

CTPECC ISSUE PAPER



LABOUR IN THE POST PANDEMIC

- **EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AS THE POLICY TO STABILISE THE LABOUR MARKET UNDER THE EPIDEMIC**
- **EXPLORING THE NEW TENDENCY OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE APEC REGION: THE DYNAMICS OF THE FUTURE OF WORK**

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Issue Paper

This year, CTPECC has held a number of forums and seminars based on the current issues in international political and economic situation as well as other notable topics. Based on the outputs of these events and the discussions inspired, this publication of issue paper mainly seeks to address the opportunities and challenges in response to the future regional development. The issue paper also provides readers with valuable information and perspectives that are widely noticed nowadays, and deliver the insightful views of experts and scholars.

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Introduction

The global pandemic is not just changing our political economy; it is also setting new trends in the labour market. Lockdowns threaten businesses, jobs, and employment security. Ambiguity over who is an “essential” worker, and how government relief are to be distributed, are bureaucratic nightmares that frequently cause conflict and uncertainty. Domestic issues further divert the attention of the working-age population, as families take care of their loved ones and deceased. At the same time, long-term trends such as climate change, globalisation, and population ageing continue to pose challenges to labour, capital, and governance alike. How then, should firms adjust their business models? How should employment security be safeguarded? How should regulations adjust to new labour norms? All of these constitute important issues that workers, employers, and regulators must consider.

In this volume, Dr Wu Chi-Hsin, associate professor of labour relations at the National Chung Cheng University, analyses the impact of the pandemic on the global economy and labour market. Dr Chang Hung, associate researcher at the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research Department of International Affairs, analyses emerging trends of employment in the Asia-Pacific. We hope this volume provides the reader insight into how the pandemic and the digital economy is changing labour markets in the region.



Employment Insurance as the Policy to Stabilise the Labour Market Under the Epidemic

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(Nov 2021)

The novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) broke out at the end of 2019. Due to the impact of the epidemic, many companies have overcome the immediate difficulties by reducing personnel costs. The number of companies implementing reduced work time and the number of workers affected are the highest since the 2008 financial crisis.

The impact analysis and policy recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) pointed out that the vast majority (93%) of workers across the world are facing business interruption, and this has continued since mid-March 2020. In the estimation report of the International Labour Organisation, the number of working hours in the first half of 2020 has dropped significantly, showing a worsening dilemma, especially in developing countries. Compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, the estimated number of global working hours for the first quarter of 2020 decreased by 5.4% (equivalent to 155 million full-time jobs). The global reduction in working hours in the second quarter of 2020 reached 14.0% (equivalent to 400 million full-time jobs), with the largest reduction in the United States (18.3%). Among the countries where relevant data are available, the factors that lead to the reduction of working hours vary widely. In some countries, shortened shifts and unpaid



furlough are the main reasons for the reduction in working hours. The main factor in other countries is that workers are facing layoffs and leaving the labour market.

The latest data from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) show that in the first quarter of 2020, the number of international tourists has fallen by 22% due to the pandemic. The world lost out on opportunities for tourism to create jobs, support businesses, kick-start development, and protect and preserve the very things we leave our homes to see. Under the difficulty of decreasing income, business performance has generally declined, and proper working hours and manpower deployment have become the primary goal of hotel operators to reduce expenditure. In the case of reduced work demand, inappropriate manpower arrangements will indirectly affect the quality of service. Labour working hours and manpower directly affect labour costs. In the end, it is necessary to consider the proper use of manpower after the economic recovery in the future.

As the epidemic slowly eases, countries around the world have begun policies to revitalise the economy and stabilise the labour market. The key factors for restoring the labour market include the following:

1. Find the correct balance of policies;
2. Have the necessary intervention of policies and actions;
3. Support the disadvantaged and hard-damage groups, and produce fair results from the labour market;
4. Ensure international solidarity and support;
5. Strengthen social dialogue and respect rights in the labour market.



Take the United States as an example. Since the epidemic, the number of confirmed cases and deaths has been the highest in the world. With the global economy being damaged, and to alleviate the economic blow caused by the epidemic and maintain social stability through economic stimulus measures, the US government has introduced the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). The CARES Act includes tax deductions for businesses, increased unemployment benefits, a \$10,000 exempt subsidy for small businesses, a one-time subsidy of \$1,200 (\$500 for dependent children), and a small and medium-sized enterprise exempt loan, etc. The CARES Act applies to all Americans and provides direct financial support to American workers and families and small businesses. The CARES Act has provided American companies and job-creators with meaningful financial support, so that they can be friendlier to supporting employees, and prepare to increase work as soon as possible.

