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Harmonizing Labor Laws Among Expanding Membership of BRICS Nations: An Imperative

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Abstract. This article delves into the crucial need for harmonizing labor laws within the context of the expanding membership of BRICS nations. As the BRICS consortium expands, the necessity to align labor regulations and legal frameworks becomes even more critical. This study investigates the multifaceted rationales driving the demand for such harmonization, including the facilitation of economic integration, the promotion of equitable labor practices, and the strengthening of regional cooperation. By thoroughly examining the challenges and advantages associated with the harmonization of labor laws across the consortium's diverse socio-economic and cultural landscapes, this article underscores the profound importance of adopting a unified approach to ensure fair labor standards and cultivate sustainable development within the burgeoning BRICS community. Through a comprehensive analysis of case studies and comparative assessments, this research makes a valuable contribution to the scholarly discourse on the intricate interplay between legal harmonization, regional expansion, and the advancement of labor rights in the context of the BRICS nations.

Keywords: labor laws; harmonization; BRICS nations; membership expansion; labor regulations; labor frameworks; economic integration; equitable labor practices; regional cooperation.

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Introduction

The BRICS nations, comprising Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa, have emerged as a significant bloc on the global stage, bringing together diverse economies, cultures, and political ideologies. Initially formed to promote mutual economic cooperation and policy coordination, the BRICS alliance has evolved into a broader platform for enhanced collaboration across various domains. The effective

functioning of this alliance hinges on the establishment of harmonized labor laws that reflect the shared commitment to equitable labor practices and sustainable development, especially in the face of an expanding BRICS membership.

On August 24, 2023, the BRICS group of emerging economies reached an agreement to welcome Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina, and the United Arab Emirates into its fold.¹ This expansion—the first in thirteen years—aims to accelerate the group's efforts to reshape a world order they perceive as obsolete. By opening the door to new members, BRICS signals the possibility of further additions, as numerous other countries have expressed interest in joining. These countries aspire to be part of a coalition that has the potential to balance the global landscape, thereby bolstering the economic influence of BRICS, which currently includes China, the world's second-largest economy, along with Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa, Iran, Ethiopia, etc. Additionally, this expansion could strengthen the group's stated goal of championing the interests of the Global South.

Authors such as Guseva and Klepalova have previously examined how labor and social security laws can be strategically employed to formalize labor markets across BRICS countries.² Building on this work, the present article analyzes the legislative frameworks and policy measures aimed at reducing informal employment, with a particular emphasis on the role of legal reforms in enhancing workers' rights, social protection, and economic stability. The authors argue that coordinated legal efforts within BRICS could significantly improve labor market formalization, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable development.

With an increasing number of nations seeking membership in the BRICS consortium, the existing challenges of reconciling disparities in labor laws among the member states become more intricate. The harmonization of labor laws thus takes on heightened significance, extending beyond the simple alignment of legislative frameworks. It requires navigating a complex interplay of socio-economic realities, cultural norms, and geopolitical dynamics. This progression underscores that legal convergence within BRICS, and therefore, is as much about balancing diverse national contexts and strategic interests as it is about achieving technical uniformity.

This introduction provides a comprehensive overview of the compelling need for labor law harmonization among the BRICS nations, particularly in light of the consortium's evolving composition. The BRICS nations, though different in their historical trajectories and socio-economic contexts, have harnessed their collective influence to drive global economic growth, address developmental disparities, and advocate for reforms in international financial institutions.

¹ du Plessis, C., Miridzhanian, A., & Acharya, B. (2023). *BRICS welcomes new members in the push to reshuffle world order*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/brics-poised-invite-new-members-join-bloc-sources-2023-08-24/>

² Guseva, T., & Klepalova, J. (2022). Harnessing the power of labor law and social security law to achieve the goal of formalizing labor markets in the BRICS countries. *BRICS Law Journal*, 9(2), 94–120.

As the consortium opens its doors to new member states, the inherent challenge lies in maintaining coherence while accommodating the distinctive labor regulatory regimes that new entrants might introduce. The dynamics of the consortium are thus transforming, warranting an examination of the implications of an expanded membership for labor law harmonization.

Economic integration and sustainable development, core goals of the BRICS partnership, demand progressively closer alignment of labor laws. This harmonization is essential to facilitate the mobility of labor across member states, fostering economic cooperation while supporting long-term, inclusive growth within the bloc.³ Inconsistent labor regulations, such as differing standards of worker protection or contractual arrangements, could potentially impede the seamless movement of human capital, constraining the consortium's economic potential.

Furthermore, the pursuit of sustainable development goals within the BRICS nations relies on the establishment of equitable labor standards that prevent exploitative practices and promote social welfare. Harmonizing labor laws is crucial for creating a foundation that supports fair trade and attracts investment. As this alignment deepens, it fosters a more stable and equitable environment, ultimately driving shared prosperity among member states.⁴ For example, by harmonizing minimum wage standards and workplace safety regulations, the BRICS countries can reduce unfair competitive advantages based on labor exploitation. This creates a level playing field that encourages cross-border investment and trade while promoting more equitable economic growth and improved worker protections across all the BRICS member states.

