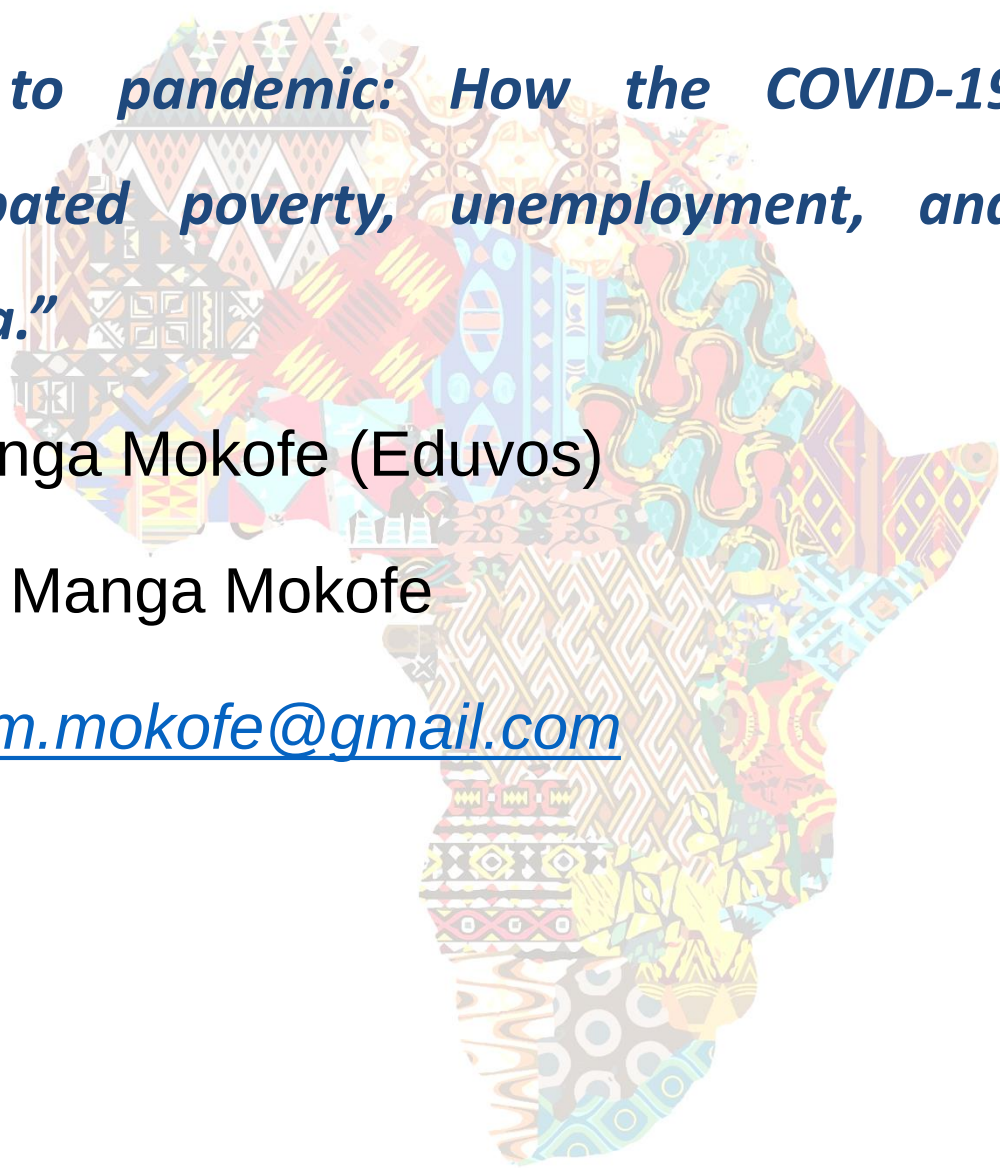




ILERA **AFRICA** 9th Regional Congress

26 - 29 September 2021





Title: *“From precarity to pandemic: How the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa.”*

