Committee: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Issue: Mitigating Economic Inequality Arising from AI-Driven Labor Market Transformation

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Introduction

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for promoting international economic and social cooperation and development. ECOSOC coordinates the work of numerous UN specialized agencies, commissions, and programs dedicated to sustainable development, poverty reduction, employment, education, and technological advancement. As technological innovation increasingly shapes global economic systems, ECOSOC plays a vital role in addressing emerging challenges that affect social equity and economic stability.

Among all challenges presented, artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies of the twenty-first century, fundamentally reshaping economic systems, labor markets, and patterns of global development. Through advances in machine learning, predictive analytics, robotics, and generative AI, businesses are increasingly capable of automating tasks previously performed by human workers. These technologies have generated unprecedented opportunities for productivity growth, innovation, and economic expansion. Estimates from the McKinsey Global Institute suggest that generative AI alone could contribute between $2.6 trillion and $4.4 trillion annually to the global economy through increased productivity and new economic activity. However, the extent to which these gains are distributed equitably remains one of the most important policy questions facing governments and international organizations.

However, the benefits of AI are unlikely to be distributed equally. While businesses, investors, and highly skilled workers often benefit from technological advancement, many workers face displacement, wage stagnation, or declining job security. Unlike previous waves of automation that primarily affected manual labor, modern AI systems increasingly perform cognitive and professional tasks, including customer support, translation, accounting, legal research, software development, and data analysis. As a result, a wider range of occupations may experience disruption than during earlier technological revolutions. The rapid pace of AI

adoption has intensified concerns regarding economic inequality. Wealth generated through AI is becoming increasingly concentrated among large technology companies, highly educated professionals, and countries possessing advanced digital infrastructure. Meanwhile, workers lacking digital skills, developing economies with limited technological capacity, and marginalized communities face growing risks of exclusion from the benefits of technological progress.

For the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the challenge extends beyond technological innovation itself. The committee must examine how governments, international organizations, educational institutions, and private-sector actors can ensure that AI-driven economic growth contributes to inclusive development rather than widening existing inequalities. Beyond questions of employment and productivity, delegates must confront a broader challenge: if artificial intelligence increasingly performs tasks traditionally associated with human labor, how should societies redefine the relationship between work, income, and economic opportunity in the twenty-first century?

Definition of Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, including learning, reasoning, language processing, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Automation

The use of technology to perform tasks with minimal human intervention.

Labor Market Transformation

Changes in employment structures, job requirements, wages, and workforce demand resulting from technological, economic, or social developments.

Economic Inequality

The unequal distribution of income, wealth, and economic opportunities among individuals, groups, or nations.

Labor Market Polarization

The growth of high-skill and low-skill employment alongside the decline of middle-skill occupations.

Human-AI Complementarity

The use of AI systems to enhance and support human labor rather than replace it.

Reskilling

Training workers to acquire entirely new skills that allow them to transition into different occupations.

Upskilling

The enhancement of existing skills to help workers adapt to technological change within their current profession.

Digital Divide

The gap between individuals, communities, or countries that have access to digital technologies and those that do not.

Gig Economy

A labor market characterized by freelance, platform-based, or short-term work arrangements rather than traditional full-time employment.

Technological Unemployment

Job loss resulting from technological innovation replacing human labor faster than new employment opportunities can be created.

Algorithmic Management

The use of AI systems and algorithms to monitor, evaluate, and manage workers.

Productivity Dividend

Economic gains generated by increased efficiency and productivity resulting from technological innovation.

Foundation Models

Large-scale AI systems trained on extensive datasets that can perform a wide range of tasks across different domains.

AI Governance

The legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks that regulate the development, deployment, and use of artificial intelligence technologies.

