

Challenges and Contradictions in the 'Normalising' of Flexible Labour Markets

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Precarious work as the new norm?

- Consensus on likelihood of continued expansion
- Processes of legitimising and normalising precarious work (low pay and non standard forms of employment (NSFE)) but from multiple perspectives/ with multiple objectives
 - Insider/outsider
 - Protecting the Standard Employment Relationship (SER)
 - Activation agenda
 - Social justice/universalism

Debate on how to respond to precarious work

- Insider/outsider (mainstream economists/ Rueda etc)
 - Levelling down
- Protecting the SER through reform(Bosch, Supiot)
 - Extend coverage/definition of work
 - Change form while maintaining substance of decommodification
- Activation agenda
 - precarious work as acceptable/required alternative to unemployment (need for in-work benefits)
 - For social inclusion or for general work discipline (Greer)
- Social justice/universalism
 - Abandon SER as no longer fit for purpose (Stone and Arthurs, Vosko, Standing)
 - Universal social protection as alternative to employment protection and welfare state conditionality

Precarious work and recommodification/decommodification processes

Recommodification

- Precarious work almost by definition leads to the recommodification of labour.
- This is intensified by policies to encourage/require take up as alternative to unemployment

Decommodification is occurring alongside recommodification through three interlinked processes:

- the extension of SER protections to more forms of NSFE;
- the flexibilisation of the SER to enable take up/ retention of SER-type employment;
- state-based decommodification of precarious employment through in-work benefits (but only for minority as household-based)

Decommodification

- part of a solution to
- and/or part of the problem

By normalising, legitimising and supporting precarious work, its spread is facilitated.

Plan of paper

Paper explores these developments in three stages, drawing on a six country comparative study of protective gaps for precarious work (to provide examples of varieties of practices, not as country case models of inclusion)

1. Uses an expanded decommodification framework to explore both the extension and the flexibilisation of the SER
2. Explores the repositioning of precarious work as an acceptable and required alternative to unemployment to promote activation
3. In light of findings considers the validity of the arguments against reform and retention of SER-type protections.

Table 1 . *Historical SER context in the six selected countries*

	Regulation of SER	Male breadwinner 'norm'	Labour market flexibility for permanent workers	Gaps in standards between employment forms
Denmark	Voluntarism	Weak	High (but with strong social wage)	Moderate
France	State-centred voluntarism	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Germany	Hybrid	Strong	Low	High
Slovenia	State-centred voluntarism	Weak	Low	Low
Spain	State-centred voluntarism	Strong	Moderate	High
UK	Employer-led voluntarism	Moderate/ strong	High (but limited social wage)	Low/moderate

