

**Forum:** ECOSOC

**Issue:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) and labor protection

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## Introduction

Artificial intelligence refers to when machines can behave intelligently, like humans. Automation is the use of machines to provide goods and services without human intervention. The adoption of AI and automation has been extremely rapid with a growth of ~270% in the past 4 years. It has ushered in a new era of efficiency and innovation, but it also raises significant concerns about labor protection. Large corporations that employ thousands of workers are switching to more cost-efficient AI tools and automated robots. There is a growing apprehension about the potential impact on jobs, workers' rights, and the overall landscape of employment.

One of the biggest concerns due to the advancement of AI is job loss. Lots of repetitive tasks and jobs are becoming automated, leading to workers losing jobs in a variety of industries. This raises questions about how to protect the labor force through policies that promote reskilling and upskilling initiatives.

The use of AI in hiring processes, performance evaluations, and workplace monitoring, raise ethical concerns. Biases in AI algorithms can result in discrimination. Ensuring fairness and transparency in AI-driven decision-making processes is crucial for protecting workers from such unfair treatment.

AI's effect on labor poses a risk to global economies and society at large, making it vital to address this pressing issue.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence refers to machines or software having intelligent behavior, similar to humans or animals. It could mean the field of study in computer science which develops and studies such intelligent machines or the intelligent machines themselves.

### Automation

Automation is when technology, including AI, is used to perform tasks without human intervention. In the context of labor, automation often refers to the replacement of human workers with machines or software.

### Algorithmic Bias

Algorithmic bias refers to the inherent bias in algorithms due to the data that the algorithm was trained on. Specifically in the workplace, algorithmic bias can lead to discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion, and other employment-related decisions.

### Data Privacy

It is protection of individuals' personal information that is collected and processed by AI systems. This includes safeguarding sensitive data from unauthorized access and ensuring compliance with privacy regulations.

### Reskilling

Reskilling is the process of acquiring new skills to adapt to changes in the job market, including those driven by advancements in AI and automation.

### Workplace Surveillance

This refers to the use of AI and technology to monitor employees' activities, behavior, and performance in the workplace. This could include monitoring through digital tools, cameras, or even wearable devices.

## Background Information

### Addressing job displacement due to automation

There are three main workforce related challenges which are causing businesses to replace humans with AI and automation. Firstly, doing tasks manually results in a higher risk of human error resulting in inconsistent product/service quality. Secondly, in certain industries, working conditions could be dangerous for humans. And lastly, the global increase in wage costs and their recurring nature impacts companies' ability to make profit. Therefore, corporations are firing employees as they invest in technology to address these core issues. An estimated 85 million jobs will be lost to machines by 2025.

Employees who are fired find themselves in a scenario where their skills have become redundant, leaving them with limited opportunities to get a job again. Longer durations of unemployment leads to more poverty, higher debt levels and a poorer quality of life. Unemployed workers are exempt from paying taxes, which means that the government also receives less tax

revenue, and thus there is less work done on social welfare. There are also social consequences like higher stress levels, higher suicide rates and people falling into bad habits like smoking/drinking. A vicious cycle forms with those being unemployed for longer, finding it even harder to get a job.

The transportation industry is a prime example of job losses the world-over, due to AI. Autonomous vehicles are advertised as being safer than present-day cars. Data from hundreds of autonomous cars collectively improves the AI model driving the autonomous vehicle, creating an extremely experienced driver. Moreover, AI is not prone to human issues like fatigue or drunk driving, reducing the risk of accidents. Ridesharing companies, like Uber and Lyft, are looking to rapidly adopt this technology, developing their own robotaxi fleets which are cheaper and simpler to operate (no salaries, medical insurances, paid leaves or union issues). Furthermore, robotaxis will eliminate passenger safety concerns including sexual harassment or muggings. Naturally, consumers are likely to prefer the safety of these autonomous vehicles, causing taxi and private drivers to soon become non-existent. Additionally 17 other occupations (like traffic policemen, car mechanics, gas station employees) that contribute to millions of jobs, are at risk.

The impact of automation and AI on jobs is also visible in service industries like IT. IT firms employ millions of people, many of which are estimated to lose their jobs, primarily due to technology. Robot Process Automation (RPA) is growing in popularity. It uses software robots to perform repetitive tasks. Estimates suggest that implementing RPA instead of having real humans will result in savings of \$100 billion in reduced costs, making RPA a lucrative proposition for these IT firms and their clients. Contrastingly, unemployed IT workers with very little savings, are forced to take loans at high interest rates, to run their households. When they aren't able to pay these loans back on time, they default. Not only does this put an immense financial burden on the unemployed borrowers, it affects banks and other lenders too. Unemployed people also don't pay taxes, thereby impacting government revenues, especially when government expenditure is increasing (as they are obligated to provide for the unemployed).

