



POVERTY AND
EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

PEPSO Policy Options Working Papers: Introduction

May 2014

Introduction

In the past two years, the term ‘precarious employment’ has entered common parlance in the media and in daily conversations. Neither the term nor the experience are actually new: significant research and policy efforts have been building over the years to address this issue. Precarious employment has been defined in slightly different ways by different researchers — but the meaning that unites these definitions is employment that has shifted away from the secure, permanent, full-time jobs. Precarious employment is employment with some measure of uncertainty, insecurity, and a lack of control. According to PEPSO’s *It’s More than Poverty* report,¹ 40% of workers in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area labour markets are now working in some degree of precarious employment.

Precarious employment is problematic not just because it impacts individual careers or a person’s experiences of work. It is problematic because it impacts individual wellbeing, family wellbeing, and the ability of individuals to participate in their communities. This insecure employment points to a shift within the workplace and a shift within society.

Because of the connection between precarious employment and the broader community, the solutions that can address the challenges for those in precarious employment go beyond the workplace. They include the resources and supports needed to support workers in their experience of work as well as their experiences as individuals and community members. It has become increasingly clear that we must find alternative solutions to meet the needs that were previously addressed by a traditional employment relationship.

This set of papers is a first step toward finding these solutions. The policy options contained in these papers may be policy changes or practice shifts, and may be proposed or already in use in other jurisdictions. Together these proposals establish a menu of options to address the key challenges for workers in precarious jobs in southern Ontario today.²

PEPSO

The Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) research initiative is a five year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Community-University Research Agreement (SSHRC-CURA) grant that began in 2010. The goals of PEPSO are to:

1. Research the impact of precarious employment on the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities.
2. Make meaningful policy changes to improve the lives of those in precarious employment.
3. Build a foundation for future research.

Research on the impact of precarious employment is ongoing. In February of 2013, the results of the first survey were published in a report entitled *It’s More than Poverty*. This report was the result of a survey of over 4,000 people living in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Areas in late 2011. It also included interviews with 83 people working in precarious employment. In addition, 5 additional case studies are in the process of researching and publishing work on collective responses, the community sector, migrant labour, urban neighbourhoods, and racialization and gender

¹ PEPSO’s *It’s More than Poverty* report refers to the report that was published in February 2013 that was based on the main survey conducted by PEPSO. In these working papers this report will be called the PEPSO report or the PEPSO survey. This is only appropriate for these working papers as there are other PEPSO reports that will be published by the five additional PEPSO case studies.

² We acknowledge that the opinions and priorities of organizations may evolve and shift. Therefore, this menu of options should be viewed in the context of what was most appropriate for these organizations at the time of publication.

politics. A report based on a second survey will be published in 2015, and will both build on the results of the first survey, as well as consider particular issues in more depth.

Defining precarious employment

As noted in the introduction, the definition of 'precarious employment' can vary to some degree. For example, a low-wage is sometimes encompassed in the definition of precarious employment. For the purposes of PEPSO, precarious employment was defined using an Employment Precarity Index based on these ten questions:

1. Getting paid if you miss a day's work
2. Having one employer, who you expect to work for a year from now, who provides at least 30 hours of work a week, and who pays benefits
3. Income variability in the past 12 months
4. Likelihood that income will be reduced in the next 6 months
5. Working on-call
6. Knowing your work schedule at least one week in advance
7. Being paid in cash
8. Form of employment relationship (short-term, casual, etc.)
9. Receiving employment benefits from your current employer
10. Likelihood that current employment would be negatively affected if you raised a health and safety or employment rights concern.

Throughout the papers, readers will note that terms such as 'precarious,' 'non-standard,' 'temporary' and 'insecure' are all used. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, though they have different meanings. For example, non-standard work may not be precarious, because the particular non-standard job may have many elements of security. As often as possible, the original terms used in the literature have been used in the working papers.

Methodology

To help achieve the second PEPSO goal of meaningful policy changes, a comprehensive policy map was developed. This map includes policies and practices that have been proposed or implemented in Canada or other jurisdictions³ to either reduce or mitigate precarious employment. The objectives of the policy map were to build on existing work, to understand alignment between stakeholders,⁴ and to uncover new and innovative solutions.

Research for the policy map came from a review of over 300 sources from academia, think tanks, labour, the community sector, media and the private sector. Every effort was made to ensure that research was included from a diversity of perspectives, sectors, and political beliefs. The map contains 2,750 policy recommendations and practices, which were synthesized and used to develop the policy option working papers that are found in this compendium.

³ Other jurisdictions mainly included the United States, the EU, Australia, and New Zealand.

⁴ In order to quickly view which stakeholders support or have implemented policies and practices, endnotes are organized around the name of the organization, with the exception of academic work. To find the full reference, search the bibliography by endnote citation and the full APA reference will follow. For example, an endnote may read "Statistics Canada, 2012". To find the full citation, one would find "Statistics Canada, 2012" in the bibliography, and the author and full publication information will be listed.

Although the contents of the policy map have been categorized into different areas, it is important to note that there is much intersection between the areas. Leave benefits, child care, and community supports for example, can all be interdependent. Despite this, we have left the papers in categories in order to enable discussion to move forward.

The intent of this exercise was to find options that have been offered for a range of stakeholders: governments, employers, unions and labour groups, the community sector and individuals. However, the literature focused mostly on the role of governments with some focus on the community sector and labour, and even less focus on employers. Despite the literature's focus, we hope that readers will still consider roles for other stakeholders.

