

Employment Matters Too Much To Society To Leave To Markets Alone

The Role Of Public Employment Programmes As Part Of A Social Contract For The Future Of Work

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Abstract

The future of work (FOW) will involve massive labour market disruption and potentially, a significant net decline in the demand for labour. Many in the labour force will be unable to take advantage of new opportunities. How should societies limit the negative social impacts, to foster more equitable societies – and fairer labour markets?

Universal social protection is key. Yet while access to income certainly matters, the anticipated social challenges go beyond loss of income. Access to decent work creates networks, structure, skills, access to information, a means of contributing to society and a sense of self-worth. Unemployment erodes these, contributing to psycho-social problems and anti-social behaviours that impact whole communities; it also contributes to a decline in work skills, with implications for overall productivity even where labour demand rises.

It is in recognition of the social and economic impacts of unemployment that many global social contracts have committed to the goal of full employment, including as part of the Social Development Goals for 2030. The paper argues that the goal of full employment needs to be re-asserted as part of the social contract on the future of work, with a commitment to use the full spectrum of public policy levers to shape employment outcomes, rather than leaving this to markets alone. This includes consideration of the role of the state as employer of last resort and the role of employment guarantees and other forms of public employment, with such employment focused on the creation of public value and on providing the positive benefits of participation in decent work for people otherwise excluded from employment.

The paper explores the diverse ways in which public employment programmes (PEPs) can address the challenges anticipated as part of the future of work. This includes their potential role in ending involuntary unemployment, creating a labour market floor in support of a Universal Labour Guarantee, complementarities between PEPs, social protection instruments and Active Labour Market Policies, the role of PEPs in responding to displacement of people, the scope for new forms of work in the public interest, the role of PEPs in placemaking and in support of livelihoods and social enterprise.

Keywords: employment guarantee, full employment, future of work, public employment, social contract

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1 Introduction

The changes associated with digital technology... the changes that might yet lie ahead as we wait fretfully for the robot overlords, are continuing to transform society. The benefits are unevenly distributed; the transformation can only be glimpsed through current statistics; the cautious evidence-based policy consensus is palpably inadequate; and the rage against the elite is widespread. (Coyle 2018)

It's a turbulent world. The future of work looks set to exacerbate this turbulence, with a range of forces pulling the future in different directions. Technological change is exponential. Emerging technologies are disrupting how value is created, without new systems for its distribution having yet emerged. In some quarters, 'automation anxiety' feeds fears of a dystopian future in which the robots take over the jobs; in which capital can create wealth without workers, massively exacerbating inequality.

Yet for others, this is scaremongering. Instead, this same disruption represents potential freedom from the shackles of unfulfilling work. No more drudgery, no more hard physical labour, no more routine tasks. Technological change will create as many if not more jobs as it displaces, on better terms. Working hours will drop, making space for creativity and lifelong learning. Societies will be better places, with more wealth available to meet social needs.

In practice, elements of both versions may hold true: but for different people, in different parts of the world – or different parts of the same city or neighbourhood, with an exponential rise in inequality a serious risk.

There is, however, nothing inexorable about the outcomes. They will be determined, to a significant extent, by political economy, social agency and the role of governance in shaping the way technology impacts on societies in a context in which technology is not neutral.

...technologies are solutions, products and implementations that are developed through social processes, stand in and for people and institutions, and contain within them a whole set of assumptions, values and principles that in turn can (and do) affect power, structure and status in society. (Schwab 2018, p 32)

So, as in the past, the current technological revolution holds new levels of promise along with new levels of risk.

While analysts debate future scenarios, elements of many of these are happening already. In the industrialised world, labour markets are ‘hollowing out’, with a concentration of high-education, high-wage occupations at one end of the spectrum, and low-education, low-wage manual occupations on the other (Autor, Li & Notowidigdo 2019, p. 3). Erosion of job quality is common, with increased outsourcing, insecurity, casualisation, the rise of the gig economy and the destruction of many key labour standards. In the developing world, informality remains a norm, with serious decent work deficits. The role of collective organisation in asserting rights at work has declined, not least because the jobs and sectors in which labour has traditionally been strongest are often those worst affected by off-shoring and job displacement. Globalisation, monopsony power and increasingly harsh regulation have all contributed to weakening the power of labour (Nocero 2018).

The challenges posed by technology are compounded by other drivers of change. Environmental degradation and climate change are predicted to have widespread job destruction effects, including from natural disasters and desertification. Yet mitigation and adaptation to climate change have the potential to create new jobs at scale, too – not least through technological innovation. This is one of the more hopeful synchronicities to emerge from the noise of sometimes widely divergent projections for the future (Balliester & Elsheiki 2019).

