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# International organisations: policy agendas and transfer mechanisms in global labour governance

**Dr Vicente Silva**
**London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Abstract**

For more than a century, international organisations have been interested in developing blueprints on labour market policy and employment regulations. This chapter studies the evolution of these institutions in the past four decades, focused on their contribution to global labour governance, i.e. the collective efforts to manage labour conditions made by transnational actors. The study looks at four organisations -the ILO, OECD, WB and IMF- to analyse their respective policy agendas on work and employment. The argument is that they possess different transfer mechanisms to influence policymaking at the national and local levels – which go from softer forms associated to ideational factors to harder mechanisms like financial conditionalities. Even though international institutions pursue their own mandates, they tend to focus on the same global agendas. The chapter indicates also how these four organisations have recently converged around specific policy models, such as the flexicurity approach in labour market policy.

**Keywords**

International organisations – Global labour governance – Policy transfer – Flexicurity – Globalisation – Future of work

## Introduction

The role of International Organisations (IOs) in shaping labour market policy has been object of significant academic research and debate in recent years. For more than a century, international agencies of different kinds have engaged with labour-related matters. As in most fields of public policy, these actors –multilateral bodies, civil society associations and regional organisations- constantly try to inform policymaking through the creation of initiatives, norms and reform plans. Even though labour market interventions and regulations are implemented primarily on a national or sectoral basis, the role of global governance cannot be overlooked, referring to the collective endeavours of international actors to address global issues "in the absence of a world government" (Weiss, 2013, p. 99). Although there are other relevant international policy actors (see chapter on the EU in this volume), this chapter is focused on the role of four major actors in global labour policy: the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and two international financial institutions: the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These agencies are arguably the most influential voices in the field insofar they act as 'global governors': they are "authorities who exercise power across borders for purposes of affecting policy” (Avant, Finnemore and Sell, 2012, p. 2). The two central ideas of the chapter are that IOs policy agendas on work and employment have been more adaptative than fixed in past decades, on the one hand; on the other, there has been convergence around an ‘inclusive liberal’ position across organisations recently despite their history of antagonism and contradiction.

**International organisations and global labour governance**

As a starting point for this chapter, it is relevant to specify what IOs are and how they operate in the field of global labour governance. With regards to the first question, different schools of thought have conceptualised IOs in various ways. They have been understood as providers of global public goods (Kaul, 2013); normative regimes that rule issue areas (Krasner, 1982); institutional templates and world values (Meyer, 2010), or as agents of globalisation (Woods, 2006). IOs can be seen from different angles because they are enormously complex and multidimensional. A useful formulation to make sense of such complexity has been proposed by Hurd (2011), for whom these organisations can be conceptualised as *actors* in international politics; as *fora*, where global players negotiate, and: as *resources* that powerful states or companies use for their own strategic benefit.

These three concepts -actors, fora and resources- denote a *political* approach to IOs, in the sense that they refer primarily to dynamics of power and influence that shape their agendas and positions (see Barnett and Finnemore, 2009). It is assumed in this perspective that IOs are subject to external pressures -first and foremost, from member states, but also from international business actors, from philanthropic foundations, non-governmental organisations, and private donors. Still, given that IOs have agency in the international arena, they are also represented here as relatively autonomous bodies, which despite foreign influences possess their own mandates, organisational operations and identities (Kaasch and Martens, 2015). Given their need to respond to both external factors and internal imperatives for institutional recalibration, they must be envisioned as malleable agents with adaptable agendas and policy approaches (Béland and Orenstein, 2013).

Apart from the political approach to IOs, there is another perspective that must be taken into account. From a *policy* viewpoint, the main problem is how international institutions transfer policies to national and local governments, and how IOs draw lessons from them. Scholarship has proposed the notions of ‘mechanisms’ of transfer and diffusion (Evans, 2004; Marsh and Sharman, 2009; Marsh and Evans, 2012) to make sense of the pathways that policies may follow, which naturally applies to the field of employment and labour market policy as it will become clear in the subsequent sections. Among the various forms of transfer that IOs promote, there is a distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ forms of transfer (Stone, 2004, 2008).The first type includes coercive policy transfer, i.e., when the most powerful nations or multilateral agencies impose a given policy path (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett, 2007; Gilardi, 2013). Coercion works through different mechanisms: by direct imposition of policy reforms, or by the exercise of conditionality realised by international financial institutions (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Babb and Carruthers, 2008).

