

CALL FOR ARTICLES

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences

Issue on:

Improving Employment and Earnings in Twenty-First Century Labor Markets

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In recent decades, the Russell Sage Foundation has highlighted labor market institutions and policies as key determinants of the most important social and economic outcomes in the US and elsewhere, including poverty, inequality and economic growth.

Accordingly, we will edit an issue of *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* focusing on recent labor market trends and policies, and what they mean for future growth and inequality in earnings.

Each paper will: 1) Review recent trends and developments, and synthesize the research findings on their causes; 2) Speculate on how these factors will shape labor markets in the coming years and decades; and 3) Offer policy suggestions. We therefore envision papers that, while reviewing past trends, are essentially forward-looking. The papers we seek will be non-technical so that they are accessible to all social scientists and policy-makers who read the RSF journal.

We plan for a conference on September 21, 2018, so first drafts of papers will be due by August 23, 2018.¹ Authors will then be invited to revise their drafts, in light of comments they receive at the conference as well as from peer review, with a publication target date in 2019.

Below we list eleven topics on which papers will be considered, from which we will choose ten. The papers are broadly categorized into those addressing: A) Shifting Demand and Supply in the Labor Market; B) Worker-Oriented Institutions and Policies; and C) New Developments in Firms and their Future Implications.

A. Shifting Demand and Supply in the Labor Market

¹ The conference, and dinner the night before, will be held in honor of Richard Freeman, who is completing his 50th year as a professor in the Economics Department at Harvard, and has contributed importantly (as a Russell Sage contributor and more broadly) to our knowledge on a wide range of topics in labor economics and labor market policy.

1. *Technology and Automation*

Skill-biased technical change (SBTC) is regarded by most labor economists as a large contributor to rising inequality between workers with and without higher education over the past four decades. And, going forward, the rise of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) causes some analysts to predict large-scale displacement without rapid reemployment of even highly educated professionals in medicine, law, finance and other fields. This paper will review the evidence on SBTC, consider what we know and don't know about AI in the foreseeable future, and consider policies (such as education in "21st Century skills" or "lifelong learning") to deal with it.

2. *Trade*

Although the role of trade in causing rising wage inequality remains somewhat disputed in the economics literature, political observers agree that many voters' belief that burgeoning trade has hurt the working class was a critical factor in the election of Donald Trump as president. The largely benign view of trade effects on labor markets has changed, especially in light of recent evidence on the large negative impacts of trade with China in the past 15 years and its lasting negative effects on workers and their communities. We seek a paper that reflects evolving views on trade in the economics profession, and can move us closer to some consensus on likely future impacts and appropriate policy responses.

3. *Immigration*

Similarly, immigration's perceived impacts helped elect Trump as president, and there remain different views among economists on the magnitudes of its negative effects on American workers (though most economists believe highly educated immigrants have quite positive impacts on the economy). This paper will lay out the evidence to date, propose a consensus view and consider possible policy changes going forward.

4. *Higher Education/STEM Workers*

Economists wrestle with why the rise of higher educational attainment among workers has not been greater in the US, given the very large rewards to college and advanced degrees. In particular, shortfalls in US workers' attainment of STEM credentials may limit prospects for future earnings and labor market productivity. The author(s) will review what we know on these topics and suggest appropriate policy responses to raise the attainment of higher education credentials in generally and in STEM specifically.

B. Worker-Oriented Institutions and Policies

5. *The Fair Labor Standards Act: Minimum Wages and Overtime Provisions*

Economists continue to debate the extent to which raising the minimum wage reduces employment among low-wage workers, in both the short and long runs. Nevertheless, various states and large cities are moving ahead with plans to raise their statutory minimum wages to \$15 – a level mostly beyond the range of increases in the literature to date. This paper will consider and reconcile different points of view on this research), and the likely short- and long-run impacts on workers of

the trend to a \$15 minimum wage. It will also briefly review the overtime provisions of the FLSA, including recent efforts to raise the nominal ceiling for earnings levels below which overtime provisions are effective.

