

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS - RSA POLICY EXPO 2021

The Future of Work, the Gig Economy, and Inclusive Growth

Technological change is reshaping local labour markets. Employment structures have polarised in many advanced countries, with growth in high-wage professional occupations alongside growth in low-wage jobs. At the same time, there is widespread concern about the rise of the Gig Economy – task-based employment, often mediated via digital platforms, which offers few of the benefits of a traditional employer-employee relationship. This has led to concerns about the hollowing out the labour market, algorithmic control of employment, and – particularly in the context of COVID-19 – concerns that the burden of economic and health risk is being placed on the worker rather than the firm.

These changes in the labour market have coincided with a widespread concern that the benefits of economic growth are not being shared equally. Inequality has been rising over the past 50 years, with recent growth being driven primarily by the top 1%. Growth has often been accompanied with a decline in the labour share. And wages have been stagnant for the median worker in many countries. The result has been increasing concern with the notion of ‘Inclusive Growth’, with local areas launching strategies aiming to change the pattern of growth in their local economies. The OECD has launched an ‘Inclusive Growth in Cities’ campaign and cities across the world, from Cape Town to Belfast, have launched strategies aimed at making growth inclusive.

Local policymakers have been rethinking how they support workers in this changing context. Technological change challenges traditional support for those in (e.g. Unions) and out (e.g. welfare-to-work) of the labour market, the structure and targeting of skill systems, and the way in which local policymakers think about labour market interventions such as transport. These changes are likely to be accelerated by COVID-19 which, early evidence suggests, is increasing the skill bias in the economy with job losses primarily focused on the low-wage labour market.

This RSA Policy Expo Call seeks proposals which consider these challenges and the implications of existing research for policy. Key issues which could be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- Mapping the changing world of work, how it varies geographically, and what different local policy responses might be
- Considering evidence on the geography of the gig economy and what that means for place-based policy
- Reviewing and evaluating place-based policies which seek to address low wage employment, such as skill upgrading
- Highlighting international best-practice in efforts to address labour market change, such as the New York Career Pathways model
- Comparative evidence on policy responses to local labour market change