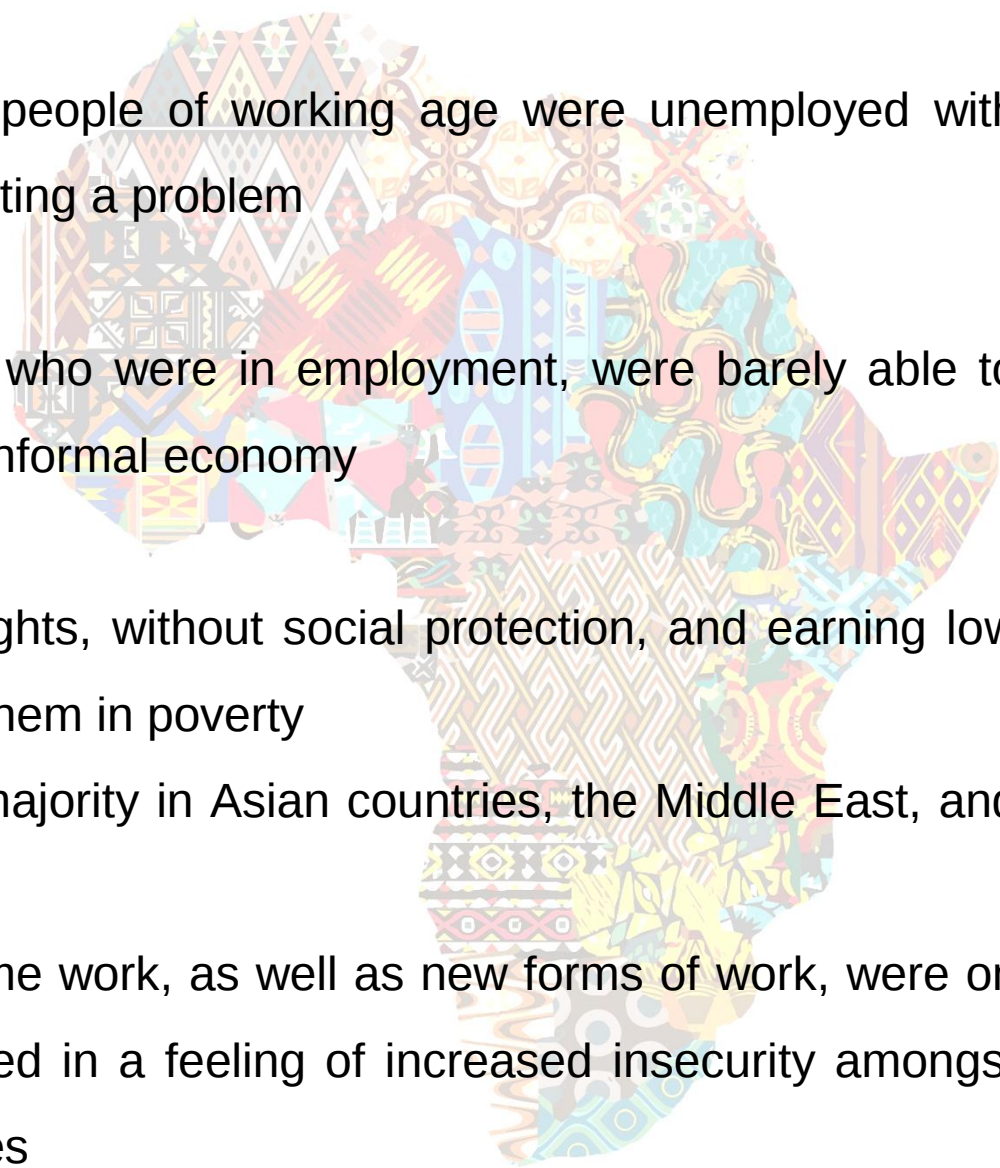
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