History

Early Industrial Revolutions and Technological Displacement

The relationship between technological innovation and labor market disruption is not a new phenomenon. During the First Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century, mechanized production transformed manufacturing and agriculture throughout Europe and North America. Machines dramatically increased productivity, allowing goods to be produced more efficiently and at lower cost. However, these advancements also displaced many traditional workers, leading to unemployment, wage reductions, and social unrest. One notable example was the Luddite movement in early nineteenth-century Britain, where textile workers destroyed machinery they believed threatened their livelihoods. Although industrialization ultimately generated economic growth and new industries, the transition period demonstrated that technological progress often creates both winners and losers. The Second Industrial Revolution introduced electricity, mass production, and assembly-line manufacturing. While these innovations increased living standards and economic output, they also required workers to adapt to new production methods and skills. Governments gradually responded by expanding public education systems, labor protections, and social welfare programs to help societies manage technological change.

The Digital Revolution

Beginning in the late twentieth century, computers and the internet transformed global economies. Information technology became a major driver of productivity growth, economic integration, and globalization. During the 1980s and 1990s, economists observed a phenomenon known as skill-biased technological change. New technologies increased demand for highly educated workers possessing digital and technical skills while reducing demand for routine occupations. As a result, wage inequality increased in many developed economies. Highly skilled workers benefited from rising productivity and expanding employment opportunities, while many low-skilled workers faced stagnating wages and increasing job insecurity. This period marked the beginning of broader debates regarding technology's role in shaping inequality.

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence

Even the foundations of modern AI were established decades earlier, but significant breakthroughs emerged during the 2010s due to advances in computing power, data

availability, and machine learning techniques. Unlike earlier forms of automation, AI increasingly performed cognitive tasks rather than solely physical labor. This development sparked concerns that professions traditionally considered secure—including accounting, legal research, and administrative work—might become vulnerable to automation.

Major milestones included:

2012: Deep learning systems achieve breakthrough performance in image recognition.

2016: AlphaGo defeats world champion Lee Sedol, demonstrating AI's capacity for complex strategic reasoning.

2017–2020: AI applications expand rapidly across healthcare, logistics, finance, manufacturing, and customer service.

COVID-19 and Technological Acceleration

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation worldwide. Businesses rapidly adopted remote work technologies, automated systems, and AI-driven solutions to maintain operations. While many organizations improved efficiency through digital technologies, millions of workers experienced job losses, reduced hours, or labor-market instability. The pandemic also exposed significant digital inequalities, as workers lacking internet access, technological resources, or digital skills faced greater economic hardship. These developments highlighted the growing importance of digital inclusion and workforce adaptation policies.

The Generative AI Revolution

The emergence of generative AI systems during the early 2020s marked a new phase in technological transformation. Generative AI demonstrated capabilities in:

- Content creation
- Translation
- Programming assistance
- Research support
- Data analysis
- Customer service

The launch of ChatGPT in 2022 brought advanced AI capabilities to hundreds of millions of users worldwide. Businesses increasingly integrated AI into daily operations, while policymakers began debating the long-term implications for employment, productivity, and inequality. Unlike previous technological transitions that unfolded over decades, generative AI spread globally within a few years, intensifying concerns regarding workforce preparedness and economic adaptation.

Emergence of International AI Governance

As AI's societal impacts became more apparent, governments and international organizations began developing governance frameworks.

1) OECD AI Principles (2019)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development adopted the world's first intergovernmental AI governance framework. The principles emphasize human-centered values, transparency, accountability, and inclusive growth.

2) UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

UNESCO adopted the first global ethical framework for AI governance. The recommendation promotes human rights, fairness, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

3) UN General Assembly Resolution on Artificial Intelligence (2024)

In 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted its first comprehensive resolution concerning safe, secure, and trustworthy artificial intelligence, highlighting AI's potential role in advancing sustainable development while emphasizing the need to address risks and inequalities. Despite these initiatives, no binding international framework currently governs AI's labor-market impacts. As AI capabilities continue to expand, policymakers face increasing pressure to develop coordinated responses that balance innovation with economic inclusion.