Figure 1. A framework for extending and flexibilising the SER



Example : Security: Inclusive social protection

Social protection sufficient for social reproduction

- High minimum benefit levels per person

Access to social protection

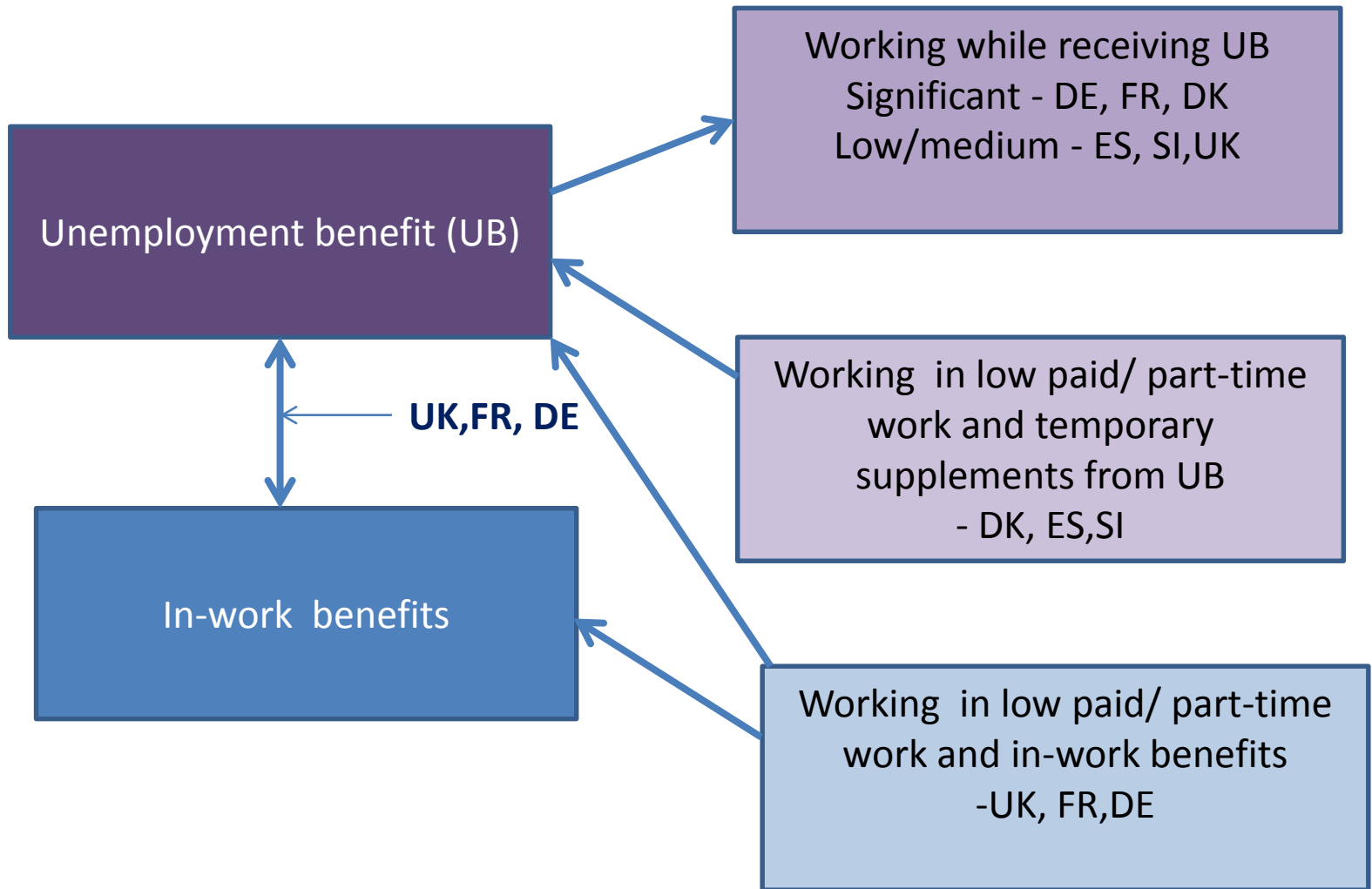
- Low or no thresholds for contributions
- Low continuity requirements
- Inclusion of self employed (SE)

Access to social assistance

- Long benefits
- And/or guaranteed social assistance

Levelling the playing field

- Care credits for mothers
- Low thresholds for maternity leave for the young
- Upward valuation of part-time (PT)



Towards the integration of out of work and in work benefits

Contradictions and challenges

Three types of contradictions

1) new rigidities or new patterns of segmentation (e.g. France excludes those on in-work benefits from minimum working-time guarantees; most countries entrap those using flexible working to one employer)

But all policies imperfect – universalism/ elimination of all segmentation a is utopian

2) employers are innovative in strategies for evading controls (derogations on working time regulations, temps equal pay rights, exploitation of existing loopholes- ZHC)

But nothing new- like tax evasion keep having to plug the gaps

3) Welfare conditionality is the outcome of sustaining precarious work though in-work benefits due to high costs (e.g. in UK universal credit will have to rely on sanctions as financial work incentive removed on cost grounds- also recipients required to find full-time work while employers have no obligations to guarantee hours)

But basic income is a pared down approach to decommodification, does not solve the funding problems and implicitly legitimises precarious work

Conclusions

- There is no straight path towards an inclusive protection system-trade offs along the way .
- Some progress in security aspects of decommodification but even less progress elsewhere –and problems of new rigidities and new evasion strategies
- Activation measures even more problematic- combine costs of decommodification for the state with cost of recommodification of work and sanctions for workers
- But still not time to abandon control of employment relationship- basic income does not solve either the welfare cost or the recommodification problem- some ‘good practice’ inclusion strategies from which other countries can learn