72). As a result, “although much of the GUFs’ work is carried out in the developing regions of the world, their strategies and modes of action…are heavily influenced by the thinking and experience of their European affiliates” (Ford, 2019, p. 75). For example, donors tend to pay more attention to large developing countries than to smaller ones (Ford, 2019, p. 93).

Second, the personal values and strategic orientations of global union staff influence their engagement with migrant workers. Even if a global union’s head office has little interest in migrant labor engagement, it is possible for regional offices located near migrants’ countries of origin or destination to have dedicated staff who are committed to migrant worker issues and autonomous in developing migrant-focused projects. Regional offices have considerable flexibility in executing projects (Ford, 2019, p. 73-74). The personal values, experiences, and priorities of the individuals staffing regional offices also heavily influence

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5 Suomen Ammattiliiton Solidaarisuuskeskus (Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland)
global unions’ programming (Ford, 2019, p. 98). For example, the Philippines benefited from having a program coordinator who was from that country and had many years of experience working with NGOs there (Ford, 2019, p. 100).

Third, a collection of variables related to the national and local contexts in which the global unions operate also influence whether and how migrant workers are incorporated into transnational campaigns. National laws and formal industrial relations systems affect whether migrant workers may form or join unions, the extent to which governments monitor and control local and foreign NGOs, and freedom of association in general (Ford, 2019, p. 74, 102). Even in countries with relatively strong unions, it might be the case that those unions are not affiliated with the global union in question or are absent from migrant-dense industries or locations, such as special economic zones (Ford, 2019, p. 100-101). Moreover, existing unions might simply be unwilling or unable to take part in a global union campaign (Ford, 2019, p. 74). These factors suggest that increased cooperation with NGOs and other civil society organizations could greatly enhance global unions’ prospects for involving migrant workers in transnational labor rights campaigns.

**BWI AND MIGRANT WORKERS**

Building and Woodworkers’ International (BWI) is the global union most engaged with migrant workers’ issues. In 2010, BWI launched a global campaign called BWI-Connect that aims to expand migrant worker membership in BWI-affiliated organizations, connect origin- and destination-country unions, advocate for policies and legislation to support migrants’ rights, negotiate with employers to ensure migrants earn fair wages, and build coalitions with civil society organizations focused on migrant labor (BWI-Connect, n.d.). Additionally, BWI has been involved in campaigns to improve destination-country unions’ attitudes toward migrants, programs that educate migrants on their rights prior to departure, and partnerships connecting union affiliates in origin and destination countries, including the embedding of origin-country union organizers in destination-country unions (Ford, 2019 p. 83). BWI focuses its migration work mainly on destination countries in Europe but is active in Asia as well, where it has supported projects in Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan (Ford, 2019, p. 107).

BWI has also spearheaded some of the most significant transnational labor campaigns for the rights of migrant construction workers in the past decade. Joined by ITUC, IndustriALL, IUF, and the Swiss union Unia, BWI and its affiliates have put pressure on The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the governments of South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Qatar to protect the rights of migrant workers building facilities for the 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022 World Cup games, respectively. International migrant labor plays a crucial part in preparing countries to host so-called “mega-sporting events” like the World Cup and the Olympics (Rombaldi, 2017). Governments, organizing committees, and construction companies all rely on these workers to stay on track for these events’ strict deadlines. Yet, tight schedules and strict deadlines force workers into an unsafe pace of work, causing health problems and deadly accidents (BWI, 2012, 2014a; Watts, 2014).
Moreover, migrant construction workers are subject to exploitation, low pay, wage theft, and unsafe living conditions. In Brazil, for instance, over 100 workers reported being promised a wage of US$625 per month, yet had to pay US$220 to secure a job. Despite paying the fee, most were not immediately employed and were forced to live in makeshift camps around the Sao Paulo international airport (BBC, 2013). Furthermore, international migrant workers are often not allowed to organize. In Qatar, for example, 99 percent of all construction workers are international migrants, yet migrants are prohibited from joining trade unions (BWI, 2011).

BWI and its allies experienced challenges in the World Cup campaign. Negotiating with FIFA was difficult because it was an unfamiliar entity and not a traditional transnational campaign target, which is normally the employer (Dorcadie, 2017, p. 2; Rombaldi, 2017). National and local unions sometimes had difficulties controlling when and how workers went on strike (Dorcadie, 2017, p. 3; Rombaldi, 2017). In Brazil, there was no national collaboration in negotiations on a unified wage agreement throughout the country, even though it was a recurring theme for most trade unions (Rombaldi, 2017).