Key Issues

Workforce Transition Capacity

The most immediate challenge posed by AI is not necessarily the elimination of jobs but the speed at which workers can transition into new occupations. Historically, technological revolutions have created more jobs than they destroyed; however, the transition period often lasts years or even decades. During these periods, workers whose skills become obsolete may face prolonged unemployment, wage reductions, or underemployment. According to the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2025*, approximately 22% of current jobs are expected to undergo significant disruption by 2030, with technological change serving as a primary driver. The report estimates that 170 million new jobs may be created globally while 92 million existing jobs may be displaced, resulting in a net gain of approximately 78 million jobs. However, these gains depend heavily on successful workforce adaptation and reskilling efforts. The challenge for policymakers is therefore not simply job creation but ensuring that displaced workers possess the skills necessary to access newly emerging opportunities. These projections suggest that successful workforce transition policies will play a decisive role in determining whether AI contributes to shared prosperity or increased economic inequality.

Unequal Distribution of Productivity Gains

One of the most significant concerns regarding AI is that its economic benefits may be concentrated among a relatively small group of actors. Historically, productivity growth has often translated into rising wages and living standards. However, recent decades have demonstrated that productivity gains do not automatically benefit workers equally. AI may accelerate this trend because the technologies themselves are highly concentrated among large technology companies possessing substantial computing infrastructure, data resources, and research capabilities.

Many economists warn that AI-generated wealth could disproportionately benefit:

- Technology firms
- Shareholders
- Highly skilled workers
- Countries with advanced digital infrastructure

while workers performing routine tasks may experience stagnant wages or declining bargaining power. If productivity gains are not broadly distributed, AI could significantly exacerbate existing economic inequalities both within and between countries. Historical

experience demonstrates that productivity growth does not automatically translate into broadly shared economic benefits. In the United States, worker productivity increased by approximately 80% between 1979 and 2023, while typical worker compensation grew by only around 30% during the same period. Many economists warn that AI could intensify this divergence by concentrating economic gains among technology firms, investors, and highly skilled professionals unless governments implement policies that promote wider distribution of productivity dividends.

Human Capital Mismatch

Educational institutions often struggle to adapt at the pace of technological change. Many current education systems were designed to prepare workers for industrial or early digital economies rather than AI-driven labor markets. As AI increasingly automates routine analytical tasks, employers are placing greater emphasis on skills that complement AI systems, including:

- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Leadership
- Communication
- Adaptability

The urgency of educational reform is increasing as AI adoption accelerates. According to the World Economic Forum, nearly six out of every ten workers worldwide will require some form of reskilling or upskilling by 2030. Educational institutions, vocational training programs, and lifelong learning initiatives therefore face growing pressure to prepare workers for occupations that increasingly emphasize human-AI collaboration rather than routine task execution. Recent analyses of global labor markets indicate that AI-exposed occupations increasingly require higher-order human skills rather than purely technical competencies. Workers who lack opportunities for lifelong learning may therefore face increasing vulnerability.

The Global Digital Divide

The impact of AI is unlikely to be uniform across countries.

Developed economies possess:

- Advanced digital infrastructure
- High internet penetration
- Significant AI investment
- Strong research institutions

Many developing countries lack these advantages and risk falling further behind. The IMF has noted that advanced economies will experience both the benefits and risks of AI earlier because a greater share of their employment is concentrated in cognitive-intensive occupations. Emerging and developing economies may initially experience less direct exposure, but they also risk missing opportunities for productivity growth and technological advancement. The AI divide extends beyond unequal access to digital infrastructure: the concentration of AI investment, research institutions, and high-skilled employment in technologically advanced economies can draw both human and financial capital away from the Global South. Skilled researchers, engineers, and entrepreneurs may migrate toward countries offering higher salaries, greater computing resources, and stronger AI ecosystems, intensifying brain drain and weakening domestic innovation capacity.

At the same time, investors may increasingly direct capital toward established AI hubs where returns and technological capabilities are perceived to be greater, potentially contributing to capital flight and limiting the financing available for emerging technology sectors in developing economies. This can create a self-reinforcing cycle in which countries that already possess AI capital attract even more talent and investment, while developing countries struggle to build competitive domestic ecosystems. UNCTAD has highlighted the extent of this concentration: just 100 companies accounted for 40 percent of global corporate R&D spending in 2022, with none based in developing countries except China.

