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THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS

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Daffodil Graphics #8368564419, 9313726383



6th THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

19-21 January 2026 | Symbiosis School of Economics, Symbiosis International (Deemed) University, Pune, India

Neoliberal Capitalism and the World of Work: Back to the Basics

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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President, 66th ISLE Conference

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By

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Organised by

The Indian Society of
Labour Economics

Symbiosis School of Economics
Symbiosis International (Deemed) University Pune

19 JANUARY 2026



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Neoliberal Capitalism and the World of Work: Back to the Basics

Praveen Jha¹

Abstract

It hardly needs stressing that multiple dimensions pertaining to the world of work are organically intertwined with the nature and functioning of capitalism in its different phases; this paper engages with some of the critical linkages between neoliberal capitalism, which started gaining global ascendancy by the late 1960s/70s, becoming hegemonic as the macro-economic policy regime, and major features relating to the landscape pertaining to work across the globe. Although the broad trends relating to outcomes associated with the working people since the 1970s are marked by a degree of unevenness, across regions and countries, the fact of serious adversities are inscribed on almost each one of these. It is very well documented that there have been, inter alia, incessant assaults on the working people across the globe, intensification of precarity, and undermining of the trade unions across sectors, during more than seven decades of Neoliberalism. Massive acceleration of primitive expropriation mechanisms reflected in heightened extractivism, intensified grabbing of land and other natural resources, ever-increasing reckless profiteering from the planet Earth, and all that surrounds it, among other adverse and pressing challenges have become commonplace. Sure enough, increasing assaults on working people have not gone unchallenged and there have been powerful instances of innovative forms of resistance from working people at large. Without romanticizing or exaggerating any of these positives, it is extremely important to take note of such efforts aimed at strengthening alliances and envisioning new horizons.

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I. Introduction

I am extremely grateful to the Indian Society of Labour Economics for bestowing on me the privilege of being the President of the 66th Annual Conference; it is, indeed, a great honour and I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Society for this responsibility. As a small gesture to fulfill the trust that the Society has posed in me, for this address, I have picked up a broad theme, that has been central to the canvas of the ISLE, namely, Capitalism and the World of Work; specifically, I focus on the current phase of neoliberal capitalism in the global economy and some of its major consequences, at the highest level of generality, for the working people at large.

It hardly needs stressing that multiple dimensions pertaining to the world of work are organically intertwined with the nature and functioning of capitalism in its different phases; this paper engages with some of these critical linkages between neoliberal capitalism, which started gaining global ascendancy by the late 1960s / 70s, and became dominant by the early 1990s, and the world of work, in the neoliberal era. Although the broad trends relating to outcomes associated with the working people since the 1970s are marked by a degree of unevenness, across regions and countries, the fact of serious adversities are inscribed on almost each one of these, across the globe.

There is overwhelming evidence that the neoliberal macroeconomic policy regimes have been characterized by incessant assaults on the working people. Increased subordination of labour by capital, intensification of precarity, undermining of the trade unions across sectors, are among the major hallmarks of neoliberalism for more than five decades now. Deepening of gendered, racialized and other hierarchical inequalities, reconfiguration of migrant labour regimes, massive acceleration of primitive expropriation mechanisms, reflected in heightened extractivism, intensified grabbing of land and other natural resources, ever-increasing reckless profiteering from the planet Earth, and all that includes and surrounds it, among other adverse and pressing challenges confronting humanity, are very well documented.



Sure enough, increasing assaults on working people have not gone unchallenged and there have been instances of innovative forms of resistance from a range of quarters, including trade unions, peasant movements, informal workers' associations, climate activists, feminist movements, among others. In quite a few of these struggles, there have been serious attempts to forge national and transnational alliances, which have also been marked by attempts to build bridges across sectors and types of organizations. In spite of the rise of repressive political regimes and a whole range of adverse economic-structural mechanisms, the working people have continued to explore and innovate their agency of resistance. Without romanticizing or exaggerating any of these positives, it is extremely important to take note of such efforts aimed at strengthening alliances and envisioning of new horizons.

The canvas sketched above, indeed, has a broad scope; in this paper, for reasons of space, it is not possible to engage with more than a couple of major issues. The first section provides a very brief overview of the major economic-structural correlates of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Section two focuses on a couple of critical consequences for the world of work, which are organically connected with the current juncture. The paper closes with some ideas stated telegraphically, that merit serious engagement and further reflections, if at least some sand has to be put in the wheels of the neoliberal juggernaut.

II. Major Markers of Neoliberal Capitalism

Contemporary capitalism, or what is often designated as neoliberal capitalism, is, first and foremost, the latest phase of imperialism with its own *differentia specifica*, a theoretical position shared by a large number of Marxist Scholars. Furthermore, as highlighted by Samir Amin, in several of his writings, the imperialism of the current era is based on the advantage and control, by the Global North, of five key domains, which include: i) frontier technologies, ii) access to natural resources, iii) global monetary and financial system, iv) systems of communication and information, and v) weapons of mass destruction. Such control, as Amin suggests, was



facilitated overwhelmingly by a new phase during the last half century or so in the ‘law of concentration and centralization of capital’, one of the prominent laws of capitalism enunciated by Karl Marx. This new stage of centralization of capital, headquartered in the Global North, has profoundly reconfigured capitalism and imperialism, as a system of *generalized monopolies*, on a global scale, resulting in almost a stranglehold over large parts of contemporary global economy.

This system of generalized monopolies, or a globalised regime of accumulation dispersed across countries, is marked by several critical attributes and it is worth flagging a couple of these here. One of the most important developments associated with contemporary capitalism is that the production of many commodities is dispersed / fragmented across the globe, thus, effectively transcending the standard Fordist / Taylorist models of assembly line or mass production, in which, typically, raw materials and a few other inputs entered a factory and final output came out of it. For well over half a century now, increasingly, this has been substituted by a model in which different components that go into the making of a final commodity get produced in multiple locations across the globe and then all these are put together in some designated location. Much of the contemporary scholarship, engaging with this phenomenon of *de-centering* of economic activities and their associated implications, have used analytical metaphors / frameworks of ‘chains’ or ‘networks’; thus, expressions, such as Global Commodity Chains (GCCs), Global Supply Chains (GSCs), Global Value Chains (GVCs) or Global Production Networks (GPNs) have acquired considerable currency.

As discussed in some of our earlier writings (e.g. Jha & Yeros, 2021; Jha & Yeros, 2022), in spite of shedding useful light on trans-nationalization of production and exchange, the above noted frameworks suffer from serious shortcomings, as they remain inadequate in engaging with the deeper tendencies and processes that are central to the frameworks of capitalist dynamics in Marxian political economy discourses. In fact, in our view, chain or network based frameworks remain trapped, largely, in appearances on the surface and hence, we categorize these as ‘managerial



paradigms’, in contrast to Marxian approaches, which offer relatively comprehensive and systemic ‘value system’ frameworks. It is for this reason, we prefer to designate the globally connected trans-nationalized value generation and appropriation mechanisms and processes as ‘Global Value Systems’ (GVSs); such systems, sure enough, have a long ancestry, right since the beginning of capitalism, but the current juncture, that we designate as contemporary global value system, has its own powerful specificities.

The phase of trans-nationalization, during the neoliberal era, has reconfigured, almost dramatically, global trade, investment, production, employment, and all other significant economic attributes. Essentially, as stated in an earlier paper, this restructuring of the world economy implies that “components of a single-end-use commodity/final output are conceived, designed, produced, procured, and processed in different parts of the globe, before being assembled together at a specific destination for ultimate consumption, which again may have a global reach” (Jha & Yeros, 2022, p. 36). In other words, the division of labour has reached a point where what was a particular task a few decades ago has increasingly been broken into multiple sub-tasks across the globe. Thus, we have an intensified global connectedness in which the number of nodes in the accumulation process has been increasing. As already noted, this restructuring has been driven by giant corporations; in some ways, this phase is reminiscent of *laissez faire* during the high noon of colonialism, but with significant differences in terms of economic-structural attributes.

Of course, the literature on trans-national corporations in the domain of production (going beyond multi-national trading corporations), *per se*, has a long ancestry. Bukharin’s impressive book, ‘Imperialism and the World Economy’ (Bukharin, 1917), for which Lenin had written the introduction, offers an excellent account of the processes and tendencies, often highlighted as the ‘laws of motion of capitalism’, leading to the rise of trans-national corporations. It may be worth quoting a few sentences from the aforesaid introduction by Lenin: ‘At a certain stage in the development of exchange, at a certain stage in the growth of large-scale



production, namely, at the stage that was reached approximately at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, commodity exchange had created such an internationalization of economic relations, and such an internationalization of capital, accompanied by such a vast increase in large scale production, that free competition began to be replaced by monopoly. The *typical ruler of the world became finance capital*, , a power that has already made large strides on the road of concentration, so that *literally several billionaires and millionaires hold in their hands the fate of the whole world* (emphasis added). Subsequently, quite a few eminent Marxists, during the immediatepost-WWII period, such as Baran, Sweezy, Hymer, and Barnett and Muller, built on these insights in profound ways. The last two authors, in their justly famous co-authored book, *Global Reach*, demonstrated in great detail that '(t)he rise of the global corporation represents the globalization of oligopoly capitalism'. As in the North, there were very important voices from the 1960s onwards, such as, Nkrumah, Amin, Bagchi, among others, engaging in substantive ways with the challenges of centralization of capital on a global scale, with a particular focus on the Global South, highlighting restructuring and deepening of neocolonialism and imperialism.

The crux of these and several other contributions from Marxist political economy perspectives is simple but profound: concentration and centralization of capital, which resulted in the dominance of global corporations, largely headquartered in the North, facilitated a whole range of monopolistic advantages, including access to a bounty of natural resources and labour, at throw away prices, located in countries of the South, and access to their markets. In other words, it implied strengthening of imperialism. During the neoliberal era, that is, since the early 1970s, one of the major features of the global capitalist system has been the mobility of *capital-in-production* from the North to the South on a significant scale; this was never the case before in the history of capitalism (except in the 'colonies of settlement'). Furthermore, the sophistication of mechanisms and the spectrum of strategies, employed by MNCs, have, indeed, reached new levels altogether; it is these issues which are at the center of



comprehending contemporary neoliberal capitalism / imperialism. Apart from the mobility of capital-in-production from the North to the South, there has been a huge *incorporation of production processes* in the South by the TNCs, headquartered in the North, with negligible investments in productive capacities.

It may be recalled here that in some strands of the literature, the above noted mobility / incorporation is explained by the so-called ‘global labour arbitrage’ (an expression often attributed to Stephen Roach, an ex-employee of Morgan Stanley). Roach (2004) had suggested that a major feature of the contemporary capitalism happens to be the reaping the advantages of the wage hierarchy between the North and the South, which supposedly explains the shift of capital-in-production to the Southern countries, as well as intensified incorporation of their productive bases / capacities in the global value systems. Of course, notable wage differences between the North and the South, at the current juncture, play an important role in explaining the mobility of capital in the contemporary international oligopolistic system. However, two obvious points need to be flagged: i) wage differences between the North and the South have been a significant feature for a very long time, but this did not facilitate any mobility of capital to the South, and in fact, on the contrary, there was systemic destruction of productive activities in the latter; ii) while acknowledging the importance of wage arbitrage at particular junctures, we need to take into account a number of other economic-structural correlates which have been critical to this important phenomenon. As a short hand, in our formulation, we have tried to encapsulate these correlates under the category of ‘*labour-nature-regulation arbitrage*’ (Jha & Yeros, 2022), to accommodate the relevant dimensions underlying the accumulation processes, which include, *inter alia*, costs of natural resources, environmental regulations, infrastructure, tax frameworks, and overall macroeconomic policy regimes. In essence, instead of focusing only on cost of labour, one has to take cognizance of a range of different socio-political and economic features that are relevant to the regimes of accumulation at any juncture.



