

Public works for a degrowth transformation: Executive Summary

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Context

Two of the major challenges of the 21st century are the ecological crisis and rising economic inequality. These crises are intertwined: the **poorest households** suffer the harshest consequences of climate change and are those most likely to be **left behind by the ecological transition**, especially as labor is reoriented toward technical and highly specialized green sectors. This is evidenced by the pervasiveness of **involuntary unemployment** and **diminishing quality of life** among the poorest Europeans.

This policy brief proposes to implement a **job guarantee as a twin solution** to the the social harm caused by **involuntary unemployment**, and to the question of the labor required for **social-ecological transformation**.

Problem diagnosis

Unemployment is a key issue in the EU. The EC reports an unemployment rate of 5.7%, a number which reaches 14.5% for youth unemployment and which is strongly linked to rates of poverty and social exclusion. Even among those who have a job, **underemployment**, **precarious work**, and **in-work poverty** are prevalent. For instance, a staggering **30% of the workforce** was found to be in precarious positions.

At the same time, **tackling the ecological crisis is more urgent than ever**. According to the IPCC, it requires “*rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society*”. However, most of the workforce is currently focused on producing what is profitable, rather than what is needed to bring about this societal transformation. So who will do this work? We must find a way to **retrain and transfer part of the workforce toward socially and ecologically useful sectors**. Here we propose to do so through a state-sponsored job guarantee program.

Proposal: jobs for all who want them

Description

A job guarantee is a **federally funded program to end involuntary unemployment by providing up to 30 hours of weekly work to all those who seek it, paid at a living wage**, focused on the most important challenges of the 21st century. It can be rolled out in two phases:

Phase 1: Participants are mainly employed by organizations in **social and ecological sectors** and **sectors in which the state is already embedded**, such as ecosystem restoration and childcare.

Phase 2: The government expands its capacity to employ workers directly by **bringing strategic sectors** (e.g., renewable energy systems, building retrofits) **under public ownership**. Wherever possible, the job guarantee is administered locally, allowing communities to direct labor power towards the work they deem most urgent.

Retraining and support for workers throughout this process is central.

Benefits

The program **provides the labor required** to achieve social-ecological transformation. It **reduces overall material and energy use** by orienting the workforce away from the most material and energy-intensive sectors.

It puts an **end to involuntary unemployment** based on the principle that no one is unemployable.

It sets **standards for decent working conditions** throughout the economy:

- a living wage, a 30-hour work week, the relocalization of work.
- the private sector will have to match the conditions set by state jobs since workers will no longer rely on private companies for employment.

FAQ

• How do we pay for a job guarantee program?

It will require increased public spending, but in the long term the available evidence suggests that job guarantee programs pay for themselves given their fiscal savings in traditional unemployment benefits.

• Would it replace welfare benefits?

Access to social benefits would not be contingent on enrolment. The job guarantee program is completely voluntary and would be enacted alongside existing welfare programs.

• Would all participants receive minimum wage?

The program would include a tiered income system based on the skill level of participants and whether they seek part-time or full-time positions. This will encourage retraining and the development of skills across the entire workforce.

Next steps...

Find out more

Read the [full policy brief on the R&D website](#).

Further reading on the Job Guarantee :

- Antonopoulos, R., 2024. Towards a European Job Guarantee. Report by the European Trade Union Institute.
- Tcherneva, P.R., 2020. The Case for a Job Guarantee. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Center for Working-Class Politics, 2024. Poll: Federal Jobs Guarantee Is Popular Across Political Divides. Jacobin.

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