6. *The Path to “High-Road” Employer Practices: Unionism v. Other Approaches*

Collective bargaining coverage has declined to almost 6 percent in the private sector, and is under siege in the public sector as well. This paper will review the most recent trends in collective bargaining (public and private sector), other potential forms of worker “voice,” and perhaps a broader range of policies to incentivize or assist employers in implementing “high road” employment practices where firms invest more in worker skills and productivity, and also share profits with workers, thus improving both worker outcomes and firm performance.

7. *Race in the Labor Market: The Role of Equal Employment Opportunity and Other Policies*

For about 15 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, African Americans enjoyed strong labor market gains. These gains have since stalled and even receded recently. This paper will review these trends and their likely causes, consider likely paths in the near future, and discuss policy proposals for EEO and Affirmative Action, as well as criminal justice and child support policies, to improve these relative outcomes.

8. *Gender in the Labor Market: The Role of EEO and Family Friendly Policies*

Women continue to enjoy earnings growth relative to men (with the ratio of female to male earnings among year-round full-time workers now up to 0.81) but their labor force participation rates have also receded a bit since 2000, and the US now lags behind many other industrial countries on this measure. This paper will review these trends and their likely causes, consider likely paths in the near future, and discuss policy proposals for both EEO as well as “family-friendly” policies like expanded funding for child care and paid family leave.

9. *Non-Working Young Adults: What Policies Would Bring Them Back?*

For some groups of less-educated workers – particularly African-American men – labor force withdrawal has been highly correlated with previous incarceration and child support arrears. For others – especially less-educated white men – its recent rise has been associated with opioid dependency, disability, and reliance on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). This paper will review recent trends in labor force non-participation among young adults and its causes/correlates. It will also consider a range of policies that might help them reenter, or prevent others from dropping out – including criminal justice, child support and SSDI reforms, plus job creation and workforce policy more generally.

C. New Developments in Firms and Their Future Implications

10. *Establishments, Firms and Inequality in Earnings*

Recent evidence suggests a large and growing divide between the earnings of workers at highly productive and profitable firms and establishments, relative to those with low productivity. Market share is also growing for the successful firms, in what has been described as a “nearly winner-take-

all” context in several industries. This paper will review recent evidence on these trends and consider their potential implications for product and labor market policy.

11. New Labor Market Rules, the Contingent Workforce, and the Gig Economy

By some measures, there has recently been strong growth in the fraction of workers who are listed as independent contractors in the US labor market or are contracted out by their employer, while trends in other forms of contingent work (like working for a temp agency) are more mixed. This paper will review the evidence on trends in nontraditional work arrangements and contingent work, their implications for US workers, and appropriate policy responses that might help provide more benefits and legal protections to such workers.

Anticipated Timeline

Prospective contributors should submit a CV and an abstract (up to two pages in length, single or double spaced) of their study along with up to two pages of supporting material (e.g., tables, figures, pictures, etc.) no later than 5 PM EST on January 19, 2018 to:

<https://rsfjournal.onlineapplicationportal.com/>

All submissions must be original work that has not been previously published in part or in full. Only abstracts submitted to <https://rsfjournal.onlineapplicationportal.com/> will be considered. Each paper will receive a \$1,000 honorarium when the issue is published. All questions regarding this issue should be directed to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications, at journal@rsage.org and not to the email addresses of the editors of the issue.

A conference will take place at Columbia University in New York City on September 21 (with a dinner the night before). The selected contributors will gather for a one-day workshop to present draft papers (due a month prior to the conference **on 8/23/18**) and receive feedback from the other contributors and editors. Travel costs, food, and lodging for one author per paper will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. After the conference, the authors will submit their revised drafts by 12/14/18. The papers will then be sent out to three additional scholars for formal peer review. Having received feedback from reviewers and the RSF board, authors will revise their papers by 5/16/19. The full and final issue will be published in the late 2019. Papers will be published open access on the RSF website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Muse.