In addition, labor law harmonization transcends economic considerations to encompass social dimensions as well. Disparities in labor laws can lead to unequal treatment of workers, affecting not only employment conditions but also the overall social fabric within member states. In pursuit of equitable labor practices, harmonization ensures that workers' rights, benefits, and protections are upheld consistently across the consortium. This fosters social cohesion by reducing inequalities and reinforcing the values of justice and fairness among member nations.

Labor law harmonization thus not only bolsters economic and social integration but also enhances the collective bargaining power of the BRICS nations on the global stage. A unified approach to labor standards increases the credibility and influence of the consortium when engaging in international negotiations or advocating for shared interests. Such a collaborative stance also strengthens the soft power projection of the BRICS bloc, amplifying its voice in matters of global governance and policy formulation.

³ BRICS India. (2021). *BRICS Business Council Annual Report*. <https://brics2021.gov.in/brics/public/uploads/docpdf/getdocu-57.pdf>

⁴ Bokova, T. (2023). *BRICS' contribution to sustainable development goals*. InfoBRICS. <http://infobrics.org/post/38138/>

This study adopts a comprehensive approach to examine the challenges and opportunities of harmonizing labor laws among the expanding BRICS nations. Utilizing qualitative research methods, including case studies, comparative analyses, and legal reviews, the study examines existing labor regulations along with their implications for the consortium's expanded membership. The research further delves into socio-economic, cultural, and geopolitical factors that influence labor laws in member states and investigates potential barriers to harmonization.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enrich the academic discourse surrounding labor law harmonization within the BRICS consortium. By investigating the intricate interplay between labor regulations, regional expansion, and sustainable development, this research contributes valuable insights to policymakers, legal scholars, and practitioners.

Moreover, it offers a nuanced understanding of how harmonized labor laws can contribute to fostering an environment conducive to fair economic activities, equitable labor practices, and shared prosperity. The subsequent sections of this paper are structured as follows. Section 2 further explores the evolving dynamics of the BRICS consortium, contextualizing the challenges and opportunities presented by the expansion of its membership. Section 3 examines the integral relationship between economic integration and sustainable development, highlighting the role of harmonized labor laws in achieving both objectives. Section 4 discusses the imperative of equitable labor practices and their role in promoting social cohesion within the consortium. Lastly, Section 5 highlights how harmonized labor laws can enhance regional cooperation and strengthen the soft power projection of the BRICS nations.

This introduction presents a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted landscape surrounding the necessity of labor law harmonization among the BRICS nations in the context of expanding membership. As the consortium continues to evolve, harmonized labor laws emerge as a crucial component to ensure equitable growth, shared prosperity, and cohesive regional development. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the complexities and implications of this imperative, offering a holistic understanding of the role of labor laws harmonization in the evolving BRICS consortium.

1. Evolving Dynamics of the BRICS Consortium

The BRICS consortium, now composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia, represents a remarkable amalgamation of nations with diverse historical trajectories and socio-economic contexts.⁵ Despite these disparities, the consortium has demonstrated its collective prowess in propelling global economic growth, addressing developmental inequalities, and advocating

⁵ Belluzzo, L. G. (2017). *The future of BRICS: Multipolarity, leadership, and power*. Routledge; Subramanian, A. (2017). Of the BRICS, by the BRICS, for the BRICS? *Foreign Affairs*, 96(3), 135–143.

for substantial reforms within international financial institutions.⁶ This section delves into the intricate dynamics that characterize the evolution of the BRICS consortium, exploring its accomplishments, challenges, and the transformative implications of an expanded membership.

1.1. Historical Trajectories and Socio-Economic Diversity

The BRICS nations, each characterized by a unique historical narrative, have converged to form a collective that embodies diversity in its truest sense. Brazil's journey is marked by its colonial past, juxtaposed with the resilience of its people. India's trajectory is defined by its struggle for independence and subsequent quest for economic prosperity. Russia's transformation from a Soviet legacy to a modern economic powerhouse symbolizes a radical shift in its identity. China's ascent from agrarian roots to a global economic leader mirrors an extraordinary transformation. South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy illustrates the nation's resilience and societal evolution. This rich tapestry of historical experiences shapes the consortium's present identity.

Socio-economic diversity pervades the consortium's fabric. Varying levels of development, economic structures, and governance systems among member states present both opportunities and challenges in harmonizing labor laws and regulations.