How to read these papers

The larger theme of these papers is **Key Challenges for those in Precarious Employment**. While reading these papers, it is important to be aware that those in precarious employment may at times be best aided with solutions that raise standards or make improvements for everyone. For example, strengthening health and safety standards for everyone could help those in precarious employment as well. Other times, those in precarious employment require targeted recommendations that will primarily assist those working in these types of jobs. For example, benefits provided for those who do not have access to workplace benefits. We have focused these recommendations on those policy and practice recommendations that will help those in precarious employment either directly or indirectly. **It is important to note that this is not a compendium of recommendations that PEPSO is advocating for, but a range of ideas to be used to develop recommendations.**

This set of papers is grouped into 4 areas of challenge. Each area contains a set of papers, as follows:

A. The challenge of employment security

- Working paper #1: How to begin shifting attention to employment security
- Working paper #2: How to reduce or mitigate precarious employment

B. The challenge of getting needs met

- Working paper #3: How to provide adequate & regular income
- Working paper #4: How to provide extended health benefits
- Working paper #5: How to provide retirement benefits
- Working paper #6: How to provide leave benefits
- Working paper #7: How to provide adequate community supports

C. The challenge of labour & employment rights

- Working paper #8: How to ensure health & safety at work
- Working paper #9: How to enable more voice at work through unions and labour groups
- Working paper #10: How to extend & raise awareness of employment standards rights
- Working paper #11: How to ensure employment standard rights are adequate
- Working paper #12: How to enforce employment standards

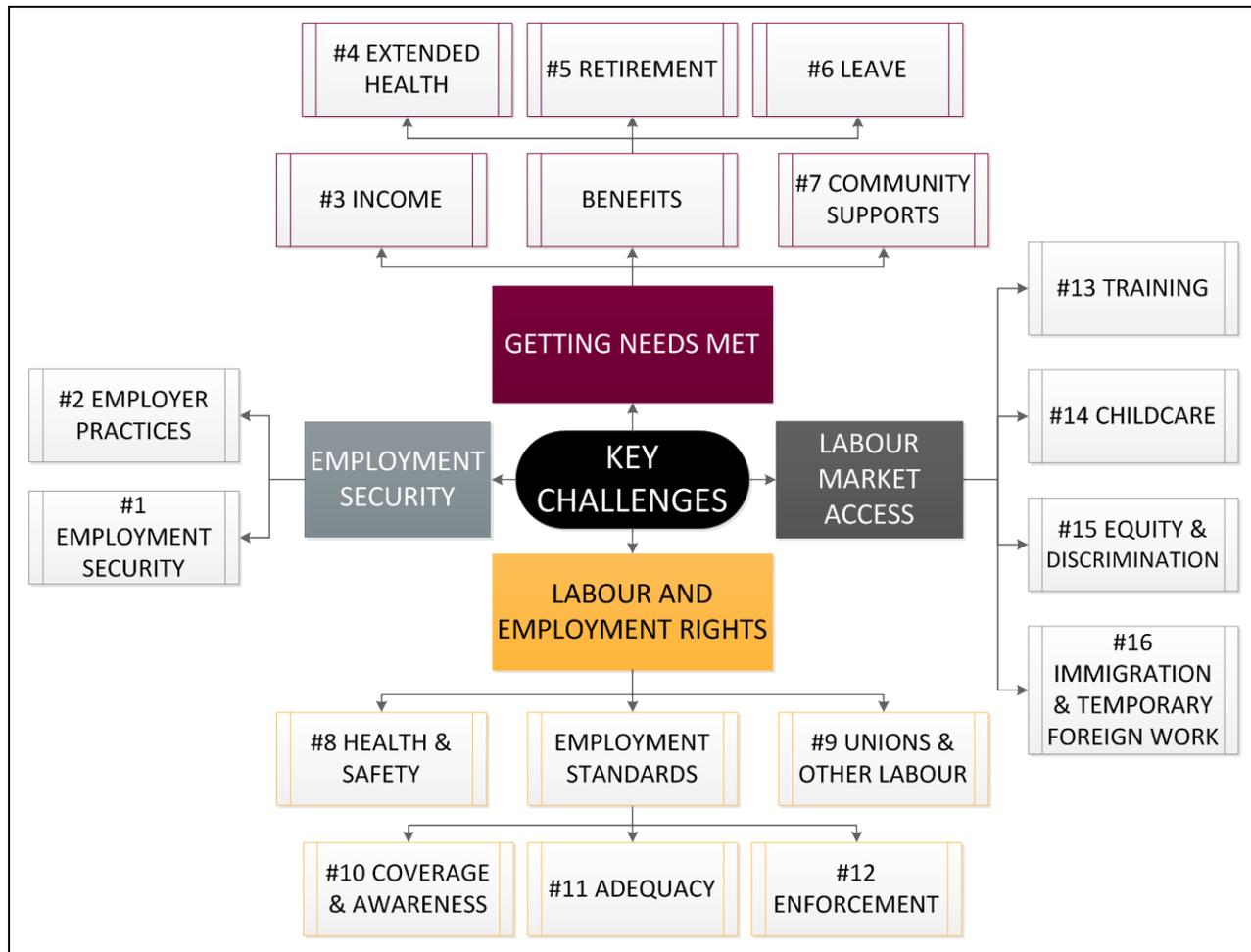
D. The challenge of labour market access

- Working paper #13: How to provide more opportunities for training

- Working paper #14: How to provide more appropriate childcare
- Working paper #15: How to increase equity and reduce discrimination
- Working paper #16: How to increase employment security for immigrants and temporary foreign workers

Each paper also includes a 'driver tree' diagram to help guide readers through the policy options.

We are aware that there may be gaps, omissions, and contradictions. This is because these papers aim to consolidate the reviewed literature on the issue and do not aim to promote a particular viewpoint. In recognition of your role as key subject matter experts, we welcome and value your contributions and opinions on the content of the papers and look forward to discussing the papers with you at the roundtable.⁵



⁵ The attendees of the May 26th roundtable are the primary audience for these papers.