On its part, *soft* forms of transfer might include the promotion of ideas and goals, and the creation of policy networks. IOs spread ideas and policy paradigms by proposing ‘lessons’ based on previous successful experiences (Rose, 1991, 2004; Meseguer, 2005); by benchmarking (Dominique, Malik and Remoquillo-Jenni, 2013) and elaborating performance-related indicators (Lehtonen, 2011; Kelley and Simmons, 2015), as well as constructing standards and norms for national governments (Boli and Lechner, 2015). Another form of transfer is the creation of networks: global public policy networks (Stone, 2004), transnational executive networks (Stone, 2013), and knowledge networks such as epistemic communities (Haas, 1992). Soft transfer is not necessarily less influential than the more coercive instruments to spread policies: in fact, the history of IOs indicates that one of their most long-lasting contributions to international politics and policies has been related to ideas, for example, through the creation of concepts that define policy agendas and reform strategies (Weiss, 2015).

Global labour governance, as the collective efforts made by transnational and international actors to manage working conditions and employment on a worldwide scale (Hassel, 2008; Hendrickx *et al.*, 2016), is shaped by IOs through different transfer mechanisms. International financial institutions such as the WB or the IMF possess hard transfer instruments, particularly the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (Anner and Caraway, 2010). Historically, adjustment has been associated with the deregulation of working conditions and the flexibilization of labour markets, being part of an international neoliberal agenda known as the 'Washington Consensus' (Babb and Kentikelenis, 2021). The WB has also soft forms of influence especially through programme implementation in developing countries and through knowledge creation (Marshall, 2008; Kramarz and Momani, 2013). The OECD, on its part, has predominantly soft means to influence countries (Marcussen, 2004; Ougaard, 2010). The OECD exercises relevant agenda-setting capacities in ministerial meetings; it elaborates Jobs Strategies; publishes flagship reports that assess member states' performance in labour market policy, and offers comparative data on different types of employment policies (McBride and Watson, 2019). In comparison, the ILO plays a similar role to the OECD: it produces international labour statistics and creates policy frameworks that countries are expected to emulate (Jakovleski, Jerbi and Biersteker, 2019; Silva, 2021). However, the ILO is also a forum for states, employers and workers where international labour norms are designed, giving it a normative weight that other IOs do not possess. Having established a minimum characterisation of IOs in this field, the following sections will explain how they have utilised their transfer mechanisms in their respective agendas over the past decades, noting also patterns of convergence and divergence in global labour governance.

## 1. International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO is the specialised agency in the United Nations system on the world of work. It is therefore the only multilateral organisation exclusively committed to this theme. It was created after the First World War in 1919, alongside the League of Nations and with the specific mandate of promoting class compromise to avoid communist revolutions worldwide (Deacon, 2015). Its role became to generate international labour standards and, thus, respond to the 'social question' that industrialisation and urbanisation were causing in virtually all the world (Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). Since its birth, the ILO has had a global reach, but given that its headquarters are placed in Geneva, it has historically interacted with European organisations and academic institutions. For more than a century, the ILO has published a significant number of Conventions –mandatory norms for member states-, Recommendations –soft-law guidelines made to exercise moral pressure over countries-, and Declarations -statements that position the institution in global debates. Also, it has played a significant role in producing conceptual frameworks, reports, and statistics on labour-related topics (Vosko, 2002). In terms of governance, the ILO is a forum for states and social partners. It has a tripartite structure in which representatives from governments, employers and workers have a voice in the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference, where yearly these partners meet to deliberate on new norms or orientations for the organisation (Baccaro, 2015; La Hovary, 2018; Maupain, 2020).

The ILO social partners, represented by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), have long a history of clashes and compromises. In the past decade their relationship was marked by severe disputes, especially in relation to the right to strike (La Hovary, 2013) and the (de)regulation of global supply chains (Thomas and Turnbull, 2018). In terms of governments, it not clear that the ILO follows a particular faction in international relations, though in the past it was under the influence of the United States' hegemony (Cox, 1977). The ILO secretariat, even without a voting role in policymaking instances, plays a key role in pushing agendas and providing technical support to the social partners with some relative autonomy. The ILO staff -part of the International Labour Office- does not follow the principle of tripartism (la Hovary, 2015). It is composed by officials appointed by the organisation's Director-General, who are supposed to be autonomous in their decisions vis-à-vis the influence "from any governments or from any other authority external to the Organization", according to its constitution (ILO, 2012).