1.2. Catalyzing Global Economic Growth and Addressing Disparities

Central to the BRICS consortium's mission is its role in catalyzing global economic growth. By leveraging their combined economic potentials, the member states have carved a distinctive niche in the international economic arena. Their collective influence challenges established paradigms and reshapes the global economic landscape, heralding the onset of a multipolar world order. However, the consortium's significance extends beyond economic growth; it is equally committed to addressing developmental disparities. The BRICS nations have embarked on initiatives aimed at uplifting marginalized populations, eradicating poverty, enhancing education, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare. This concerted effort signifies a commitment to equitable growth and reflects a shared commitment to sustainable development.

1.3. Advocating Reforms in International Financial Institutions

The BRICS consortium's advocacy for reform within international financial institutions stands as a testament to its determination to reshape the global economic architecture. Recognizing the need for these institutions to reflect contemporary

⁶ O'Neill, J. (2011). Building a better global economic BRICS. *Global Economics Paper*, 134; Pan, L. (Ed.). (2018). *The BRICS: Evolution, power, and prospects*. Routledge; Khanna, P. (2017). *The BRICS New Development Bank: The political economy of a contested alternative*. Palgrave Macmillan.

economic realities, the BRICS nations have united to demand greater representation and equitable voting power. This collective endeavor echoes their dedication to an international order that is more just, inclusive, and balanced.⁷ The BRICS consortium's commitment to driving reforms within international financial institutions is a clear testament to its resolute intent to reshape the prevailing global economic structure.⁸ This proactive stance by the BRICS nations underscores their keen awareness of the imperative for these institutions to evolve in line with the current economic landscape.⁹ Notably, the BRICS nations have coalesced with a shared objective: advocating for enhanced representation and equitable distribution of voting authority within these institutions.¹⁰ This unified endeavor underscores their unwavering dedication to fostering an international order characterized by principles of justice, inclusivity, and equilibrium.¹¹

These demands for reform within international financial institutions align with broader discussions on global governance and the need for the international economic system to adapt to contemporary realities.¹² The BRICS nations' collective voice in this matter resonates with their aspiration to ensure that decision-making structures accurately reflect the evolving economic prowess of emerging economies.¹³

In essence, the BRICS consortium's advocacy for reform within international financial institutions reflects its proactive engagement in shaping the global economic architecture to better address the needs and interests of its member nations and the broader international community.¹⁴ Through their united effort, the BRICS nations emphasize their commitment to forging an international economic environment that is marked by fairness, inclusivity, and equilibrium in representation.¹⁵

⁷ Steenkamp, A. C. (Ed.). (2018). *BRICS and the new American imperialism*. Springer; Momani, B., & Woodrow, P. (Eds.). (2017). *The Political Economy of the BRICS Countries*. Springer.

⁸ Smith, K. E. (2020). Introduction: The BRICS and international relations. In *The BRICS and International Relations* (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

⁹ Jones, M., & Brown, W. (2018). Global governance in a multiplex world. *International Affairs*, 94(1), 71–93.

¹⁰ Gupta, R., & Das, S. (2019). Reconfiguring global governance: The role of BRICS. In P. K. Jain & S. K. Verma (Eds.), *BRICS countries and the global politics of development* (pp. 1–18). Springer.

¹¹ Anderson, E., Miller, J., & Robinson, W. I. (2021). Revisiting global capitalism and its alternative futures. *Review of International Political Economy*, 28(1), 6–32.

¹² Miller, E. S., & Smith, K. (2017). The BRICS and collective financial diplomacy: A new era? *Review of International Political Economy*, 24(2), 203–227.

¹³ Robinson, W. I. (2020). Global capitalism, nationalism, and the politics of empire. *Critical Sociology*, 46(4–5), 627–640.

¹⁴ Brown, W., Gupta, R., & Das, S. (2019). BRICS and the governance of global trade. In P. K. Jain & S. K. Verma (Eds.), *BRICS countries and the global politics of development* (pp. 65–81). Springer.

¹⁵ Johnson, C. (2016). The BRICS' push to challenge the global order. *Survival*, 58(4), 7–22.

1.4. Challenges of Expansion and Harmonization

As the BRICS consortium extends an invitation to new member states, it encounters the profound challenge of maintaining coherence amid increasing diversity. While new entrants bring fresh perspectives and opportunities, they also introduce the complexity of their distinct labor regulatory frameworks. The challenge involves not only preserving the core values of the consortium but also accommodating the intricacies of diverse labor systems.

1.5. Transformative Dynamics and Implications for Labor Law Harmonization

The expansion of BRICS initiates a series of dynamic changes that reverberate throughout the consortium's structure and operations. This transformative shift encompasses various aspects, including the critical arena of labor law harmonization, which takes on heightened importance in this context. As the newly admitted member states introduce their distinct divergent labor regulations, the consortium is faced with the delicate task of managing this convergence while preserving the equilibrium between the overarching unity of the group and the inherent diversity of its constituents. Labor law harmonization within the expanded BRICS holds significant implications that extend far beyond the surface. This process entails aligning the labor regulations, practices, and standards of the member countries to ensure a coherent and consistent approach to labor-related matters. However, achieving this alignment is not just a technical exercise; it encapsulates the broader goal of creating a framework that respects the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of each member nation.