It has already been hinted in the preceding that a *differentia specifica* of the centralization and concentration of capital in the neoliberal globalisation era has been the growing ascendancy of ‘*capital as finance*’, which has acquired almost a stranglehold in the recent decades. To recall Paul Sweezy’s observation from the early 1990s: “Traditionally financial expansion has gone hand in hand with prosperity in the real economy. Is it really possible that this is no longer true, that now in the late twentieth century opposite is more nearly the case; in other words, *that financial expansion feeds not on a healthy real economy but a stagnant one? The answer to this question, I think is yes it is possible, and it has been happening?*” (emphasis added) (Sweezy, 1994). We may note that a number of heterodox and Marxist economists were already hinting at the dangers of footloose finance across the globe well before it became a decisive economic entity during the neoliberal era. It is worth recalling a serious apprehension voiced by J M Keynes regarding the dangers of ‘the best brains of Wall Street’, indulging in the world of untrammelled finance, and his categorical warning that if “the capitalist development of the country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done” (Keynes, 1936, p. 159). As is well-known, economists close to Keynes or influenced by his insights on this subject, in the immediate post WWII period, such as Joan Robinson, Hyman Minsky, among several other eminent scholars, carried forward the lead in this area provided by Keynes, and equally importantly by the first generation of Marxists building on Marx’s insights, in profound ways, enriching our understanding of the disastrous economic consequences of unregulated speculative finance. In the last few decades, we have witnessed a veritable explosion of the literature pertaining to uncontrolled speculative finance and its depredations vis-à-vis productive activities in general, and in strengthening neocolonialism / imperialism; to mention only a few of these, we may note the following: C P Chandrasekhar (2017), Gerald Epstein (2005), Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy (1987), Mariana Mazzucato (2017), Prabhat Patnaik (2016a, b), Robert Pollin (2012) and Paul Sweezy (1994), among others.

Yet another major feature, central to the current phase of capitalism, happens to be the dramatic technological transformations, often



labeled as ‘Industry III’ and ‘Industry IV’, and their implications for economic processes, in particular, pertaining to the world of work. Of course, incessant and ceaseless technological progress is visualized as a major feature characterizing Marxian understanding of capitalism; however, the fantastic leaps and continuous reconfiguration in the ICT associated with Industry III and IV, with its major attributes, *inter alia*, mind-boggling, artificial intelligence, deep machine learning, robotics, automation, etc. have often been perceived as distinctly different from preceding waves of technological changes, especially from the point of view of the world of work. Those playing the ‘informed’ guess-games have been painting almost a dooms-day scenario with respect to net labour displacement. For instance, in a recent interview to the German newspaper, *Die Welt*, the co-founder and CEO of OpenAI claimed that the AI-based systems are on threshold of achieving ‘super intelligence’ and by 2030 it will replace 40 per cent of existing jobs; as hinted, Altman’s apocalyptic prophesy is not an exception and there are several others, supposedly keen observers of the Silicon Valley, whose whispers about pending redundancy of human labour have become louder in the recent years. A recent book by Karen Hao, *Empire of AI* (2025), contextualizes the emerging larger picture due to these dramatic technological advances, and goes on to paint the super giants of amongst AI players as a metaphor of new empires in the image of colonialism.

Taken together, the economic-structural attributes of contemporary capitalism, flagged above, along with other important features that I have not engaged with here, for reasons of space; in an earlier volume of essays, these have been examined in a relatively more substantive manner (Jha *et al.*, 2021). Based on the existing literature, including our own work, it clearly emerges that the current juncture offers a deeply pessimistic prognosis for absorption of human labour in the foreseeable future; in fact, the recent trends based on the ILO data, some of which will be presented later, provide a flavor of it.

It is extremely important to recall here that the above noted association between economic-structural attributes and the world of work are not ad



hoc or accidental, but are rooted in the inner dynamics, or the *immanent tendencies*, central to Marx's understanding of capitalism. In fact, as is well-known, Marx's theoretical framework of capitalism, at the highest level of generality, consisted of a number of "Laws of Motion" organically connected with accumulation of capital; such a theoretical framework was one which abstracted from human agency, in which a capitalist was "capital embodied", and it was driven by ceaseless quest for accumulation. As Marx put it, to highlight its compulsive logic, in chapter 24 of Capital, Volume I: "Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!" In this framework, an early articulation of which was already there in the *Communist Manifesto*, *capitalism was conceived as a system driven by a number of laws, which included, inter alia, ceaseless accumulation, combined and uneven global capitalist development, resulting in 'core and peripheries', incessant polarization, concentration and centralization of capital, endemic economic crisis, etc.* In passing, we may note that Marx's closest life-long collaborator, Friedrich Engels, in his graveside eulogy for the departed comrade, noted that:

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history... But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production, and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created.

For reasons of space, it is not possible here to get into any further considerations of these laws; however, Marx's formulations provide brilliant insights into the working of capitalism driven by its own logic and immanent tendencies. Several Marxist scholars, such as Oscar Lange and Prabhat Patnaik, have often used the expression 'spontaneous capitalism', to capture the relevant conceptual framework. The period under consideration here, namely, the neoliberal capitalism is, indeed, a strong case of spontaneous capitalism, with utterly adverse implications for the world of work, an argument that we flagged at the outset. There has been strengthening of the forces of primitive accumulation in a comprehensive sense, accelerating the processes of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey) and 'accumulation through encroachment' (Patnaik). In much



of the global South, destruction of petty production has been rampant, in all its forms, which had received some support during the erstwhile *dirigiste* era during the immediate post WWII period. Such processes have aggravated the problem of growing labour reserves, on a significant scale, across the South, and even countries in the North have been exposed to it.

As noted earlier, we stay away from detailed deliberations pertaining to immanent tendencies and their implications for the capitalist dynamic, but I would like to briefly note one of these, particularly relevant for the theme at hand, and possibly the most compelling idea to comprehend 'labour reserves' under capitalism, which Marx, in chapter 25 of *Capital*, Volume I, titled, 'The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'. As he put it:

"The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve-army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, develop also the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve-army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve-army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus-population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working-class, and the industrial reserve-army, the greater is official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation. Like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here".

One of the strong and clear messages conveyed by the above passage is: an inevitable outcome, which accompanies the incessant development of productive forces under spontaneous capitalism is a strong tendency of *labour repulsion*, and thus, *burgeoning of labour reserves*. Furthermore, in another passage, Marx suggests a perennial tendency, again in a context of spontaneous capitalism, for the overall worsening of the lot of labour:

"Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual



labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work, and turn it into a hated toil... It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse”(emphasis added).

In short, the world of work under capitalist system, driven by its own immanent tendencies, is perennially exposed to a number of powerful adverse implications, both with respect to quantitative and qualitative dimensions. In fact, all these have been documented extremely well by historians of capitalism. However, it is worth recalling that contemporary capitalism, which is way more prosperous materially than the earlier stages, also tends to get trapped in similar outcomes. For instance, a stark case is that of the working people in the richest economy in the world, as noted by Joseph Stiglitz: he has estimated that the average real wage of a male American worker happen to be less than what it was in 1968. Of course, the American economy during this period has grown at a decent clip, with all its ups and downs. More recently, it has been noted by Herr Hansjorg that the decade after 2011, for the American workers, has been no different. In short, from the late 1960s to the early 2020s, workers in the US did not benefit from the growth of the GDP; this, incidentally, stands in sharp contrast to the first couple of decades immediately after the WWII.

Before proceeding to the next section, we need to underline again that the arguments flagged above, with respect to the current neoliberal episode of globalization, are relevant at the highest level of generality / abstraction. To examine the nitty-gritty of several other important aspects of capitalist transformation trajectories, globally, nationally, and locally, whether in a *longue duree* or at particular stages, of course, we need to engage with a range of other relevant factors and processes in a fuller fashion; a task which is not feasible here. Thus, across the globe, with respect to substantive and detailed accounts of transformation trajectories, even in



the overall neoliberal regime, we find a variety of differences, both between the North and the South, and within each bloc. Let me mention just one relevant attribute of some significance, namely public employment as a proportion of total employment, which has significant ramifications for working people at large. As per the most recent available estimates (2023), according to the World Bank's *Worldwide Bureaucracy Indicators Dashboard*, of the total working population in the global North, approximately 15-20 per cent is in public employment, with some OECD countries (Nordics, France) reporting figures in the range of 20–30 per cent. The comparable estimate for the global South is close to half of it, with figures for the poorest countries of the Africa, such as Burundi, Burkina Faso, Chad, Benin, Cameroon, Angola, Djibouti, falling as low as 0 to 0.5 per cent.

In other words, like varieties of capitalism, we also have varieties of Neoliberalism, in particular, with important variations between the North and the South; however, it is not feasible to pursue this matter here. The second caveat, which must be noted, is that the Chinese socio-economic and political trajectory, in spite of certain similarities does not conform well to the above sketched current neoliberal phase. After embarking on the so-called economic reforms from the late 1970s, China has essentially remained a model of State Capitalism, with its strong specific features, even though there have been important policy shifts during the last half-a-century or so. And the final caveat: our brief account in the foregoing has abstracted almost entirely from a number of important economic-structural attributes, as well as several outcomes pertaining to critical domains, such as ecology, race, caste, ethnicity, patriarchy and gender, among others, which are, of course, inextricably enmeshed with the neoliberal capitalist dynamic; needless to add, all these constitute critical markers of the world of work, which we need to investigate thoroughly.

III. Some Prominent Features of the World of Work: A Global Snapshot

As has been suggested in the preceding section, the neoliberal era, through multiple direct and indirect changes in the overall macroeconomic policy



regime, has implied a large scale assault on the working people, often accompanied by outright suppression of trade unions and abridgement of workers' economic and political rights. The fairy tale, peddled by the ideological champions of neoliberalism, that it was and is, for the overall betterment of countries and peoples, including workers, across the world, indeed, has remained a chimera. In this context, we may recall the general optimism pushed by the proponents of the 'Washington Consensus' that the overall resource-use efficiency and GDP growth rates will transition to higher levels across countries, and, of course, in the global economy. There are a large number of studies since the early 1990s, (for instance, the studies from the Political Economy Research Institute, conducted by Weisbrot and others), which have demonstrated categorically that even with respect to the growth rate of GDP, a large number of countries have not witnessed any uptick. In a recent note, Patnaik, using the World Bank data, with 2015 as the base year (aggregated for the world as a whole in terms of dollars at the 2015 exchange rates), has estimated growth rates approximately over six decades, since 1961 to 2018. *What emerges is a trend of clear slowdown: the sub-periods for this exercise are 1961-1973, 1973-1984, 1984-1997, 1997-2007, 2007-2018, and the respective percentage annual growth rates over these sub-periods are: 5.4, 2.9, 3.1, 3.5 and 2.7;* (for further details of this exercise, see Patnaik, 2024, October 6). In fact, taking the GDP growth rate between 2018 and 2022 (the latest year for which information was available at the time of Patnaik's write-up), the figure comes down to 2.1 per cent per annum. This essentially paints a picture of long-drawn stagnation of the global economy.