Demographic trends also differ significantly across the world, creating differing incentives in relation to the scale of automation considered socially desirable. Current demographic trends may, however, be disrupted by mass displacements of people arising from conflict and from climate change – with the latter potentially fuelling the former. These dynamics all interact systemically, with nothing linear about the march of progress into the future.

All these effects are likely to be uneven across the globe, with the highest levels of job destruction from both technological change and from climate change projected to take place in the developing world. As a consequence, the traditional trajectory of structural transformation, which entails a shift from low wage agricultural activity to higher-wage manufacturing jobs in urban areas, may no longer be plausible. As a result, in some contexts and societies, the future of work is likely to share key elements with the present: with large swathes of underemployment, unemployment and working poverty – potentially compounded by displacement and conflict.

Our inability to take decisive action in relation to these challenges in the present may not augur well for our ability to do so in the future.

But without decisive action we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social and economic repercussions (ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work p. 21).

What form should such decisive action take? This question is already urgent.

2 Full employment and the social contract for the future of work

2.1 Social and economic impacts of unemployment

Commitments to policies of full employment are a goal in many global agreements, as part of the social contract. Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations defines full employment as a necessary condition for stability and well-being, and commits all members to use their policy powers to ensure it. The 1944 Philadelphia Declaration of the ILO places an obligation on the ILO to further full employment as one of its core goals, and Convention 122 on Employment Policy (1964) states that each ILO Member ‘should declare and pursue, as a major goal, an active policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment.’ The commitment to full employment and decent work is also one of the 2030 Social Development Goals (SDGs). These commitments are in recognition of the social and economic costs of unemployment, which ripple through households and communities and impact on society as a whole.

Unemployment exacerbates poverty and inequality, with effects often concentrated spatially or in relation to marginalised groups, catalysing wider social and economic decline in regions and neighbourhoods. This leads to ‘disrupted communities with weak social controls; acute harassment and anti-social behaviour; a clustering of pressures provoking a cumulative crisis’ (Power & Mumford 1999).

For those directly affected, the income effects can be severe; these are compounded by significant non-income effects with the two often mutually reinforcing (Sen 1999; Winkelmann & Winkelmann 1998). Employment provides structure to people’s use of time, provides status, a sense of social purpose and access to networks. Even where work is exploitative, workers have often used the

workplace to build organisation and forms of solidarity to fight against such conditions, creating alternative forms of social recognition and identity.

Unemployment is also associated with a loss of capabilities; just as people learn by doing, they also 'unlearn by not doing' (Sen 1997). Work skills decline, with long-term unemployment eroding latent workforce productivity. For the unemployed, this translates into a decline in their future employment prospects, with the mark of unemployment 'like a scarlet letter' limiting their chances of re-employment (Tcherneva 2017).

Also part of the equation is the social and economic opportunity cost of unused labour, not only for economic productivity and growth, but also in relation to the foregone contribution to public goods and services and their impacts on collective well-being.

2.2 Full employment: honoured in the breach?

From the post war period up until the mid-1970's, maintaining full employment was an overriding goal of economic policy in the developed world and unemployment was largely held below two percent. When unemployment threatened to increase, government intervened by stimulating aggregate demand (Mitchell and Musysken 2008, p.2). Yet today, commitments to full employment are more likely to be honoured in the breach, with it rarely having primacy as a macro-economic policy goal any longer.

This framework [full employment] has been systematically abandoned in most OECD countries over the last 30 years. The overriding priority of macroeconomic policy has shifted towards keeping inflation low and suppressing the stabilisation functions of fiscal policy. As a consequence, the insights gained from the writings of Keynes, Marx and Kalecki into how deficient demand in macroeconomic systems constrains employment opportunities and forces some individuals into involuntary unemployment have been discarded.

The concept of systemic failure has been replaced by sheeting the responsibility for economic outcomes onto the individual. Accordingly, anyone who is unemployed has chosen to be in that state either because they didn't invest in appropriate skills; haven't searched for available opportunities with sufficient effort or rigour; or have become either 'work shy' or too selective in the jobs they would accept. Governments are seen

to have bolstered this individual lethargy through providing excessively generous income support payments and restrictive hiring and firing regulations. (Mitchell & Muysken 2008, p.3)

Mitchell and Muysken characterize this as a shift from acceptance of full employment as the responsibility of society and as the basis of macro-economic policy, to a focus on full *employability*, with the onus shifting to the individual, regardless of levels of demand for labour in the wider economy – or of the conditions of work on offer. If jobs aren't available, then the poor are expected to self-employ their own way out of poverty on market terms, through enterprise activity. Certainly, entrepreneurship can create jobs; but the unemployed are just often not best placed to take on these risks.

