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EC 7250, Economic, Social and Ecological Systems, Spring 2020

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Call Center Jobs to Mitigate Unemployment and Isolation Problems amid Coronavirus Crisis in the United States

By Pepin Kazadi

Overview of the Problem

The global economy is undoubtedly under threats of the novel coronavirus. Government and local authorities have taken precaution measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. Shutdowns and social distancing restrictions, taken in the context of fighting the spread of the virus, have prompted an unpredicted slowdown of the global economy. In the United States, the economic disruptions due to the pandemic have terribly increased the unemployment level. About 22.034 million of Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since March 21, 2020 (Mutikani, 2020). In addition, working hours have been reduced. Small businesses, such as food and beverage services, hotels, bartenders, stylists, car services, and barber shops, to name just few, have closed doors as people are locked in. Predictions from St. Louis Federal Reserve show a total employment reduction of 47 million, which is the equivalence of 32.1 percent of unemployment rate for the next two quarters (Cox, 2020). Millions of Americans lost their purchasing power during this

coronavirus crisis, causing the gross domestic product to continue falling, given that 70 percent of the gross domestic product comes from the consumer spending, (Merrefield, 2020). Forecasts show that “the American gross domestic product should fall by 30.1 percent in April-June, driving up the unemployment on an average of 12 percent over the same period” (Kennedy & Bloomberg, 2020).

The one-time stimulus package, providing cash into the hands of workers and boosting small businesses and major industries, could feed the economy for just few months but not to bring it back where it was before the outbreak. In addition, the stay-home orders in almost all the states have not only heightened the unemployment rate, but also generalized the loneliness, and thus, making more fragile social interaction within communities.

More actions need to be taken in order to prevent both the economic recession and the collapse of social relations. To enhance the economic activities and overturn the walls of isolation amid the coronavirus crisis, the government, through job guarantee programs. One such program is the creation of an inbound and outbound call center jobs targeting phone calls to nursing homes and prisons. This kind of program should be able to mitigate both the level of unemployment rate and the loneliness in nursing homes and prisons.

Proposal

In their efforts to reshape the economy amid the outbreak, one of the best decisions that governments can make is the creation of job guarantee programs. While jobs are still being cut in private sector and the economy slowing down, new jobs should help to replenish the employment level by eliminating involuntary unemployment, stabilizing incomes at the bottom of the distribution for both workers within and outside the program, and improving the physical and

mental health of the previously unemployed (Tcherneva, 2018). Also, the implementation of jobs guarantee would automatically increase the consumer spending level, and thus, stem the fall of the gross domestic product growth. States and local government can proceed in the recruitment of agents from low-income people, but also amongst those who lost their jobs due to coronavirus crisis. One such program could be Call Center Jobs for nursing homes, prisons, and detention centers. The recruitment could be proportional to the number of nursing homes and prisons a city or a state has.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “there are 15,600 nursing homes in the United states with 1.4 million patients” (Kali in Waltham, 2019). Let us assume that on average, one agent can make 10 phone calls or receive 10 of them, nursing homes alone could create more than 140, 000 new jobs guarantee. In addition, “the American criminal justice system holds more than 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the U.S. territories”, (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Analogically to the above estimation, the American criminal justice itself can generate 230,000 new jobs. It derives from these statistics that more than 370,000 new jobs guarantee could be created with the implementation of this program.

Those jobs would address the isolation amongst millions of people who may experience days or weeks of isolation, as well as boost employment and dampen recessionary pressures. Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997), advocated that “to the maintaining basis of every economy belong ecological processes and caring activities”. In other words, the call center job guarantee that we suggest in this study is a caring activity that tries to maintain the economy by reducing unemployment and combatting isolation amongst the elderly and incarcerated people.

The stay-home and social distancing preventive measures taken by government officials do care about how to stop the spread of coronavirus but care less about the isolation and all its implications deriving from such restrictions. Before the coronavirus crisis, loneliness was already pervasive. The isolation caused by the downsides of lockdown and social distancing measures is very harmful and exposes the lives of elderly residents of nursing homes and those in prisons in a profound health risks. Research has shown that “the mortality effect of social isolation is like smoking 15 cigarettes per day” (Taylor, 2019). Also, some studies have established a positive relationship between a chronic loneliness and a great risk of heart disease, dementia, depression, and even death. “Greater social connection is associated with a 50 percent reduced risk of early death, while the deficits in social connection (social isolation, loneliness, living alone) have a significant and equivalent effect on risk for mortality, which exceeds the risk associated with obesity” (Holt-Lunstad, 2017).

These negative implications of isolation could be prevented with the implementation of this jobs guarantee program. With an inbound call center services, agents should permanently get in touch with elderly in nursing homes and prisoners as well, talking with them about everything, encouraging them morally, and providing them with any kind of information they need. In the same ways, the outbound call center agents will be receiving calls from the same people in prisons and nursing homes, answering their questions, and trying to make things much easier for them. This should break the chains of isolation and reconnect them again with a community. Because the call center jobs guarantee would be a long-term program, the employment should be able to provide a permanent and guaranteed social network. The ecological aspects of this job are that, it is a carbon emission free. It does neither need to burn any resources or consume more energy. It plays almost same role as green jobs.

Though it provides a relief to the economic, social, and ecological problems, the implementation of this call center job guarantee program could face some challenges. The first difficulty agents may encounter is that some people are not easy talkers. Engaging a conversation with someone they do not know could be a problem. Consider a situation in which a person grew up without being opened to people they do not know. It may be difficult for them to talk over the phone for a while with someone they are not too friendly. In this case, any effort made by agents to help breaking the harmful effects of isolation could produce no result. A second challenge is that elderly resident in nursing homes may not have cellphones, and there is restriction in phone calls in prisons and detention centers. Finally, there is uncertainty about the budget and funding mechanism of this program, which in the job guarantee proposals comes from the federal government (Tcherneva 1918).

Concluding Remarks

While measures have been taken by government authorities to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus help to stop the spread of the coronavirus, those restrictions are contributing to the increase of the unemployment rates and the collapse of social relations, leading to recession and isolation. The implementation of a call center job guarantee program could be a part of addressing those problems. This program should be able to provide a necessary relief to the economic and social disruptions caused by the novel coronavirus. The ecological advantage for this call center job program is that it consumes less energy. Though its implementation can face some challenges, there is always a way of breakthrough if there is a political will.

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