SEIZING CONTROL

TRANSPORT WORKERS' PRINCIPLES FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

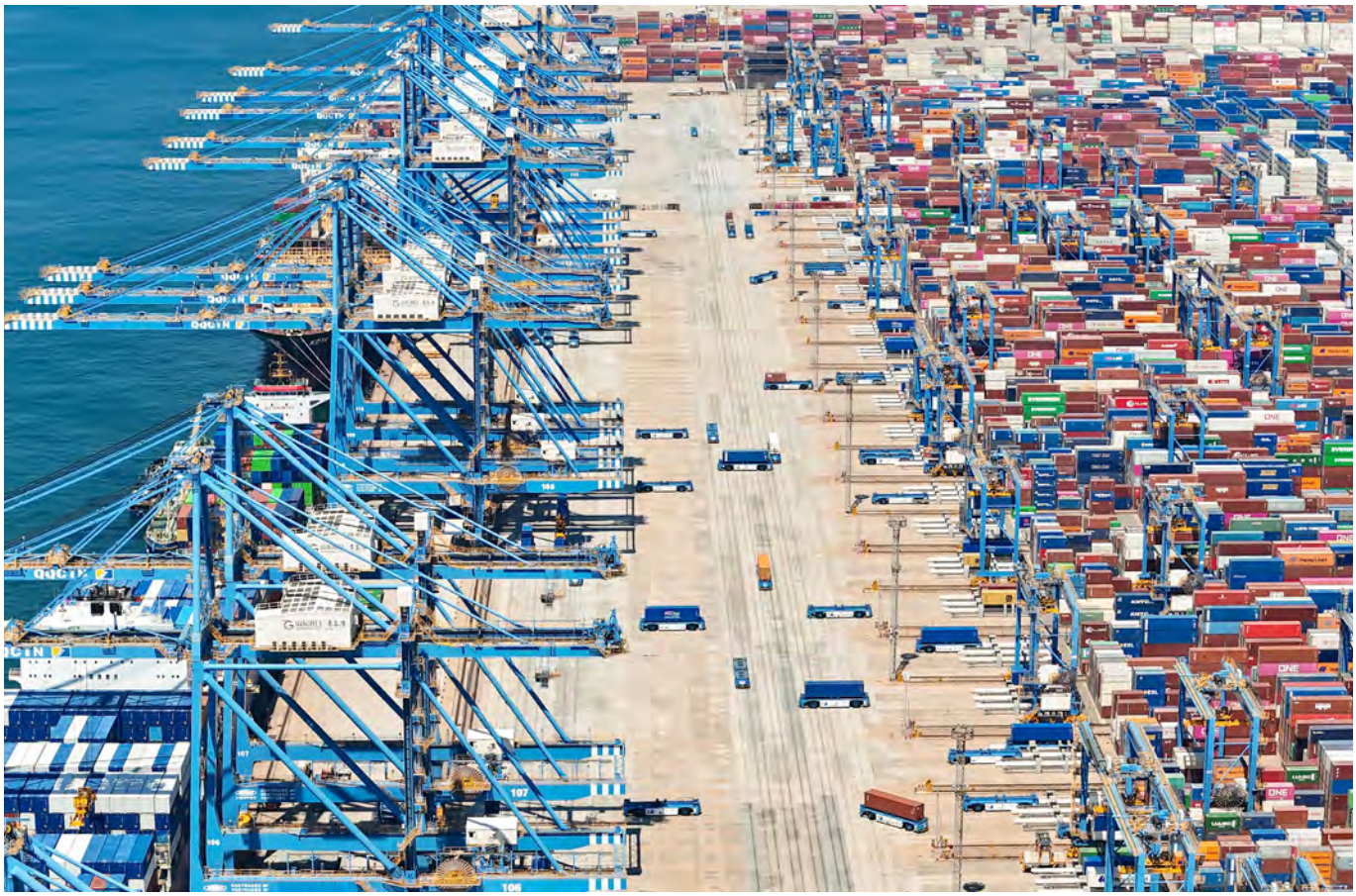
INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION

SEIZING CONTROL: TRANSPORT WORKERS' PRINCIPLES FOR AI

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) makes it more urgent than ever that the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) sets out a clear position on its impact on workers and our society – and clear demands in response.

Employers and policymakers often highlight AI's potential to improve productivity, efficiency and safety. But for transport workers, AI poses serious risks to jobs, working conditions, privacy, occupational safety and health (OSH), and fundamental labour rights. AI systems produce errors, amplify biases and are already being deployed in ways that undermine workers' rights and safety.

This paper sets out how AI is currently being deployed across the transport industry, the risks and opportunities for workers, and the critical role of trade unions in shaping and seizing control of how AI is regulated, negotiated and used.



WHAT IS AI?

AI is a broad term covering emerging technologies, including automated decision-making systems, predictive tools, and generative and semi-autonomous systems.

AI is used in different ways across the transport sector by employers and workers alike. This diversity means there is no single regulatory or bargaining response. Worker-centred rules, collective agreements and sector-specific approaches must instead be tailored to how AI is deployed in specific workplaces and operations.