Even if one assumes that the growth process over the above noted period has not been labour-displacing, which is obviously not the case, as is clear from all available data sources, the labour absorption in the global economy would have taken a huge hit on account of the deceleration in the GDP growth rates. Furthermore, if we factor in several other aspects of the macro policy regime that became ascendant during the neoliberal era, and their consequences, such as rising inequality, which has been documented very well for this period (e.g. in the World Inequality



Report 2026), increased adversities for the world of work are a foregone conclusion. In particular, as has been recognized by a large number of economists, a neoliberal economic framework fundamentally conforms to the tenets of the so-called ‘supply-side economics’, ignoring the significance of the ‘demand-side’ considerations, emphasized by the other well-known strands in the profession, such as the Keynesian and the Marxist traditions. The fact that rising inequality tends to compress the overall demand in any economy, due to suppression of the incomes of the working people, has no place in supply-side economics, of which neoliberalism is an extreme version. It is precisely mocking at such an understanding that John Kenneth Galbraith had said that: “[S]upply-side theory... holds that the poor do not work because they have too much income; the rich do not work because they do not have enough income. You expand and revitalize the economy by giving the poor less, the rich more” (Galbraith, 1982). Needless to add that for a comprehensive analysis of the outcomes pertaining to workers in general, in a *longue duree* framework, all the relevant linkages between capitalism and their possible consequences, especially with a careful reckoning of the ‘laws of motion’ of capitalism that Marx highlighted, are mapped out carefully; some very important leads in this respect are provided by Patnaik and Patnaik in “Capital and Imperialism: Theory, History, and the Present” (2021).

With these brief remarks, we now highlight in the following a few trends, pertaining to the world of work in the recent decades of neoliberalism. The period that we cover here is from the early 1990s/2000s to mid-2020s, based on the data available from the ILOSTAT (ilostat.ilo.org/data); the relevant methodology and other related issues are provided in the documents available at the source. Of course, both for conceptual and empirical reasons, operational measures to map the world of work constitute a somewhat slippery terrain and remain contentious. Nonetheless, in spite of the challenges and the limitations, I am of the view that a reasonable sketch pertaining to several relevant features and trends may be drawn from the ILO data. These are, often, considered



good indicators with respect to the progress and the challenges relating to the well-being, or otherwise, of workers.

Going by the ILO data, the global work force increased from approximately 2.26 to 3.7 billion between 1991 and 2024. Over the same period the number of unemployed increased from approximately 150 to 189 million. The employed are distributed by the ILO into two main categories: wage and salaried workers (also known as employees) and self-employed workers (consisting of self-employed workers with employees, called employers; self-employed workers without employees or own-account workers and members of producers-cooperatives and contributing family workers, also known as unpaid family workers). Another distinction made by the ILO is between 'non-vulnerable' employment (consisting of employers as well as wage and salaried workers) and 'vulnerable' employment, consisting of all those who work but can not be considered wage and salaried workers; basically it comprises of 'own-account workers' and 'contributing family workers'. The information for the period since the early 1990s regarding the above noted classification is provided in the Annexures.

We have also drawn on the ILO data to flag trends pertaining to a few other features, which include: trends regarding labour income, global and regional sectoral shifts in employment, challenges of youth unemployment, discrimination with respect to gender, the health of the labour institutions, among others. For all these variables, the ILO provides information for individual countries, which we have processed for the period under consideration; however, for reasons of space, the information presented here are for broad regions, as per the currently used classification of the global economy provided by the ILO.

Changes in the nature of employment

A major indicator of the world of work is the share of wage and salaried employment (WSE) as a share of total work. Between 1991 and 2023, the share of WSE expanded by almost 8 per cent, at the global level,



increasing from 44.3 per cent of the workforce in 1991 to 52.2 per cent in 2022–23 (ILO 2023). This expansion is widely understood as a marker of economic progress, since WSE is more closely associated with regular contracts, social protections, and integration into formal labour markets. The corresponding decline in contributing family work (CFW)—from 18.9% of global employment in 1991 to below 10% in the early 2020s—further highlights this structural shift. Yet, the apparent global progress masks geography of uneven transitions. In developed economies and the European Union, the share of WSE was already high in 1991, at 79.1%, which reached 84 per cent by 2023; in these countries, the majority of the workforce has long been formally employed, supported by welfare states and labour market regulations.

However, it is East Asia that provides the most dramatic example of transformation. The share of WSE nearly doubled between 1991 and 2023, from 35.5% to 57.7%. This reflects the extraordinary industrialisation of China and its neighbours, where millions of rural workers migrated to urban factories and service centres. It may be recalled that China's transition, after 1978, from a model of 'command socialism' to 'market socialism' had diluted considerably the 'iron bowl' model of social security, *albeit* at a relatively low income level, contributing significantly to the weakening of provisions of protection in the world of work, for almost three decades, before a turnaround in the same. Further, it is worth noting that the growth of export-oriented industries integrated East Asia, particularly China, deeply into global value systems, creating vast pools of wage labour (Chan 2010). Thus, China became the 'factory of the world' with increases in real incomes, including for workers, but it came with some costs: long hours, limited protections, and frequent violations of labour rights.

By contrast, Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa remain heavily reliant on vulnerable employment. In the former, over half of all workers are own-account workers, and around 16% are still classified as contributing family members. Sub-Saharan Africa is even more precarious: WSE accounted for only 22% of total jobs in 2022–23, and the rest remaining



a variety of vulnerable options (Jha, Chambati and Osesome 2021). In the Northern Africa and the Middle East, the share of WSE also increased over this period, though unevenly. Structural adjustment policies in the 1990s reduced public sector employment, but subsequent urban growth and diversification into services created a few secure jobs. Latin America experienced some improvements in the world of work, although the continent as a whole reflected mixed trajectories. In countries like Brazil and Argentina, social policies and labour regulations supported better work provisions, while in Central America, vulnerability remained pervasive.

The expansion of WSE globally, since the early 1990s, has been a complex and mixed phenomenon. On the one hand, the numbers show that fewer workers rely on relatively vulnerable work options and there has been a net shift toward the categories which offer, ostensibly, better provisions. However, it must be stated right away that WSE does not automatically guarantee security provisions associated with the decent work agenda of the ILO; a significant portion of the decline in the share of self-employment is often on account of primitive accumulation and forced commercialization, for which we do not have good quality, large-scale data sources for careful estimation. Many ‘formal’ jobs are characterised by temporary contracts, low wages, or lack of union representation (Standing 2011), which raises question markson the qualitative dimensions supposed to constitute WSE. Furthermore, the trends across different regions of the world have been quite uneven in the recent decades. The persistence, if not deepening, of vulnerable and precarious work, particularly in Africa and South Asia, also highlights the limits of recent growth trajectories. Addressing entrenched vulnerabilities in the world of work requires more than economic growth: it demands institutional reforms, industrial policies that generate decent jobs, and investments in social protection systems.

Global and Regional Sectoral Shifts in Employment

A decisive element of labour market transformation since the early 1990s has been the reallocation of workers across sectors. Globally, employment



in agriculture fell from 43.4% in 1991 to 26.1% in 2022–23. This represents a historic decline, reflecting both rising agricultural productivity and the absorption of labour into other sectors. The counterpart to this decline has been the expansion of services, which grew from 35.1% of employment in 1991 to 50.2% in 2022–23 (ILO 2023). Industry, by contrast, expanded only modestly, from 21.4% to 23.8%. This pattern highlights a distinctive feature of contemporary globalisation: instead of mass industrialisation absorbing surplus labour, as in the classical model of development, the majority of displaced agricultural workers have moved into often low-productivity service jobs (Rodrik, 2016).

A comparative analysis of regional employment data underscores the deeply uneven pathways of structural transformation across the globe. In developed economies, the shift away from agriculture is nearly complete, with the sector accounting for a negligible 4.7% of total employment by 2022–23. The services sector has solidified its dominance, employing almost 75% of the workforce, while the industrial share has either stabilised or undergone a relative decline. This trend reflects the phenomenon of de-industrialisation, as manufacturing has been outsourced to countries with lower labour costs. A similar trajectory is observed in Latin America, where the services sector now accounts for nearly two-thirds of all employment. However, this shift was not driven by robust industrial growth; instead, the region's industrial base expanded only marginally, constrained by its historical dependence on commodity exports and vulnerability to global price shocks. In this context, the expansion of services often absorbs workers from agriculture into low-productivity, informal service jobs rather than into stable, high-wage industrial employment.

In stark contrast, East Asia provides a unique and dramatic archetype of structural change. Over the three-decade period, the region's agricultural workforce was almost halved, falling from 53.2% in 1991 to just 20.6% by 2022–23. This profound transformation was driven by dynamic, state-led industrialisation, which successfully absorbed millions of workers into formal factory employment, as exemplified by China's rapid ascent as a manufacturing powerhouse (Chan 2010). This industrial base then enabled



further diversification into technology and advanced services. In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia remain heavily agrarian. Despite some shifts, sub-Saharan Africa still had nearly half of its workforce in agriculture in 2022–23, illustrating a limited capacity to absorb a growing population into either the industrial or service sectors. This challenge is compounded by slow structural transformation and the entrenchment of informal economies, a dynamic explored in detail by a large number of scholars. For instance, with respect to Northern Africa and Middle-East, Kate Meagher (2016) has shown a process of gradual diversification, with a steady expansion of services but weak and constrained industrialisation, often hindered by political instability and over-reliance on oil rents. By and large, accounts of diversification across the South demonstrate a strong reliance on the service sector, and a great deal of it on account of distress in the primary commodity producing sectors of the economy.

The implications of these divergent regional pathways are profound. As Dani Rodrik (2016) has argued, many parts of the Global South are experiencing premature deindustrialisation wherein workers bypass the critical developmental stage of formal, high-productivity manufacturing and move directly from agriculture into a fragmented, low-productivity service sector. This structural shift raises serious concerns about the quality of employment, as it fundamentally constrains the capacity of these economies to generate sustained wage growth and build a secure, middle-class workforce. The data, therefore, shows that while all regions are moving towards a service-dominated economy, the quality of this transition and the resulting social outcomes are vastly different.

This pattern directly undermines the capacity of these economies to generate sustained wage growth and stable, well-protected jobs, thereby contributing to the persistence of vulnerability and the decline in labour's share of national income. Therefore, the sectoral composition of an economy is not merely a statistical curiosity; it is a critical determinant of a workforce's ability to secure equitable outcomes and, in turn, is central to why the "labour question" remains so acutely unresolved in the Global South today.



Challenging Pertaining to Youth and Women

One of the most profound and persistent challenges in world of work pertain to the issues of youth and women unemployment, which affects them disproportionately, in pervasive ways. The global youth unemployment rate, after peaking at 14–15% in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, remained stubbornly high at 12.7% in 2022–24 (ILO 2023). This high rate is a testament to the acute vulnerability of young workers, who are often the first to be dismissed during economic downturns and the last to be rehired during recoveries. The regional dynamics of this phenomenon, however, reveal a deeply uneven landscape. Developed economies, for instance, have seen their youth unemployment rates fluctuate between 12% and 15%, reflecting their sensitivity to economic cycles. In contrast, Central and South-Eastern Europe and the CIS nations experienced particularly high rates, exceeding 25% in the late 1990s, with a slow and gradual recovery over the next two decades. East Asia, buoyed by decades of robust industrialisation and growth, has consistently maintained relatively low youth unemployment levels, generally below 11%, though recent years have shown signs of upward pressure. The most severe and structurally entrenched challenges are located in Southern Asia, Latin America, and especially the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In MENA, youth unemployment rates frequently exceed 25%, with the rate for young women often surpassing 30%. This crisis, as the relevant literature demonstrates, is not merely cyclical but structural, driven by a profound mismatch between the skills provided by education systems and the demands of the world of work, compounded by demographic pressures from a rapidly growing youth population.