BWI and its allies also saw some victories, however. For instance, in Brazil BWI affiliates played an important role in securing an agreement for better working and living conditions after a four-day strike, including a nine percent wage increase (BWI, 2014b). On the international level, public scrutiny exerted significant pressure on authorities to participate in negotiations with trade unions (Rombaldi, 2017). Hence, in 2019 BWI and FIFA met in Berlin to discuss the health and safety of the 27,000 construction workers building infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Discussions included the need for better auditing, inspection, compliance, enforcement of standards, reimbursement of illegal recruitment fees, improvements in workers’ accommodations, and grievance mechanisms. During the meeting, FIFA Head of Sustainability and Diversity Federico Addiechi stated, “There is real value to be brought by BWI and similar stakeholders in relation to mega-sporting events. The case of Qatar is a positive example because we have all witnessed the evolution.” BWI General Secretary Ambet Yuson added, “In the past few years our relationship with Qatar and FIFA has been transformed. The conversation has moved forward and the collaboration continues” (FIFA, 2019).

**IUF AND MIGRANT WORKERS**

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF) has engaged with migrant workers in various ways, including supporting collective bargaining negotiations and coordinating international protests and solidarity demonstrations (Ford, 2019, p. 105). Agriculture and domestic work are the two areas in which the IUF is most engaged with migrant labor. In 2008, the IUF published a handbook with strategies for organizing migrant workers in agriculture and related sectors. In 2014, the IUF collaborated with Amnesty International (AI) in a joint campaign to support temporary farm workers migrating from Cambodia to South Korea, which led to an ongoing relationship between the IUF and AI. The IUF also worked with the ITF in a successful campaign to assist migrants working in fisheries in Asia in which workers used camera phones to document labor violations (Ford, 2019, p. 106).
In the realm of domestic labor, the IUF’s Dignity for Hotel Housekeepers campaign has supported migrant workers in the hotel industry. The campaign identifies best and worst practices, supports housekeeper union membership and activism, and helps hotel companies improve working conditions (Ford, 2019, p. 81). Along with Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the ITUC, the Global Labor Institute (GLI), and the ILO, the IUF sponsored the creation of the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN), a network for foreign domestic workers, unions, and their allies with regional coordinators in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In 2011, the IDWN, IUF, and ITUC were instrumental in convincing the ILO to adopt Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which holds signatories responsible for upholding domestic workers’ freedom of association, guaranteed monthly payments, access to social security, and one day off per week (Ford, 2019, p. 81).

**PSI AND MIGRANT WORKERS**

Public Services International (PSI) maintains a small project focused on migrant workers in the healthcare industry involving capacity-building, advocacy, and information exchange, including information in the form of “pre-departure decision kits” which inform potential migrant workers of their labor rights as well as the benefits and risks of migration (Ford, 2019, p. 85). PSI also supports the Migration and Women Health Workers Project, which engages unions and NGOs in key origin countries such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka and encourages the recruitment of migrants into unions in key destination countries such as Japan and South Korea. Attempts to foster relationships between unions in the Philippines and Japan failed, however, given “the Japanese unions’ reluctance to recruit foreign workers” (Ford, 2019, p. 108).

**THE ITF AND MIGRANT LABOR**

International labor migration is not a high priority for the ITF, which has no official global program for migrant workers (Ford, 2019, p. 87); however, some of the ITF’s initiatives assist migrant workers indirectly. For instance, ITF has participated in the 2022 World Cup campaign, focusing on the rights of employees of Qatar Airways, 90 percent of whom are temporary migrants (Ford, 2019, p. 87). A more substantial example of a campaign impacting migrant workers is the ITF’s highly successful Flags of Convenience (FOC) campaign. Migrants and others employed in the shipping industry have benefitted from this campaign, which protested against ships that fly “Flags of Convenience,” whereby ship owners and corporations are located in one country, yet flag their ships in different countries to avoid taxes, labor laws, and the minimum health and safety standards of their home countries. The FOC campaign produced a global convention on seafarer rights that should be applied to all vessels, including those flying FOCs. With the new seafarer’s Bill of Rights, the ILO’s 2006 Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) entered into action, requiring all ship owners to offer clear and understandable contracts setting out the terms and conditions of employment. This includes a contract in which wages and all working conditions are stated prior to each side signing the contract. The new contracts under MLC rules make it clear for the first time exactly who is considered a seafarer (anyone who works aboard a ship), and cover the entire cruise ship industry (ITF, 2013).