In addition, on March 27, 2020, the President of the United States signed a law to provide additional unemployment insurance assistance (UI) to workers affected by the COVID-19. The unemployment insurance assistance is part of the policy of stabilising employment. This new law added the following provisions:

1. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance – Allows individuals who are traditionally not eligible for unemployment benefits (such as self-employed workers, independent contractors) to qualify for unemployment benefits;
2. Pandemic unemployment benefit – on the basis of regular subsidies, an additional 600 US dollars will be paid to all unemployment insurance recipients every week;



3. Pandemic emergency unemployment benefits – increases the unemployment insurance benefits for 13 weeks, exceeding the current 26 weeks, covering a total of 39 weeks.

Among them, the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) programme also expanded the eligibility for unemployment benefits. Individuals who were not eligible to receive regular unemployment insurance subsidies (including self-employed persons and independent contractors) and who were unable to work for the following reasons became eligible to apply for pandemic unemployment assistance:

1. Has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or has symptoms of COVID-19 and is seeking a diagnosis;
2. A family member has been diagnosed with COVID-19;
3. Provides care for families or family members who have been diagnosed with COVID-19;
4. Be the primary caregiver of children who are attending schools or nursing facilities that have been closed due to COVID-19;
5. Be unable to reach the workplace due to quarantine, or self-quarantine recommended by the medical provider with COVID-19;
6. Due to the direct reason of COVID-19 pneumonia, was originally scheduled to start a new job and could not reach the workplace;
7. Because the head of the household died of COVID-19 and became the main breadwinner;
8. Resigned directly because of COVID-19 pneumonia;
9. Due to the direct reason of COVID-19 pneumonia, their workplace was closed;
10. Comply with any additional standards set by the US Secretary of Labour.



Individuals who can work remotely or receive paid sick leave or other paid vacation benefits (regardless of whether they meet the above categories) are not eligible for pandemic unemployment assistance.

Looking back at Taiwan, Taiwan's jobless rate fell for a third straight month in September to 3.96 percent as locally transmitted COVID-19 cases have been brought under control, the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) said. The number of those who were out of a job in September fell 34,000, or 6.71 percent, to 471,000. With economic activity stabilising, the number of people employed in September rose 18,000, or 0.16 percent, from a month earlier to about 11.42 million, and the labour participation rate was 58.93 percent, down 0.05 percentage points from August.

Taiwan's job market had been hit in May and June by a serious COVID-19 outbreak, but the situation has been improving, giving a boost to business activity and lifting employment. Also improving the employment picture was the ability of first-time jobseekers to land jobs.

In Taiwan, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) announced its "Stimulus 4.0" package to provide relief to residents who have been affected by the recent outbreak and Level 3 restrictions. Several government ministries are discussing ways to provide aid to foreign residents who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic, with the MOL extending its "Peace of Mind Employment Plan" to a full 24 months.

First, under the Peace of Mind Employment plan, any legally employed worker, be they foreign or Taiwanese, can receive subsidies, so long as they have labour insurance. Under this



scheme, Taiwanese and foreigners with employment insurance included with their labour insurance can receive a percentage of the difference between their lost salary and the amount of their employment insurance.

When calculating the subsidy, the MOL will look at the average monthly amount an employer insured their worker for over a year. The maximum monthly employment insurance that an employee can be insured for is NT\$45,800.

If a worker suffers a reduction in their work hours, the MOL will pay for 50 percent of the difference between the average monthly insured employment insurance amount and their remaining monthly salary. This will be the subsidy that the underemployed worker would receive per month for a maximum of 24 months.

Second, under the Peace of Mind Immediate Work Plan, workers who have lost their jobs will be provided with simple, part-time jobs that will pay NT\$160 per hour for no more than 80 hours per month. The maximum that a participant can earn per month is NT\$12,800. Workers can participate in this programme for up to one year.

Third, under the Employment Insurance Law, as long as a foreigner was legally employed and had labour insurance before losing their job, they can qualify for unemployment benefits with the MOL. The payment formula is 60 percent of their average monthly salary over the previous six months before they lost their job.

