

# **Extended Life Courses, Structural Labour Pressure, and the Reabsorption of Time in the Polycrisis**

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary debates on the future of work frequently emphasise technological disruption, especially artificial intelligence (AI). While important, such accounts often under-specify the broader structural conditions shaping labour market change. This paper argues that the central issue is not job loss alone, but the failure of contemporary labour systems to convert efficiency gains into reduced working time.

The paper asks how extended life courses interact with time-based employment institutions to generate labour pressure, fragment jobs, and reabsorb saved time as intensified work rather than release it as free time.

This work-in-progress develops a conceptual framework through a critical synthesis of sociology of work and employment, demographic change, and labour process analysis. It is informed by preliminary comparative evidence on working-time and productivity trends in the United States, France, and Germany, and illustrated through contemporary cases of AI-restructured professional work and compensatory public employment.

Within this framework, rising longevity and delayed labour market exit generate structural labour pressure: an accumulating condition in which more workers remain economically active across time while labour market institutions remain organised around shorter and more standardised working lives. Under these conditions, employment forms are reshaped through

task fragmentation, weakened job stability, and deteriorating labour market trajectories.

The paper introduces time absorption to explain a recurrent mechanism. Under conditions of structural labour pressure, time-based employment, competitive pressure, and imperfect evaluation, productivity gains do not reliably translate into shorter hours. Instead, saved time is reallocated into task expansion, labour compression, and intensified organisational control. The paper advances three claims. First, labour market restructuring under these conditions appears not only as job loss but also as task fragmentation and weakened occupational coherence. Second, where available tasks are insufficient to sustain full jobs, employment may be institutionally expanded into low-intensity or compensatory forms rather than simply disappear. Third, AI is best understood not as the origin of this structure but as an amplifier that accelerates output, increases verification demands, and intensifies monitoring and responsibility concentration.

The argument is conditional rather than universal. Preliminary comparison suggests stronger absorption where saved time remains institutionally captured, and greater partial release where institutional mediation more effectively translates productivity gains into reduced working time or security. By linking extended life courses to labour market restructuring and AI-mediated control, the paper offers a demographic-institutional account of why productivity gains are often reabsorbed as intensified work rather than translated into shorter time.

Keywords: Sociology of work and employment, Polycrisis, Working time, Labour process, Artificial intelligence

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