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“Achieving SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in line with the 2030 United Nations agenda."

Committee: United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
Agenda Item: Accelerating the Adaptation of Industry 4.0 Technologies for Sustainable Industrial Growth
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Introduction

Industry 4.0 is the fourth industrial revolution, which is synonymous with smart manufacturing and is the realization of the digital transformation that the field is undergoing. Industry 4.0 delivers real-time decision making, enhanced productivity, flexibility and agility in order to revolutionize the way companies manufacture, improve and distribute their products. (IBM, 1) These technologies provide important perspectives for future innovation and business growth. Technologies such as; Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Machine Learning (ML), and other advanced technologies are being utilized to implement this new industry. Although this new Industry approach in the course of implementation, it is vital that we are able to catch up with this new industry hype and that this growth is sustainable for future generations. "Accelerating the adaptation" of Industry 4.0 means speeding up the implementation process, helping countries transition faster from traditional methods to these technology-powered smart systems in an effective way. This adaptation stage of the industry is crucial because many developing countries are left behind due to high costs of advanced technologies, lack of skills, and weak infrastructure. The concept of sustainable industrial growth refers to economic growth without harm to the environment, job creation without the exploitation of workers, and development that can be maintained long-term. The implementation of Industry 4.0 has its benefits alongside its risks. The successful execution of the new revolution will reduce waste and shift to alternative energy usage globally, will result in higher productivity and competitiveness, and better monitoring of emissions and resources. These benefits will exist alongside job displacements due to automation, a digital divide between developing and developed countries, plus higher initial investment costs.

Definition of Significant Terms

Industry 4.0

This is the fourth industrial revolution which integrates advanced technology and digital devices autonomously communicating with each other along the manufacturing value chain driven by data, connectivity, algorithms, human-machine interaction, robotics and artificial intelligence aiming to enhance efficiency, productivity and optimization in production processes.

Value Chain

This contains the whole process and production activities that are realized from the initial idea of a product or service to the final stage of its delivery to customers and later to its disposal after use.

Digital Divide

The UN University defines 'Digital Divide' as "the gap between those who have access to and use ICTs including internet connectivity, internet-enabled devices and digital literacy skills and those who do not.".

Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID)

This is industrial development aiming to achieve economic and social growth fostering environmental sustainability and societal prosperity.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

These cover all technological hardware and software which are used for computing and communication.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The fundamental definition of AI is the range of technological hardware and software which showcase characteristics of self-learning and adaptivity.

Internet of Things (IoT)

Internet of Things refers to hardware deployed with sensors that communicate and exchange data with other digital devices that can collect, process, store and transfer information.

Smart Manufacturing

This refers to the revolutionary usage of data-driven, efficient, agile, innovative and collaborative (especially fostering human-machine interaction), connected, automated orchestration of business, physical and digital processes in industrial production.