Our country has officially implemented the “Employment Insurance Law” on January 1, 2003, the Article 1 of Employment Insurance Law:



This Law is established to improve the ability of workers to find employment, promote employment, and guarantee worker job training and basic living requirements for workers for a certain period of unemployment. Matters not provided for herein shall be governed by regulations of other laws.

Therefore, the Employment Insurance Law contains four insurance benefits: unemployment benefits, early employment allowances, vocational training living allowances, and national health insurance premium subsidies.

Therefore, according to US measures, an employment stabilisation policy should be established during the epidemic, in which unemployment benefits should include the following:

1. Employed by an employer or organisation that is exempt from registration by the law and has no approved taxation or is exempt from registration by the law and does not have a uniform invoice purchase certificate;
2. Workers who are not insured but have the facts of work and are unemployed;
3. Those who cannot obtain proof of involuntary resignation;
4. Private school teachers who participate in Insurance for Civil Servants and Teachers.

In addition, the employment stabilisation policy should also include the flexible adjustment of unemployment benefits during the period. This is in accordance with Article 16 of the Employment Insurance Law:



Considering the unemployment rate and other circumstances in conjunction with the economic downturn or emergencies of various nature, the central competent authority may extend the benefit payment period prescribed in Paragraph 1 to a maximum of nine months, or longer if deemed necessary but no more than twelve months. The extension shall not apply to the regulations in Article 13 and Article 18. The criteria, targets, conditions, period of implementation, length of extension and other related regulations in regard to the unemployment benefit payment extension described in the preceding paragraph shall be defined by the central competent authority and presented to the Executive Yuan for approval.

During the epidemic, the payment object and the payment period should be extended. When the unemployment rate rises, workers who cannot work can be protected.

In addition, an alarm bell mechanism needs to be setup for the labour market. When a downturn signal (a leading indicator of prosperity) appears or an indicator of an epidemic situation appears (such as when borders are closed or human-to-human transmission occurs), there will be an alarm bell, and the government needs to stabilise the labour market by holding related meetings, and discussing whether the relaxation of employment benefits related objects, and whether the claim period and the claim ratio need to be adjusted flexibly.



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Exploring the New Tendency of the Labour Market in the APEC Region: The Dynamics of the Future of Work

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1. Introduction

This article aims to explore the new tendency of the labour market in the APEC region in the post-pandemic era. As identified by most international organizations, the rapid progress of digitalization is the most critical dynamic that is changing the nature of work in the post-pandemic era (ADB, 2021; ILO, 2020; Kerr et. al., 2020a; IOE, 2021). Apart from the accelerated progress of digitalization, according to the recently published “APEC Economic Policy Report 2021: Structural Reform and the Future of Work” (APEC, 2021b), the dynamics of climate change, globalization, and demographic change also serve as key drivers propelling the future of work across the APEC region since the burst of COVID-19. This paper provides analyses of these dynamics have generated the emergence of new work patterns and new job opportunities in the post-pandemic era, and further illustrates impacts of the dynamics of future of work on regional labour markets. Finally, this paper will make policy suggestions for addressing challenges to labour markets caused by these dynamics.



2. The Accelerated Progress of Digitalisation

The accelerated progress of digitalisation is deemed as the foremost dynamic changing employment patterns and the labour markets in the APEC region following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. The stringent lockdown measures adopted by most countries for preventing the spread of COVID-19 may account for this dynamic. Although it has been nearly 2 years after the burst of the pandemic, the reported cases are still in accumulation, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) there have been more than 2,553 million reported cases by November 20, 2021. In this regard, lockdown measures remain the most effective approach to deter the spread of COVID-19 until the prevalence of vaccination.

Consequently, many enterprises have adopted digital tools to assure daily operations of enterprises during the pandemic, such as the adoption of “work from home” (WFH) and remote work, which have become the “new normal” after 2020 (ILO, 2021). Some enterprises have even facilitated the utilization of digital technology in manufacturing process and services (Deloitte, 2020), so as to enhance productivity whilst reducing the number of workers and physical contacts among workers during the pandemic. In this context, as remote work has become a new working pattern, it is estimated to breed impact on the labour markets. Deloitte (2020) has further predicted that approximately 47.6 million of workers in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Brunei would be transferred into remote work in the future.