In terms of the ILO role in global governance, the ILO has transitioned since the 1990s from a hard-law approach –which norms many times failed to make an impact in national regulations (Peksen and Blanton, 2017) towards soft mechanisms of policy transfer. The prime example are the publication of Declarations almost every decade, i.e., texts that operate as normative frameworks on a certain topic (Maupain, 2009), or the promotion of voluntary codes of conduct for multinational companies (Hassel, 2008). In recent decades, ILO agendas have evolved in line with some structural changes in the economy. After decades of promoting the de-commodification of labour and full employment, inspired by Polanyi and Keynes (Deutschmann, 2011), the ILO in the late 1990s had to reinforce its normative foundations since the end of the Cold War had made their main objective redundant -proposing a rights-based alternative to revolutionary communism (Maupain, 2009). In 1998 the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work was published, promoting four types of rights that became the ILO's *core labour standards*: "freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced and compulsory labour, the abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation" (Anner and Caraway, 2010, pp. 153–4).

While in the Cold War, the ILO supported welfare capitalism against communism, after the fall of the Soviet Union it defended a 'social' version of globalisation against neoliberalism (Hauf, 2015). In that line, from 1999, the core labour standards conformed the ILO *decent work agenda*, which established formal employment as the main normative standard to be pursued by labour policy (Deranty and MacMillan, 2012), reinterpreting the long-standing commitment of the ILO to tackle informality (Benanav, 2019). In 2008 the organisation made the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization that established employment and social rights as conditions for an equal society (Maupain, 2009). Finally, as an extension of the decent work concept, in 2011 the *social protection floor initiative* was launched, after a process of continuous internal debates (Deacon, 2013a). It extended the notion of decent conditions to other policy fields beyond the labour sphere: member states were encouraged through a Recommendation to provide essential services to their population, as well as social transfers and benefits that allow people to reach a minimum living standard. The ILO had spent the 2000s decade formulating an approach to counter *laissez-faire* globalisation, and in the aftermath of the subprime crisis it developed an alternative to the austerity approach that was going to dominate the response from rich economies. For instance, The ILO *Jobs Pact* from 2009 supported macroeconomic stimuli, active labour market policies and income support for the unemployed (McBride and Merolli, 2013).

If the decent work framework and the social protection floor initiative had focused the ILO's in the 1990s and 2000s, in the 2010s there was a third agenda that centred the ILO contribution to labour policy: the *future of work initiative* (2015-2019). A Global Commission on the Future of Work formed by the ILO secretariat developed a report explaining the 'human-centred approach', the framework that was going to be adopted by the institution to face technological change (ILO (International Labour Organisation), 2019). In 2019, the organisation published the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which promoted investing in skills and lifelong learning, strengthening the institutions of work and supporting companies as job creators. This Declaration was fundamentally influenced by the Employers Group at the ILO, who with the help of right-wing populist governments at the International Labour Conference of 2019 –Australia, the United States, Brazil- blocked policy innovations advocated by the ILO secretariat and the Workers Bureau – institutionalising living wages, time sovereignty or regulating platform work (Silva, 2021). The response shown by the ILO with regards to the coronavirus pandemic was based on the Centenary Declaration, recommending member countries to embark on a 'human-centred job recovery', investing in occupational health and safety as well as in income protection associated to job losses (ILO, 2021).

## 2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECD is a multilateral agency that, contrary to the ILO or the international financial institutions, does not have a global reach strictly speaking, given its orientation towards advanced political economies. Usually considered the 'club of the rich countries', this organisation established in 1961 groups developed nations that have a commitment to democracy and the international expansion of the market economy (Martens and Jakobi, 2010, p. 1). The previous explains that in the international discourse it is often situated in the liberal pole of global governance along with institutions such as the WB or the IMF. Even though the organisation was initially conceived as a group of wealthy liberal democracies, it has expanded in recent decades its membership to leading economies from other regions (Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2011). Other non-democratic economic powers –for example, China- are not members, marking a difference with other groups such as the G8 or the G20 that do not have this political filter in terms of membership.

