September 4, 2020 |

Releases

Three in five BC workers' jobs face "medium to high likelihood" of automation impact: new BCFED report

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people think about the future of work, they think about the trend toward working from home. But a research report released today by the BC Federation of Labour suggests the increasing trend toward automation deserves urgent attention.

"Anyone who thinks they're immune to automation should think twice," BCFED president Laird Cronk said. "This report finds that three out of five BC workers are at medium-to-high likelihood of having their jobs affected in the next 20 years."

Automation isn't limited to affecting only rote, repetitive jobs, the report finds; machine learning allows computers and robots to take on more and more sophisticated tasks. It can often mean taking away pieces of existing jobs from human workers, rather than replacing them outright.

"The report shows that automation is coinciding with big changes in the structure of work and our economy," said BCFED Secretary-Treasurer Sussanne Skidmore. "And it's not just in the shift away from industrial jobs toward service and technical jobs that we usually think of around automation. There's growing inequality in wages within those job categories too."

Among the report's findings:

- Automation threatens to increase precarious employment in BC.
- Good-paying industrial jobs are declining in labour share, directly attacking the gains unionization in those sectors has produced for all workers.
- The growing gap between the average and the median wage in every employment category in BC contributes to increasing inequality — a shift that affects women, people of colour and immigrants in particular.
- Lower costs and increasing sophistication of automated systems may accelerate the displace ment of workers and elimination of jobs across the labour market.

The report includes a case study into BC's ports that illustrates the harm done when employers call the shots in implementing automation.

"This should serve as a call to action for workers and unions everywhere in BC," Cronk said. "The issue isn't about stopping automation, or whether it's good or bad. It's about making sure we're active participants in deciding how automation will change work, workplaces and the lives of working people. "

The full report is available at https://bcfed-d7.ddev.site/automation-research-report-2020.