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## **Social Exclusion in the Learning Economy**

### **SUMMARY**

The paper analyses the impact the emerging learning economy may have on processes of social exclusion. It is argued that the need for more flexibility can be seen as a major factor behind increasingly unstable and insecure work careers for a growing number of people. While traditionally disadvantaged workers, as, for example, the unskilled and elderly as well as the socially excluded, are the most likely to become unemployed due to the streamlining and outsourcing strategies of companies, a growing number of new employee groups, such as middle management and some specialists, are also at risk of losing their jobs. Particularly, not being integrated into information networks implies being prevented from participating in the learning activities associated with new and more efficient uses of ICTs, and increases the risk of becoming excluded from the labour market.

The phenomenon of social exclusion of whole territories is also discussed. Against the argument that regional specialisation will lead to economic convergence, it is stressed that many regions are caught in the trap of a low road development as companies are not only searching for nodal points in global information and

knowledge flows but also for cheap labour and less restrictive environmental regulations.

The paper argues that there is a need for stabilising employment and improving social security together with the transformation into a learning society. Individual-targeted and general approaches aiming at preventing or combatting social exclusion are discussed. Individual-targeted strategies, it is argued, are based on a concept of social rights, aiming at keeping people in, or reintegrating them into, work. To this extent, they are different from those underlying the postwar social consensus, which simply ensured the population against predictable risks. A five-stage model of social exclusion is presented and strategies of intervention are suggested. General strategies for combatting social exclusion are based on the idea of solidarity. The sharing of work is seen as the key approach towards re-establishing solidarity. But one can argue that a more pro-active strategy of restoring strong economic growth conducive to massive job creation is needed. Here we can speak of the need for a conditions-enabling innovation policy.