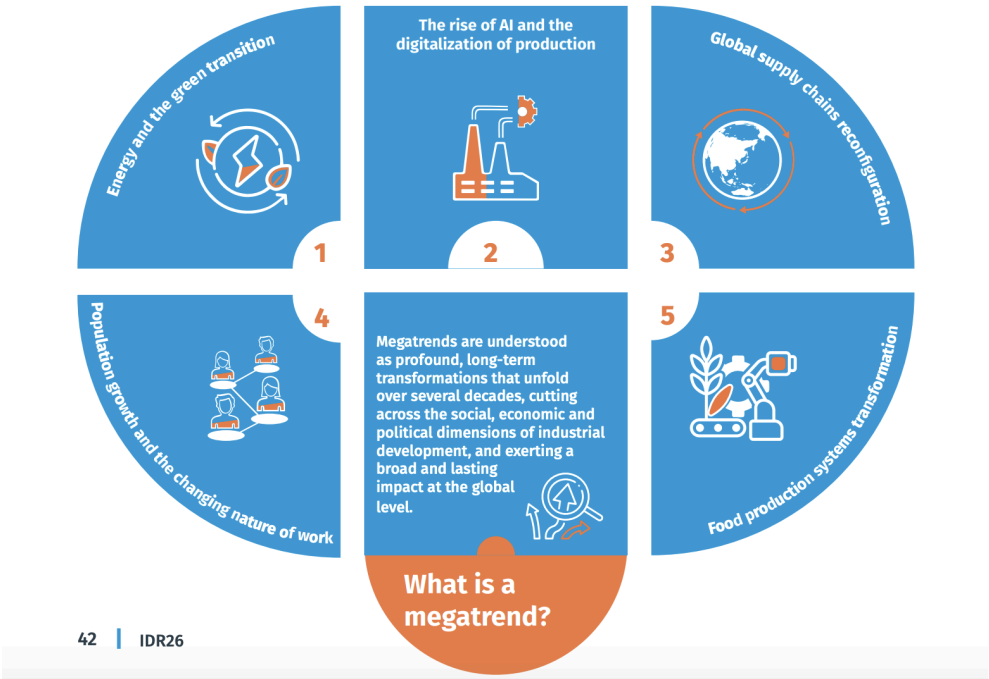
Detailed Background of the Issue

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) originated in 2011 from a project of the high-tech strategies of the German Government. (Science Direct, 1) It advanced the concept of Cyber Physical Systems (CPS) into Cyber Physical Production Systems (CPPS). The term was publicly announced to the public during the intermission of the Hannover fair in 2011. This new era of industrialization differed from the third industrial revolution which saw field-level computers such as Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC) and communication technologies in the production process, which lead to automated production. In this era production systems, in the form of CPPS, are able to make intelligent decisions through real-time communication and cooperation that is not completely automated and still requires human foresight and confirmation. This enabled more flexible production of high-quality personalized products at maximum efficiency contrasted with the third industrial revolution. In order to progress further and ensure a coordinated approach, organizations like the Verband Deutscher Maschinen und Anlagenbau (VDMA), which is the German Engineering Federation, and Bundesverband Informationswirtschaft, Telekommunikation und neue Medien (BITKOM), which is Germany's foremost digital association, have established the joint Industrie 4.0 platform. Subsequently, the

concept of Industry 4.0 started gaining international recognition and was adopted by numerous states as a strategic framework for the new industrial revolution.

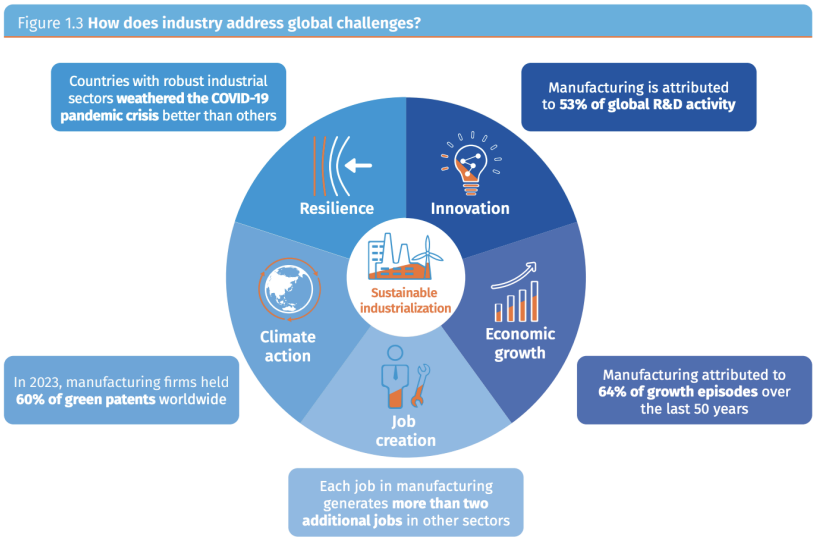
Contemporary Dynamics Regarding Industry Policies and Strategies

The contemporary scene of industry is shaped by five key megatrends worldwide : green transition, AI and digitalization, reconfiguration of global supply chains, population growth and evolution of workplace and labour and lastly transformation of food production systems.



UNIDO (2026) Industrial Development Report, THE FUTURE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION Building future-ready industries for sustainable development, p.42

Sustainable and inclusive industrialization may contribute to all those megatrends through giving positive reactions and feedback to global challenges.



UNIDO elaboration based on (i) UNIDO (2023a); (ii) Lavopa and Riccio (2024) ; (iii) Lavopa and Riccio (2025); (iv) Lavopa and Menéndez (2023); (v) Lavopa and Donnelly (2023)

Accelerating Industry 4.0 Adoption Through International Cooperation

The acceleration of adaptation of Industry 4.0 technologies requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all technological, economic, environmental and social barriers that are slowing down the implementation of this revolution. One of the primary mechanisms for accelerating adoption is the strengthening of digital and industrial infrastructure in order to keep pace with the ever-growing Industry 4.0. Innovative digital ecosystems are required in order to facilitate Research and Development (R&D), technology transfer, and knowledge exchange across the industry. These ecosystems could consist of: Smart-Factory Labs, focusing on applied research and technological development as well as trial of Industry 4.0, Technology Test-Beds, which can be focused on experimenting and running the first industrial pilots of mature Industry 4.0, Innovation Labs and Centers, focusing on education and training of the future production workforce. There are many research challenges in the road ahead for the “Factories of the Future” from the perspectives of human, machine, planning and control, operation and maintenance, and product design which require open international collaboration. Overall, a Global Digital Ecosystem for the Future of Production is fundamental for the rapid technological advancement, optimization and adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies.