As regards gender inequities, there are persistent and profound layers of structural vulnerabilities. Women are disproportionately concentrated in the most precarious forms of employment, including home-based work, domestic service, and a range of unpaid family roles that often fall outside the purview of formal labour protections (Jha, Chambati and Ossome 2021). This concentration in insecure work is



compounded by higher unemployment rates, persistent wage gaps, and systematic exclusion from social security benefits in many regions. The much-discussed feminisation of labour in export-oriented industries, particularly across Asia, created new opportunities for women but simultaneously entrenched a new set of vulnerabilities. Women were frequently sought out as "docile" and flexible workers for low-wage manufacturing, a trend that led to widespread exploitative conditions and the reproduction of traditional gender hierarchies in the workplace (Elson and Pearson 1981; Ghosh, 2004;2021).

At the same time, the unpaid care work that women perform in the household continues to serve as an invisible and essential subsidy to labour markets, enabling the social reproduction of the workforce while simultaneously acting as a significant barrier to women's full and equitable participation in formal employment (Ghosh, 2009; ILO 2023). The implications of these challenges are clear: without inclusive and gender-sensitive policies, millions of women and young people remain excluded from stable work; furthermore, women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of insecure and undervalued labour. Therefore, addressing these structural gendered inequalities requires policy interventions that go beyond simple job creation to include the cultivation of effective education-to-employment linkages, the implementation of gender-sensitive labour provisions, and recognition of the economic value of unpaid care work in national strategies and policy formulations. Ultimately, the failure to provide secure and equitable work for young people and women is not just an economic inefficiency; it represents a profound social and political risk. It fuels widespread disillusionment and economic frustration, leading to a significant underutilization of human capital and, in some cases, contributing to social fragmentation and instability.

Labour Income Distribution and the Shifting Balance of Power

An analysis of labour income share—the proportion of a nation's GDP that accrues to workers in the form of wages and salaries—provides critical



insight into the distributive outcomes of global economic transformations. On a global scale, the labour share has remained relatively stable, fluctuating narrowly between 52% and 53% from 2004 to 2025, with a minor recent dip to 52.3%. However, this apparent stability masks significant regional disparities. In developed economies and the European Union, the labour share has consistently been the highest, averaging 53–54%, although recent years have shown a slight downward trend, reflecting a shift in power from labour to capital. In contrast, East and South-Eastern Asia have maintained more moderate shares of around 45–47%, with East Asia exhibiting a modest recovery after 2010, stabilizing at 47.3% by 2022–24. Latin America presents a more volatile trajectory, peaking at a relatively high 50.4% in 2013–15 before experiencing a decline, underscoring the fragility of gains in the region. Southern Asia has consistently recorded a lower share, hovering around 44–45%, which points to deeply entrenched distributional inequalities. The most pronounced inequities are found in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where labour's share has historically been at its weakest; however, Northern Africa stands out as a key exception to the general trends across regions, improving significantly from a low of 34.3% in 2004–06 to over 42% in later years. These regional trends collectively demonstrate that while a global average may appear stable, the reality on the ground is one of persistent inequality in how economic gains are distributed between capital and labour, with advanced economies and parts of Latin America demonstrating a more equitable distribution than much of Asia and Africa. This highlights the central importance of institutional and structural factors in determining distributional outcomes.

The persistent downward trend in the labour income share, over the past three decades, is a direct consequence of a complex interplay of macroeconomic forces and institutional changes that have collectively strengthened the position of capital at the expense of labour. One primary driver is the accelerating pace of technological change, particularly automation and the rise of digital platforms. As noted by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2019), these technologies often



exhibit a pro-capital bias, replacing routine labour tasks with machines and software, thereby reducing the demand for certain types of work and increasing returns to capital. Concurrently, the process of globalization and outsourcing has exerted profound downward pressure on wages. By allowing corporations to relocate production to regions with lower labour costs, globalization has intensified competition among workers globally. This has the effect of weakening wage bargaining power in high-income countries while also creating a "race to the bottom" that intensifies competition and precarity in the Global South. The financialization of the global economy further exacerbates this trend, as corporate governance has increasingly prioritised "shareholder value" over long-term investment or wage growth. This has incentivised firms to channel profits into share buybacks, dividends, and executive compensation rather than reinvesting them in the workforce (Stockhammer, 2017). The cumulative effect of these forces has led to a situation where, even in periods of robust economic growth, workers' incomes have either stagnated or declined noticeably, raising significant concerns about rising income inequality and social cohesion. Without going into country-specific details, a few continental trends are listed below for the first quarter of the 21st century as bullet points:

- Asia and Asia-Pacific Countries witnessed a fall in the labour share of income either for the entire period or during the most recent period (except for Philippines);
- In case of Africa, again except for a few countries, all major countries witnessed a fall in the labour share either for the entire period or most of it;
- Except for a couple of countries, Europe witnessed a fall in the share of labour income during the period under consideration;
- For South America as a whole, the overwhelming majority of countries witnessed a fall in the share of labour income for the entire period, while for the remaining countries, the fall was evident during the most recent period;



- North America has also witnessed a significant decline in the share of labour income; for the USA since the early 2000, it has fallen continuously, except for a brief rise during the COVID years, which was followed by even a sharper fall. In case of Canada, however, for the period under consideration, the share of labour income did not change much. There was some rise in it during the early parts of this period, followed by a fall in the subsequent years.

Weakening of Labour Institutions

Central to the erosion of labour's power has been the *systemic decline* of the institutions that historically protected and advanced worker interests, most notably trade unions. This trend is reflected in the sharp fall in trade union density and bargaining coverage across most regions since the early 2000s. In developed economies, union density plummeted from a high of 34.1% to 24.3% between 2000 and 2020. The decline was even more precipitous in Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) and the CIS, where union density collapsed from 42.8% to 21.7% in just over a decade, a drop largely attributable to the transition in the erstwhile socialist countries and the dismantling of state-supported union structures. While East Asia initially bucked the trend, its union density fell to a low of 17.7% by 2020, demonstrating that even formerly robust labour movements were not immune to global pressures.

This decline is a consequence of several interconnected structural changes (Silver, 2003). The shift from large-scale manufacturing to a fragmented service-based economy, with a proliferation of non-standard, precarious, and gig-economy work regime, makes it significantly more challenging to organize workers (Ceruti, 2022). This structural transformation is compounded by legal and political restrictions, including anti-union legislation and the general retreat of governments from their traditional role in protecting labour rights. Furthermore, the decentralization of collective bargaining, moving negotiations from a national or sectoral level to a more localized, firm-by-firm basis, has systematically weakened unions' ability to set broad wage standards.



The outcome is a demonstrable reduction in industrial disputes, such as strikes and lockouts, as workers find themselves with fewer avenues and less leverage to challenge the power of capital. The decline of organized labour is both a consequence, and a cause, of the falling labour income share, creating a negative feedback loop that perpetuates and deepens inequality. In the following, we provide a few bullet points pertaining to continent-wise highlights relating to trade union density and collective bargaining:

Trade Union Density Rate and Collective Bargaining

- Except North America, all other Continental regions witnessed a visible fall in the trade density rate since 2000.
- All continental regions, without exception, witnessed a fall in the collective bargaining coverage rate during the entire period.
- The fall was more rapid for Europe, Central Asia, and South America compared to other continental regions.

Number of strikes and lockouts by aggregate economic activity

- Except for South America, all continental regions witnessed a secular fall in the number of strikes and lockouts by aggregate economic activities
- South America witnessed a sharp rise in the rate till 2016, followed by a sharp fall.
- A marginal rise in the rate was observed in Europe, Central Asia, and North America during the post-COVID-19 period.

Workers involved in strikes and lockouts by economic activity

- Except for South America, all continental regions showed nearly negligible involvement of workers in strikes and lockouts during the entire period (except the period of financial crises 2008-2011)
- South America has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of workers involved in strikes and lockouts since 2017.



Days not worked per 1000 workers due to strikes and lockouts by economic activity

- Except for Africa, other continents witnessed a continuous fall in the days not worked per thousand workers due to strikes and lockouts by economic activity during the entire period.
- Africa showed some sharp spikes in these numbers, first during 2004–08, and then recently since 2017.

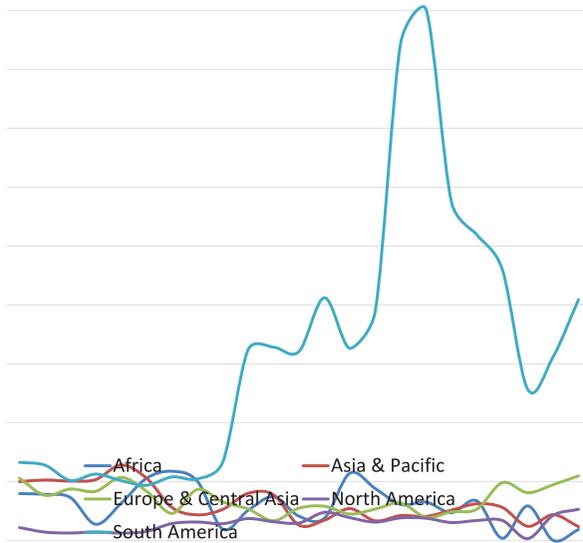
Clearly, decline in both trade union density and collective bargaining coverage across much of the globe represents a profound institutional crisis for labour. This erosion of collective power is particularly evident in regions like Europe and South America, where once-robust national or sectoral bargaining systems have given way to more fragmented, enterprise-level agreements. This decentralisation fundamentally weakens labour's leverage, as it pits workers against individual firms rather than compelling industry-wide or national-level negotiations, that could set a floor for wages and working conditions. Accompanying this institutional retreat is a broad and persistent diminution of industrial disputes. While isolated spikes in strike activity have occurred—often coinciding with moments of significant political crisis, as observed in parts of Africa and the upsurge in South America in the early 2000s—the overall global trend is one of declining frequency and scale. This reduction in strikes and lockouts is not a sign of industrial harmony but rather a symptom of a workforce with diminished capacity to contest the terms of its employment. Thus, at precisely the moment when a growing number of workers are entering formal employment, the very mechanisms designed to protect their rights, secure equitable wage gains, and address growing inequality have been systematically weakened. The 'tokenism' of formalisation of employment, therefore, is not leading to a new social contract but rather to a more precarious form of integration into a global market that is increasingly skewed toward capital.



To sum up this section: It is quite evident from the sketch presented in the foregoing that the major markers pertaining to the world of work, based on the ILO data, have entered an extremely difficult, if not dismal, zone during the recent decades. And, of course, none of these are random occurrences; these are powerfully and organically connected with the working of the Laws of Motion of capitalism, envisioned brilliantly, albeit at the highest level of generality, which we hinted at right at the outset. In passing, we may recall the great celebration amongst the mainstream economists during the late 1980s / early 1990s, by when regulated capitalism had almost given way to the ‘free-market-fairy-tale’ and the large parts of the ‘socialist bloc’ had collapsed, with loud proclamations of ‘TINA’, from the jubilant cheer leaders. In fact, one such high priest of free-market orthodoxy, Francis Fukuyama, happily proclaimed in his famous book, ‘The End of History and the Last Man’ (1992), that the problem of what constitutes a successful socio-economic system was finally resolved. Incidentally, in a recent conversation, dated, May 21, 2025, Fukuyama expresses his deep anxiety regarding the massive concentration of wealth and power in the USA; one of the immediate backdrops for his concern was the announcement by the Tesla’s Board’s offer of an incentive package for Elon Musk, amounting to one trillion dollars, if he met a few ambitious goals for Tesla’s stock. As Fukuyama notes, this sum would have amounted to 3.5 per cent of the US GDP! Add a few other plutocrats in the US economy and the massive economic and political power of a small handful assumes frightening proportions, both for economy and society, and of course, overall democracy. Let me note that Fukuyama’s apprehension is a disguised complement to the good old Karl Marx, and the Laws of Motion of Capitalism, enunciated by him. Clearly, Marx continues to hold his ground till date, and one may paraphrase Mark Twain’s famous line that the reports of Marx’s death “are greatly exaggerated!”