The role of the state shifted to creating an enabling environment for market development, mostly by getting out of the way. Instead of a market-shaping agenda, policies focused on enhancing 'employability' at the individual level, through Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) - as if the constraint on employment is primarily a function of the characteristics of the work-seeker rather than of a lack of labour demand.

Certainly, there are contexts in which a skills mismatch between the demand and supply of labour may need to be addressed, or forms of exclusion may affect access to labour markets. But too often, ALMPs simply confer advantages on ALMP participants relative to others in the labour market, allowing them to 'jump the queue', with no increase in the number of jobs – just a change in who gets them. Yet the more fundamental problem of labour demand is left out of the discourse.

In the process, primacy is given to market processes in determining employment outcomes. Yet labour markets – like all markets – are social constructs, with the rules of the game set by societies. In some, a blind eye is still turned to slavery and child labour. The right to work all too often means the right to be part of the working poor. Even where genuinely decent labour standards have been achieved, these remain contested. While the commodification of labour is decried, people often have no real choice but to compete to sell their labour at the lowest price, even where this represents working poverty. This reality is not 'the natural law of unfettered markets' – it's an outcome of social and political choices, rooted in power relations that determine what societies are willing to tolerate, with this also a function of power relations between societies, as the history of conquest, colonialism and other forms of extraction illustrate.

2.3 The state as employer of last resort

The state has a spectrum of instruments with which to influence employment outcomes at a systemic level. These include not only fiscal and macro-economic policy, but also industrial policy, public investment in social and economic infrastructure, incentives to the private sector, forms of demand-side stimulus – and also, direct investment in employment creation, in public employment programmes – also called public works.

PEPs are publicly-funded employment programmes outside the normal public service, whose purpose is to employ people, with that employment used to contribute to the delivery of assets and services that create public value and contribute to the public good. They have a long history as an instrument of public policy, historically often used to respond to cyclical unemployment and/or disaster management situations. Over time, shifts in emphasis include an increasing focus on their poverty reduction and social protection effects and, in the ILO context, on ensuring minimum standards in wages and working conditions within the wider paradigm of decent work.

Historically, such direct investment in employment has typically been time-bound and targeted, with participation rates determined by the scale of budgets allocated. Yet, as Hyman Minsky argued in the 1960s, the state can instead act as employer of last resort: guaranteeing employment to all those willing and able to work, in the process ending involuntary unemployment in society and fulfilling commitments to full employment – with government the only player able to create an infinitely elastic demand for labour (Papadimitriou, 2008).

Minsky argued that strategies to raise aggregate demand are often a blunt instrument, easily falling foul of the structure of a given economy, reinforcing existing patterns of distribution in ways that may never reach the poorest. Instead, he argued that spending should be targeted directly at the unemployed, taking workers ‘as they are’, providing jobs that fit their existing skills, and allowing the impacts of such a stimulus to ‘bubble up’ into the wider economy (Wray, 2007).

With the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, India became the first country to test an employment guarantee approach at a national scale. While the guarantee is not universal – it guarantees every rural household that registers 100 days of employment per annum, paid at a minimum wage – it is nevertheless the first rights-based employment guarantee, reaching over 70 million participations and 52 million households in 2018/19 (www.nrega.nic.in).

Yet India is still the outlier. All too often, this policy terrain is ceded, with markets left to determine employment outcomes, and people left at the mercy of these markets, even where the social need is dire. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, for example, many states were quick to act as lenders of last resort to bail out the banks – at huge and enduring social and economic cost – but failed to act as employers of last resort, despite the social desperation caused by the jobs crisis.

2.4 Full employment and the social contract

While few things are certain about the future of work, high levels of job displacement and associated social disruption are certainly anticipated, with unemployment and underemployment likely realities in many parts of the world.

It is in this context that calls for a new social contract to address the social impacts of the future of work are being made, including in the Report of the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work, 'Work for a Brighter Future' (henceforth ILO FOW), and also by the World Bank's World Development Report 2019, 'The Changing Nature of Work' (henceforth WDR 2019).

While there are of course differences between them, both include a range of important intervention proposals. In WDR 2019, the focus is on a social contract to ensure equal opportunity, secured through investment in human development and on significant investment in social protection. Important as these are, this focus nevertheless remains largely within the discourse of building capabilities to enhance employability. There is no mention of full employment as a goal. While the need for a 'New Deal' is invoked, interpreting this as a call for a large-scale public employment programme is described as 'disingenuous' – even though that is exactly what the original 'New Deal' was (WDR 2019).