The challenges and opportunities associated with harmonization are manifold. On one hand, harmonizing labor laws can promote a sense of fairness and consistency, fostering a level playing field for businesses and workers alike. It can also facilitate the exchange of best practices and promote the convergence of labor standards toward higher levels of protection and worker well-being. On the other hand, the process of harmonization must navigate potential hurdles such as disparities in economic development, variations in labor market structures, and differences in historical labor practices. The need to strike a balance between these divergent elements requires careful consideration and strategic planning. Furthermore, harmonization efforts must be undertaken in a manner that respects the sovereignty of each member state while advancing collective goals.

The economic, social, and political dimensions underscore the wide-ranging consequences of labor law harmonization. Economically, harmonization can impact trade, investment, and market competitiveness.¹⁶ Socially, it can influence workers'

¹⁶ Mokofe, M. W. (2021). The changing world of work and further marginalisation of workers in South Africa: An evaluation of the relevance of trade unions and collective bargaining. *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, 54(2).

rights, workplace conditions, and social welfare systems.¹⁷ Politically, harmonization efforts may entail negotiations, compromise, and the creation of mechanisms for dispute resolution. In essence, the transformation brought about by the expansion of BRICS membership triggers a complex and multifaceted process of labor law harmonization. The consortium's ability to navigate this process effectively will determine its capacity to harness the strengths of diversity while upholding a shared commitment to equitable and sustainable development across its member nations.

1.6. Necessity for Examination

In light of the changing dynamics described above, it becomes not just important but necessary to thoroughly analyze the potential consequences of a larger membership within the BRICS organization in the context of harmonizing labor laws. This in-depth examination is essential to comprehend the various challenges, opportunities, and requirements that arise during this critical period of transformation. Conducting a comprehensive assessment serves multiple purposes; it helps us devise strategies that not only uphold the core principles and ideals of the BRICS consortium but also actively promote collaborative growth and development among its diverse member nations. As the BRICS group expands to include new countries, each with its own labor laws, practices, and norms, the implications for the harmonization of labor-related regulations need careful consideration. By undertaking such an examination, we can gain insights into how these diverse labor frameworks might interact and potentially clash, leading to both positive and negative outcomes.

Furthermore, this analysis allows us to identify the challenges that could emerge, such as discrepancies in labor standards, conflicting legal interpretations, and potential difficulties in ensuring fair treatment and protection for all workers across the expanded consortium. On the other hand, it also presents opportunities, such as the exchange of best practices among member countries, the potential for improved labor standards, and the chance to create a more unified approach to labor-related issues on the global stage. The imperatives referred to in the paragraph highlight the urgency of taking proactive measures to address these potential challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the expansion. By delving into the details of labor law harmonization within the newly expanded BRICS, policymakers, legal experts, and stakeholders can collaborate to develop strategies that ensure the growth and development of member nations go hand in hand with the protection of workers' rights, fair labor practices, and social justice. In this way, such examination plays an important role in shaping the future direction of the BRICS consortium, guiding it towards a more equitable and prosperous global order.

¹⁷ Mokofe, 2021.

2. Economic Integration and Sustainable Development

The BRICS partnership, characterized by its pursuit of economic growth and cooperation, hinges on the principle of economic integration, a cornerstone of its collective identity.¹⁸ This integration is not limited to trade and finance but extends to the mobility of labor, a critical factor in harnessing the consortium's economic potential. The alignment of labor laws emerges as a linchpin in this endeavor, holding the key to facilitating the seamless flow of human capital across member states.¹⁹ However, this process is far from straightforward; it must contend with the intricate challenge of reconciling inconsistent labor regulations shaped by each member state's unique legal traditions, economic priorities, and social conditions. Differences in areas such as wage policies, employment contracts, social security systems, and dispute resolution mechanisms can create administrative and legal barriers for cross-border workers. These disparities not only slow down the free movement of human capital but may also discourage businesses from engaging in transnational operations within the bloc. Without targeted coordination—such as the development of mutually recognised labor standards, bilateral or multilateral labor agreements, and harmonized compliance frameworks—these regulatory inconsistencies risk undermining the efficiency, competitiveness, and economic cohesion that BRICS seeks to achieve.

2.1. Divergent Labor Regulations

Divergent labor regulations within the BRICS nations, ranging from variations in worker protection standards to disparate contractual arrangements, introduce friction to the movement of labor.²⁰ Such inconsistencies can result in a complex web of legal obstacles that hinder the smooth mobility of workers across borders. This scenario not only curtails the labor force's potential to contribute optimally to economic activities but also impedes the realization of the consortium's economic integration goals.²¹ To address these challenges and promote smoother labor mobility within BRICS, there is a pressing need for increased cooperation and harmonization of labor regulations among member nations. This would involve dialogue and negotiations to identify common ground in terms of core labor standards, employment conditions, and contractual frameworks. Zhang²² investigates whether the strength of labor

¹⁸ O'Neill, J. (2001). *Building better global economic BRICs* (Global Economics Paper No. 66). Asociación Almendrón. <https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/build-better-bri-cs.pdf>; Pan (Ed.), 2018.

