

International seminar

Labour informality: challenges posed by technological change, territorial inequality and the need for social protection

Santiago, Chile, 6 and 7 October 2021

Rapid technological progress has changed Latin American societies and labour markets profoundly. It has facilitated the expansion of new business models, mainly those related to services mediated by digital platforms. This includes web-based work, where a platform intermediates between the worker and the employer who can be anywhere in the world, and location-based work. Although the latter has generated many employment possibilities mainly in large cities, the jobs in question lack a standard employment relationship and thus, in most cases, access to social protection. Similarly, technological advances have impacted the daily work of many occupations, transforming the worker skills that are most highly valued. In this context, the workers who are most adaptable and have greatest access to technology and digital skills will benefit the most.

These changes are occurring in societies in which labour informality is a structural phenomenon, where many workers lack the minimum conditions of decent jobs (no employment contracts, no health or pension coverage or other social protection entitlements). The phenomenon of informality cuts across the axes of social inequality in the region, giving rise to significant gender, ethnic and racial, socio-economic, age and territorial inequalities.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has hastened these changes and, unless rapid action is taken, there is a risk that the gaps that already exist will widen. In the next few years, governments must prepare to build a solid institutional framework that will enable them to take advantage of technological progress to promote decent work and reduce inequalities.

Objective: The seminar aims to promote regional and interregional dialogue, based on the main findings of the project “Technological transformations in Latin America: promoting productive jobs and confronting the challenge of new forms of informal employment”, which has been implemented in seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico and Uruguay), identifying policy recommendations and key milestones for implementation.

<https://www.cepal.org/en/technological-transformations-latin-america-productive-jobs>

Programme

Wednesday 6 October	
10–10.30 a.m.	<p>Opening Daniel Titelman, Chief of the Economic Development Division, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Alberto Arenas de Mesa, Chief of the Social Development Division, ECLAC</p>
Panel 1: Platform work and decent employment	
<p>New technologies have generated new forms of business through which paid work opportunities have been created. These include workers who provide transportation and delivery services known as “location-based platform workers”. This group of workers has grown in recent years in Latin America. Governments are currently engaged in designing regulatory frameworks appropriate to this new labour market reality, with a view to providing decent working conditions for the workers in question.</p> <p>This panel aims to present progress in the measurement and regulation of platform labour in the region, in order to make recommendations for fostering decent work.</p>	
10.30–11.45 a.m.	<p>Moderator: Jürgen Weller, international consultant with the Employment Studies Unit, Economic Development Division, ECLAC</p> <p>Colombia “Promoting decent work for platform workers in Colombia” David Bardey, Consultant with ECLAC, Universidad de los Andes</p> <p>Mexico “Emerging occupations in the digital economy and their regulation in Mexico” Graciela Bensusan, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Chile “Platform work in Chile and challenges for decent work” Pablo Morris, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Caribbean “Decent work for the Caribbean workers” Reynold Simons, Labour Market specialist</p>
Comments	
11.45 a.m.– 12.15 p.m.	<p>Mr. Andrés Uribe, Vice-Minister of Employment and Pensions, Ministry of Labour of Colombia</p> <p>Mtro. Omar Nacib Estefan Fuentes, General Director Social Protection, Department of labour, México</p> <p>Mr Arturo Arriagada - Fairwork Foundation</p>
12.15–1 p.m.	Question and answer session