The ILO FOW similarly emphasizes human capital development and social protection, with emphases on global labour standards, lifelong learning and gender equity. While it does commit to the goal of full employment, the instruments discussed focus on investment in social and economic infrastructure. Important as these are, what is missing is consideration of the full spectrum of levers available to public policy, where the market demand for labour falls short of the needs of societies. In addition, while the income security provided through social protection certainly matters, participation in work plays a range of vital roles in people's lives that go beyond income alone. The social contract for the future of work needs to ensure that even in the absence of market demand

for labour, there are pathways that ensure that those willing and able to work have the opportunity to do so. An employment guarantee does this, removing involuntary employment from the equation; other forms of public employment can significantly reduce it. These policies belong in the social contract for the future of work.

3 Re-imagining PEPs as part of the future of work

3.1 The evolution of PEPs as a policy instrument

It's true. The track record of public employment programmes is not always good. Too often, short-term work opportunities translate into limited poverty impacts. Stipends instead of decent wages devalue the benefits of participation in work. The quality of assets and services has at times been poor. The work undertaken is not always meaningful (McCord 2012; Beierl & Grimm 2018). But these outcomes are not intrinsic to public employment programmes; they are an outcome of poor policy and design choices. In the same way that critiques of social welfare in the past have delivered improved forms of social protection, critiques of public employment programmes have performed a challenge function that has driven innovation and improved outcomes – and needs to continue to do so if they are to be relevant to the future of work.

One of the most significant innovations has been the introduction India's MGNREGA. Certainly, the mass rollout of this programme has not been seamless. Its requirements challenged local state capabilities – as any development programme at this scale will do. Yet year by year, evaluation, critique and the development of new capabilities have enabled stronger outcomes. And while MGNREGA is in the forefront in terms of scale and the use of a rights based approach, large scale programmes are also in place in countries as diverse as Mexico, South Africa, Peru, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Nepal and Indonesia. This is in addition to many smaller scale programmes across the developed and developing world¹.

Over the same period, there has also been a growing emphasis on the role of PEPs in contributing to the climate agenda, through work focused on implementing mitigation and adaptation strategies and augmenting existing government efforts in these regards. In addition, work in the social sector and in services has opened new opportunities for social impact. This has included emphasis on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and on community-based care. These contribute to important social

¹ Information on all these can be found on www.socialprotection.org

policy priorities, while also providing pathways to recognition for informal, unrecognised and unpaid work, mainly undertaken by women. So, for example, in South Africa, workers involved in such work in PEPs are entitled to a minimum wage, access to unemployment insurance and workplace compensation provisions.

Efforts to target youth have also led to the introduction of forms of work involving digital and internet technologies, in recognition that the notion of ‘public goods and services’ now also extends into these domains.

How might PEPs adapt and develop to address some of the specific challenges anticipated as part of the future of work?

3.2 Ending – or reducing - involuntary unemployment

Any social contract for the future of work must surely address the needs of those involuntarily excluded from work. This needs to go further than simply a commitment to some form of minimum income, important as this is. In the first instance, this requires the state to use all the means at its disposal to stimulate market-based employment. But where the market response is inadequate, PEPs provide a policy instrument to close the gap.

Desirable as it would be to test a universal employment guarantee, none yet exists. MGNREGA does however illustrate that employment guarantees do not have to be universal to make a significant difference. They can instead target stubborn problems within a labour market. These could be spatial, or seasonal, or relate to a constituency such as youth, with the concept of a ‘guarantee’ meaning that everyone who qualifies against the criteria has a right to participate, instead of participation being rationed by targeting or a fixed budget.

Even where public employment does not take the form of a guarantee, its effect is still to reduce involuntary unemployment or underemployment. This will continue to make it a vital part of the policy toolbox.

3.3 Creating a labour market floor to support a Universal Labour Guarantee

While minimum and living wage laws have historically been implemented to place a floor in the labour market, they have proved hard to enforce, especially in contexts of high informality. An

employment guarantee provides an alternative instrument for achieving this aim, functioning as a *de facto* floor in the labour market, greatly increasing the bargaining position of workers throughout the economy (Paul, Darity and Hamilton 2018 p8). In the process, this would give effect to the calls for a Universal Labour Guarantee made by the ILO's FOW, that aims to ensure minimum conditions and standards for those in work. By guaranteeing work at what is considered the lowest acceptable level, i.e. the minimum level of the Universal Labour Guarantee, an EG or PEP operating at sufficient scale can have systemic effects on the labour standards floor, pushing up wages and working conditions more widely.