Socio-Economic Implications and Workforce Challenges

The ongoing revolutionary socio-economic changes are particularly evident in the context of implementing the principles of Industry 4.0, aiming to enhance two categories: the efficiency of actions taken and productivity, influenced by the increasing level of process automation. The

utilization of robots, automation, and virtual reality are elements that not only characterize the economic environment but also the daily life of individuals. The adoption of high-tech solutions and applications may result in lack of human force requirement and a shift towards AI dependency. This demands a new configuration of industrial workplace where human authenticity is prioritized while utilizing AI and robotics to complete time consuming and risky tasks in the business environment. Socio-economic and environmental challenges may be suppressed by policy instruments that are human oriented, fostering access to finance facilities for SMEs and startups, enabling green transformation and circular economy. Inclusive strategies regarding industry development particularly within the scope of Industry 4.0, can support and reinforce gender mainstreaming, societal well being, equality and engagement of civil society with governance.

Relevance to the United Nations and Sustainable Development

The acceleration of Industry 4.0 technologies holds significant relevance for the United Nations, as it directly intersects with the organization's core objectives of promoting sustainable development, reducing inequality, and fostering inclusive economic growth. The United Nations has long emphasized the importance of sustainable industrialization as a foundation for poverty reduction, employment generation, and long-term economic resilience. In this context, Industry 4.0 presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the international community. Industry 4.0 technologies contribute directly to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most notably, SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) calls for the development of resilient infrastructure and the promotion of inclusive and sustainable industrialization through innovation. Additionally, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) is supported through improved resource efficiency, waste reduction, and real-time monitoring of production processes enabled by advanced digital technologies. The relevance of this issue further extends to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), as Industry 4.0 reshapes global labor markets. Finally from an environmental perspective, Industry 4.0 supports SDG 13 (Climate Action) by enabling energy-efficient production, emissions monitoring, and the optimization of industrial processes. Ultimately, the relevance of this matter to the United Nations lies in its multidimensional impact on economic development, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Accelerating the adaptation of Industry 4.0 technologies in a coordinated and inclusive manner supports the UN's overarching mission to promote peace, prosperity, and sustainable development for all, ensuring that the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are shareable across nations and populations.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
April 1, 2011	The terminology of “Industry 4.0” was introduced in Germany’s Hannover Messe trade fair for the concept of digitization of manufacturing processes.
2015	The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the UN.
2016	UNIDO integrated the Industry 4.0 concept into its Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID) framework.
2018-2022	UNIDO published several reports highlighting sustainable and inclusive industrial development targeting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Developing Countries.
2020	COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the unexpected but obligatory digitalization, generating impact on industrial policies, strategies and production.
2025	UNIDO published the Industrial Development Report 2026 : The Future of Industrialization - Building future-ready industries for sustainable development

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Germany

Germany is widely recognized as the pioneer of Industry 4.0, having introduced the concept in 2011 as part of its national high-tech strategy. This reflected the country’s long-standing emphasis on advanced manufacturing, engineering excellence, and industrial competitiveness. Germany’s approach to Industry 4.0 is characterized by close cooperation between the government, industry, research institutions, and labor representatives, often referred to as the “triple helix” model. In addition, German industrial policy emphasizes the integration of cyber-physical production systems into existing manufacturing structures, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the German economy. The country also places strong emphasis on standardization, interoperability, and data security, ensuring that Industry 4.0 technologies can be safely and widely implemented. The country continues to play a leading role through strong collaboration between government, industry, and research institutions. German manufacturing firms and engineering associations remain central actors in advancing cyber-physical production systems and setting global industrial standards.

United States

The United States is also a key player in Industry 4.0 through its leadership in digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics, and advanced robotics. Unlike Germany's manufacturing-centered approach, the U.S. model is largely market-driven, with innovation led by private-sector companies, research universities, and technology firms. U.S. initiatives such as **Smart Manufacturing** focus on enhancing productivity, flexibility, and global competitiveness across industrial sectors. The country's strong venture capital ecosystem and innovation culture accelerate the development and commercialization of Industry 4.0 technologies. However, workforce disruption and unequal access to technological benefits remain key challenges, prompting increased attention to reskilling programs and inclusive growth strategies.

Japan

Japan's engagement with Industry 4.0 is closely linked to its broader national vision of Society 5.0, which seeks to integrate digital technologies not only into industry but into society as a whole. Japan is a global leader in robotics, automation, and precision manufacturing, and its approach emphasizes human-centered technological development. In response to demographic challenges such as an aging population and labor shortages, Japan views Industry 4.0 as a means of maintaining industrial productivity while improving quality of life. Sustainability, efficiency, and resilience are key priorities, with smart factories and digital supply chains playing a central role. Japan's balanced focus on technological advancement and social stability makes it an influential model in discussions on inclusive industrial transformation.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

UNIDO is the primary United Nations agency responsible for promoting inclusive and sustainable industrial development. It plays a central role in assisting developing and least developed countries in adopting Industry 4.0 technologies in ways that support economic growth while minimizing social and environmental risks. UNIDO provides policy guidance, technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and pilot projects related to smart manufacturing and industrial digitalization. A key focus of UNIDO's work is preventing the widening of the global industrial divide by facilitating technology transfer, supporting SMEs, and strengthening local industrial ecosystems. Through its initiatives, UNIDO positions Industry 4.0 as a tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals rather than as an end in itself.