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USE OF AI IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

AI is already widely used across transport and logistics, including:

- Digitalised administrative processes (including recruitment and management functions)
- Operational intelligence (forecasting, real-time information)
- Fleet management (digital telematics, eco-driving, performance management)
- Warehouse operating systems
- Platform and gig economy (matching, route-planning, fare-setting)
- Safety management (driver monitoring, cognitive fatigue monitoring)
- Traffic management, scheduling and signalling systems
- Passenger management systems (airports, rail, metro)
- Security systems (facial recognition, pattern recognition)
- Automation (rail, cargo and baggage handling, ticketing)
- Signalling and rail traffic control
- Autonomous vehicles and navigation systems
- Truck and vessel platooning
- Remote operation (air traffic control, port gates, robotics)

Image credit: Eri Konno, The Yomiuri Shimbun via Reuters Connect

IMPACTS ON JOBS AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The full impact of AI on transport jobs remains uncertain. Current evidence suggests that AI is more likely to augment work rather than to replace it outright – increasing work intensity, task volume and responsibility. But AI is already displacing workers and driving real job destruction, particularly in transport jobs requiring cognitive skills.

Young workers risk losing decent entry-level jobs, older workers face exclusion where reskilling and redeployment are neglected, and female-dominated occupations like admin and clerical support – where women in transport are concentrated – face almost double the exposure to generative AI compared to male-dominated roles. In an industry already failing to build a diverse workforce, this should concern everyone.

AI – for the moment – struggles with accuracy, security and reliability. Workers are required to correct AI outputs or manage system failures, increasing responsibility and stress without corresponding recognition, training or pay. In safety-critical transport work, these failures carry real danger – not just for the workers left to manage them, but for passengers and the public, infrastructure and the environment.

One of the most significant changes is the expansion of algorithmic management. These systems allocate tasks, monitor performance, influence pay, and shape hiring and dismissal decisions. Through algorithmic control and surveillance, workers are watched, measured and managed by systems they cannot see, question or control. This is common in platform-based transport work, which relies on constant data collection, opaque decision-making and limited human oversight. It undermines workers' privacy, due process, collective rights and trade union freedoms, and the role of human judgement itself.

AI must therefore be understood not only as a technology, but as a tool reshaping power relations at work.

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RISKS TO SAFETY, HEALTH AND RIGHTS

AI presents both opportunities and serious risks for transport workers' safety. While some systems can remove workers from hazardous tasks, many others are accompanied by invasive monitoring that increases stress, fatigue and burnout. And in transport, failure can be a matter of life and death.

Key risks include:

- Decisions based on inaccurate or biased data
- Incorrect correlations leading to unsafe or unfair outcomes
- Discrimination embedded in datasets or algorithms
- Erroneous prediction of behaviour, emotions or fatigue
- Reduced human judgement in safety-critical environments

These risks are not hypothetical. AI has already been involved in deaths and serious injuries in transport workplaces, alongside mounting psychosocial impacts from the loss of autonomy, isolation, constant surveillance and reduced human interaction at work. Even where AI systems function as designed, their use can still damage workers' mental health and dignity.

WIDER SOCIAL AND GLOBAL IMPACTS

AI development reflects and reinforces global inequalities. Ownership of AI infrastructure, data and platforms is dominated by a small number of corporations seeking control over the digital infrastructure that economies – including transport – run on. As in previous industrial and technological revolutions, the workforce developing AI lacks diversity – just 22% are women, for example – risking the perpetuation of existing inequalities. AI also relies on large-scale data extraction and on invisible data labour performed under precarious conditions, often in the Global South.

Regulatory protection is uneven: binding rules are emerging in some regions, while others see minimal oversight. Transport multinationals often exploit these regulatory gaps, applying different standards to workers in different regions. Tech giants are actively working to keep it that way – lobbying for deregulation while writing their interests into legislation and trade deals that seek to lock out regulation before workers ever get a seat at the table.

AI also carries a significant environmental cost due to its energy and water demands, placing additional strain on public infrastructure and climate goals. These impacts directly affect transport workers and the communities they serve.

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS

Regulatory responses to AI are evolving. In the European Union, binding frameworks including the AI Act, data protection laws and the Platform Work Directive are emerging and need to be strengthened. Elsewhere, governments still rely on voluntary guidelines offering little real protection for workers.

This cannot be a moment of passivity for the trade union movement. Unions must be at the table when decisions about AI are made. The ITF demands rights-based, binding and enforceable regulation, developed through social dialogue and industrial democracy – where workers are actively involved in decision-making, with real responsibility and authority in the workplace. Collective bargaining, worker participation and international coordination are essential to ensuring AI is used to improve, rather than undermine, transport work.

Workers and their unions must have the right to:

- Be informed and consulted before AI systems are introduced or changed.
- Participate in the design, deployment and evaluation of AI.
- Access meaningful transparency and accountability around data use and algorithmic systems.
- Meaningful human oversight and control in safety-critical and employment decisions.
- Share fairly in productivity gains through better pay, reduced working time and improved job quality.
- Secure employment status based on the reality of the working relationship, including algorithmic direction and control.