Without targeted international cooperation, technology transfer, investment in local skills and research institutions, and policies that create attractive opportunities for skilled workers at home, AI may widen global inequality not only through differences in technological access, but also through an increasingly unequal distribution of the human and financial capital needed to develop and benefit from the technology.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), approximately 2.6 billion people remained offline in 2023, limiting access to digital education, AI technologies,

and emerging economic opportunities. While advanced economies are expected to experience AI-related transformation more rapidly, many developing countries risk being excluded from AI-driven productivity growth due to insufficient digital infrastructure, limited computing resources, and shortages of specialized technical expertise.

Concentration of Market Power

The modern AI ecosystem is dominated by a relatively small number of corporations controlling:

- Advanced AI models
- Cloud-computing infrastructure
- Semiconductor production
- Large-scale datasets

This concentration creates concerns regarding competition, innovation, and equitable access. Unlike previous technological revolutions, AI development often requires substantial computational resources that are inaccessible to smaller firms and developing countries. As a result, a limited number of companies may capture a disproportionate share of the economic value generated by AI. Such concentration could reduce market competition while increasing wealth inequality. The concentration of AI development is already evident in global investment patterns. According to the Stanford AI Index Report 2024, the United States attracted approximately $67 billion in private AI investment in 2023, compared with $7.8 billion in China and $3.8 billion in the United Kingdom. The same report found that the United States produced 61 notable AI models in 2023, significantly more than any other country. These trends raise concerns that the economic benefits of AI innovation may become concentrated within a small number of countries and corporations.

Algorithmic Bias and Labor Discrimination

AI systems are increasingly used in:

- Recruitment
- Hiring decisions
- Employee monitoring
- Performance evaluation

While these systems may improve efficiency, they can also reproduce existing societal biases if trained on biased data. Researchers and policymakers have identified instances in which AI-driven hiring tools disproportionately disadvantaged certain demographic groups. Such outcomes risk reinforcing existing inequalities and limiting access to employment opportunities. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in algorithmic decision-making remains a major governance challenge.

The Future of Social Protection

Many social protection systems were designed during an era of stable full-time employment. If AI accelerates labor-market disruption, policymakers may need to reconsider existing approaches to:

- Unemployment insurance
- Healthcare access
- Retirement systems
- Worker retraining

Some experts advocate policies such as Universal Basic Income (UBI), wage insurance, or expanded public training programs. Others argue that these measures may be financially unsustainable or could reduce labor-force participation. The debate surrounding social protection has therefore become central to discussions regarding AI and inequality.

International Regulatory Fragmentation

Countries are pursuing significantly different approaches to AI governance. The European Union emphasizes regulatory oversight and worker protections. The United States generally prioritizes innovation and private-sector leadership. China combines strong government involvement with extensive AI investment. India and many developing countries prioritize digital inclusion and workforce development. The absence of a unified international framework creates uncertainty for businesses, workers, and governments attempting to navigate AI-driven transformation.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

State Actors

United States

Supports a private-sector-led approach to AI while investing in domestic technological capacity. Through the CHIPS and Science Act, it has expanded support for semiconductor manufacturing and R&D, alongside federal programs for AI and STEM workforce development.

Key priorities: AI innovation, private investment, workforce reskilling, semiconductor production, and maintaining technological leadership.

China

Treats AI as a strategic national priority, with strong government involvement in investment and industrial planning. China supports domestic AI, semiconductor, and computing industries while regulating generative AI and algorithmic services.

Key priorities: technological self-sufficiency, government-supported AI investment, industrial automation, and domestic AI capacity.

European Union

Promotes human-centered and regulated AI development. The EU AI Act establishes rules based on the risks posed by AI systems, while EU policies also emphasize digital skills and worker protections.

Key priorities: AI regulation, worker and fundamental rights, transparency, digital skills, and responsible innovation.

India

Focuses on ensuring developing economies can participate in the AI transition. Through the IndiaAI Mission, India is expanding computing capacity, AI skills, datasets, and support for domestic startups.

Key priorities: digital inclusion, affordable AI access, workforce development, domestic innovation, and greater technological opportunities for the Global South.