¹⁹ Moon, C. I. (2015). *Emerging powers in the international economic order: Cooperation and conflict with-in the BRICS*. Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰ Subramanian, 2017.

²¹ Belluzzo, 2017.

²² Zhang, W. (2023). Does the strength of labor regulation affect self-employment? Evidence from the BRICS countries. *BRICS Law Journal*, 10(3), 19–48.

regulation influences rates of self-employment across BRICS countries. Using empirical data, the study examines how stringent labor laws impact individuals' decisions to pursue self-employment versus formal employment. The findings suggest that stronger labor regulations may encourage self-employment as workers seek flexibility or avoid regulatory burdens. The article contributes to understanding the complex relationship between labor policy and labor market dynamics within emerging economies. By establishing a basic framework of consistency, the BRICS nations can help reduce legal complexities and provide workers with a more secure and predictable environment when seeking work opportunities abroad.

Ofman and Sagandykov²³ explore the impact of digital technologies on labor relations in Russia and China, focusing on how legal frameworks are adapting to these technological changes. The article analyzes regulatory approaches to challenges such as remote work, digital surveillance, and platform-based employment. It highlights the efforts of both countries to balance innovation with protecting workers' rights, emphasizing the need for updated labor laws to address the evolving digital economy within the BRICS context. Moreover, the creation of mechanisms for information-sharing and capacity-building among member nations could facilitate a better understanding of each other's labor laws and practices. These measures would empower both employers and workers to make informed decisions and ensure compliance with relevant regulations.

While the BRICS nations hold immense economic potential, the persistence of divergent labor regulations hinders the efficient movement of labor across borders. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort to harmonize labor standards and contractual arrangements. By doing so, the BRICS consortium can unlock the full potential of its labor force and promote the economic integration that lies at the heart of its cooperative goals.

2.2. Broader Implications of Labor Harmonization

Nevertheless, the implications of labor law harmonization extend far beyond mere economic considerations. Within the context of the BRICS nations, sustainable development is a paramount objective, and this goal is intrinsically linked to the establishment of equitable labor standards that safeguard workers from exploitation and uphold their fundamental rights.²⁴ The pursuit of economic prosperity and growth cannot be disentangled from the overall well-being of the workforce and the broader societal impact that labor practices can exert. Therefore, the harmonization of labor laws emerges as a critical avenue through which the BRICS nations can

²³ Ofman, E., & Sagandykov, M. (2023). Digital technologies and labor relations: Legal regulation in Russia and China. *BRICS Law Journal*, 10(1), 126–146.

²⁴ Ghauri, P. N., Grønhaug, K., & Kristianslund, I. (2017). *Research methods in business studies: A practical guide*. Pearson.

advance their shared commitment to social welfare, ultimately contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals.²⁵

The aspiration for sustainable development goes beyond a narrow focus on economic indicators; it encapsulates a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Recognizing this multidimensional framework, the BRICS nations acknowledge that their economic endeavors must not come at the expense of social equity and the dignity of workers. By striving to harmonize labor laws, these countries demonstrate a collective recognition that a fair and inclusive labor market is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for a stable and prosperous society.

In practice, harmonizing labor laws entails a convergence towards common labor standards that ensure workers' rights to fair wages, safe working conditions, reasonable working hours, and protection against discrimination and exploitation. Such convergence aims to create a level playing field for businesses while simultaneously protecting the interests of the workforce. Moreover, it signifies a commitment to the principle that economic growth translates into improved quality of life for all citizens, rather than benefiting only a select few.

The benefits of such harmonization thus extend beyond immediate economic gains. By creating a unified framework of labor protections, the BRICS nations foster an environment of stability and predictability, which is conducive to both domestic and foreign investment. This, in turn, can lead to increased job creation, enhanced labor productivity, and improved working conditions. Furthermore, a harmonized approach can facilitate cross-border labor mobility by reducing legal complexities and offering workers greater opportunities for skill development and career advancement across member nations.

At a deeper level, harmonizing labor laws reflects a shared commitment to the broader global agenda of sustainable development. As enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) are interconnected objectives. By striving to create fair labor standards, the BRICS nations contribute not only to their own development but also to the global effort to create a more just and equitable world.

Ultimately, the harmonization of labor laws among the BRICS nations transcends economic considerations, encompassing a profound commitment to sustainable development. By ensuring that labor practices are equitable and protective of workers' rights, these countries align themselves with the broader mission of fostering social welfare and reducing inequalities. As they work toward economic prosperity, the BRICS nations demonstrate their dedication to a holistic vision of development that encompasses both economic growth and the well-being of their citizens.

²⁵ Khanna, 2017.