The scope for even a partial guarantee to do so has been illustrated by the impact of MGNREGA on labour standards in rural India, where payment of a minimum wage has pushed up local agricultural wages. It has also made significant gains in closing the gender wage gap – by paying equal wages, setting new local norms and expectations in this regard (Breitkreuz, Rhonda, et al. 2017).

This potential of course only applies where the PEP itself has decent labour standards. But the scope exists for deliberate use of a PEP to set a labour standards floor, within a specific sector or more broadly.

3.4 PEPs, social protection and UBI

PEPs contribute to the income security dimension of the ILO's Social Protection Floor and often, this is part of their purpose. The more universal and rights-based the scheme, the greater this social protection effect is likely to be, with lessons from recent work highlighting the severe limits of poverty targeting in social protection programmes (Kidd & Athias 2019).

Yet, even in a universal scheme such as an employment guarantee, there are likely to be coverage gaps that social protection interventions need to address. PEPs are primarily an instrument of inclusive employment policy aimed at full employment. As with all forms of decent work, this has positive anti-poverty effects that reduce the pressure on social protection systems. This should enable synergy and policy complementarity rather than creating a binary choice between instruments; yet the latter is often the direction the discourse takes.

These issues have come into renewed focus in the context of debate on the future of work. In the public discourse, when big tech innovators from Silicon Valley like Elon Musk say that the risk of the robots taking our jobs is real, this has tended to have more traction than when economists say that

they won't. It has been against the backdrop of such concerns that the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) has re-emerged, capturing some of the public and policy imagination. With strong proponents and critics, the debate can be fierce.

Amongst the divergent rationales for supporting UBI, the most powerful is surely the idea that it offers a simple means of ensuring an end to poverty, that contributes to redistribution of wealth in a world in which inequality is an affront to social justice. By using the fiscus to claw back the payment from the non-poor, it avoids costly and inaccurate means-testing and reaches everyone. In this narrative, UBI is placed at the heart of the new social contract.

Every element of that rationale is, however, disputed. Concerns have, for example, been raised that in some contexts, UBI risks eroding hard-won gains in other areas of social protection, leaving some of the poor in society poorer as a result (Ortiz et al 2018).

This applies also to the proposed funding mechanism. In much of the developing world, high levels of informality mean there is little or no scope to claw back transfers made to the non-poor through the tax system. This can make the UBI approach a highly regressive and expensive approach to achieving a minimum income unless it is accompanied by a radical restructuring of the tax code and collection system. UBI's quest for a simple solution overlooks a reality of complexity

In the context of the discussion of UBI, debate has emerged that contrasts the relative merits of UBI versus an employment guarantee. It is largely an unhelpful debate often based on false premises. So, for example, the possible weaknesses of a UBI do not in themselves invalidate the importance of other forms of minimum income policies in societies. At the same time, dismissing employment guarantees for making workfare a condition of social support (Standing 2013) is simply inaccurate. Arguments for workfare come out of a very different tradition:

What distinguishes this tradition [workfare] is its grounding in the belief that jobless individuals are at fault for their own joblessness. Advocacy of the right to work is and always has been premised on the opposite assumption – that the reason jobless individuals lack work is because the economy has failed to make work available to them. Rather than supporting the use of labour as a disciplinary measure to put pressure on the poor to cure their own joblessness by reforming their attitudes and behaviour, right to work advocates have argued that job creation initiatives are needed

to remedy the failure of the market to create enough jobs to eliminate involuntary employment (Harvey 2005, p10).

The goal of an employment guarantee is to ensure that everyone who wants paid employment is able to obtain it; there is no necessary imposition of a duty to work. That said, it is also true that in the absence of minimum income support, people may have little choice. There is therefore an inherent danger in seeing these two instruments as representing a binary choice, rather than looking at how they may be synergistically designed as part of an integrated anti-poverty strategy that recognises the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and that does indeed enhance choices.

Even where a minimum income does exist, and is adequate for survival, it can be assumed that for many, the route to improving the quality of their lives will nevertheless remain through employment. An employment guarantee keeps that route open. If market opportunities for economic participation and advancement are limited, if the returns from self-employment are poor and if access to labour markets is highly constrained, then societies need alternatives that allow people to improve their conditions of life as well as benefit from the non-income impacts of economic participation.