Verband Deutscher Maschinen- und Anlagenbau (VDMA)

VDMA, the German Engineering Federation, represents one of the world's largest networks of mechanical and plant engineering companies. It has played a pivotal role in shaping the practical and technical foundations of Industry 4.0, particularly from the perspective of industrial

manufacturers. VDMA contributes to the development of technical standards, best practices, and implementation frameworks that enable European companies to integrate cyber-physical production systems into real-world manufacturing environments. It also serves as a bridge between policymakers and industry, ensuring that regulatory decisions reflect industrial realities. Through international cooperation, VDMA helps disseminate Industry 4.0 concepts beyond Germany, influencing global manufacturing standards.

Bundesverband Informationswirtschaft, Telekommunikation und neue Medien (BITKOM)

BITKOM is Germany's leading digital industry association and a key actor in the digital dimension of Industry 4.0. While VDMA focuses on mechanical engineering, BITKOM represents companies in information technology, telecommunications, software, and digital services, making it essential to the integration of data-driven technologies into industrial systems. BITKOM's involvement ensures that issues such as data governance, cybersecurity, connectivity, and digital infrastructure are addressed alongside industrial automation. As a co-founder of the Industrie 4.0 platform, BITKOM facilitates cross-sector collaboration between the digital and manufacturing industries. Its work highlights the importance of secure, interoperable, and scalable digital systems in accelerating Industry 4.0 adaptation.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Although no single UN resolution to date has exclusively addressed Industry 4.0, there has been significant policy and normative work within the UN system that supports the sustainable and inclusive diffusion of digital and industrial technologies. In November 2019, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) adopted Agreed Conclusions on the theme of Structural Transformation, Industry 4.0 and Inequality. This document acknowledged the potential of digital technologies to contribute to structural transformation, productive capacity, competitiveness, and integration into global value chains. It also recognized the risks associated with widening digital and productivity divides, particularly for developing countries and least developed countries, and requested further research and policy work to address these challenges, demonstrating an early multilateral effort to link digital innovation with development goals. While not specific to Industry 4.0, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions recognizing the importance of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for sustainable development. For example, A/RES/79/194 (2024), which emphasized the role of ICTs as drivers of sustainable development and supported international cooperation to bridge digital divides. Additionally in the "Industrial development cooperation : note / by the

Secretary-General" of the General Assembly meeting on 15 July 2024, it is established that industrialization targeting the transformation to sustainable and inclusive production and supply chains should be a common objective for all stakeholders such as: regulators, industry, consumers, and industrialized and industrializing nations alike.

Alternative Solutions

One promising approach to accelerating the adaptation of Industry 4.0 technologies is the establishment of helix modeled cooperation ecosystems where the main focus is Industry 4.0 and there's strong collaboration between academy, industry and public institutions that provide shared access to digital infrastructure, targeted funding, ecosystem facilitation, and coordinated human capital development tailored to local economic contexts. Such innovation hubs and labs enable smaller firms to benefit from pooled resources and technical expertise, addressing barriers that individual companies face and helping to narrow regional digital divides by engaging public, private, and academic stakeholders in collaborative innovation networks. Multilevel governance systems facilitating regional policy research highlights how local governance actors can play a strategic role by advocating for supportive conditions, facilitating networks, and providing targeted financial incentives that make smart technology adoption feasible for a broader range of firms. Another solution could be promoting open-source and low-cost digital platforms for smart industrial systems, which reduce dependence on proprietary technologies and lower financial barriers for developing economies and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). By encouraging collaborative development and shared platforms, states can democratize access to core digital technologies like IoT, data analytics, and connectivity tools, improving flexibility and encouraging innovation while preserving interoperability and reducing lock-in costs. Regulatory ecosystems that safeguard and foster technological and industrial development which aim at sustainable and inclusive policies. These alternative pathways emphasize inclusivity, cost reduction, and regionally relevant strategies that help expand the global diffusion of Industry 4.0 while balancing economic and social objectives.

Useful Links

https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/unido-publications/2025-11/UNIDO%20IDR26.pdf

https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/Unido_industry-4_NEW_0.pdf

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https://hub.unido.org/publications?field_section_target_id=All&field_publication_types=All&combine=inclusive+and+sustainable+industrial+development (for your researches on UNIDO's publications)

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