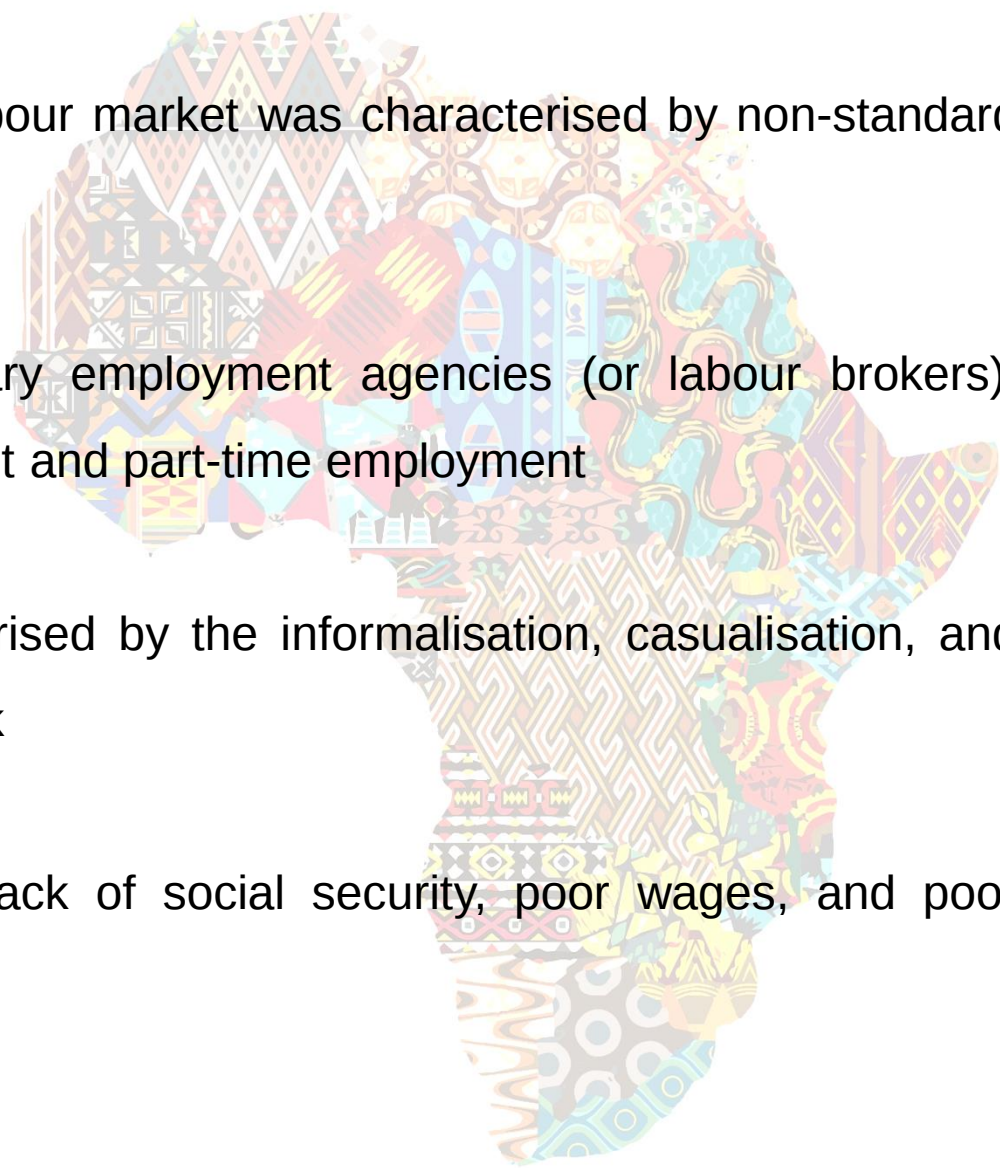
INTRODUCTION