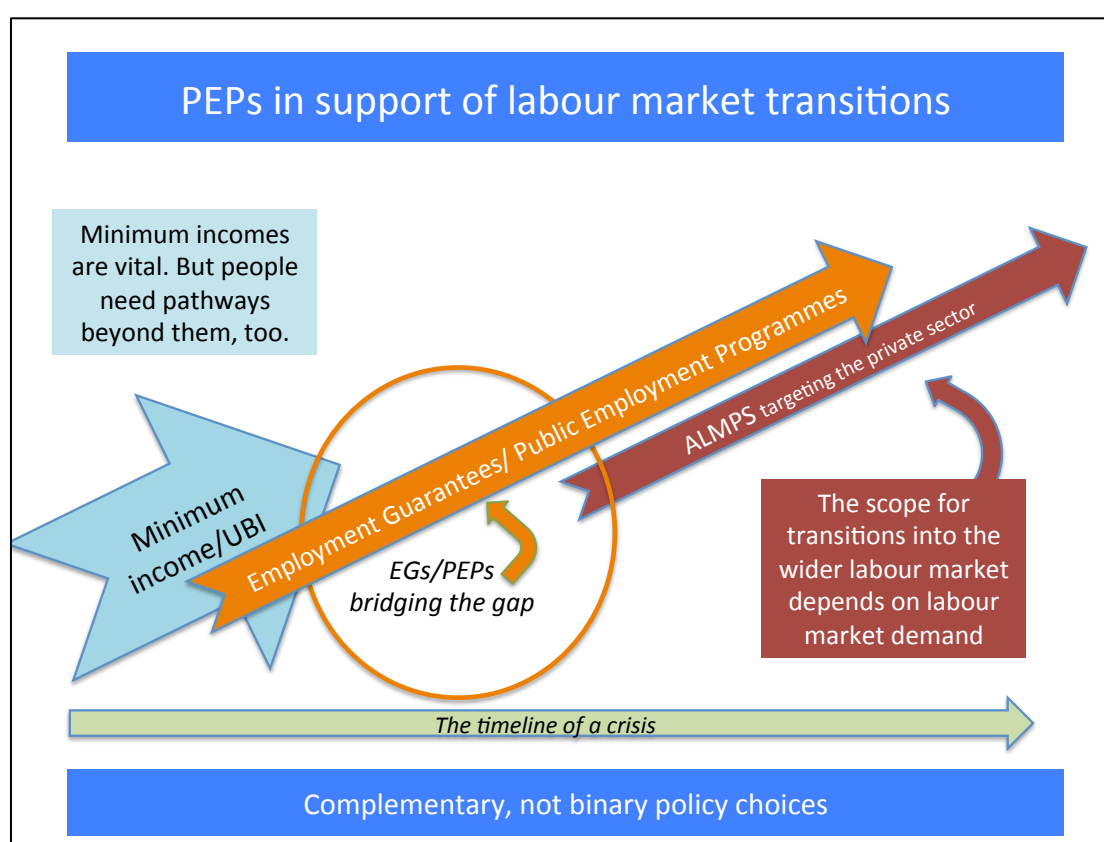
Rather than being stuck in a paradigm of binary, competing models with silver bullet solutions, the priority, in this context of complexity, is to look at how the right to income and the right to work can be addressed in synergistic and complementary ways, that allow people to combine these options as their needs change, in ways that enhance and diversify their pathways into social and economic inclusion.

3.5 PEPs, ALMPS and support to transitions

In the future, where labour demand exists, the most desirable transition cycle is one in which workers move straight from job-loss into relevant training, from where they transition directly into a new work opportunity. Under these circumstances, there is no role for PEPs. Yet in many instances, it is likely that there will be a time-gap between job loss and the start of appropriate training, and between the conclusion of such training and securing a new job. PEPs can provide a transitional form of activation in such contexts that keeps people in the labour market during these gaps. This pre-empt a range of negative social impacts and societal costs of unemployment. It also maintains work habits and capabilities, off-setting the erosion of these associated with long-term unemployment and means that people are work-ready when work opportunities arise. For those who have never

worked before, it builds these capabilities in a context in which work experience is often an important factor influencing employer hiring strategies.

The role of a PEP is also likely to change over the life-cycle of a crisis. If PEPs can go to scale early, they provide a form of activation that can limit the decline of work skills and of productivity in the economy. They can provide a transition out of social assistance into regular work, providing a platform for labour market re-integration. As recovery begins, the interface with other ALMPS becomes increasingly relevant. If, however, long-term unemployment sets in before the PEP begins, then their focus is on *rebuilding* work readiness.



PEPs: The interface with minimum incomes and ALMPs.

