



Event: Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals

Date: Tuesday 7 May 2024

Venue: Online

Session topic: Panel 2: Real-Life Examples of AI Contributions to the SDGs

Session time: 4:30 – 5:50 p.m. (EDT)

Length of speech/intervention: 5 minutes – 656 words

Speaking Posture: Live oral intervention

Ladies and gentlemen,

Artificial intelligence (AI) is already impacting the world of work through various channels, creating both opportunities and risks. According to ILO’s research, artificial intelligence won’t lead to a “jobs apocalypse” but it will have a significant impact on working conditions, employment relations and job quality, as well as recruitment.

For these reasons, AI has a potentially profound impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. At the same time, AI can potentially help accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

In this context, I would like to share the specific application of AI to labour inspection, which is a key institution to enforce labour laws and has a critical role in relation to SDG 8.7 on eradicating forced and child labour and SDG 8.8 on promoting safe and secure working environments.

How can AI augment labour inspection and ensure better enforcement of regulations that aim to improve not only Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) but also address other labour law violations and non-compliance?

In recent decades, labour inspectorates around the world have moved to a more strategic approach that draws on data and risk assessments to help target enforcement and promote compliance. AI now offers the possibility of further improving the effectiveness of these approaches.

Let me turn to a specific example from an EU-funded ILO project in Albania. In 2021, the ILO and the Albanian Inspectorate of Labour and Social Services embarked on a joint effort to bolster the inspectorate's effectiveness in addressing undeclared work using the power of data mining and machine learning to develop a new risk assessment tool.

This new tool draws from historical data to predict potential hotspots of undeclared work or other labour law and occupational safety and health violations. AI helps to spot labour law violation trends early, providing the government with a greater ability to prevent new schemes when they are in their embryonic phase.

According to an ILO study conducted as part of the project, the use of the risk assessment tool utilizing data mining and machine learning increases the predictive accuracy of undeclared and underdeclared work by 30 per cent compared to the prior approach.

The predictive power of this risk assessment tool is expected to increase as more data is collected. To ensure that bias is reduced and new trends in employer behaviour are identified, the Albanian labour inspectorate is making sure that around 30 per cent of inspection visits are **not** planned based on the AI predictions, but randomly or due to other grounds.

It is not surprising that AI and predictive analytics are becoming common practice in many labour inspectorates.

Lessons from this project include two key takeaways. First, it is important to actively involve the users in the development of the application. Second, training of inspectors is critical. These steps promote full ownership and upskilling necessary for success.

Therefore, as we see in all use cases for AI, it is critical we do not take humans out of the loop – we need to employ these tools to improve the quality of labour inspections, but **not** to replace inspectors.

We need to keep this principle firmly in mind as we apply new technologies to additional cases, such as the use of AI in job matching and career guidance, which should be part of an integrated and coherent data strategy and not a replacement for people providing employment services. Having humans in the loop will also help identify and tackle potential biases in AI application.

The ILO calls for a human-centred approach to AI that recognizes both the opportunities and challenges that these technologies pose for the world of work. New approaches must take a comprehensive view of the benefits and risks, firmly based on evidence and social dialogue.

Bringing in social partners assures grounding in practicalities of the world of work and allows workers and employers a voice in their future.

Thank you.