1 p.m.	Close
<p>Panel 2: Technological change and skills for the future</p> <p>Rapid technological progress in information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence and robotics is rapidly changing the way people live, learn and work. In this process, the skills or competencies demanded by the labour market are also changing. Evidence suggests that the labour market has become more demanding in terms of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, prioritizing the management of new technologies, while also valuing socioemotional skills.</p> <p>This panel aims to report on progress made on the measurement of skills and the collection of data on skills in the region, in order to make recommendations for the design of policies to reduce skill mismatches.</p>	
2.30–3.30 p.m.	<p>Moderators: Sonia Gontero, Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Development Division, ECLAC</p> <p>Measuring skills mismatch in Latin America Rafael Novella, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>O*NET Uruguay. Methodologies for using skills data from occupational surveys Miguel Velardez, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Big Data. Using job vacancies to identify the skill demand and supply Emanuel Menendez, Consultant with ECLAC</p>
Comments	
3.30–4 p.m.	<p>Maria José Gonzalez, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Uruguay</p> <p>Felipe McRostie, National Training and Employment Service (SENCE), Chile</p> <p>Juan Manuel Rodríguez Bas, former Director of the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (INEFOP), Uruguay</p>
4–4.50 p.m.	Question and answer session
4.50–5 p.m.	Close

Thursday 7 October	
9–9.15 a.m.	<p>Welcoming remarks Martín Abeles, Chief of the ECLAC office in Buenos Aires</p>
<p>Panel 3: Social protection for informal workers</p> <p>Among the responses deployed by the countries to mitigate and protect against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a set of measures targeting informal workers were created in the region. This is a noteworthy element of the social policy response, since these workers had traditionally been outside the scope of social protection policies, or else had less access to them.</p> <p>In addition to characterizing the response of countries in terms of social protection for informal workers, especially during the pandemic, this panel will discuss priority policies to expand universal access to social protection, in a context marked by the pandemic and the strategic orientations towards recovery.</p>	
9.15–10.15 a.m.	<p>Moderators: Claudia Robles, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, ECLAC</p> <p>Policies to address the challenges of old and new forms of informality in Latin America Laís Abramo, International Consultant with Social Development Division, at ECLAC</p> <p>Social protection of informal workers from the impacts of COVID-19 Mario Velásquez, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Social policy in the context of COVID and the recovery. The experience of Argentina Vanesa Wainstein, Special Advisor for the International Affairs and Relationships, Ministry of Social Development, Argentina</p> <p>Social protection policies in the midst of COVID-19, Representative of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS), Peru (TBC)</p>
Comments	
10.15–10.45 a.m.	<p>Roxana Maurizio, Regional Specialist in Labour Economics for Latin America and the Caribbean, International Labour Organization (ILO)</p> <p>Laura Alfes, Director of the Social Protection Programme, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)</p>
10.45–11.30 a.m.	Questions and discussion
11.30 a.m.	Close

Panel 4: Labour informality at the subnational level

Labour informality is a structural phenomenon in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Since its origin, the discussion on this topic has been associated with the issues of poverty and income inequality. By contrast, the relationship between informality and the other structural axes of social inequality —such as gender, ethnicity or race, age and territory— has been developed less.

This panel aims to advance the discussion on the relationship between informality and territorial inequalities. It will report the results of applying the methodology to estimate labour informality at the subnational level in four of the region’s countries; and it will identify the relevance of this methodology for the design of public policies aimed at reducing labour informality at the territorial level.

2.30–3.30 p.m.	<p>Moderators: Soledad Villafaña, Economic Affairs Officer, ECLAC office in Buenos Aires</p> <p>Proposal for estimating Informality at the subnational level, and the estimation of informality at the district level in Peru. Andrés Espejo, Consultant with the Social Development Division of ECLAC</p> <p>Estimation of informality in the departments of Argentina Lucía Trujillo, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Estimation of informality in the communes of Chile Felipe Livert, Consultant with ECLAC and Fidel Miranda, Consultant with ECLAC</p> <p>Estimation of informality in the municipalities of Mexico Eduardo Ibarra-Olivo, Consultant with ECLAC</p>
Comments	
3.30–4 p.m.	<p>Humberto Soto, Social Affairs Officer, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters in Mexico</p> <p>Fabio Bertranou, Director of the Office for the Southern Cone of Latin America of the International Labour Organization (ILO)</p>
4–4.50 p.m.	Questions and discussion
4.50–5 p.m.	Close