As the rise of remote work has bred significant impacts on regional labour markets, the rise of platform work is another emerging employment pattern that shall not be neglected. In



effect, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the revenues of business-to-consumer platforms reached US\$3.8 trillion in 2019, which was equivalent to 4.4% of global GDP (ADB, 2021). As for Asian economies, the revenues of these platforms shared more than 6% of regional GDP in 2019, and the amount of revenues was about US\$1.8 trillion (ADB, 2021).

It has been argued that COVID-19 has facilitated the online shopping and e-commerce (UNCTAD, 2021). Simultaneously, the number of platform workers has also been increased steadily, and platform work or gig work, such as delivery riders and private-hired drivers, have become the alternative source of income for those furloughed workers or workers who temporarily lose their jobs during the pandemic (OECD, 2020). However, unlike wage workers, platform workers and gig workers may not have specific employers, fixed payment, and regular working hours. As such, these emerging employment patterns are excluded from social protection measures because most social protection measures were mainly designed for wage workers. In this light, to provide comprehensive protection for workers, it is essential for the government to make comprehensive social protection measures covering emerging employment patterns in the digital age

3. The Dynamic of Climate Change

In addition to the rapid progress of digitalization, the factor of climate change is argued to have continuous impact on the labor market (APEC, 2021b). Specifically, according to ILO's estimation, the rise of 1.5°C will result in the loss of 2.2% of total working hours, which may further affect productivity impacting 80 million jobs by 2030 (ILO, 2019).



So far, APEC economies have reached consensus on promoting sustainable development. Specifically, the “Strong, Balanced, Secure, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth” is a key economic driver of the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040. Moreover, the APEC economies have clearly put the task of advancing circular economy and renewable energy into the recently promulgated “Aotearoa Plan of Action” (APEC, 2021a). Additionally, as the host economy of APEC in 2022, Thailand stresses the importance of promoting sustainable and inclusive growth through the bio, circular, and green (BCG) economy model (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand, 2021).

In the context of the determination to facilitate sustainable and inclusive growth among APEC economies, sectors of green economy and circular economy, such as renewable industries, are estimated to keep growing conducive to the creation of more job opportunities in the labor market. The APEC Economy Policy Report 2021 further illustrates that these sectors may further contribute 7.3 million new job opportunities in maximum in the US, 950,000 jobs in South Korea, and renewable energy sector has created 26,850 new jobs in Australia in 2019 (APEC, 2021b).

4. Impacts of Globalization

Globalization has contributed to economic growth across the APEC region since the last century. For example, in terms of trade in goods and services, the APEC region has witnessed the annual growth by 6.7% in average between 1994 and 2019 (APEC, 2020). The relocation of production networks and the construction of global value chains have further led to the increase of output and decent job opportunities. However, the rising demand of skilled workers caused by the rapid



progress of digitalization in the era of globalization may impact on jobs in low-skilled sectors, which may further deteriorated income inequality (APEC 2021b).

Notably, jobs in labour-intensive sectors may be replaced by automation in the trend of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), and the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020) has forecasted that 85 million jobs may be replaced by 2025. Notably, in the meantime, 97 million new vacancies will be created owing to new divisions “between human, machines and algorithms” (WEF, 2020). In order to assist labour in adapting to the changing nature of work, it is essential to empower unskilled workers for future job transitions. By assisting labour in entering into high-skill sectors, it is beneficial for mitigating impacts of income inequality in the era of globalization.

5. Demographic Change

Aside from digitalization, globalization, and climate changes, demographic change has been perceived as an important driver of the future of work in the APEC region. Specifically, so far, the number of the elderly (people over the age of 65) in the APEC region has reached 383 million in 2021, as the birth rate has been decreased from 22‰ in 1989 to 14‰ in 2019 (APEC 2021b). The question of whether this change has led to the decrease of youth labour force participation rate is worthy of discussion. However, as developed APEC economies have entered aged society while developing economies need to prepare for aging society, the rising demands of elderly care will increase the demands of workers in healthcare. According to Scheil-Adlung’s (2016) survey, skilled workers in healthcare will be increased by 27 million by 2030. Moreover, as digital tools and big data analytics are



estimated to be widely applied to healthcare sectors including elderly care, it is reasonable to expect the increase of job vacancies in relevant fields (Runde et. al., 2021).