African Union

The AU's Continental AI Strategy seeks to strengthen Africa's ability to develop and benefit from AI. It emphasizes infrastructure, education, research, local innovation, and international cooperation.

Key priorities: closing the AI divide, retaining skilled workers, attracting investment, developing local AI industries, and preventing dependence on foreign technology.

International Organizations

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Focuses on protecting workers during the AI transition. It promotes social dialogue between governments, employers, and workers, alongside retraining and social protection.

Key priorities: decent work, collective bargaining, reskilling, worker protections, and sharing AI productivity gains.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Studies AI's effects on productivity, employment, and inequality and assesses countries' preparedness for AI adoption. It warns that unequal access to AI could widen economic gaps between countries.

Key priorities: economic stability, AI preparedness, workforce adaptation, social safety nets, and preventing greater global inequality.

World Bank

Supports developing countries through financing and technical assistance for digital infrastructure, education, skills, and institutional capacity.

Key priorities: closing the digital divide, building technological capacity, developing local skills, and helping lower-income economies benefit from AI.

Non-State Actors

Major Technology Companies

Technology firms control much of the capital, computing power, AI models, and skilled talent driving the AI revolution. Their investments can create jobs and innovation but may also concentrate profits and talent in advanced economies.

Key priorities/actions: AI investment, global talent recruitment, commercialization, data-center expansion, and influencing AI regulation.

Trade Unions

Represent workers affected by AI-driven automation and workplace technologies. They advocate consultation before AI deployment and protections against job displacement and algorithmic surveillance.

Key priorities: job security, retraining, collective bargaining, workplace transparency, and ensuring workers share in AI productivity gains.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	**Event & Significance**
1760s	First Industrial Revolution begins : Mechanization transforms production, creating new industries while displacing traditional forms of labor.

Date	Event & Significance
1811–1816	Luddite movement in Britain : Workers resist machinery amid concerns over job losses, wages, and working conditions.
1956	Dartmouth Conference : Establishes artificial intelligence as a formal field of research.
1997	IBM Deep Blue defeats Garry Kasparov : Demonstrates that computers can outperform humans in certain complex cognitive tasks.
2012	Deep-learning breakthrough : Advances in neural networks accelerate modern AI development and its practical applications.
2016	AlphaGo defeats Lee Sedol : Demonstrates AI's growing capabilities in complex strategy and decision-making.
2019	OECD AI Principles adopted : Establishes international principles for trustworthy and human-centered AI.
2020–2022	COVID-19 accelerates automation : Remote work and labor shortages encourage faster adoption of automation and digital technologies.
2021	UNESCO AI Ethics Recommendation adopted : Creates a major global framework for ethical and human-rights-based AI development.
November 2022	ChatGPT launches : Generative AI becomes widely accessible, rapidly expanding AI use in education and knowledge-based work.
2023	Generative AI adoption expands : Businesses increasingly use AI for writing, coding, administration, and customer service.
March 2024	UN General Assembly AI Resolution adopted : Promotes international cooperation on safe and inclusive AI, including greater attention to developing countries.

Date	Event & Significance
2024–Present	Global AI governance and labor debates intensify : Governments address regulation, reskilling, worker protections, and the unequal distribution of AI's benefits.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

1. OECD AI Principles (2019)

The OECD AI Principles represented the first major international effort to establish governance standards for artificial intelligence.

The principles emphasize:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Human-centered values
- Inclusive growth

Their greatest strength lies in establishing a common international vocabulary for AI governance. However, the framework remains entirely voluntary and lacks enforcement mechanisms. Consequently, implementation varies significantly among member states.

2. UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

UNESCO's Recommendation constitutes the first global ethical framework for AI governance. The recommendation promotes:

- Human rights
- Fairness
- Environmental sustainability
- Social inclusion

Its broad international support has helped elevate ethical concerns within AI policymaking. However, UNESCO lacks the authority to compel implementation, limiting the recommendation's practical impact.

3. National Reskilling Programs

Countries such as Singapore, Germany, and South Korea have implemented large-scale workforce development initiatives designed to prepare workers for technological change. These programs have demonstrated that targeted training can improve workforce adaptability and reduce vulnerability to automation. Nevertheless, such programs require:

- Significant public investment
- Long-term political commitment
- Strong educational infrastructure

Many developing countries lack the resources necessary to replicate these initiatives at scale.