TRANSPORT WORKERS' PRINCIPLES FOR AI

The ITF's Transport Workers' Principles for AI are grounded in international labour standards, including the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment, ILO Convention 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, and the ILO Tripartite Declaration concerning Multinational Enterprises.

01. HUMAN RIGHTS, LABOUR RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY BY DESIGN

The ITF demands that AI systems in transport are designed, procured and deployed in full compliance with human rights and labour rights, including the International Labour Organization's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW). AI must not undermine freedom of association, collective bargaining, working conditions, equality, due process or worker dignity. Workers and their unions must be recognised as legitimate stakeholders in AI governance at workplace, company, sectoral and global levels, and actively involved in decision-making.

02. MANDATORY INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION

The introduction of AI constitutes a fundamental change to work organisation. The ITF demands legally enforceable rights for unions to be informed, consulted and to negotiate collective and other binding agreements from the point of conception, through to any introduction, modification or expansion of AI systems. This must apply across workplaces, supply chains and multinational operations, including transnational and sectoral agreements.

Workers must shape the technologies governing their work. AI must not replace labour, and upfront joint labour impact assessments – including impacts on job levels – must precede any AI rollout. Where AI may materially affect employment, employers must negotiate binding transition plans with unions guaranteeing job security, skills assessments, employer-funded training, and the retention and redeployment of existing workers. This must align with national employment policy under ILO Convention 122 which commits states to full, productive and freely chosen employment.

03. HUMAN OVERSIGHT AND DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

In safety-critical transport operations, human judgement is irreplaceable – lives depend on it. The ITF demands that AI complements, never replaces human decision-making: humans must always retain final authority. Automated hiring, firing, disciplinary or pay decisions, and algorithmic management systems that undermine FPRW and workers' dignity, must be prohibited. Workers must have the right to challenge AI-driven decisions, receive a written substantiated reply, appeal to a human authority, and access an effective remedy.

04. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH AND THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

AI introduces new physical and psychosocial risks. The ITF demands that AI systems are subject to independent OSH risk assessments before deployment, and that psychosocial risks such as stress, fatigue and surveillance are explicitly addressed. Employers and technology providers must explicitly evidence how AI systems make workplaces safer: the burden of proof lies with them, not workers. Workers retain the right to stop work where AI systems create unsafe conditions.

05. DATA RIGHTS, TRANSPARENCY AND ALGORITHMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Data generated by workers is the product of their labour. The ITF demands that this is recognised, that workers are given informed consent, and that they are compensated for it. Employers must ensure transparency over data collection, processing and algorithmic decision-making, union access to intelligible information, joint bias/discrimination audits, and enforce strict limits on surveillance and biometric technologies, including their absolute prohibition in specific instances. Workers must also retain rights to access, rectify and erase their personal data. Employers cannot evade responsibility by blaming algorithms or vendors.

06. EQUALITY, GENDER JUSTICE AND YOUTH PROTECTION

AI systems can reproduce inequalities – against women, young workers, older workers, migrants and workers with disabilities - unless actively corrected. The ITF demands the active involvement in women, young workers and other marginalised or vulnerable groups in AI development and collective bargaining, alongside mandatory impact assessments, bias testing in hiring, scheduling and performance systems, and protection from the negative impacts of automated management. AI must support skills development, progression and decent work, not deskilling or deepening inequality. And given both the transport and AI sectors' gendered division of labour, AI's expansion must go hand in hand with renewed efforts on gender equality and equal representation.

07. CORPORATE AND SUPPLY CHAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

The ITF demands that multinational companies apply the highest labour standards globally – not the weakest local regulation – and that these standards explicitly cover AI, algorithmic management and data governance. Companies and technology providers must conduct effective human rights and environmental due diligence to ensure accountability across the full supply chain.

08. FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

Where AI increases productivity, workers must benefit through higher wages, reduced working time with no loss of pay, improved job quality, employment security, and employer-funded training and reskilling. Workers must not bear the costs or risks of technological change.

Image credit: USA TODAY Network via Reuters Connect

USING AI TO STRENGTHEN UNION POWER

AI is not only a risk to workers; governed democratically, it can also be a tool for union power.

Unions can use AI to:

- Analyse employer data to expose unsafe scheduling, fatigue and excessive work intensity
- Identify discriminatory outcomes in pay, promotion and rostering
- Support organising in fragmented, outsourced or platform-based transport work
- Monitor compliance with collective agreements and corporate accountability agreements
- Strengthen bargaining through evidence-based claims
- Improve health and safety reporting and early risk detection

The ITF will support affiliates to build AI literacy and technical capacity, share tools and expertise across sectors, and use technology to strengthen organising, bargaining, enforcement and international solidarity.

The question is not whether AI will be used in transport, but who controls it, who benefits from it, and whose interests it serves.

The choice before us is stark: stand by while a handful of corporations write the rules of AI in transport – or organise, act and seize control for ourselves.

The ITF will continue to fight for a transport sector where AI advances safety, equality and decent work, and where workers, not algorithms, remain at the centre of decision-making.

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INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

49-60 Borough Road
London SE11DR
+44 (0)20 7403 2733