3.6 Responding to displacement of people

Conflict, climate change and natural disasters may lead to ever-higher numbers of displaced people. PEPs can provide such people with income security as well as with structure, access to new networks, social interaction and application of their skills, which can off-set psychological stress and promote social inclusion. The work undertaken can focus on meeting some of the immediate social and infrastructural needs of such a group – or contributing to these in the wider society.

3.7 New forms of work from a more diverse skills base

PEPs have traditionally targeted unskilled work. In the future, with a more educated demographic and many jobs lost from the 'missing middle', there will be a need to think differently about the scope of work that is possible and on offer. The opportunities in this regard were illustrated by the experience of Kinofelis, the Greek public employment programme presented below.

Innovation in new forms of work in Kinofelis in Greece

In Greece, not only unskilled workers were affected by the crisis. This created an opportunity to broaden the scope of work undertaken. The following projects initiated by municipalities:

- Psychologists providing counseling to people in stressed and depressed communities
- Integration of the Roma into the education system, coupled with health visits and an information campaign
- Archaeologists, historians and computer scientists created an interactive local history programme, attracting many viewers
- Physiotherapists provided services to the elderly in poor neighbourhoods
- Environmental scientists gave lectures at schools
- Translation of local tourism guides
- Extension of cycling and walking trails on some islands
- Digitisation of archives
- Support to municipalities to cope with the refugee crisis
- Veterinarians neutering stray animals
- Support to community and mobile libraries.

There are also new forms of digital and platform-based public services to which PEPs could contribute. These are particularly attractive to youth and create skills in areas of relatively high labour demand. For example:

- Tablet-based local economic and social surveys.
- Geo-coding public services and facilities
- Assisting the public to access and use internet-based public services
- Local social histories and the creation of associated media products.

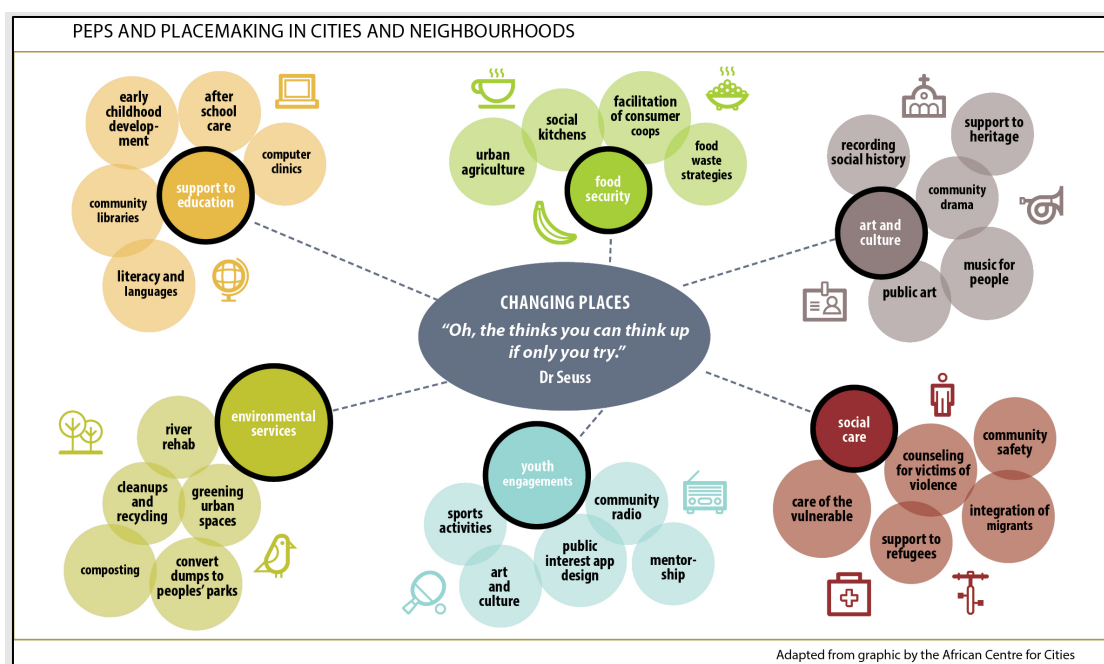
Through this process, PEPs can also support exploration of a number of critical questions regarding the FOW. How might the involvement of stakeholders, including the unemployed themselves, results in an ever-wider range of work that has social value? How might a wider lens on what constitutes ‘useful work’ open opportunities for new forms of work in the public interest? What are the auxiliary services which PEPs can provide to complement those provide through the normal civil service? What shifts might there be in how work is valued – and what work is valued? Will certain forms of work that can be automated be valued less; and might forms of work that cannot be automated and that are in the public interest be valued more?