If not tackled in time, the advent of AI could result in widespread and uncontrollable unemployment across the world. Prevention is better than cure, and it is best to tackle the issue in its nascent stages.

### **Addressing ethical considerations in AI-driven decision making related to jobs**

While at first AI was being used as a replacement for human workers, it is now evolving into being an important factor in job-related decision making. The applications of AI in decision making are huge including being used for hiring decisions, employee performance evaluation and workplace monitoring. This use of AI brings up a whole host of ethical issues that need to be solved.

There are multiple reasons for using AI in such decision making. The most important is efficiency and accuracy. AI can process lots of data very quickly, making hiring or performance evaluations much

faster. Secondly, many believe that AI can provide objectivity in such decisions. AI will use evidence logically without any external factors influencing its decision, making it seem to have more reliable decisions compared to a human. Thirdly, it is much easier to scale AI technologies. If companies need to review more applicants/employees, they do not need to spend too much extra money or time but simply have to make the AI model read more data.

Using AI for such decision making has its consequences on workers. While some could argue AI is objective, others could say that the AI model has its inherent bias based on the data it was trained on. After all, AI cannot consciously eliminate bias from its decisions like humans still can and could have bias based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc. Studies show that nearly two-thirds of executives in large corporations are aware that AI has inherent bias, yet they have not found a solution to removing this bias. Moreover, there are also legal and regulatory considerations. Today's HR laws and frameworks do not take AI into account and many are advocating for some sort of standardization in company policy with regards to the use of AI for decision making. Most importantly however, using AI for decision making loses the human touch and empathy that is crucial in HR. There is much lesser of a nuanced understanding of an employee's needs, which could affect overall morale and job satisfaction.

Such ethical issues with AI, result in unfair treatment with workers. If not solved, there would be immense public backlash and loss of diversity in the workplace.

### **Addressing workplace surveillance and privacy issues due to AI**

Another major issue due to the heavy use of AI in the workplace is surveillance and privacy. Through AI, companies have the power to closely monitor their employees, in ways that could be deemed unethical. In research conducted from March 2020 to June 2023, it was observed that there was a 54% increase in demand for employee surveillance software.

There are 4 major causes for this issue. Firstly, the extremely rapid advancement of AI and technology has made it much easier for employers to implement surveillance systems in their workplaces. Secondly, the increased adoption of work-at-home culture has made employees shift a lot more of their work online, resulting in it being easier for employers to track them, thus invading their privacy. Some employers are concerned with ensuring data security and confidentiality and spy on their employees to prevent any such data leaks. Moreover, lack of proper legal frameworks around AI have also given companies more liberty to use AI as per their discretion with little consequence, resulting in its misuse.

Such surveillance has multiple consequences. Employees tend to start losing trust in their employers, leading to poor morale and higher attrition in the company. This, in turn, affects the company's productivity. The fear of being constantly monitored stifles employees leading to a lack of creativity or innovation, with employees doing the same things monotonous tasks day after day.

Furthermore, there are also psychological effects to being constantly monitored. Employees could experience heightened stress and anxiety and experience burnout.

Controlling such surveillance is crucial for worker safety. It is imperative that we find a way to monitor the use of AI.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States

Having always had a strong presence in the world of technology, the United States has caught on to the AI revolution. Silicon Valley companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft etc have rapidly adopted AI and implemented it in their products. The advent of tools like ChatGPT stems primarily from the US. Not just this, but even in government related functions, AI and automation are gaining widespread prevalence. The police have started using facial recognition for crime prevention and computer programs are being written to track fake news on social media. While all this does benefit society, it also leads to loss of jobs for millions of workers, among other issues. The US government has already taken important steps including an executive order for companies to take active efforts to rule out bias in their AI algorithms and creating an "AI Bill of rights". Being a driver of AI and automation in the workplace, the United States plays a key role in finding solutions to this pressing issue.