However, it is noteworthy that the rapid progress of digitalization may not be beneficial for elderly workers to participate in the labour market. Most reports have pointed out the urgent need to provide elderly workers with digital skills training so as to assist them in adapting to new forms of work in the digital age, such as remote work and gig work (Heck et. al., 2021). As elderly workers with limited digital skills may transfer to low-skilled jobs with relatively low payments following the progress of digitalization (Scheil-Adlung, 2016), the government needs to envisage decent social protection measures for the elderly, such as pensions.

6. Conclusion

In the summary, the rapid progress of digitalization, globalization, climate change, and demographic change are core dynamics driving the changing nature of work in the future, which have brought both opportunities and challenges for the labour market. The growth of circular economy, as well as the rising demands of skilled workers in digital sectors and elderly care, will generate job opportunities in the future. In addition, emerging employment patterns in the digital age have also provided workers with an alternative career path different from wage workers.

However, the dynamics of the future of work are challenging current labour and social protection measures. Specifically, emerging employment patterns in the digital age, such as the remote work, gig work, and platform work, are beyond the coverage of current social protection schemes. The deterioration of income inequality and the growing number of



the elderly have further magnified the importance of making comprehensive social protection measures. The ILO's (2011) "two-dimensional strategy" for extending social protection is an important guideline for protecting workers' rights and privileges. The COVID-19 may have provided APEC economies with a good timing for the government to review the strengths and flaws of current social protection measures, and extend the coverage of social protection for protecting workers in the digital age. In 2021, Taiwan has formulated the "Labour Occupational Accident Insurance and Protection Act", which effectively extends the coverage of labour insurance by including wage workers, workers who have no definite employer, self-employed and any natural person who is actually under employment. This Act should be a good reference for APEC economies in forging social protection measures in the digital age.

Finally, capacity building, including the empowerment of digital skills, knowledge for circular economy and so on, are key to assist workers in adapting to the future of work. The APEC economies should keep solidifying collaboration to close digital divide and enhance skills for everyone, so as to fulfil the policy goals of strong, balanced, secure, inclusive and sustainable growth set by the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 (APEC, 2020).



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Conclusion

In the final quarter of 2021, this publication looks into the development of the labour market in the post-pandemic era. Given the increasing global vaccination rate, living with the virus has been gradually achieved, and countries are steadily easing the control of COVID-19 prevention measures.

However, owing to the pandemic, the large-scale layoffs and unpaid furloughs have caused the imbalance between supply and demand in the labour market, while the rising inflation and global energy supply crisis have slowed down the momentum of economic recovery.

As a matter of fact, an adequate labour force has always been the core of economic growth, therefore, labour-related issues should not be disregarded in the phrase of economic recovery. As a result, it is obvious that the government and enterprises must consider and take into account how to adjust the operations and how to satisfy the needs of employment security, as well as how to respond to new work patterns on labour regulations.

In this issue paper, CTPECC has collected analyses and insights on the future of labour issues from two experts, namely Dr. Chi-Hsin Wu and Dr. Hung Chang. Firstly, Dr. Wu shares a study from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in his article, which illustrates how labourers are forced to leave the labour market, resulting in an imbalance between supply and demand. Moreover, Dr. Wu cites the statistics from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) to demonstrate that inappropriate workforce arrangements will indirectly affect the quality of service when the demand for work decreases. In addition,



Dr. Wu compares the subsidy packages in the United States and Taiwan throughout the pandemic, highlighting how policies can guide stakeholders out of the dilemma, and finally suggesting that economies should develop an alert mechanism to tackle the next pandemic.

On the other hand, Dr. Chang explores the new tendency of the labour market in the APEC region throughout the post-pandemic era. Citing APEC Economic Policy Report 2021, Dr. Chang indicates that the dynamics of climate change, globalisation, and demographic change are key drivers for the future of work across the APEC region since the outbreak of COVID-19. Additionally, Dr. Chang refers to academic publications by institutions and scholars to confirm that effective implementation of digitalisation is a critical factor in transforming work patterns. However, Dr. Chang also points out that remote work and platform work are beyond the scope of current social protection schemes, and not to mention that the worsening income inequality and the growing number of elderlies further amplify the importance of developing social protection measures.

All in all, comprehensive legal safeguards and diversified capacity building will be the core objectives of promoting labour force development in the post-pandemic era. We encourage readers to join CTPECC in paying attention to the subsequent development of labour issues.

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