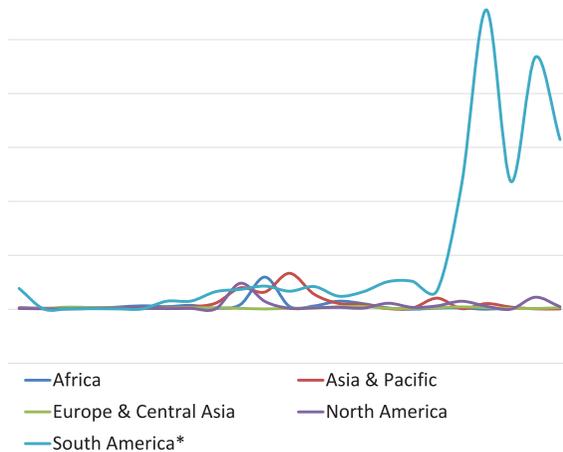


Graph 3
Number of strikes and lockouts by aggregate economic activity



Except for South America, all continental regions witnessed a secular fall in the number of strikes and lockouts by aggregate economic activities

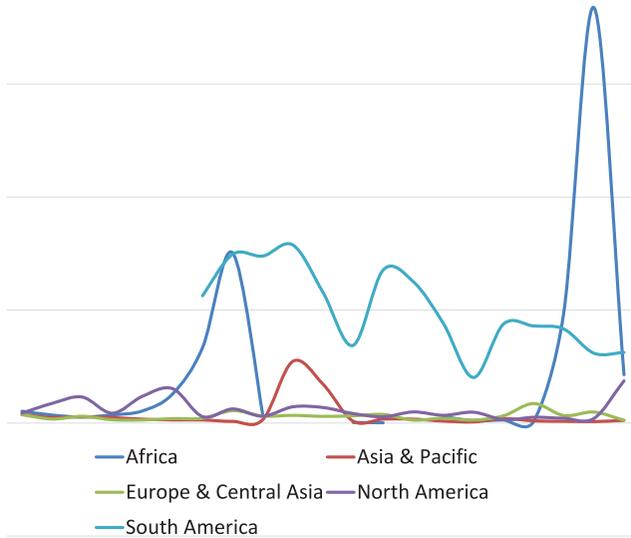
Graph 4
Workers involved in strikes and lockouts by economic activity (thousands)



Except for South America, all continental regions showed nearly negligible involvement of workers in strikes and lockouts during the entire period (except the period of financial crises 2008-2011)

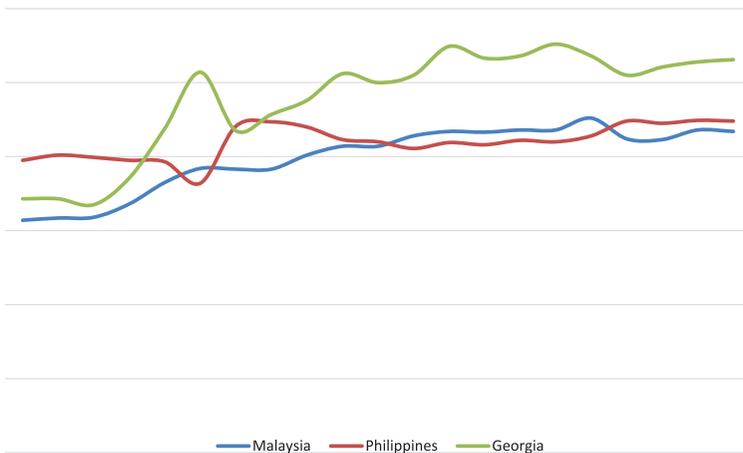


Graph 5
Days not worked per 1000 workers due to strikes and lockouts by economic activity



All continents except for Africa witnessed a continuous fall in the days not worked per thousand workers due to strikes and lockouts by economic activity during the entire period.

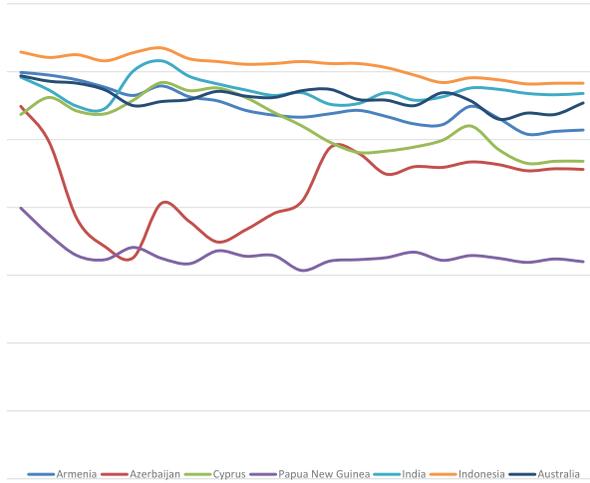
Graph 6
Countries with significant Rise in the labour income share in Asia



Malaysia, Philippines and Georgia are countries with significant gains in the labour share of income during the entire period.

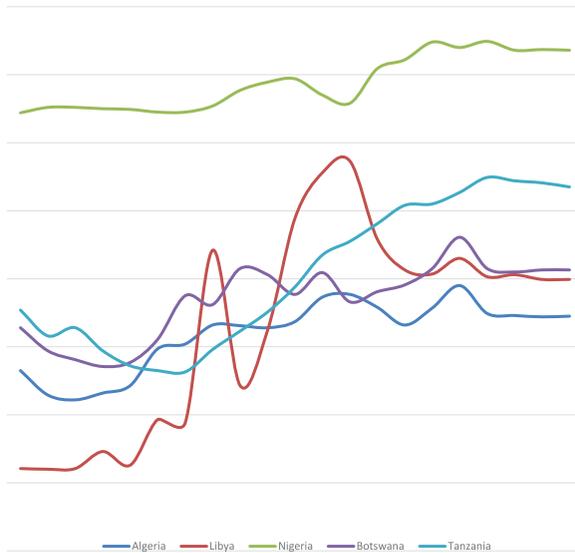


Graph 7
Countries with a significant fall in the share of labour income in Asia



Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Papua New Guinea, India, Indonesia and Australia witnessed a significant fall in the share of labour income during the entire period.

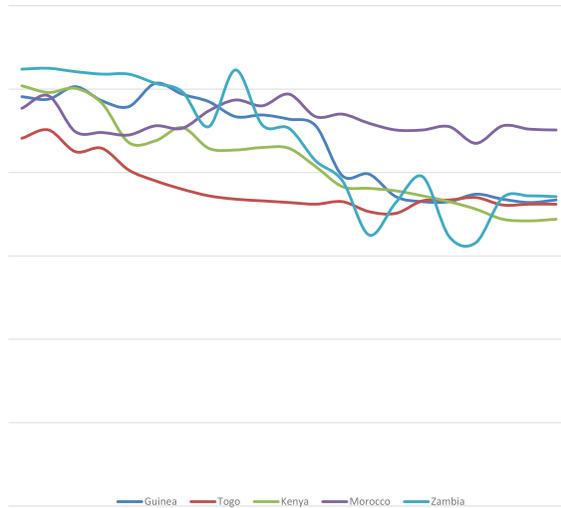
Graph 8
Rising labour income share of countries in Africa



Only five countries in Africa witnessed a rise in the share of labour income during the entire period

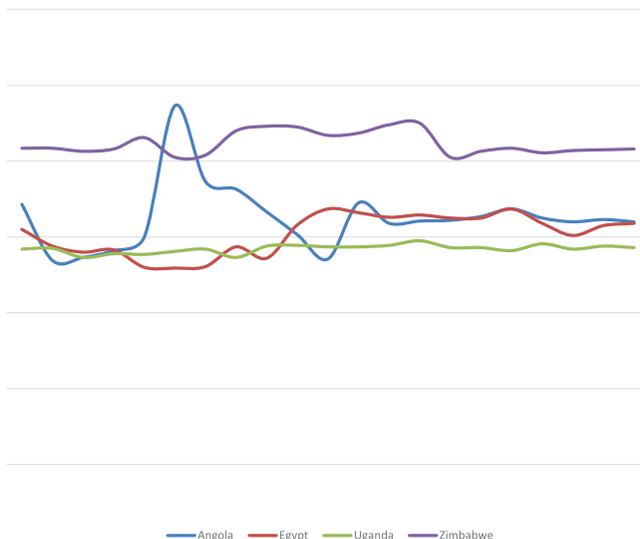


Graph 9
The falling share of labour income in Africa



Countries like Guinea, Togo, Morocco and Zambia witnessed a sharp fall in labour income share during the entire period.

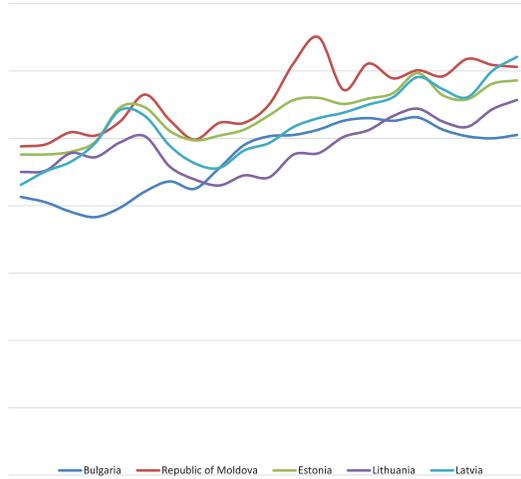
Graph 10
Falling labour income share during the recent period in Africa



Except for a few countries, all major countries witnessed a fall in the labour income share either for the entire period or for the most recent period.



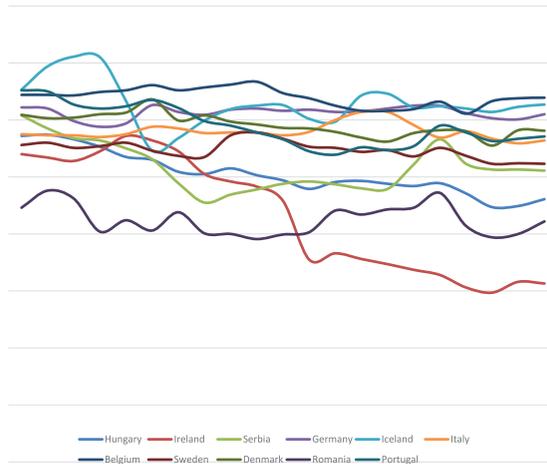
Graph 11
Rising Labour income share in Europe



Bulgaria, Moldova, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia showed a rising trend in labour income share during the entire period

However, except Latvia and Lithuania, other countries showed a reversal of trends during the most recent period.