### China

China has embraced AI as a key driver of economic development and innovation, including its impact on the labor market. The Chinese government sees AI as a strategic technology that can enhance productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness across various industries. While emphasizing the positive contributions of AI to economic growth, China is also aware of the challenges and disruptions it poses to traditional employment. The government has expressed the need for proactive measures to address potential job displacement, emphasizing reskilling and upskilling initiatives to prepare the workforce for AI-driven transformations. Additionally, China has recognized the importance of international cooperation in setting ethical standards and guidelines for the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies, including those related to labor issues. However, having the reputation of doing mass surveillance, there are concerns of China misusing AI for workplace surveillance, causing privacy issues.

### Singapore

Singapore, too, has seen a massive transformation with companies leaning towards technologies like AI and machine learning which will improve revenues and efficiency for businesses and employers. Singapore views AI as a boon that it wants to leverage as quickly as possible. In fact, Singaporeans are

one of the highest users of AI at work, with 68% of workers using AI. The government is optimistic that AI will open new avenues for the country and will lead to a boost in productivity. As long-term measures, the government has already started education programs with all students in Nanyang Technology University (NTU) learning Python and associated machine learning tools.

## Germany

Germany has tried to implement AI in the workforce too, but has met lots of backlash. Approximately 61% of them are concerned that AI will take their jobs. At the same time, the IT sector in Germany is transforming with more companies adopting AI creating jobs in new avenues like machine learning, computer vision and natural language processing. The ethical concerns due to the increased adoption of AI have yet not been directly addressed, but the EU's proactive reaction to AI seems promising to curtail any ethical issues due to AI.

## International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The ILO approaches the intersection of AI and labor issues with a global perspective, focusing on ensuring that technological advancements benefit workers worldwide. The ILO recognizes the potential for AI to transform the world of work and improve productivity but underscores the importance of addressing associated challenges, including potential job displacement. The organization advocates for a human-centered approach to AI that prioritizes social justice, inclusive growth and the well-being of workers. The ILO emphasizes the need for international cooperation to develop policies and standards that safeguard workers' rights, promote decent work, and address the ethical implications of AI in the workplace. As a specialized agency of the United Nations, the ILO actively engages in research, policy development and collaboration with member states to navigate the complexities of AI and ensure that technological advancements contribute positively to the global workforce.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Name	Description
1950	Alan Turing develops the Turing Test	The Turing Test is used to identify whether a machine is artificially intelligent or not.
1980	First conference of AAAI is held at Stanford	AAAI (Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence) promotes research in AI.
1993	The word "cybernetics" is included in the Oxford English Dictionary.	Cybernetics is the study of human/machine interaction and its inclusion in the dictionary reflects the growing influence of AI and technology on the

		world.
September, 1st, 2013	Oxford University study reports that 47% of jobs are at risk of automation in the next 2 decades	Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne conduct a study titled "The Future of Employment". Not only do they show AI/automation affecting jobs, but also show a negative correlation between wages and education with an occupation's probability of computerisation.
2016	The term "Fourth Industrial Revolution" is coined.	Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, coined this term to refer to the advent of AI and how it will eat into the job market. This follows the first 3 industrial revolutions which drastically transformed the job market.
September, 2019	EU releases guidelines on AI ethics	The European Union published a document outlining guidelines for the ethical and responsible use of AI.
March, 2020	COVID-19 pandemic hits globally	Lockdowns due to COVID-19 force people to switch to a work-from-home model, resulting in much more widespread use of technology
2020	National AI Advisory Committee established by the US government	With the rising use of AI and the advent of COVID, the US government wanted to have some control over AI usage and thus established this committee of experts to regulate AI.
April, 2021	EU publishes a proposal for an Artificial Intelligence Act	The EU takes stronger steps to control AI and its ethical issues with regards to labor through legislation in the form of an AI act.
November 25th, 2021	All member states of UNESCO adopt a global agreement on AI ethics	This was the first ever global agreement on Ethics of AI and 193 countries signed it.
November 30th, 2022	ChatGPT is launched	ChatGPT was launched by OpenAI revolutionizing the way we think about AI and its applications.
February 9th, 2023	California State government introduces SB 398	SB 398 is targeted towards using AI for government initiatives, signifying how governments are also trying to adopt AI, displacing jobs.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, 18th January 2018 (A/RES/72/242)
- Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, 3rd December 2018 (A/RES/73/17)
- UNESCO Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, 25 November 2021

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Efforts to address issues related to AI and labor have been seen at a national and international level.