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6 Known as International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) until 2009
INDUSTRIALL AND MIGRANT WORKERS

Some of the GFAs that IndustriALL has signed with transnational corporations include references to migrant labor. Also, in collaboration with a Dutch research NGO, IndustriALL participates in the Good Electronics Network, which includes efforts to organize electronics workers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although many workers in the electronics industry are international migrants, migrant labor is not an explicit focus of this project (Ford, 2019, p. 106). Overall, there is little evidence of substantial, direct engagement with migrant workers on the part of IndustriALL; “migration is not an identified priority at the global level, and it remains a relatively minor theme in IndustriALL’s work” (Ford, 2019, p. 89).

UNI AND MIGRANT WORKERS

UNI references migrant workers in some of the GFAs that it has signed with transnational corporations. UNI also advocates for the use of “unions passports,” which would allow migrant workers who are unionized in their country of origin to receive services from or even membership in destination-country unions (Ford, 2019, p. 90). In 2015, UNI engaged local and global unions in policy discussions regarding international labor mobility in the lead-up to the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Economic Community (Ford, 2019, p. 108). Overall, however, there is little evidence of UNI Global Union substantially engaging with migrant issues.
GLOBAL INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF AUTOMATION ON WORKERS

This section highlights important initiatives launched by international organizations that focus on how stakeholders will need to adapt to workplace disruptions caused by automation. It is important to note, however, that the impacts of automation, like those of the platform economy, share the complexities of all results of rapid technological change. These impacts are ambiguous, have widely varying incidence across social groups, and are the source of ongoing controversy and discussion in the economics profession. The international labor community needs mature analytical frameworks for predicting societal changes and corrective policies to ensure social protections and prevent worker displacements and barriers to economic modernization for developing economies. In many respects, the research initiatives are well on their way.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

Correspondence with the International Center for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR) yielded the result that this organization ran a symposium on “Industry 4.0,” culminating in a special edition of International Union Rights (volume 25.3) in 2018, featuring 15 short articles on issues related to platform work and automation. ICTUR has not undertaken any other research, program, or policy initiatives on these topics.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

The World Economic Forum (WEF) considers a “platform” an environment for mobilization, collaboration, and shared learning (Hagel & Mortensen, 2018). WEF has multiple platforms addressing the effects of automation, from greater capital intensity in manufacturing to artificial intelligence, as well as a sophisticated site linking and cross-referencing materials by topic, country, and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). The platform known as “Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society” is used by WEF to convene and drive collaboration among “150 of the world’s leading companies and 100 international, civil society and academic organizations” (Allen et al., n.d.). The platform houses multiple projects, including the following:

- “Preparing for the Future of Work,” which comprises task forces of senior executives, researchers, and labor officials as well as Industry Accelerators to identify interventions, create skills development and certification programs, and promote re-skilling and redeployment systems.

- “Preparing for the Future of Work in the Mining and Metals Industry,” a collaboration between WEF and the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), an industry group. This project focuses on re-skilling, up-skilling, and the development of supports for those displaced by automation.

- A working paper series including research on re-skilling approaches and visualizing the most likely future scenarios for workplaces and work.

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7 This issue is accessible on JSTOR at https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14213/inteuniorigh.25.issue-3
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

The 2017 report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) devotes an entire chapter to the challenges of increased automation (UNCTAD, 2017). The report surveys literature both optimistic and pessimistic about the medium- and longer-term effects of automation on job creation, ranging from broadly increased well-being to a “jobless future.” While the report generally suggests that the current threat to job creation from the advancing use of robotics and automation is not widespread, and may more greatly impact countries with large, skill-intensive manufacturing sectors, it may have the effect of concentrating industrial development within a smaller number of economies over time (reshoring), threatening the inclusiveness of gains from industrialization. UNCTAD recommends a variety of relatively traditional policies to create efficiencies and integrations among industries within developing countries (such as by streamlining logistics) to slow reshoring effects; investing in training and education to prevent skills gaps; and consideration of wealth taxes and universal basic incomes and dividends, although the latter should not be considered substitutes for strengthening worker rights or for broad social protections. UNCTAD does not recommend robot taxes, however, for a variety of reasons parallel to the reasoning provided by the International Federation on Robotics and discussed immediately below.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION ON ROBOTICS