The OECD, unlike those organisations, has an autonomous secretariat located in Paris, which is led by the OECD Council that makes strategic decisions with regards to agendas and resources; various Departments coordinate events and publications, while several Committees evaluate implementation in member countries (Martens and Jakobi, 2010). Even though the secretariat is relatively autonomous, government ministers can set agendas and propose new problems in diverse thematic meetings coordinated by the OECD a few times a decade (OECD, 2016, 2018c). Apart from member states, another source of external influence particularly relevant for social and labour market policy are the OECD social partners: Business at OECD (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC). BIAC and TUAC give voice to international business and labour in the organisation by providing recommendations on key institutional strategies and participating in high-level meetings (Farnsworth and O'Brien, 2022). They have a primarily collaborative role as they do not have decision-making powers as the ITUC and IOE do in the ILO governance structure – the OECD is not tripartite in that sense.

In broad terms, the contribution of this organisation to global governance relies on the OECD's capacity to set agendas and to offer a forum for international debates (Ougaard, 2010). Developing normative and technical frameworks for countries is also part of their tasks, though its governance methods rely on delegation of implementation and 'naming and shaming' countries that do not comply their strategies in the policy fields they oversee (Marcussen, 2004). In a more restricted sense, with respect to labour market policies, countries' performance is constantly assessed in two annual reports, the OECD Economic Outlook and the OECD Employment Outlook. They are produced by two different agencies: the Economics Department and the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA). In work-related matters, the two bodies have supported different approaches to labour and employment regulation, though in recent decades the OECD has published successive Jobs Strategies (OECD, 1996, 2006, 2018b) that have presented a unified and official position on labour policy.

The different Jobs Strategies offer a framework to assess labour market performance, serving at the same time as a guideline for reforms. They have responded to specific problems identified by the OECD in the labour markets of its member countries. Under the predominance of the Economics Department, the famous 1994 Strategy was concentrated on high unemployment in advanced economies, which was expected to be reduced by eliminating 'rigidities' and the adoption by governments of a supply-side approach (OECD, 1996). The follow-up 2006 Strategy addressed deficits in inclusiveness from marginalised groups, women and the long-term unemployed. It proposed that either the strict neoliberal approach or the Nordic flexicurity model could be effective in terms of securing employment levels, while activating the excluded from the jobs market. The first would increase labour mobility through flexible working arrangements, at the cost of greater inequalities; the second would provide social security and activation measures under flexible conditions, at the cost of higher social expenditure. This shift from the orthodox 1994 Strategy was a response to increasing evidence on the positive performance of jobs markets in Nordic countries and the negative implications of the Anglo-Saxon liberal model in relation to inequality and exclusion (McBride, McNutt and Williams, 2008). This openness to other models at the OECD and the recognition of the importance of including marginalised groups in the 2006 Strategy represented a step towards 'inclusive liberalism' (Mahon, 2011), a perspective than gained momentum in global governance at the beginning of the century.

The past decade was marked by the responses to the great recession in OECD publications. In line with the trajectory of other international institutions in this period, the OECD initially adhered a Keynesian counter-cyclical strategy, though it became one of the most influential voices for austerity after the Euro crisis (McBride and Merolli, 2013). The scenario changed in 2016, when labour ministers and the OECD secretariat agreed to make a new strategy for work and employment regulation (OECD, 2016). That same year, international politics was shocked by the election of Donald Trump in the United States, marking the beginning of an era of populist leaders with a clear message against multilateralism (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019). The OECD took the role of defender of the liberal order when it strengthened its 'inclusive growth' agenda, remaking its approach to social and labour policy to tackle the same inequalities that had cause far-right populism in the first place (Deeming and Smyth, 2018).

The elaboration of the 2018 Jobs Strategy showed a new consensus between the Economics Department and DELSA, in terms of their incorporation of job quality and resilience into the OECD framework to assess countries' labour market performance (OECD, 2018a). It was a strategy explicitly made for a 'changing world of work' shaped by technological innovations. It decisively supported flexicurity strategies to increase adaptability, but with an emphasis on income security and inequality reduction through centralised collective bargaining and new regulations for non-standard employment (OECD, 2019b, 2019a). The influence of the inclusive growth approach was noticeable, representing an ideational shift led by new problem definitions and the changing meaning of labour market performance.