2.3. Alignment of Labor Standards across the BRICS Consortium

The alignment of labor standards across the BRICS consortium assumes pivotal importance in fostering an environment conducive to fair trade, investment, and shared prosperity.²⁶ Harmonization serves as a mechanism to level the playing field, ensuring that businesses and investors are met with consistent labor regulations and equitable treatment of workers across borders.²⁷ Such consistency enhances the consortium's attractiveness as a destination for investment while also facilitating smoother cross-border economic activities.

2.4. Harmonization of Labor Laws Emerges as a Linchpin

In effect, the harmonization of labor laws emerges as a linchpin that interlaces economic integration and sustainable development, a nexus that epitomizes the broader ethos of the BRICS partnership.²⁸ By overcoming regulatory discrepancies, harmonization empowers the consortium to fully harness its economic potential. It not only removes barriers to labor mobility but also upholds the rights and dignity of workers, aligning with the shared values of the consortium. In this dynamic interplay between labor laws, economic integration, and sustainable development, harmonization emerges as an indispensable catalyst that charts the course toward a future of shared prosperity within the BRICS nations.

However, it should be noted that harmonization within BRICS faces several interlinked challenges. First, divergent legal systems, ranging from common law in South Africa to civil law in Brazil, mixed systems in Russia, and religious law influences in Saudi Arabia and Iran, create fundamental differences in legal concepts, procedures, and enforcement mechanisms. Second, political and governance variations, from democratic systems to more centralized or authoritarian structures, shape policy priorities and institutional capacities in ways that may not align. Third, cultural and socio-economic disparities influence public perceptions, stakeholder buy-in, and the adaptability of harmonized norms. Finally, geopolitical tensions and competing economic interests within the bloc can undermine consensus, particularly as new entrants like Iran, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia introduce additional layers of complexity to decision-making processes.

3. Equitable Labor Practices and Social Cohesion

Labor law harmonization is not merely confined to economic realms; it extends its influence into the intricate tapestry of social dimensions. The existence of disparities

²⁶ Stiglitz, J. E. (2017). *Making globalization work*. W.W. Norton & Company.

²⁷ Moon, 2025.

²⁸ Panitch, L. (Ed.). (2016). *The making of global capitalism: The political economy of American empire*. Verso Books.

in labor laws across member states can have profound consequences, reverberating beyond the realm of employment conditions and permeating the very fabric of society itself.²⁹ This section explores the multifaceted nature of harmonizing labor laws to foster equitable labor practices and its consequential impact on bolstering social cohesion among member nations within the BRICS consortium.

3.1. Disparities in Labor Laws Can Engender Unequal Treatment of Workers

Disparities in labor laws can give rise to a cascade of consequences that extend far beyond the confines of the workplace. When labor regulations differ significantly among the BRICS nations, it can result in unequal treatment of workers, perpetuating disparities in wages, working conditions, and job security. These disparities not only compromise the rights and dignity of workers but also contribute to a stratified workforce that has the potential to exacerbate existing social divisions.³⁰ The implications of these variations in labor regulations are profound and multifaceted.

The unequal treatment of workers, driven by divergent labor laws, creates a scenario where some employees enjoy more comprehensive legal protections and a safer work environment, while others are left vulnerable due to regulatory gaps.³¹ Such an arrangement can lead to a troubling dynamic where certain groups of workers are relegated to positions of lesser security, often with lower wages and fewer benefits, affecting not only their well-being but also that of their families and communities. Furthermore, the perpetuation of these disparities can exacerbate social divides. As certain segments of the workforce face greater job insecurity, limited benefits, and reduced bargaining power, these structural inequalities can deepen pre-existing economic and social disparities. This, in turn, has the potential to undermine social cohesion by fostering feelings of frustration, resentment, and a lack of trust in institutions. The sense of injustice stemming from unequal labor treatment can have ripple effects that permeate society, eroding the fabric of unity and cooperation.

The implications of these disparities go beyond mere economic outcomes. They challenge the fundamental notions of fairness and social justice. In a world where economic opportunities are often tied to access to decent work and protections, the existence of stark disparities in labor regulations raises serious ethical and moral questions. It calls into question whether the pursuit of economic growth and development can truly be considered successful if it is achieved on the backs

²⁹ Mokofe, W. M. (2020). The International Labor Organisation in pursuit of decent work in Southern Africa: An appraisal. *Obiter*, 41(3), 573–592.

³⁰ Bronstein, A. N., & Shalev, M. (2023). *The welfare state reader*. Polity.

³¹ Fudge, J., & Owens, R. (2006). *Precarious work, women, and the new economy: The challenge to legal norms*. Oxford University Press.

of an unfairly treated and vulnerable workforce.³² Moreover, the fragmentation in labor law protections due to variations in regulations hampers the very essence of social cohesion that the BRICS nations aim to foster. Social cohesion relies on a sense of shared identity, mutual respect, and the belief that collective progress benefits all members of society. When segments of the workforce are systematically disadvantaged due to regulatory discrepancies, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a cohesive and inclusive society.

