

A Word with Eleonora Peliza: The Working Poor and Decent Work in the Digital and Ecological Transition

An interview by S. Prosdocimi to E. Peliza, Professor of Labour and Social Security Law (Pontificia Universidad Católica, Argentina). She is also Professor of Comparative Labour law and Industrial Relations (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero) and a labour judge, as well as Member of the Executive Committee of ILERA (International Labour and Employment Relations Association).

The interview took place during the 13th Edition of the International Conference by ADAPT, “[Towards a Workless Society? An Interdisciplinary Reflection on the Changing Concept of Work and its Rules in Contemporary Economies](#)”, held in Bergamo from 30 November to 2 December 2023. Eleonora Peliza participated in the event, presenting a paper titled “*The working poor phenomenon in Latin America: causes, factors and dynamics. Policies needed to provide income guarantees*”.

The first question focuses on the ongoing transformation due to technological advancements and environmental changes, highlighting the shifts in the concept of work. How can industrial relations promote new social policies to strike a balance between environmental, economic, and social interests, ensuring decent work for all while maintaining economic competitiveness?

I believe that labour or industrial relations and its comprehensive, holistic approach – i.e. seeing work not only as an action but as human realisation and vision – holds significant potential. In this context, industrial relations can contribute substantially. Why? Because in the current transformation of work, considering the impacts of technologies, environmental concerns, and health, they offer diverse perspectives for developing government policies. I believe that the study of industrial relations can assist in advising specific government policies that adopt a multifaceted view of work. Work is a social reality often erroneously compartmentalised into separate domains - rights, management, human resources, health - when in fact, as a social entity,

it encompasses all aspects of human life: paid work, fulfilment, and its impact on health. Hence, the interdisciplinary nature of industrial relations draws from various disciplines, and I believe it can provide a comprehensive view of work, its impact, and the establishment of tailored policies for each country, considering demographic and cultural factors, also having a future perspective in mind.

With the integration of new technologies and digitalisation, labour has been substantially affected. How can trade unions in different countries and sectors actively contribute to shaping policies concerning vocational training, education for emerging skill sets, professions, and their subsequent implementation as public policies to ensure a fair transition?

In the just transition, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of trade unions or workers’ representatives. Just as technology and artificial intelligence are present, there needs to be a digital level of unionism that reconnects with the grassroots and ensures

workers identify with them. The separation introduced by technology challenges the physical presence of unions in the workplace. But there is a way. Just as AI tracks and monitors, unions must use technology to re-establish its presence in this digital world of work. Naturally, workers will seek ways to be represented, perhaps even through platforms, and unions, adapting to these new technologies, can ensure representation not only physically but also digitally. This does not imply a lack of protection. Additionally, considering the ongoing changes, unions will represent precarious and vulnerable workers, so I believe emphasis should first be placed on representation and then on changes. We are also part of this change, which does not mean accepting the negative aspects but understanding our role in this transition. Hence, we need to educate, especially on the new rights and obligations in the platform or digital economy.

Given the ongoing transition towards sustainable economic models and the development of green industries, how is this shift specifically impacting working poverty in Latin America? Furthermore, what policies could facilitate an inclusive transition for vulnerable groups amidst this social-ecological change, and how can trade unions and collective bargaining contribute to this transition?


Specifically, regarding working poverty, I believe the key lies in adding value to any activity related to this transition, ensuring no one is left behind. The motto here is that a just transition will only be just if no one is excluded. Jobs aimed at safeguarding and preserving the environment should also be considered decent work. There must be an understanding that decent work encompasses environmental concerns. If work is decent, the issue of working poverty will be further removed, especially in activities that enhance worker qualifications. For instance, in economies heavily reliant on natural resources, transitioning towards agroecology could uplift medium to very precarious family subsistence economies, incorporating this transition with government training initiatives. For example, transforming precarious agricultural activities into something more sustainable, potentially adding value and improving workers' incomes.

There is also an interest from social actors, particularly unions, in their role concerning environmental protection and decent work related to that. They are

already including specific clauses in this regard. Again, it is about education and skill development for workers in production, which need to be aligned with environmental care and ecology. I believe this transformation will play a major role. Hence, to prevent anyone from being left behind in this changing scenario or in preserving ecosystems, education should be given priority, i.e. developing ecological or environmental skills. From there, a new wave of sustainable jobs in less developed economies could potentially bridge the gap in terms of working poverty.

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