Even though the OECD Jobs Strategies have not necessarily determined the course of labour regulations in its member states (Armingeon, 2004), partly due to its soft-power mechanisms, they can be considered a proxy of broader political changes in the organisation. For one thing, in the past decade, the OECD took a turn towards a more social-democrat position, partnering with the ILO in the *Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth* from 2018 (ILO and OECD, 2018). Observers may keep considering the OECD in the neoliberal tandem led by the World Bank and the IMF (e.g., Janssen, 2019), but the reality is that the institution at the beginning of the 2020s seems closer to the social democratic imaginary of the ILO. On the other hand, the Jobs Strategies must be seen as the guide with which the OECD addresses new events and trends in the world of work. For instance, the organisation's reaction to the coronavirus pandemic was explicitly grounded on the 2018 Jobs Strategy, explaining that its discourse was not only focused on job losses but also on qualitative aspects related to teleworking, as well as the need to support workers' income through transfers and the temporal extension of unemployment benefits (OECD, 2020).

## 3. International financial institutions: World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The WB and the IMF – also called 'Bretton Woods institutions' (Woods, 2009)- are two of the most influential economic actors in global governance. They were both established in 1944 in the Bretton Woods conference in New Hampshire, United States, when the post-war international economic framework was being discussed. These organisations possess to two both soft and hard tools to govern countries: "the Fund and the Bank have been able to use both financial incentives/penalties and policy expertise in development and economics to push particular policy options" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 155). Particularly in situations of sovereign debt or balance-of-payments crises, when countries need of a lender of last resort to overcome default, these institutions have pushed forward a liberalisation agenda both in developed and emerging economies. In general terms, the discourse of their policy prescriptions has traditionally been focused on boosting countries' competitiveness through labour market deregulation and poverty reduction strategies (International Labour Organization, 2005). Flexibility a source of adaptability for companies in times of crisis, and cutting down social expenditure for fiscal consolidation, have been part of the 'structural adjustments' demanded by their loans since the 1980s (Haworth, Hughes and Wilkinson, 2005). Financial conditionality is not the only source of power for the WB and the IMF, as they also influence national work and employment regulations through policy advice and knowledge production.

The WB provides financial services and policy prescriptions to middle-income and developing countries, as well as financial support in cases of crisis. Its headquarters are located in Washington D.C., though its offices are spread all over the world. Due to its governance model that gives veto power to its majority shareholder – the United States, it tends to be considered as an extension of American dominance in international politics (Woods, 2006; Vestergaard and Wade, 2013). In any case, it is a complex agency, running development programmes in dozens of countries, possessing a secretariat that collects international data on social and labour policy issues, operating with relative autonomy with respect to the Bank's stakeholders (Marshall, 2008). In the last three decades, the WB has explicitly aimed to be considered a 'knowledge bank'; yearly publications such as the World Development Report or the Doing Business Report have been a key input in global policy debates (Cammack, 2003). The former have often focused on macro-trends in the world of work of developing economies, (World Bank, 1995, 2013, 2019), whereas the latter have ranked member countries, including advanced economies, assessing the ease of doing business and the presence of 'burdensome' regulations in them – including labour standards (Stein, 2014).

Initially, after its birth in 1944, the WB offered funding for infrastructure building or agriculture promotion in Third World countries, aiming to limit Soviet influence in them (Woods, 2009, p. 249) – similar to the ILO's aim in the same period. In the 1960s, the institution engaged with formal education expansion, framing it as a key pathway to development, under the idea of the 'knowledge society' (Mundy *et al.*, 2016). In terms of labour policy, since the 1980s, and in the context of successive financial crises in the developing world, the Bank included labour reforms to its 'structural adjustment' programmes, which had as a primary objective to increase employer's power to hire, fire and regulate work (Caraway, Rickard and Anner, 2016). This perspective was still predominant in the WB in 2003, when it started publishing the Doing Business Reports that included labour market 'rigidities' as a negative factor for competitiveness. However, in the 2010s, the WB adopted the ILO decent work and the social protection floor agendas partly due to the de-legitimisation of the Washington Consensus after the great recession (Güven, 2012). At the end of the 2010s, the Bank had abandoned the strict neoliberal approach to advocate for a new form of flexicurity for the Global South, especially suited for the rapid evolution of technologies in the fourth industrial revolution. The discourse was to develop institutions of work up to a point that would not discourage employment (World Bank, 2013), focusing public policy on universal income schemes to support individuals in a flexible and dynamic labour market (Packard *et al.*, 2019)