The International Federation on Robotics (IFR) is a trade association and research nonprofit founded in 1987 and is the principal source of country-level information on the adoption of robotic automation for this report, as its member organizations report unit sales data by country and industry for its statistical bureau. Correspondence and document searches yielded two research and position papers from 2018. In the first, “Robots and the Workplace of the Future,” IFR (2018a) outlines a position that maintains that automation using robotics is pro-growth, pro-employment (largely complementary of labor and therefore driving job creation), and pro-worker (relieving principally physically demanding or un-ergonomic tasks); and that the skills gap, particularly in understanding of industrial processes, is creating a drag on the gains that might result from fuller adoption of robotic automation. The paper calls for closer cooperation among governments and employers in the areas of training and education to close the skills gap. In the second position paper, “The Impact of Robots on Productivity, Employment, and Jobs,” IFR (2018b) reviews 60 sources to outline its claims that robots are again generally complementary of labor, employment, wage-growth, and workers. For this reason, IFR opposes a tax on robots, a policy proposal widely discussed in industrialized countries since at least 2017 with major statements by Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Jeremy Corbyn in support, proposed (but ultimately unsuccessful) legislation in the European Parliament, and enacted tax-break reforms in the Moon administration in South Korea.

IFR notes in a separate document that roughly 400,000 new robots are added to industrial processes each year, with slightly under 2.5 million robots currently in use (IFR, 2019). More than half of these installations are in either China (36.5 percent), South Korea (9.0 percent), or Japan (13.1 percent), with installations in Australia and New Zealand rounding out the Asia total to 67 percent. The remaining installations are in Europe (17.9 percent) and the Americas (13.1 percent).

The use of robots in industrial applications in the developing world is not yet widespread; IFR notes that the five individual countries making up 74 percent of the world market are industrialized: China, Japan, the United States, South Korea, and Germany (IFR, 2019).
The International Labour Organization (ILO) has an extensive searchable database of written documents. Searches relating to “automation” or related topics yielded the following numbers of “hits” in the ILO database against their predetermined thematic categories:

- Future of work: 91 results
- Labor market: 36 results
- Labor policy: 21 results
- Social protection: 18 results
- ILO partnerships: 8 results
- Collective bargaining: 7 results

The documents initially screened from these “hits” were reviewed more thoroughly to determine if they had more than a superficial connection to the topic of this report (for example, a single mention of automation in the document’s introduction would not qualify it for further review). Under the “future of work” category, nine items were retained; under “social protection,” four items were retained. These were relevant mainly to the issue of platform labor, discussed earlier. None of the other thematic categories’ materials from the initial keyword searches were suitable for further analysis.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

This report has highlighted recent initiatives by international organizations to address major trends shaping the future of work in the global economy: platform labor, international labor migration, and automation. Although the initial goal of this report was to assess what has been successful and what has failed in these initiatives, it is clear from the review of the literature that most programs and campaigns seeking to address these three issues are too new to evaluate in terms of ultimate success or failure. Rather, what may be useful at this stage is to analyze these international initiatives in light of what researchers have already found regarding the factors influencing the outcomes of transnational campaigns in general.

USAID’s 2019 Global Labor Collective Action report identified several variables that influence the effectiveness of transnational labor campaigns occurring within the past two decades (USAID, 2019). These variables include the active participation of grassroots actors, sensitivity to national political settings, strategic targeting of multiple pressure points, strategic use of different power strategies, the construction of deep coalitions, leadership, and issue framing. Although a full evaluation of the extent to which these variables apply to transnational campaigns focused specifically on platform labor, migrant labor, and automation is outside the scope of the present report, some basic insights can be offered here.

NATIONAL POLITICAL SETTING

National context, including countries’ industrial relations systems and legal protections for freedom of association and other rights, strongly influences which types of transnational campaign strategies make an impact (USAID, 2019, p. 25-26). It is not surprising that most international initiatives to promote labor rights in the platform economy currently come from unions and solidarity support organizations based in Western Europe, a region home to several coordinated market economies featuring strong union rights, widespread collective bargaining, and systems of codetermination. The same is true for campaigns to support migrant workers, as European unions and NGOs fund most of the global unions’ migrant worker projects (Ford, 2019).