4. Universal Basic Income Experiments

Several governments and municipalities have experimented with UBI as a potential response to automation-driven disruption. Results have generally indicated improvements in:

- Financial security
- Psychological well-being
- Economic stability

However, concerns remain regarding:

- Fiscal sustainability
- Political feasibility
- Long-term economic effects

As a result, UBI remains highly controversial.

5. Public-Private Workforce Partnerships

Many governments have partnered with technology companies to expand digital training opportunities. These partnerships have increased access to technical education and AI-related skills. However, critics argue that they frequently focus on the needs of employers rather than addressing broader structural inequalities.

Despite these efforts, no international mechanism currently exists to coordinate responses to AI-driven labor market transformation. The IMF estimates that approximately 40% of jobs worldwide may be affected by AI, while the figure rises to approximately 60% in advanced economies. The scale of potential disruption suggests that existing national-level approaches may be insufficient without stronger international cooperation. Existing UN initiatives are largely non-binding, meaning that they establish principles and recommendations but generally cannot compel states to adopt specific labor protections, fund worker-reskilling programs, or compensate those displaced by automation.

Enforcement is further complicated by differences in national labor laws, economic capacities, and priorities regarding AI regulation. Technology transfer presents an additional challenge: advanced AI systems, computing infrastructure, and intellectual property are largely controlled by states and private companies that may be reluctant to share them because of commercial interests, intellectual-property protections, and national-security concerns. Consequently, developing countries may support stronger international mechanisms for capacity-building and technology transfer, while technologically advanced states may resist commitments that restrict their companies or require redistribution of technological advantages.

Stronger international cooperation must therefore address not only common principles for responsible AI, but also the political and economic disagreements surrounding who bears the costs of worker protection and who receives access to AI technologies.

Possible Solutions

1. Preventing AI Colonialism and Bridging the Global AI Divide

As AI development becomes increasingly concentrated among a small number of technologically advanced countries and corporations, many developing nations risk becoming dependent on foreign-owned AI systems and digital infrastructure. Without meaningful participation in AI innovation, these countries may be excluded from future economic opportunities and become consumers rather than creators of AI technologies.

Expanding Access to AI Infrastructure

The international community should support developing countries through investments in digital infrastructure, computing resources, and technical capacity-building programs. Such efforts can reduce technological dependence and enable broader participation in the global AI economy.

Promoting AI Knowledge Sharing

Governments, international organizations, and private-sector actors should cooperate to expand access to AI education, research opportunities, and technological expertise, ensuring that the benefits of AI development are distributed more equitably across countries.

2. Ensuring Fair Distribution of AI-Generated Productivity Gains

AI has the potential to generate unprecedented productivity growth and economic value. However, there is growing concern that these benefits will be concentrated among a small number of technology firms, investors, and highly skilled professionals, while many workers experience job insecurity or wage stagnation.

Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth

Governments should explore policies that ensure AI-generated wealth benefits society as a whole. These may include workforce transition funds, profit-sharing mechanisms, or targeted investments in education and social protection programs.

Supporting Broad Participation in the AI Economy

Policies should encourage SMEs, startups, and local innovators to access AI technologies, helping prevent excessive market concentration and ensuring that economic opportunities created by AI are widely shared.

3. Protecting Worker Rights in the Age of Algorithmic Management

AI systems are increasingly used to monitor, evaluate, and manage workers. While these technologies may improve efficiency, they can also reduce transparency and limit workers' ability to challenge decisions that affect their employment.

Establishing Transparency Standards

Workers should have access to clear information regarding how AI systems influence hiring, promotion, scheduling, performance evaluation, and termination decisions. Greater transparency can strengthen accountability and trust in AI-assisted workplaces.

Strengthening Human Oversight and Worker Protections

Governments should develop legal frameworks that ensure meaningful human oversight in employment-related decisions and provide workers with mechanisms to appeal potentially unfair algorithmic outcomes.

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