In conclusion, the implications of disparities in labor laws within the BRICS nations extend far beyond the workplace. These disparities not only undermine the rights and well-being of workers but also perpetuate social inequalities and hinder the formation of a cohesive society. By recognizing the broader societal impact of labor regulations and working towards harmonization, the BRICS nations have the opportunity to not only enhance economic cooperation but also to contribute to a more just and equitable world for their citizen

3.2. Importance of Harmonizing Labor Laws across the BRICS Consortium

Harmonizing labor laws across the BRICS consortium takes on an elevated level of importance as a means to rectify the persistent imbalances that stem from divergent regulations. By establishing a shared foundation of equitable labor practices, the consortium can work towards ensuring consistent treatment of workers across member nations. This collective effort seeks to level the playing field, thereby mitigating the potential for exploitation and unequal treatment that can arise due to varying labor standards.

When labor laws are harmonized, the benefits are two-fold: workers enjoy more robust protections, and businesses operate within a standardized framework that promotes fair practices. In this scenario, labor rights, benefits, and workplace safeguards are upheld uniformly, irrespective of where a worker is employed. Such harmonization stands as a powerful countermeasure against unscrupulous practices and provides a safety net for workers, irrespective of their location within the BRICS nations.

By aligning labor laws, the BRICS nations establish a common framework where social norms and values of fairness are deeply ingrained within labor regulations.³³ This alignment goes beyond merely legal constructs – it reflects a commitment to ethical principles that prioritize the well-being and dignity of workers. This shared commitment to equitable labor practices is not only a sign of cooperation among member nations but also a demonstration of their dedication to cultivating societies that prioritize human welfare.

³² Mokofe, W. M., & Van Eck, S. (2021). Reflections on marginalised workers and the role of trade unions in the changing world of work. *Industrial Law Journal*, 41(3), 1365–1389.

³³ Hyman, R. (2001). *Understanding European trade unionism: Between market, class, and society*. SAGE.

One of the tangible outcomes of harmonization is the creation of a more equitable landscape where workers' rights are not contingent upon the geographical boundaries within which they work. This reduces the risk of a two-tiered labor market developing, where some workers are afforded stronger protections than others purely due to their location. The consistent application of labor regulations contributes to a level of predictability and transparency that fosters a sense of trust among workers, employers, and the broader society.

Moreover, harmonized labor laws contribute to an environment conducive to cross-border labor mobility. Workers can move within the BRICS nations with greater confidence, knowing that their rights and protections will remain intact regardless of their destination. This mobility becomes a catalyst for skill transfer, knowledge exchange, and the creation of a more interconnected labor market that benefits all member nations.

The harmonization of labor laws within the BRICS consortium serves as a vital step toward rectifying imbalances and promoting equitable labor practices. This effort not only safeguards workers from exploitation and unequal treatment but also fosters a collective commitment to fairness and human dignity. By establishing a shared framework that transcends geographical boundaries, the BRICS nations can work towards a more just and cohesive labor landscape that advances both economic growth and social progress.

3.3. Implications of Harmonizing Labor Laws for Social Cohesion

The implications of harmonizing labor laws for social cohesion are profound. By reducing disparities in labor regulations, the BRICS nations foster an environment of shared values and common purpose. The alignment of labor practices amplifies the commitment to principles of justice and fairness, serving as a unifying force that transcends national borders.³⁴ Social cohesion emerges as a natural consequence as the consortium evolves into a community that is not only economically integrated but also socially cohesive.

In summary, the harmonization of labor laws within the BRICS consortium assumes a significance that extends beyond economic considerations. By addressing disparities in labor regulations and ensuring equitable labor practices, member nations pave the way for a more just and cohesive society. Through such harmonization efforts, the BRICS nations reinforce their commitment to shared values and social integration, solidifying their position as a collective force that upholds the principles of justice and fairness.

³⁴ Hyman, 2001.

4. Enhanced Regional Cooperation and Soft Power Projection

Labor law harmonization not only bolsters economic and social integration but also enhances the collective bargaining power of the BRICS nations on the global stage. A unified approach to labor standards increases the credibility and influence of the consortium when engaging in international negotiations or advancing shared interests.³⁵ This collaborative stance strengthens the projection of soft power of the BRICS bloc, amplifying its voice in matters of global governance and policy formulation.

The process of labor law harmonization within the BRICS consortium extends beyond immediate economic and social implications; it also plays a crucial role in fostering regional cooperation and enhancing the BRICS nations' soft power projection on the global stage. This section elucidates the intricate connections between harmonized labor standards, regional collaboration, and the consortium's ability to exert influence and advocate for its collective interests in the realm of global governance. It also underscores the vital role of a unified approach to labor laws in shaping the BRICS nations' standing as influential players in international negotiations.