- The pre-covid-19 world of work was rife with inequalities and difficulties
- Over 40 per cent of people of working age were unemployed with skills-mismatch presenting a problem
- The majority of those who were in employment, were barely able to eke out a living in the informal economy
- Most without labour rights, without social protection, and earning low incomes that trapped them in poverty
- A fate shared by the majority in Asian countries, the Middle East, and Latin America
- Temporary and part-time work, as well as new forms of work, were on the rise, that culminated in a feeling of increased insecurity amongst workers and businesses



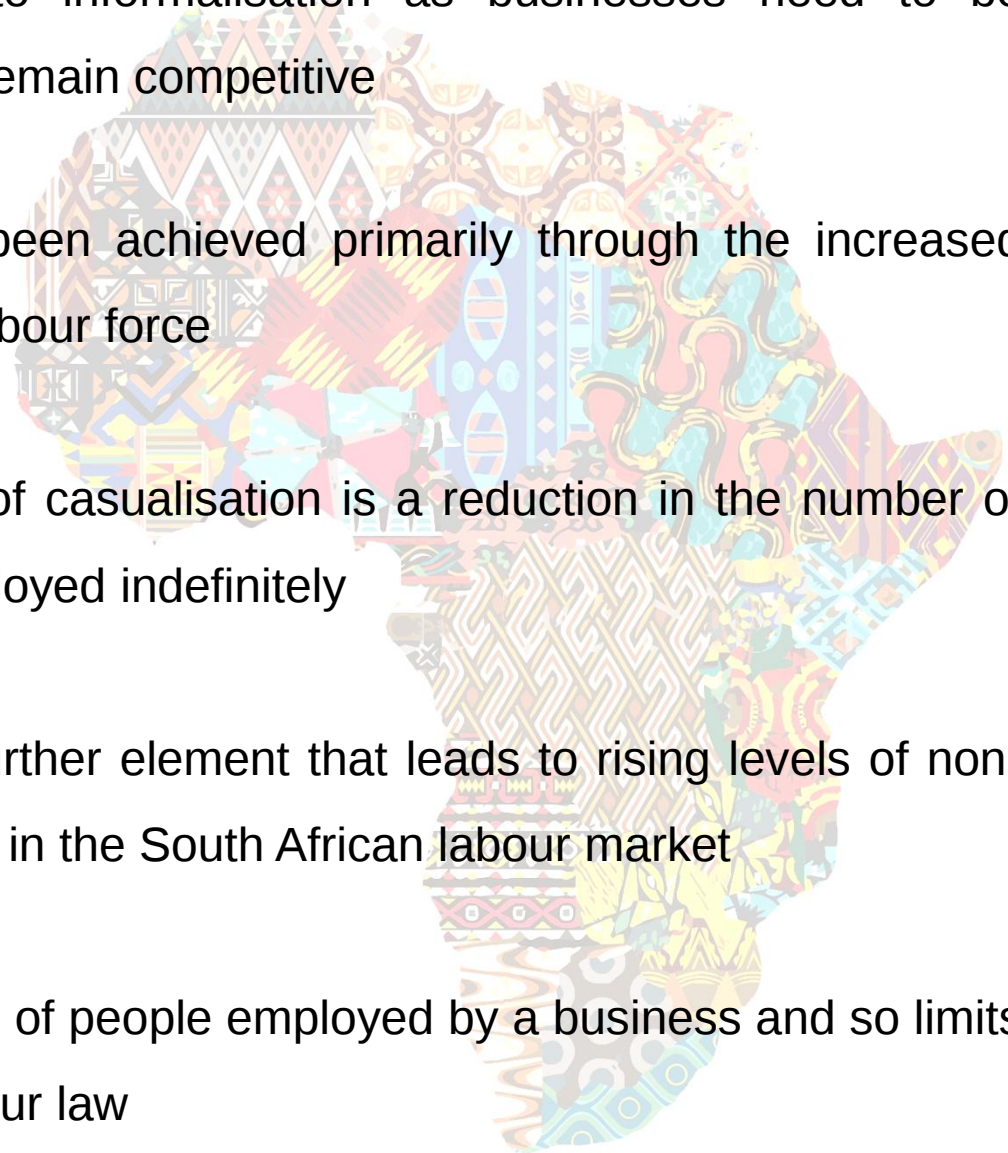
THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF WORK & PARADIGMS OF WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA BEFORE THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC

- The South African labour market was characterised by non-standard employment
- Made up of temporary employment agencies (or labour brokers), fixed-term employment and part-time employment
- It was also characterised by the informalisation, casualisation, and externalisation of work
- And Job insecurity, lack of social security, poor wages, and poor working conditions

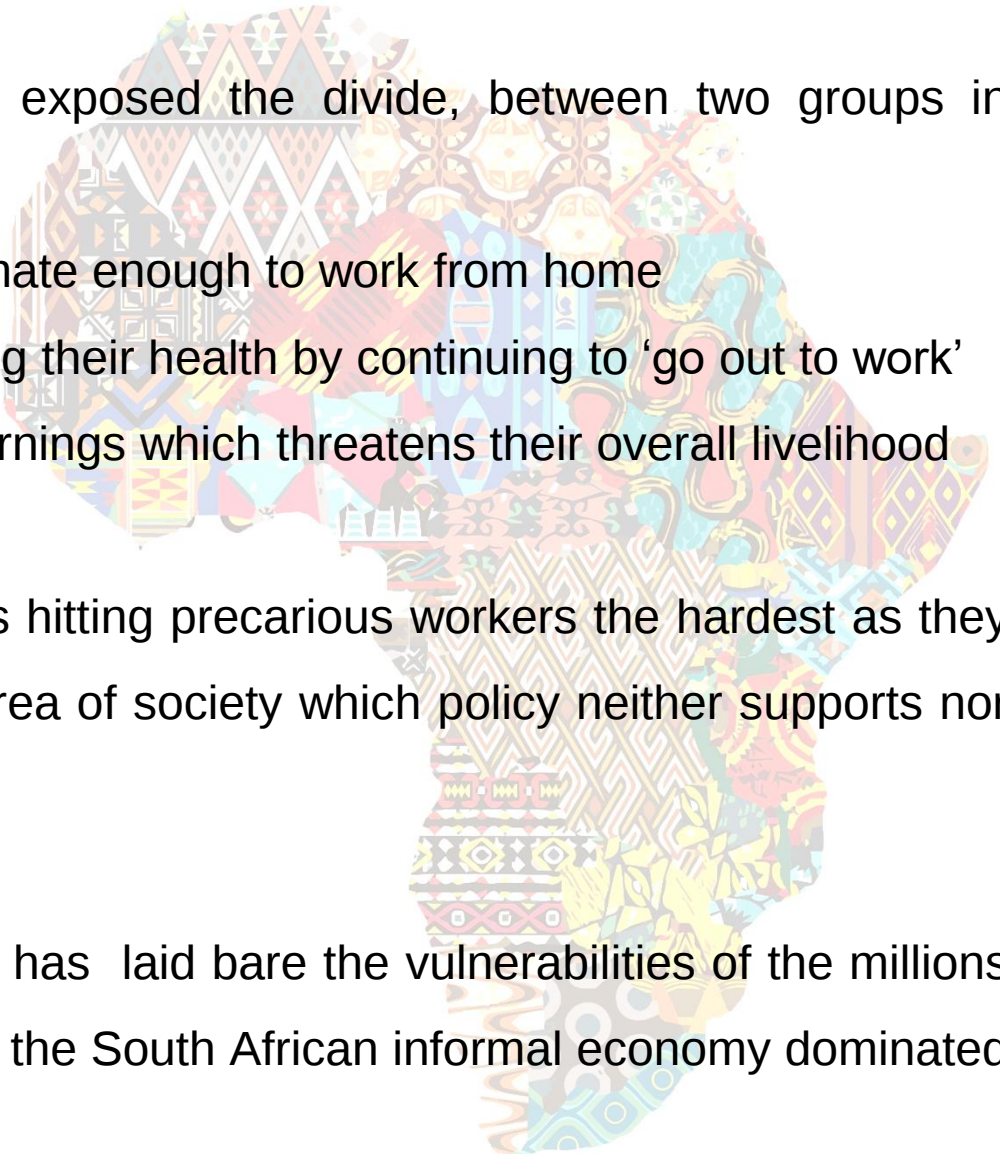


GLOBALISATION AND INFORMALISATION OF WORK

- Globalisation leads to informalisation as businesses need to be flexible if they are to remain competitive
- Informalisation has been achieved primarily through the increased casualisation of the labour force
- The eventual result of casualisation is a reduction in the number of workers who are employed indefinitely
- Externalisation is a further element that leads to rising levels of non-standard employment in the South African labour market
- It reduces the number of people employed by a business and so limits the application of labour law



THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MARKET AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

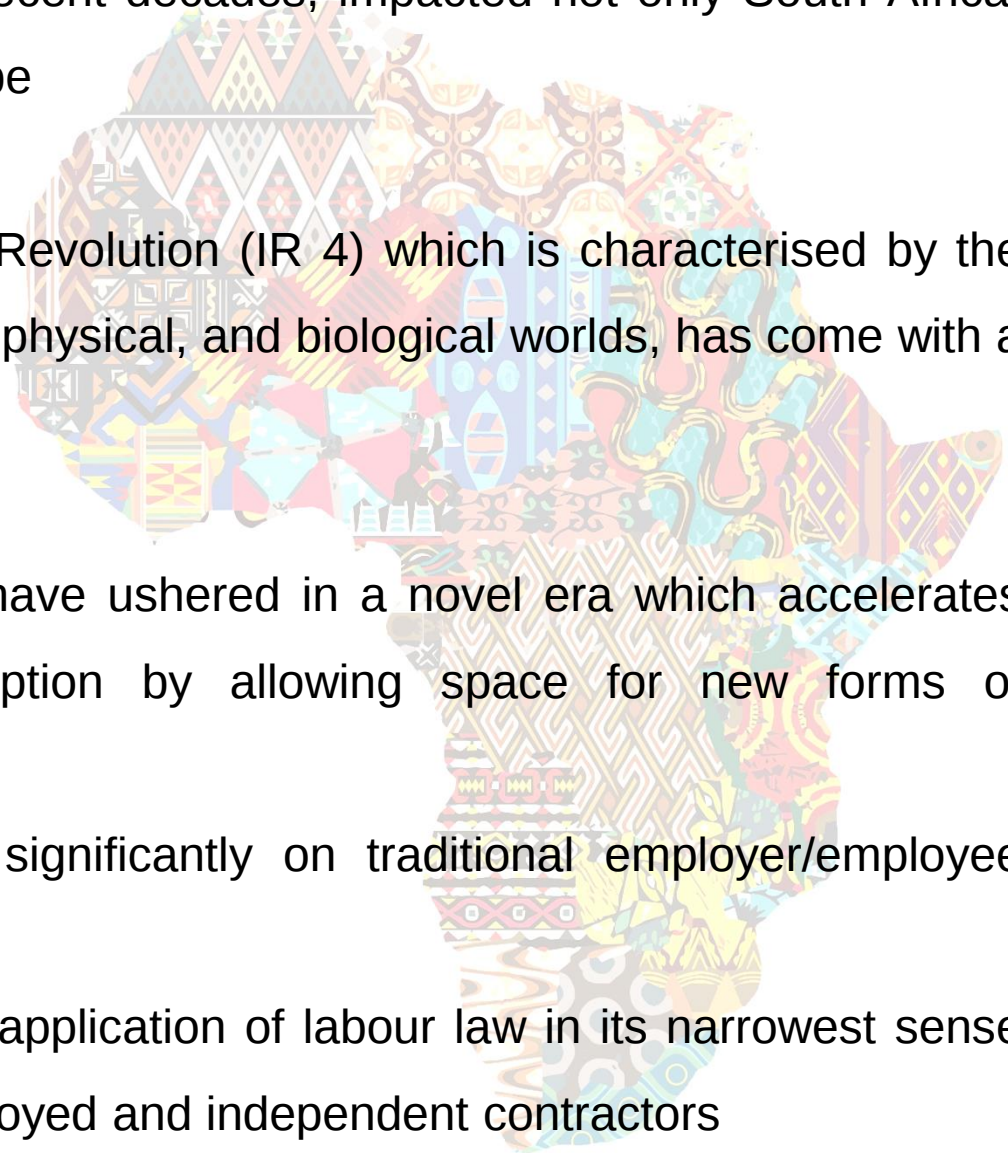
- The Covid-19 upsurge exposed the divide, between two groups in South Africa:
 - (a) those who are fortunate enough to work from home
 - (b) those who are risking their health by continuing to 'go out to work' to avoid a loss of earnings which threatens their overall livelihood
 - 'Coronavirus-poverty' is hitting precarious workers the hardest as they operate within a grey area of society which policy neither supports nor protects
 - The covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the vulnerabilities of the millions who earn a livelihood in the South African informal economy dominated by precarious work
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THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MARKET AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (CONT.)