On one hand, the national contexts of Western European countries offer great potential as launching pads for transnational campaigns that may eventually come to encompass non-European countries, including developing countries. For instance, a body established in Germany to mediate disputes between German platform companies and German platform workers now allows for participation from platform workers in other countries, “wherein if the grieving worker lives in a country other than Germany, a representative from a trade union based in that country may—at the request of the worker—join the Ombuds Office in an advisory capacity” (Johnston, 2019, p. 14). On the other hand, however, the agenda-setting biases of organizations based in European and OECD countries more generally could hamper the creativity of transnational campaigns led by actors in developing countries, for instance by encouraging platform workers to adapt to existing institutions and social dialogue (which tends to make sense mainly in contexts

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8 Available at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TQWR.pdf
where institutions like works councils are already strong) rather than pursue the creation of new regulatory frameworks and institutions, which might be more effective for many types of platform workers, especially crowd workers in the developing world (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018).

POWER AND MULTISCALAR CAMPAIGNS

Another finding of USAID’s Global Labor evidence review is that transnational campaigns allow workers, unions, NGOs, and others to “multiply leverage points so that actors in several countries are putting pressure on the target of the campaign from a variety of different vantage points simultaneously” (USAID, 2019, p. 31). This concept should be explored in future research on transnational campaigns to address major trends in the future of work. Already there is some evidence that platform labor campaigns are improved when activists consider both the local and supranational scales (Aloisi, 2019, p. 26; Ford & Honan, 2019, p. 528).

The Global Labor evidence review also found that it is not just the number of leverage points but how different power strategies are deployed over the course of a transnational campaign that influence the campaign’s effectiveness. International initiatives to address platform labor, migrant labor, and automation would do well to take into account the ways in which workers, unions, and other actors involved can exercise structural power (the capacity to physically disrupt the production and delivery of goods and services), institutional power (the capacity to invoke laws, rules, and regulations unique to the employment relationship), and coalitional power (the capacity of labor actors to leverage the influence of nonlabor stakeholders) (USAID, 2019, pp. 27-28). Part of the process of understanding power is also understanding the entity over whom power is being exercised. In the case of BWI’s World Cup campaign, for example, it mattered that FIFA cared about the smooth operation of event preparations, which migrant construction workers threatened to disrupt by withdrawing their labor on time-sensitive building projects, thus exercising structural power. Regarding platform labor and automation, IndustriALL’s comment that “it is futile to try to negotiate with a robot or an algorithm” should inspire deeper consideration on how technological progress is influencing power dynamics in transnational campaigns.

BRIDGING THE NGO-UNION DIVIDE

The Global Labor Collective Action report emphasizes the benefits of unions’ cooperation with non-labor civil society organizations for the effectiveness of transnational campaigns, especially in the long term (USAID, 2019, p. 29). Yet, research for this report revealed only limited engagement of unions with local and national NGOs. For instance, in transnational campaigns involving migrant workers, “the development of deeper, more sustained collaboration between local unions and NGOs has proven to be elusive,” in part because such collaboration depends on the “willingness of both parties to cross the union-NGO divide” and overcome conflicts over priorities and confusion over roles (Ford, 2019, p. 104).
ALL TRANSNATIONALISM IS LOCAL

No matter how vast their global reach, transnational campaigns ultimately unfold through concrete actions in specific cities, towns, and localities. The notion that “all transnationalism is local” (USAID, 2019, p. 31) helps explain why international initiatives to address automation entail so much nuance because automation does not impact all workers in the same way even in the same place. The unwillingness of local unions to welcome platform workers or migrant workers into their organizations is another way in which local particularities influence the prospects of transnational campaigns. Yet, local particularities can also influence transnational campaigns in a positive way. The ITF succeeded with the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers’ Union in Uganda in part because workers there already had their own informal networks and organizing methods (ITF, 2019d, p. 2). In Indonesia, campaigning was aided by the fact that app-based drivers belonged to self-organized community groups (Ford & Honan, 2019, p. 528).

LEARNING

Finally, another predictor of success in transnational labor campaigns is the capacity of international organizations and other campaign participants to learn from past experiences and remain open to adopting new strategies to suit changing contexts (USAID, 2019, p. 31). While many of the lessons from past transnational campaigns apply directly to those focused on platform labor, migrant labor, and automation, these more recent efforts to confront the forces shaping the future of work in the 2020s and beyond also present unique challenges and opportunities to be explored through further processes of learning. The impact of different types of automation on different types of workers in different institutional contexts has yet to be fully understood, so campaigns focused on automation will likely require additional research before they can meaningfully protect affected workers on a large scale. Similarly, campaigns promoting the rights of platform workers will require learning about novel strategies of organization and mobilization such as FairCrowdWork that take advantage of the fact that most platform workers are internet-savvy and skilled in digital communication.
REFERENCES