3.8 Placemaking and (re)building the commons

Work is not just a means for distributing purchasing power. It is also among the most important sources of identity and purpose in individual’s lives. If the role of work in society is to shrink, other sources of purpose and identity will need to grow. (Avent, 2016)

The future of work will be socially disruptive. Fragmentation, remote working, the platform and GIG economies are all contributing to the social isolation paradox – in which increasing levels of virtual social connectedness go hand in hand with increased actual social isolation. While the workplace of the past created social network effects, teamwork and identity – all of those may be lacking from the workplace of the future.

In this context, new social instruments and institutions are needed to build civic capital, with new spaces, places and purposes needed to bring people together. Without this, there is a risk that the future of work erodes networks, reciprocity, solidarity and social cohesion, enabling new forms of division, polarisation, individualism and inequality. This requires new forms of structured opportunity for engagement and new ways of building ‘the commons’. PEPs can provide a catalyst for this, able to operationalize and implement ideas that arise, with a quick turn-around from the generation of ideas to their implementation. This can assist in unlocking community agency. PEPs also unlock the social value of labour, illustrating that even where labour has no market value, it has – and it can create - social value.



Community stakeholder mapping of work that a PEP could undertake in support of placemaking (Philip, 2019)

3.9 Support to livelihoods and social enterprise

In contexts of deep structural unemployment or underemployment, PEPs may need to make an ongoing contribution to livelihoods that complements other activities, potentially also de-risking engagement in income generating or enterprise activity. This role has been evident, for example, in South Africa's Community Work Programme, where part-time work provides access to regular and predictable income and structure, while also enabling experimentation with enterprise activity. PEPs can also provide initial incubation for social enterprises, assisting in mitigating the early risks and providing a form of social capital investment.

4 Conclusions

Core to the future of work is the future of labour markets. In envisaging the future of work there is an opportunity to more intentionally shape these; to identify the levers able to give effect to global policies and to make full employment on decent terms a reality. That means using the full breadth of instruments that states have available to them; including acting as employer of last resort through direct investment in employment creation. As the phrase makes explicit, every other instrument in the policy toolbox should be used, to enable market-based outcomes. But when their combined

effects still fail to close the gap between the demand and supply of labour, there should be no hesitation in stepping in as employer of last resort – in a context in which ‘last resort’ does not mean ‘least priority’, but rather ‘leave no one behind’.

Nor, actually, is there a need to wait in this regard. There are no societies in which the demand and supply of labour are in a happy equilibrium. Even where employment levels are ostensibly at ‘full employment’, such as in the USA right now, this is a function of averages. It masks underemployment, precarious work, working poverty and spatial, racial and gender inequalities in employment outcomes. These are the things that markets, left to their own devices, do not solve. So this is where the role of the state comes in: protecting society from what the ILO’s Commission on the Future of Work calls ‘the inherent vicissitudes of the market’. Employment guarantees and forms of public employment are development tools with which involuntary unemployment and working poverty can be addressed.

Instead of keeping these in the back pocket in case of emergency – at which point they tend to be rolled out hurriedly with sub-optimal outcomes – let such approaches rather be institutionalised as an ongoing part of the employment landscape; providing employment on a counter-cyclical but predictable basis, that can be scaled up rapidly if and when the need arises.

Guarantees of minimum incomes and of employment are both social instruments through which markets can be shaped – and through which the primacy of markets in shaping people’s lives can be tempered. Using them is a political choice about the role of the state in relation to such markets and about the social construction of labour markets on new terms. In the process, desperation can be taken off the table and alternatives to working poverty provided.

At the same time, the social value of labour can be unlocked: utilising labour for the social good, rather than having its use and its value so closely tied to market demand – and all too often under-utilised in its absence. This has the further advantage of at least partly de-linking the need for employment creation to the requirement for economic growth, in a context in which perpetual growth is not sustainable as part of more the environmentally-sustainable economic systems needed in the future.

While employment guarantees enable these outcomes to the fullest extent, more targeted public employment programmes can also play a role, with their scale and degree of universality informing

the extent to which systemic impacts can be achieved. The point, however, is to start experimenting and testing improved approaches; taking on the critiques of the past and innovating to adapt this versatile policy instrument to the challenges of the future, giving serious consideration to design, institutional arrangements, and long-term resourcing commitments, as well as more attention to rigorous evaluations of the full range of PEP impacts. This experimentation needs to include the scope for synergy and complementarity between PEPs and minimum income policies.

The aim is to ensure minimum levels of income security, complemented by an employment guarantee which ensures that there are pathways to participation in work available to all at all times. This should be an essential feature of the new social contract.

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