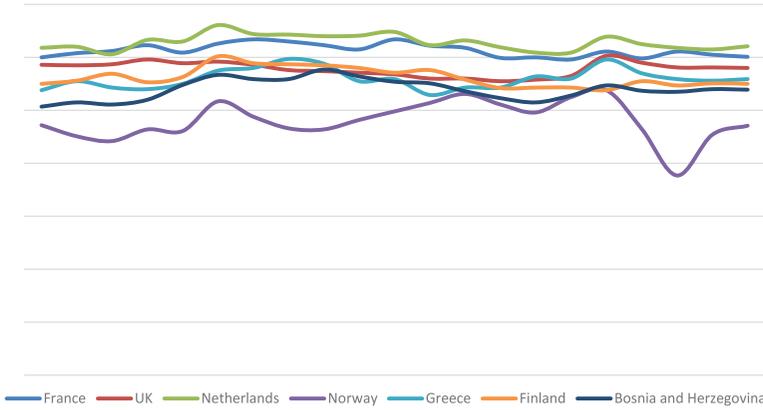
Graph 12
The falling share of labour income in Europe



Overwhelming Number of countries in Europe witnessed a fall in the share of labour income during the entire period.

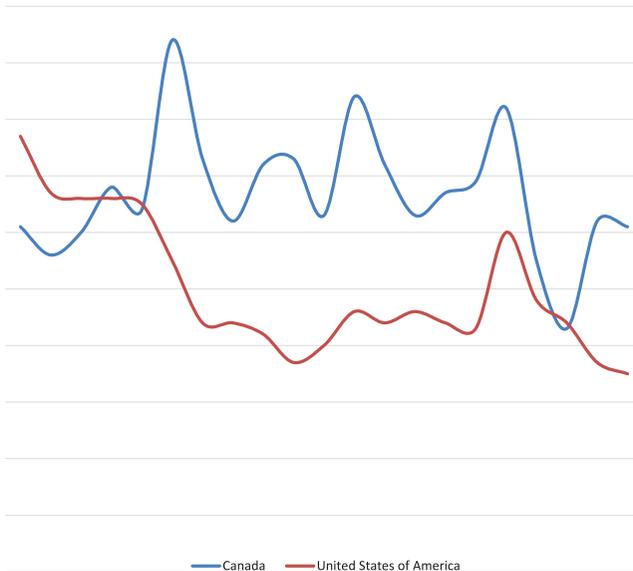


Graph 13
The falling share of labour income during the recent period in Europe



Except for a couple of countries, Europe witnessed a fall in the share of labour income for the entire or the most recent period.

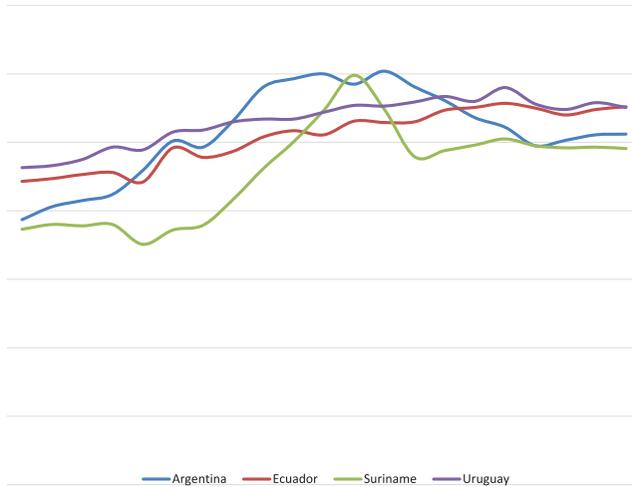
Graph 14
The fall in Labour Income share in countries in North America



There has been a continuous fall in the labour income share in the USA during the entire period. However, a brief rise was witnessed during the COVID 10 outbreak year, followed by an even sharper fall in the share.

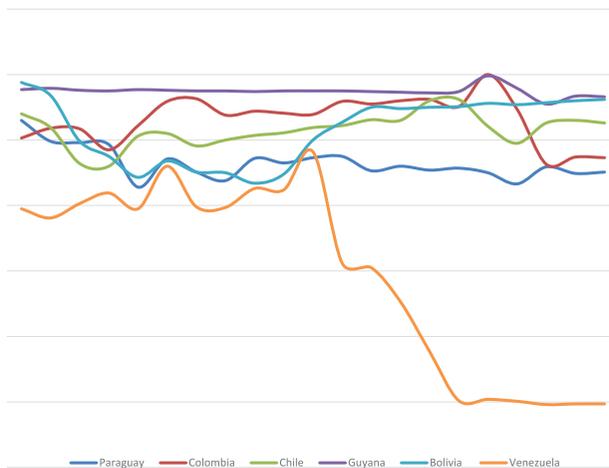


Graph 15
The falling share of labour income during the recent decade in South America



Some Latin American countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, Surinam and Uruguay witnessed improvement in the share of labour income during the entire period.

Graph 16
Countries with the falling share of labour income in South America



For South America as a whole, the overwhelming majority of countries witnessed the fall in the share of labour income for the entire period, while for the remaining countries, the fall was evident during the most recent period.



IV. Closing Remarks

As suggested in this paper, the range of adverse outcomes, sketched above, pertaining to the world of work during the neoliberal era, is on account of a drastic change in the balance of class forces, to the detriment of working classes everywhere; as emphasized repeatedly, this is due to the ascendancy and consolidation of neoliberal capitalism, which is a consequence of centralization of capital on a global scale, leading to what Samir Amin characterized as ‘a system of generalized monopolies’. Such a system, necessarily, squeezes the scope and space, through multiple channels, for working class responses, as argued and demonstrated by a large number of Marxist scholars. For instance, as Patnaik puts it, centralization of capital is a powerful means of ‘subduing the militancy of workers’. Furthermore, this is also a strong facilitator for accelerated extraction of surplus value on a global scale; to quote Amin: “The capitalism of generalized and globalised monopolies is a system that guarantees these monopolies a monopoly rent levied on the mass of surplus value (transformed into profits) that capital extracts from the exploitation of labour. To the extent that these monopolies are operating in the peripheries in the global system, monopoly rent is imperialist rent” (Amin, 2013, p. 400). Amin’s observations also points to some significant differences in the machinations of neoliberal capitalism between the North and the South, an issue we have flagged earlier. In general, the decline in the provisions for the world of work in the South has been far more brutal than in the North, to which we have hinted in the foregoing.

Let me finally, as a very brief closing comment, flag a question, without pretence of any answers: are there any prospects for ways forward for the world of work? The elemental and essential answer to this question for the working people can only be in the affirmative. If we simply glance across the globe, in spite of much gloom and darkness all around, we have the evidence from the ground of millions of mutinies, responses from trade unions of multiple kinds, varieties of struggles with considerable promise, etc. From across continents, countries, and sectors, there are successful instances of the association of workers reclaiming their agencies and



power, whether structural, associational or societal. It is well understood by working people and the trade unions that ongoing and long-drawn struggles against the current neoliberal order are the only hope for their survival. In a recent volume, *Trade Unions in Transformation* (edited by Mirko Herberg), there are worthwhile accounts of building alliances and strategies from across the world, which certainly inspire hope.

Although we have stayed away from country-specific instances of powerful contestations, let me simply mention a couple of cases. Mexico provides a powerful illustration where the current progressive regime, which has been in power since 2018, has offered significant transformations in the lives of working class Mexicans, in spite of an overall neoliberal architecture; between 2018 and 2024, average labour income has increased significantly, with 13 million lifted out poverty. Furthermore, the country has witnessed steepest drop in inequality, during this period, over a century. Closer home, instances of joint initiatives, linking farmers with workers and social movements, seem to offer at least a glimmer of hope for class-based revival of progressive political projects; in particular, the heroic 2020-21 Farmers' Protest, in which more than 700 hundred protesters were martyred on the borders of Delhi, that pushed back the so-called 3 black laws, are powerful illustration of combating Neoliberalism.

As Amin suggested, in an interesting and persuasive paper, in 2013, *What "Radical" Means in the 21st Century: Audacity, More Audacity*, that an audacious programme for the radical left must hinge on three broad headings: "(i) socialize the ownership of monopolies, (ii) de-financialize the management of the economy, (iii) de-globalize international relations". He goes on to elaborate on the ways forward with respect to each one of these; I do not have the time or space here to engage with his arguments. Let me end with a couple of sentences from the said paper:

"In conclusion: audacity, more audacity, always audacity. What I mean by audacity is therefore: (i) For the radical left in the societies of the imperialist triad, the need for an engagement in building an alternative anti-monopoly social bloc.

(ii) For the radical left in societies of the peripheries, to engage in building an alternative anti-comprador social bloc.



Audacity is what is necessary to bring about the autumn of capitalism that will be announced by the implosion of its system and by the birth of an authentic spring of the people, a spring that is possible”(Amin, 2013, p. 408).

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ANNEXURE

Table 1
Status of Employment of Global Workforce (In Percentage)

Region/ Status in employment (%)	1991			1992-94			1995-97			1998-00						
	WSE	EMP	OAW	WSE	EMP	OAW	WSE	EMP	OAW	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW			
Developed Economies & European Union	79.1%	4.3%	11.8%	4.8%	79.2%	4.3%	11.9%	4.6%	79.6%	4.4%	11.8%	4.2%	80.5%	4.2%	11.5%	3.8%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS*	79.9%	1.9%	12.1%	6.1%	79.0%	2.1%	12.7%	6.2%	76.9%	2.5%	13.9%	6.7%	76.2%	2.8%	14.5%	6.6%
East Asia	35.5%	3.6%	33.8%	27.1%	37.0%	3.6%	33.3%	26.2%	39.5%	3.7%	32.3%	24.6%	41.5%	3.7%	31.9%	22.8%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	33.9%	2.3%	36.6%	27.2%	34.3%	2.3%	36.6%	26.7%	35.4%	2.4%	36.8%	25.4%	35.4%	2.6%	37.7%	24.3%
Southern Asia	20.2%	1.0%	59.3%	19.5%	20.2%	1.0%	59.3%	19.6%	20.3%	1.0%	59.3%	19.4%	20.5%	1.0%	59.3%	19.2%
Latin America & the Caribbean	59.8%	4.3%	27.3%	8.6%	58.8%	4.4%	28.2%	8.7%	60.0%	4.5%	27.4%	8.1%	60.2%	4.4%	27.7%	7.6%
Middle East	62.5%	3.7%	26.7%	7.1%	63.4%	3.7%	26.1%	6.8%	64.3%	3.9%	25.4%	6.5%	64.7%	4.2%	24.4%	6.7%
Northern Africa	54.0%	9.5%	20.7%	15.8%	54.3%	9.7%	20.8%	15.2%	55.5%	9.5%	20.6%	14.5%	56.4%	9.9%	20.3%	13.5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.8%	5.2%	48.1%	26.9%	19.6%	5.3%	48.2%	26.9%	19.3%	5.4%	48.4%	26.8%	19.4%	5.5%	48.8%	26.2%
World	44.3%	3.3%	33.5%	18.9%	44.3%	3.3%	33.8%	18.6%	44.6%	3.4%	34.0%	18.0%	45.0%	3.4%	34.3%	17.2%

Note: WSE-Wage & Salaried workers (employees); EMP-Employees; OAW-Own-account workers; CFW-Contributing family members

Source: ILOSTAT; iloostat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Employment by sex and status in employment -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024 (thousands)

Link: rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer14/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_2EMP_SEX_STE_NB_A