The IMF, on the other hand, was created with the mandate of overseeing international financial stability, related to exchange rates and sovereign debt. Its secretariat is located in Washington D.C., not spread in different regions as in the WB case. On a national level, it provided loans and technical advice for countries with different levels of economic development (IMF, 2016). As the WB, the Fund is a relevant source of economic knowledge and statistics, expressed in flagship reports and growth forecasts – for example, the periodic World Economic Outlook. Unlike the Bank, the IMF does not possess a department especially dedicated to work and employment matters (O'Brien, 2014), which partly explains that it has not been as influential in terms of advancing new concepts or frameworks as the WB. This is not to say that the IMF does not have a strong interest in this area, however. Caraway and colleagues pointed out in 2016 that "on average, about a quarter of the IMF programs after 1987 have labour conditions. Labour conditionally reached a sample peak in 1999 when nearly 44 percent of all IMF programs included at least one labour condition" (Caraway, Rickard and Anner, 2016, p. 30). More recent data indicates that the proportion of loans with social policies attached –including labour market regulations- decreased in the next following two decades, indicating an increasing reluctance from the IMF to impose conditionalities for operational reasons, not necessarily due to an ideational shift (Güven, 2018).

The involvement of IMF programmes in developed countries found a paradigmatic example in the management of the Euro crisis at the beginning of the 2010s. In words of IMF researchers, the institution recommended to follow the Nordic flexicurity model during the post-Great Recession period, arguing for an extension of unemployment schemes to maintain aggregate demand with "flexibility in wage-setting" and "public sector wage cuts" (Blanchard, Jaumotte and Loungani, 2014, p. 16). Even though there were other European actors involved in juncture, the conditions demanded by the IMF in the Greek crisis indicate that, more than following the Nordic model, the Fund was still inspired by its conventional orthodox formula:

> Greece's conditionality stipulated extensive labour market liberalisation. The country's programme included reforms -often as prior actions- to the collective bargaining system, the precedence of firm-level (as opposed to sectoral) agreements, and the reduction of minimum wages and employee dismissal costs (Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King, 2016, p. 23)

In terms of the effect that IMF conditions have had for labour policies, the evidence suggests that, same as WB loans, they have had the effect decreasing labour rights in recipient countries, especially individual rights over those of collective nature (Reinsberg *et al.*, 2019). This does not mean that the IMF's prescriptions have been set in place without political resistance in recipient countries: despite the IMF's 'hard' power, policy implementation is performed at a state and local level, which involves negotiation and adaptation to each national context. As Caraway and colleagues (2012, p. 46) have suggested, "powerful labour reduces the intrusiveness of labour market reform conditions in IMF loans to democracies". The case of South Korea, presented by the authors, is indicative of that trend. In the context of the Asian financial crisis of 1997, it received several IMF packages in exchange for labour market reforms, but a wave of protests led by trade unions made the government defend basic work regulations in their negotiations with the IMF.

## Conclusion

IOs devote a significant portion of their attention and resources to labour-related issues. This chapter has indicated the particular structure and recent trajectory of some of them, at least those that have governance mechanisms to influence actual policymaking at the national and local levels. The ILO stands out as the official UN agency that creates international labour standards, managing the various interests pursued by member states and social partners. Whereas the source of authority in the ILO has to do with its power to create labour norms, the Bretton Woods 'twins' can be as influential, be it through knowledge creation or exerting financial pressure to their recipient countries. Thirdly, the OECD operates primarily through building policy strategies –also in interaction with social partners-, to then push states to converge based on naming-and-shaming means. These agencies, despite being essentially different in their structures and mandates, tend to focus on the same sort of issues, which explains that each of them has a position on macro-processes in the world of work: the globalisation of the economy; technological change and digitalisation; financial recessions, and most recently the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship between the mentioned international bodies, as well as their real impact on national policies, vary depending on each organisation and agendas, being a matter of future empirical research.

In terms of policy approaches, IOs have transitioned from the polar scenario of the 1990s, when international financial institutions and the OECD supported the flexibilization of work and employment arrangements through different forms of influence, and the ILO promoted decent work in the globalised market economy, defending a 'social' alternative to neoliberalism. In the following decade, the OECD and the WB embraced 'inclusive liberalism', recognising the economic and social imperatives related to including marginalised sections of the population through active labour market policies and stronger safety nets. The ILO, in parallel, spread the notion of 'social protection floors' in the international arena, being adopted by other IOs in the 2010s. The past decade was characterised by inter-organisational convergence in relation to the flexicurity model in labour market policy, being explicitly promoted by OECD and WB initiatives. The result of these trajectories is that orthodox positions have considerably lost ground in the international discourse. At the same time, notions such as inclusive growth; universal social protection and social dialogue have gained traction in global labour governance, especially in a context of growing inequality and segmentation in labour markets worldwide.

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