At the national level, some countries like Japan, China and the UK have introduced or considered legislation to regulate the impact of AI on the workforce, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and worker rights. Germany has tried to bring a strong focus on vocational training and Industry 4.0 initiatives that aid workers in adapting to AI-driven changes. South Korea is integrating AI education into schools and promoting public-private partnerships for workforce innovation. The US is encouraging public investment in AI research and development, along with community college programs targeting technology fields. Singapore's SkillsFuture initiative encourages continuous skill development, while Industry Transformation Maps guide sectors through digital transformations. These national efforts showcase a commitment to addressing workforce challenges in the era of AI through education, innovation, and strategic collaboration.

On an international scale, global institutions have engaged in discussions about the future of work in the age of AI. The European Union has proposed regulations such as the Artificial Intelligence Act, aiming to establish clear rules for trustworthy AI. The International Labour Organization (ILO) established the Global Commission on the Future of Work to recommend human-centered policies. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) promotes responsible AI adoption through its endorsed AI Principles. The World Economic Forum's Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution engages in global dialogues and collaborations to address challenges posed by technologies like AI. UNESCO contributes to ethical AI discussions with its Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. The World Bank emphasizes investing in education and training, while the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) launched a Global Initiative on AI and Data Commons for responsible AI deployment. These initiatives collectively shape the global narrative on AI and labor, fostering collaboration and ethical frameworks for the responsible adoption of AI technologies.

However, despite these attempts, challenges persist, including the need for standardized global regulations, addressing biases in AI systems, and ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of policies to safeguard the rights and well-being of workers in the face of advancing



technologies.

## Possible Solutions

### Addressing job displacement due to automation

Addressing job displacement due to AI requires a multifaceted approach that considers both short-term and long-term strategies.

Firstly, investing in reskilling employees is vital. This can be done through front-line training programmes and scholarships for college tuition. Through e-learning, companies can leverage platforms like Coursera and Udemy to help create online courses for employees. Amazon, one of the largest technology companies in the world, has invested \$1.2 billion in upskilling programs to provide employees with an opportunity to move into better paying jobs. Upskilling/reskilling employees instead of firing them, will not only help employees keep their jobs but also increase productivity and loyalty.

Secondly, governments need to make policy changes and provide support to workers. Governments can enact policies that incentivise companies to invest in workforce retraining through mechanisms like tax incentives or subsidies. They can also support individuals who are facing unemployment by giving them income support and other social safety nets to help them make the transition to more tech-friendly jobs.

Finally, global collaboration is essential for the issue to be solved. Countries need to share best practices, research, and policies for managing the impact of AI on employment. Together, the committee needs to work towards establishing global standards for AI development and deployment to ensure a consistent and ethical approach worldwide.

### Addressing ethical considerations in AI-driven decision making related to jobs

The most important solution to this is having algorithmic transparency and accountability. One possible solution could be to develop and implement AI systems that are easily explainable and transparent. This involves creating algorithms that provide clear insights into how they make decisions, enabling both users and affected individuals to understand the rationale behind AI-driven choices. These algorithms should also be auditable. Standards and regulations could be established that require organizations to have regular audits of their AI systems, ensuring that these systems adhere to ethical guidelines and do not perpetuate biases. Audits can help identify and rectify issues related to discrimination or unfair treatment.

Another important step is to try to develop diverse and inclusive AI from the get go. This can be by assembling teams comprising people from diverse occupations, ethnicities and races while developing the AI systems. The dataset used to train the AI model must be balanced and account for any biases. It is also important to implement rigorous testing protocols to identify and mitigate biases in AI

algorithms. Continuously monitoring and conducting periodic check-ins of the algorithm could also prevent discrimination in the outcomes.

### Addressing workplace surveillance and privacy issues due to AI

The most important step is to keep privacy in mind while designing AI systems. This involves integrating privacy considerations into the initial stages of system development, ensuring that minimal data is used and user consent is prioritized. At the same time, while collecting data it is important to collect it anonymously to protect individual identities. This approach helps in achieving the intended surveillance goals without compromising the privacy of specific employees.

Another solution is for governments to make clear policies about the use of AI in the workplace for surveillance. Governments should enforce their policies by ensuring that company policy also reflects the same values. Communication between the employer and the employee should be transparent, with employees being aware of the types of data collected, the purposes for which the data will be used, and the safeguards in place to protect individual privacy. Moreover, involving employees in the decision-making process and addressing their concerns fosters a sense of trust and ensures that surveillance practices are aligned with ethical standards and legal requirements.

Lastly, educating workers about AI and its uses, possibly through government education programs will ensure that employees will know when they are being tracked and their privacy is being violated.

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