Year	2001-03			2004-06			2007-09			2010-12						
	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW				
<i>Region/ Status in employment (%)</i>																
Developed Economies	81.0%	4.2%	11.4%	3.4%	81.7%	4.3%	11.3%	2.8%	82.4%	4.2%	11.0%	2.4%	82.3%	4.0%	11.3%	2.4%
& European Union																
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	76.5%	2.9%	14.6%	6.1%	77.8%	2.9%	14.3%	5.0%	78.2%	3.1%	14.2%	4.5%	77.7%	3.0%	14.5%	4.8%
East Asia	43.7%	3.9%	31.9%	20.6%	46.4%	4.0%	31.6%	18.1%	49.4%	4.0%	30.8%	15.8%	52.1%	4.1%	30.1%	13.8%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	37.3%	3.0%	36.5%	23.2%	40.3%	3.1%	36.2%	20.3%	42.2%	3.5%	36.4%	17.9%	44.9%	3.3%	34.6%	17.2%
Southern Asia	21.0%	1.1%	58.9%	19.0%	21.6%	1.1%	58.2%	19.1%	22.1%	1.2%	57.7%	19.1%	23.6%	1.3%	56.6%	18.6%
Latin America & the Caribbean	60.2%	4.5%	28.3%	7.1%	61.2%	4.6%	27.6%	6.7%	62.9%	4.5%	26.8%	5.8%	63.4%	4.3%	27.1%	5.2%
Middle East	65.6%	4.4%	23.2%	6.9%	66.4%	4.6%	22.2%	6.8%	69.1%	4.1%	21.5%	5.3%	72.4%	3.4%	20.3%	3.9%
Northern Africa	56.6%	10.3%	20.5%	12.6%	57.5%	9.1%	20.7%	12.7%	58.5%	9.2%	20.6%	11.7%	60.2%	9.6%	20.9%	9.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.5%	5.5%	49.3%	25.7%	19.7%	5.6%	49.7%	25.0%	20.3%	5.6%	50.2%	23.9%	20.9%	5.7%	50.9%	22.5%
World	45.8%	3.5%	34.5%	16.2%	47.0%	3.6%	34.4%	15.0%	48.4%	3.7%	34.1%	13.8%	49.6%	3.7%	33.8%	13.0%



Year	2013-15			2016-18			2019-21			2022-23						
	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW	WSE	EMP	OAW	CFW				
<i>Region/ Status in employment (%)</i>																
Developed Economics & European Union	82.9%	3.8%	11.2%	2.1%	83.5%	3.7%	11.0%	1.9%	83.9%	3.5%	10.9%	1.6%	84.2%	3.5%	10.9%	1.5%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	78.1%	3.0%	14.3%	4.6%	78.5%	3.2%	14.1%	4.2%	79.0%	3.2%	14.0%	3.8%	79.1%	3.5%	13.8%	3.7%
East Asia	54.0%	4.0%	29.7%	12.2%	55.6%	4.0%	29.6%	10.8%	56.9%	3.9%	29.4%	9.8%	57.7%	3.8%	29.4%	9.1%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	48.2%	3.3%	33.2%	15.3%	50.8%	3.3%	32.8%	13.1%	51.1%	3.1%	33.4%	12.5%	51.1%	2.9%	34.0%	12.0%
Southern Asia	26.4%	1.6%	54.8%	17.2%	28.4%	2.1%	53.7%	15.8%	28.5%	2.3%	53.6%	15.6%	29.1%	3.1%	52.0%	15.8%
Latin America & the Caribbean	64.4%	4.2%	26.7%	4.8%	63.3%	4.3%	27.8%	4.6%	62.4%	4.1%	29.0%	4.5%	63.3%	4.1%	28.8%	3.8%
Middle East	73.8%	3.2%	19.9%	3.1%	74.0%	3.2%	19.7%	3.1%	73.6%	3.4%	20.0%	3.0%	74.2%	3.8%	19.4%	2.5%
Northern Africa	61.0%	8.7%	21.0%	9.3%	64.8%	7.9%	20.3%	6.9%	66.7%	6.2%	21.6%	5.5%	69.1%	4.0%	22.7%	4.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.9%	5.8%	51.7%	20.7%	22.4%	5.8%	52.8%	18.9%	22.2%	6.1%	54.1%	17.6%	22.2%	6.2%	54.9%	16.7%
World	51.1%	3.7%	33.4%	11.8%	52.2%	3.7%	33.4%	10.7%	52.1%	3.7%	34.0%	10.2%	52.2%	3.8%	34.2%	9.8%



Table 2
Vulnerability and Employment of Global Workforce (Part A)

Year	1991			1992-94			1995-97			1998-00		
	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)
Developed Economies & European Union	5,04,523	83,493	16.5%	15,25,345	2,51,009	16.5%	15,75,600	2,52,631	16.0%	16,26,464	2,49,481	15.3%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	1,54,580	28,123	18.2%	4,50,678	85,063	18.9%	4,29,424	88,349	20.6%	4,28,494	90,242	21.1%
East Asia	7,50,424	4,56,997	60.9%	22,86,118	13,58,970	59.4%	23,35,774	13,28,813	56.9%	23,86,933	13,07,418	54.8%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	2,03,536	1,29,886	63.8%	6,41,460	4,06,474	63.4%	6,89,564	4,28,988	62.2%	7,32,746	4,54,292	62.0%
Southern Asia	3,88,091	3,05,850	78.8%	12,24,947	9,65,868	78.8%	13,36,143	10,51,894	78.7%	14,67,789	11,52,295	78.5%
Latin America & the Caribbean	1,66,238	59,626	35.9%	5,28,226	1,94,809	36.9%	5,59,514	1,99,104	35.6%	5,95,599	2,10,660	35.4%
Middle East	33,518	11,335	33.8%	1,06,758	35,121	32.9%	1,17,105	37,306	31.9%	1,30,780	40,677	31.1%
Northern Africa	35,614	13,011	36.5%	1,12,746	40,623	36.0%	1,21,946	42,727	35.0%	1,32,096	44,556	33.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,97,399	1,47,962	75.0%	6,26,612	4,70,502	75.1%	6,82,861	5,13,638	75.2%	7,40,963	5,55,865	75.0%
World	22,60,835	11,84,218	52.4%	69,67,018	36,51,174	52.4%	72,85,490	37,84,897	52.0%	76,62,788	39,47,165	51.5%

Note: STE: Sum of Total Employment; SPVE: Sum of Persons in Vulnerable employment, where Vulnerable employment=OAW+CFW (Table1); SSVE: Sum of Share of vulnerable employment in total employment

Source: ILOSTAT, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Employment by sex and status in employment -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024 (thousands)

Link: rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer/14/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_2EMP_SEX_STE_NB_A

Table 2
Vulnerability and Employment of Global Workforce (Part B)

Year	2001-03			2004-06			2007-09			2010-12		
	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in '000)	SSVE (in %)
Developed Economies & European Union	16,63,270	2,46,579	14.8%	17,17,708	2,41,730	14.1%	17,71,910	2,37,568	13.4%	17,86,099	2,44,037	13.7%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	4,44,927	91,809	20.6%	4,55,481	87,557	19.2%	4,69,539	87,871	18.7%	4,81,954	92,758	19.2%
East Asia	24,39,865	12,80,165	52.5%	25,19,938	12,51,083	49.6%	25,73,169	11,98,724	46.6%	26,06,186	11,43,314	43.9%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	7,74,567	4,62,179	59.7%	8,09,434	4,57,750	56.6%	8,67,762	4,71,530	54.3%	9,30,796	4,82,443	51.8%
Southern Asia	15,82,682	12,32,837	77.9%	16,87,145	13,03,479	77.3%	17,42,018	13,36,586	76.7%	17,94,532	13,47,939	75.1%
Latin America & the Caribbean	6,33,369	2,23,952	35.4%	6,88,646	2,36,059	34.3%	7,35,336	2,39,832	32.6%	7,71,250	2,49,144	32.3%
Middle East	1,45,158	43,604	30.0%	1,65,000	47,766	28.9%	1,82,719	48,971	26.8%	1,98,312	48,006	24.2%
Northern Africa	1,39,073	46,117	33.2%	1,55,296	51,868	33.4%	1,71,686	55,407	32.3%	1,80,961	54,677	30.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	8,06,530	6,04,690	75.0%	8,78,459	6,56,733	74.8%	9,49,460	7,03,384	74.1%	10,24,112	7,51,478	73.4%
World	80,32,108	40,72,106	50.7%	84,52,282	41,75,406	49.4%	88,14,783	42,23,646	47.9%	90,99,230	42,52,067	46.7%



Table 2
Vulnerability and Employment of Global Workforce (Part C)

Year	2013-15			2016-18			2019-21			2022-23		
	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in %)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in %)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in %)	SSVE (in %)	STE (in '000)	SPVE (in %)	SSVE (in %)
Developed Economies & European Union	18,46,975	2,46,129	13.3%	19,34,898	2,48,532	12.8%	19,60,019	2,45,915	12.5%	13,59,927	1,67,679	12.3%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	4,92,891	93,119	18.9%	5,03,536	92,377	18.3%	5,01,075	89,378	17.8%	3,06,802	53,571	17.5%
East Asia	26,25,713	11,00,799	41.9%	26,37,306	10,66,498	40.4%	26,19,852	10,27,900	39.2%	17,43,146	6,70,717	38.5%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	9,73,415	4,72,127	48.5%	10,09,792	4,63,382	45.9%	10,32,942	4,73,758	45.9%	7,16,243	3,29,578	46.0%
Southern Asia	18,74,289	13,49,974	72.0%	19,71,251	13,70,925	69.5%	20,67,627	14,30,998	69.2%	15,02,199	10,19,037	67.8%
Latin America & the Caribbean	8,06,248	2,53,773	31.5%	8,28,469	2,68,367	32.4%	8,25,312	2,76,566	33.5%	5,90,721	1,92,594	32.6%
Middle East	2,17,118	49,903	23.0%	2,33,614	53,284	22.8%	2,40,534	55,225	23.0%	1,70,953	37,602	22.0%
Northern Africa	1,85,745	56,291	30.3%	1,90,582	51,976	27.3%	1,95,420	52,950	27.1%	1,27,883	34,420	26.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	11,11,018	8,03,784	72.3%	11,90,899	8,54,307	71.7%	12,73,805	9,13,095	71.7%	9,24,848	6,61,787	71.6%
World	94,23,179	42,59,995	45.2%	97,51,637	42,98,262	44.1%	99,57,320	43,95,620	44.1%	69,55,382	30,60,595	44.0%

Table 3:
Employment Pattern of Global Workforce (in percentage) Part A

Year	1991			1992-94			1995-97			1998-00		
	Agri.	Ind.	Services	Agri.	Ind.	Services	Agri.	Ind.	Services	Agri.	Ind.	Services
Region/ Employment by sector (%)												
Developed Economies & European Union	10.4%	29.4%	60.2%	9.8%	28.6%	61.6%	9.2%	27.6%	63.2%	8.4%	26.9%	64.7%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	23.4%	29.8%	46.8%	23.5%	28.5%	48.0%	24.3%	26.3%	49.3%	24.3%	25.2%	50.4%
East Asia	53.2%	23.1%	23.7%	50.2%	23.8%	26.0%	45.3%	24.6%	30.1%	44.7%	24.1%	31.3%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	52.4%	15.2%	32.4%	51.3%	15.9%	32.8%	48.4%	17.2%	34.4%	47.4%	16.8%	35.8%
Southern Asia	60.4%	15.6%	24.0%	60.1%	15.6%	24.3%	58.9%	15.8%	25.3%	57.6%	16.4%	26.0%
Latin America & the Caribbean	22.6%	23.3%	54.1%	22.2%	22.9%	54.9%	20.9%	22.3%	56.8%	19.7%	22.4%	58.0%
Middle East	22.0%	27.4%	50.7%	21.7%	27.1%	51.2%	20.8%	26.8%	52.4%	20.1%	26.5%	53.4%
Northern Africa	38.9%	22.8%	38.3%	38.2%	21.4%	40.5%	35.9%	21.8%	42.2%	33.9%	21.8%	44.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	63.2%	10.2%	26.6%	63.1%	10.2%	26.7%	62.5%	10.2%	27.4%	61.6%	10.2%	28.2%
World	43.4%	21.4%	35.1%	42.4%	21.3%	36.3%	40.5%	21.2%	38.3%	39.9%	20.8%	39.3%