- The Covid-19 scourge has also underscored the worrying consequences of inadequate coverage and efficiency gaps in social protection for workers within the South African labour market
- It has highlighted and reasserted the significance of ensuring adequate social-protection cover for workers in all forms of employment, adapted to their circumstances
- And the ILO's Centenary Declaration for the Future of work
- It is urgent to accelerate the development of social protection systems which will address the most pressing societal needs

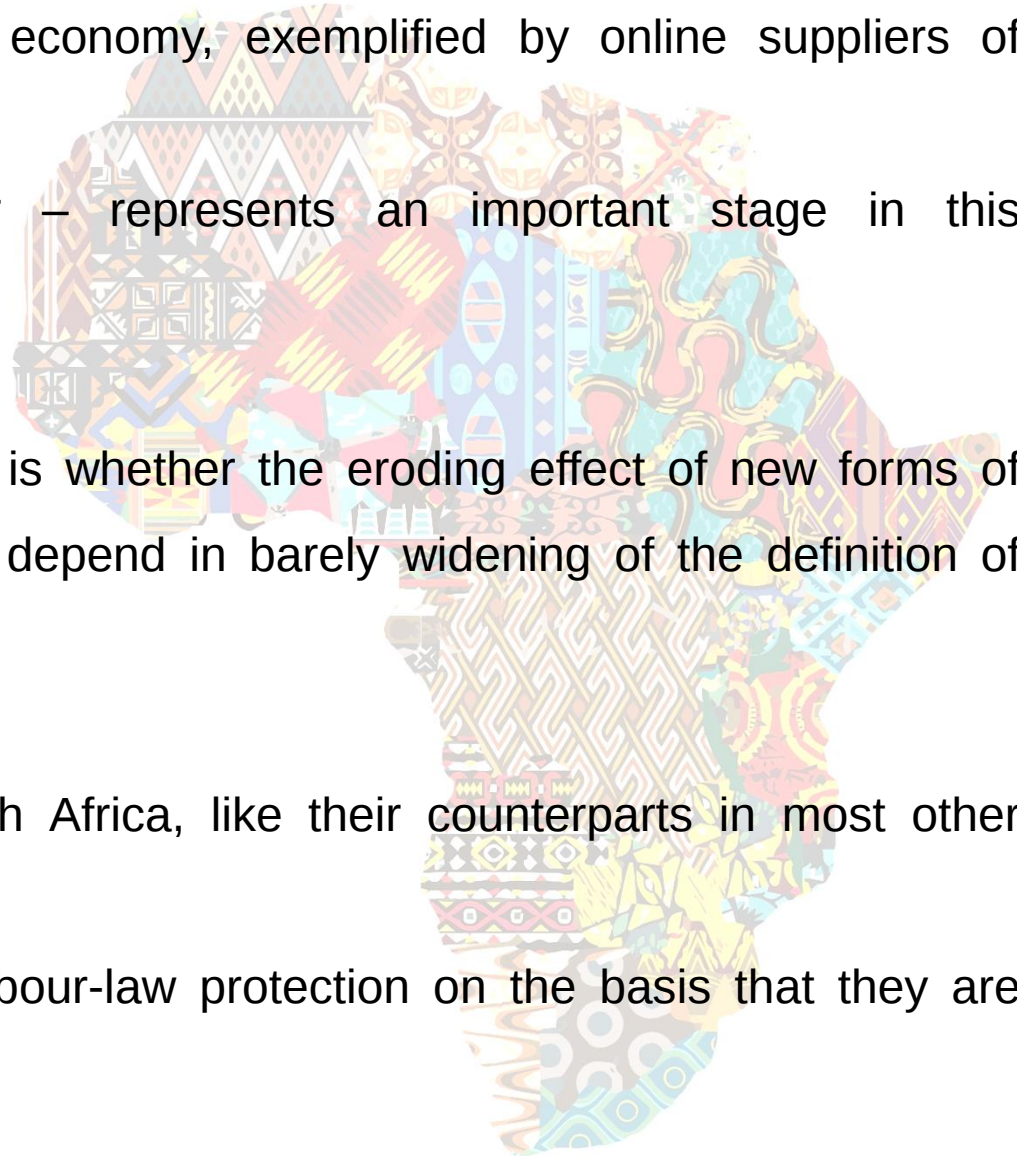
DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGE

- The disruptive technological changes and increasing socio-economic imbalances have, in recent decades, impacted not only South Africa, but also the entire globe
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4) which is characterised by the blending of the digital, physical, and biological worlds, has come with a lot of disruption
- These developments have ushered in a novel era which accelerates the process of disruption by allowing space for new forms of precarious work
- And have impacted significantly on traditional employer/employee relations
- Worth noting that the application of labour law in its narrowest sense excludes the self-employed and independent contractors



DISRUPTIVE NATURE OF WORK (CONT.)

- The digital platform economy, exemplified by online suppliers of goods and services
- For example, Uber – represents an important stage in this development
- The question arising is whether the eroding effect of new forms of work, such as Uber, depend in barely widening of the definition of employee?
- Uber drivers in South Africa, like their counterparts in most other countries
- Have appealed to labour-law protection on the basis that they are employees



THE FUTURE WORLD OF WORK

- The future world of work can create opportunities, provide decent work, improve the quality of working life
- And narrow the divide between workers and socio economic-inequality. However, it can also lead to job losses
- As a result, the Director - General of the ILO established the Global Commission on the Future of Work
- The Future of Work Report calls for a human - centered approach to the future of work
- The idea is to place people and their work 'at the centre of economic and social policy and business practice'
- In that sense, policies are best guided by the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

CONCLUSION

- The ILO has played a very significant role in developing labour standards and conventions and recognises precarious and digital workers
- Precarious workers are bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 shock, with low-skilled workers and those in vulnerable employment having been particularly exposed
- It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa
- While, the disruptive nature of new forms of work that are emerging during this period of the (4 IR) has not improved the situation
- The ILO still has a significant role to play in this regard
- And the government must step in and assist its citizens in the form of a minimum income grant during this difficult times.