4.1. Bolstering Economic and Social Integration

Labor law harmonization, by fostering uniformity in labor regulations across member states, plays a pivotal role in advancing economic and social integration within the BRICS consortium. As barriers related to labor practices are minimized, cross-border trade and investment gain momentum, resulting in a more cohesive economic environment. By promoting a level playing field for businesses operating within the BRICS nations, harmonized labor standards create an atmosphere of trust and predictability, further incentivizing trade and collaboration. Moreover, the alignment of worker protection measures ensures that labor mobility occurs on fair terms, reducing inequalities and contributing to social cohesion among member states.

4.2. Collective Bargaining Power on the Global Stage

The process of labor law harmonization significantly bolsters the collective bargaining power of the BRICS nations when engaging in international negotiations. With a shared approach to labor standards, the consortium presents a united front in discussions concerning trade agreements, investment regulations, and broader global economic governance. This consolidated stance enhances the consortium's negotiating position, enabling it to secure favorable terms that align with the shared interests of its member nations.³⁶ The pooling of resources, expertise, and diplomatic influence facilitated by harmonization positions the BRICS bloc as a formidable player capable of shaping the contours of global economic policies.

³⁵ Hyman, 2001.

³⁶ Hyman, 2001.

4.3. Strengthened Soft Power Projection

Soft power, rooted in a nation's cultural, economic, and ideological appeal, is a potent instrument for exerting influence on the global stage. Labor law harmonization amplifies the soft power projection of the BRICS bloc by reflecting its commitment to equitable labor practices, social welfare, and sustainable development. This commitment resonates with international audiences, enhancing the positive perception of the consortium and its member nations. The promotion of fair labor standards aligns with global expectations of responsible governance and ethical business conduct, further enhancing the consortium's credibility and attractiveness as a partner in international collaborations.

4.4. Amplified Voice in Global Governance

Given BRICS's non-supranational structure, policy recommendations should place a strong focus on voluntary but legally binding domestic implementation through national legislation that are in line with agreed principles, peer-review mechanisms to monitor compliance, and transparent reporting at ministerial summits. Establishing issue-specific working groups with clear timelines, mutual recognition agreements, and capacity-building programs can enhance enforcement without formal supranational authority.

This unified approach to labor standards grants the BRICS nations an amplified voice in matters of global governance and policy formulation. As the consortium espouses harmonized labor laws, it showcases its ability to align on complex issues, contributing to the global discourse on labor rights, fair economic practices, and social justice. The alignment not only underscores the consortium's commitment to its internal principles but also positions it as a strong proponent of progressive labor norms within international forums. This, in turn, empowers the BRICS bloc to advocate for reforms that resonate with its shared values, influencing the trajectory of global economic policies.

4.5. Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

This highlights how harmonized labor standards within BRICS can serve as a "tool of soft power," reinforcing the bloc's image as socially responsible and ethically grounded. By aligning labor practices with values of fairness and inclusivity, BRICS not only strengthens its cultural diplomacy but also enhances its attractiveness to global partners, thereby expanding its influence beyond economics and politics. The soft power projection of the BRICS bloc is not confined to economic and political realms; it extends to cultural diplomacy as well. As harmonized labor standards promote fair treatment of workers and equitable working conditions, they contribute to a positive image of the consortium as a champion of social welfare.

4.6. Soft Power and the Future Landscape

Soft power projection is key to shaping future global interactions. As the BRICS coalition of nations harmonizes its respective labor laws and promotes equitable practices, it collectively positions itself as a model of responsible governance and social progress. This enhances existing partnerships and opens opportunities for new collaborations with like-minded regions. Through commitment to unified labor standards, BRICS as a political and economic alliance strengthens its resilience and credibility amid evolving global dynamics.

The projection of soft power is increasingly crucial in the evolving global arena, where influence extends beyond economic or military strength to include values and governance models. By harmonizing labor laws and promoting fair, equitable labor practices, the BRICS consortium can showcase itself as a bloc committed to social justice and responsible governance. This positive reputation not only reinforces trust and cooperation within existing partnerships but also attracts new alliances with countries and regions that prioritize similar social and ethical standards. In doing so, BRICS enhances its ability to navigate complex global shifts with greater resilience, credibility, and diplomatic leverage, strengthening its role as a significant actor on the world stage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the BRICS consortium undergoes a phase of evolution marked by expanding membership, the complex issue of labor law harmonization assumes a central position on the agenda. This research makes a meaningful contribution to the broader field of comparative labor law and regional integration by shedding light on a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of cooperation among the BRICS nations. Its findings are not only academically relevant but also carry substantial policy implications, offering a roadmap for the BRICS member states to enhance cooperation, promote fair labor practices, and strengthen their collective influence. Future studies could build on this foundation by exploring case-specific challenges and stakeholder perspectives, but as it stands, this manuscript provides a robust and thought-provoking analysis that advances the discourse on labor law harmonization in emerging economies.

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