Source: ILOSTAT, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Employment by sex and economic activity -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024 (thousands)

Link: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer18/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_SEX_ECO_NB_A



Table 3
Employment Pattern of Global Workforce (in percentage) Part B

Region/ Employment by sector (%)	2001-03			2004-06			2007-09			2010-12		
	Agri.	Ind.	Services									
Developed Economies & European Union	7.6%	26.0%	66.4%	6.5%	25.4%	68.1%	6.0%	24.5%	69.6%	6.0%	23.1%	70.9%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	22.0%	25.8%	52.2%	19.0%	26.2%	54.8%	17.1%	26.2%	56.7%	16.4%	26.0%	57.5%
East Asia	44.4%	22.6%	32.9%	40.2%	24.3%	35.6%	35.6%	27.1%	37.3%	31.7%	28.8%	39.4%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	45.3%	17.7%	37.0%	42.6%	18.4%	39.0%	39.9%	18.9%	41.2%	38.0%	19.4%	42.6%
Southern Asia	54.9%	17.6%	27.5%	52.1%	19.1%	28.8%	50.1%	20.8%	29.1%	47.1%	23.1%	29.8%
Latin America & the Caribbean	19.3%	21.7%	59.0%	18.4%	21.6%	60.0%	16.5%	21.9%	61.6%	15.5%	21.6%	62.9%
Middle East	18.1%	26.7%	55.2%	15.8%	27.3%	56.9%	13.7%	28.4%	57.9%	12.1%	28.4%	59.6%
Northern Africa	32.7%	21.3%	46.0%	32.9%	22.1%	45.1%	30.9%	23.6%	45.5%	28.4%	24.4%	47.3%
Sub-Saharan Africa	60.6%	10.3%	29.1%	59.0%	10.5%	30.5%	57.1%	10.3%	32.6%	55.1%	10.3%	34.6%
World	39.0%	20.5%	40.6%	36.5%	21.2%	42.3%	33.9%	22.3%	43.8%	31.8%	23.0%	45.2%



Table 3
Employment Pattern of Global Workforce (in percentage) Part C

Year	2013-15			2016-18			2019-21			2022-23			
	Region/ Employment by sector (%)	Agri.	Ind.	Services									
Developed Economics & European Union		5.7%	22.8%	71.5%	5.3%	22.7%	72.0%	5.0%	22.5%	72.5%	4.7%	22.4%	72.9%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS		15.2%	26.0%	58.8%	14.2%	25.6%	60.2%	13.4%	25.6%	61.0%	12.6%	26.0%	61.4%
East Asia		27.0%	29.0%	43.9%	24.2%	29.2%	46.6%	21.8%	30.2%	48.0%	20.6%	30.5%	48.9%
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands		34.9%	20.6%	44.5%	31.1%	21.8%	47.1%	28.7%	22.6%	48.6%	28.2%	22.6%	49.2%
Southern Asia		43.7%	24.5%	31.7%	40.9%	24.8%	34.2%	41.1%	24.3%	34.6%	40.8%	25.3%	34.0%
Latin America & the Caribbean		14.6%	21.6%	63.8%	14.5%	20.8%	64.7%	14.6%	20.5%	64.8%	13.4%	20.7%	65.8%
Middle East		11.3%	28.1%	60.6%	10.5%	28.3%	61.2%	10.3%	27.0%	62.7%	9.4%	26.2%	64.4%
Northern Africa		26.9%	24.3%	48.8%	24.8%	25.1%	50.1%	22.8%	26.0%	51.2%	20.0%	27.1%	52.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa		52.9%	11.0%	36.1%	51.4%	11.4%	37.2%	50.5%	11.8%	37.7%	49.3%	12.5%	38.3%
World		29.2%	23.3%	47.5%	27.3%	23.4%	49.3%	26.6%	23.6%	49.9%	26.1%	23.8%	50.2%



Table 4
Youth Unemployment Rate in Percentage (Part A)

Year	1991			1992-94			1995-97			1998-00		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<i>Region/ Youth Unemployment rate by gender and age (15-24 years)</i>												
Developed Economies & European Union	12.6	12.9	12.5	13.1	13.3	13.1	13.1	12.9	13.6	13.7	13.5	14.3
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	13.6	12.6	15.1	18.2	17.4	19.7	24.0	23.3	25.7	26.0	25.5	27.4
East Asia	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.5	5.8	5.4	6.6	7.1	6.2	9.3	10.6	8.2
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	10.4	9.6	11.8	11.1	10.1	12.6	11.5	10.4	13.1	12.7	11.7	14.4
Southern Asia	13.5	12.2	17.2	13.2	12.1	16.3	12.9	11.9	15.1	12.8	11.9	15.2
Latin America & the Caribbean	18.0	15.9	21.5	18.2	15.7	21.2	18.4	15.9	22.5	18.4	15.7	22.8
Middle East	16.4	15.6	19.1	15.9	15.4	18.2	14.6	13.9	17.8	14.8	14.0	18.6
Northern Africa	28.6	26.6	32.2	30.4	28.6	33.7	30.8	28.8	34.9	30.1	27.9	34.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	15.5	15.0	16.2	15.9	15.5	16.6	15.9	15.5	16.7	16.0	15.5	16.7
World	10.2	10.9	9.3	11.1	11.8	10.1	12.3	12.8	11.7	13.1	13.5	12.6

Source: ILO Labour Statistics, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Unemployment rate by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024 (%)

Link: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer99/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A



Table 4
Youth Unemployment Rate in Percentage (Part B)

Year	2001-03			2004-06			2007-09			2010-12		
	Total	Male	Female									
<i>Region/ Youth Unemployment rate by gender and age (15-24 years)</i>												
Developed Economies & European Union	13.8	13.8	14.2	13.5	13.1	14.4	13.5	13.5	13.9	14.9	15.0	15.1
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	24.7	24.4	25.7	24.0	23.6	25.1	21.9	21.6	22.7	23.9	23.7	24.3
East Asia	10.0	11.6	8.7	9.5	10.6	8.5	9.1	10.1	8.2	9.1	9.9	8.4
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	12.8	11.5	14.9	12.0	10.6	14.0	11.7	10.5	13.5	12.1	11.0	13.6
Southern Asia	13.8	12.7	16.7	14.7	13.7	17.4	15.5	14.6	17.9	15.5	14.7	17.7
Latin America & the Caribbean	19.2	16.6	23.4	17.9	15.3	22.1	16.8	14.6	20.3	17.8	15.6	21.2
Middle East	17.6	16.4	22.1	17.5	15.9	24.5	17.0	15.0	25.7	17.8	15.7	27.8
Northern Africa	30.2	28.0	34.8	27.6	24.6	34.4	26.4	22.9	35.7	29.6	25.4	41.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	16.3	15.5	17.5	16.0	15.1	17.4	15.8	14.8	17.2	16.0	15.1	17.4
World	13.7	14.0	13.3	13.7	13.8	13.5	13.5	13.7	13.1	13.9	14.3	13.3

Source: ILO Labour Statistics, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Unemployment rate by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024

(%Link: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer99/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A)



Table 4
Youth Unemployment Rate in Percentage (Part C)

Year	2013-15			2016-18			2019-21			2022-24	
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Female
<i>Region/ Youth Unemployment rate by gender and age (15-24 years)</i>											
Developed Economies & European Union	13.6	13.5	14.0	12.3	12.0	12.9	14.3	13.9	15.1	11.7	12.2
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	23.9	23.8	24.3	21.6	21.2	22.4	19.9	19.3	21.2	17.3	18.4
East Asia	8.8	9.2	8.5	9.4	9.6	9.4	10.2	10.6	9.8	9.2	8.5
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	12.1	11.3	13.4	12.3	11.2	14.1	12.0	10.7	13.9	11.0	12.8
Southern Asia	15.8	14.8	18.7	17.2	16.1	20.0	18.3	17.3	21.2	17.3	20.5
Latin America & the Caribbean	18.3	16.0	21.9	18.6	16.3	22.2	21.1	18.6	24.8	17.2	20.0
Middle East	19.6	17.1	31.4	21.0	18.2	33.4	22.2	19.4	33.8	19.4	29.5
Northern Africa	30.8	27.2	40.8	30.4	26.9	41.0	30.3	26.8	42.5	29.7	41.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	15.7	14.8	16.9	15.7	15.0	16.8	16.8	15.9	18.2	16.0	17.3
World	14.0	14.5	13.3	14.3	14.7	13.6	14.5	14.7	14.1	12.7	12.8

Source: ILO Labour Statistics, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Unemployment rate by sex and age -- ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2024 (%)

Link: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer09/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A



Table 5
Labour Income Share as a percent of GDP (2004-2025)

Year	2004-06	2007-09	2010-12	2013-15	2016-18	2019-21	2022-24	2025
Region	Labour Income Share as a percent of GDP							
Developed Economies & European Union	53.9	53.7	53.5	53.9	54.1	54.4	52.9	53.8
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	45.9	45.6	45.8	46.1	45.5	46.0	44.9	45.2
East Asia	46.3	47.1	45.5	46.1	46.7	47.3	47.3	47.1
South-eastern Asia & the Pacific Islands	46.8	47.5	47.7	47.6	47.7	47.1	46.1	46.4
Southern Asia	45.3	45.2	45.4	45.7	45.5	45.7	44.7	44.6
Latin America & the Caribbean	48.9	49.0	49.6	50.4	49.6	49.2	48.2	48.3
Middle East	32.6	33.0	33.2	35.7	38.4	38.3	35.4	35.0
Northern Africa	34.3	34.7	38.3	42.1	42.6	42.0	41.2	41.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	41.0	40.9	41.1	41.7	41.5	41.9	41.8	41.8
World	53.4	53.5	52.9	52.9	52.9	53.2	52.3	52.6

Source: ILO Labour Statistics, ilo.stat.ilo.org/data

Indicator: Labour income share as a percent of GDP -- ILO modelled estimates, May 2025 (%)

Link: https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer88/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=LAP_2GDP_NOC_RT_A



Method of computation

Trade union density refers to the proportion of wage and salaried workers who are members of a trade union. It's calculated as the number of trade union members divided by the number of wage and salaried workers.

$$\text{Trade union density rate} = \frac{\text{Number of employee union members}}{\text{Total number of employees}} \times 100$$

For comparability purposes the scope of trade union density statistics in ILOSTAT is employees only (excluding persons not in paid employment), unless otherwise stated in the notes.

Data sources

The most common sources for statistics on trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage are administrative records (maintained by unions or government agencies).

Labour force surveys could also serve as a source of statistics on union membership and collective bargaining coverage. They have an advantage in terms of coverage as they include all types of workers and work situations. The data can also be cross-tabulated with other variables of interest, for example, variables related to employment conditions. However, the possible drawback of using labour force surveys to collect this type of data is that workers may not know their coverage status.

Establishment surveys can be used as an alternative and would deliver higher quality data. However, their coverage is often limited to large, formal sector establishments only.

