
SOCIAL RETURN ENTERPRISES

Foundational Document

Work, dignity, purpose and social peace in the face of technological
transformation

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PRESERVING SOCIAL PEACE

1. FOUNDATIONAL DECLARATION

Advances in technology in general, and in artificial intelligence in particular, are a present and irreversible reality. Global society is facing a process of transformation in which the speed of technological development does not necessarily correspond to the capacity of people, institutions, education systems, labour markets and governments to adapt.

This transformation should neither be ignored nor confronted by attempting to stop progress. The question that must be addressed is different:

How can society accompany technological progress without allowing millions of people to become displaced, deprived of purpose and excluded from productive activity?

The answer proposed in this document is the creation of Social Return Enterprises, ERS

ERS organizations are not created primarily to generate economic profit. Their reason for existing is social.

Their first and ultimate purpose is to help PRESERVE SOCIAL PEACE, understood as the possibility for a society to undergo profound technological transformation without allowing the loss or transformation of certain forms of employment to become a loss of dignity, purpose, belonging and social participation for the people who performed them.

2. THE PROBLEM

Technological transformation has a characteristic that distinguishes it from many previous economic transformations:

It can profoundly change the need for certain types of work at a speed greater than people's ability to make a career transition.

Trades and professions may disappear, decline or be transformed. At the same time, new needs may emerge and demand may increase for workers with different knowledge and capabilities.

This creates a paradox: unemployment and a shortage of qualified workers can exist simultaneously.

The difficulty does not lie only in the number of jobs available. It also lies in the gap between the capabilities a person possesses and the capabilities the new economy requires.

There is also an even deeper issue.

A person who has spent years studying, working and specialising in a particular activity does not lose only an income when that activity disappears.

That person may feel that he or she is also losing:

Professional identity.

Recognition earned over many years.

Social usefulness.

Autonomy.

A place within the community.

And the sense of purpose associated with everyday activity.

The problem, therefore, is not exclusively economic.

It is human and social.

3. THE PERSON IS NOT OBSOLETE

This is one of the fundamental principles of ERS

Technology may make a particular task unnecessary. It may change a trade. It may replace certain functions. It may even cause certain occupations to disappear.

But it does not follow that the person who performed those tasks has lost his or her value.

Technology can make a job obsolete.

It should not make the person who performed it obsolete.

This is the fundamental difference between considering unemployment solely as an economic situation and considering it as a problem of social integration.

A displaced worker needs income.

But that worker also needs a reason to get up every morning.

The person needs to continue feeling part of society.

The person needs to know that he or she can still contribute.

And when the previous activity no longer has a future, that person needs a concrete path for building a new one.

4. PURPOSE AS A SOCIAL NEED

The societies of the future will have to address a debate that goes far beyond the question of how income should be distributed.

If a growing share of the population is displaced from productive activities by automation and artificial intelligence, there may be a temptation to solve the problem exclusively through financial transfers.

Economic protection may be necessary.

But income alone does not necessarily provide purpose, recognition, participation or belonging.

For this reason, ERS starts from a different premise:

Society should not limit itself to ensuring that a displaced person can consume.

It should offer that person the possibility of continuing to participate.

The central question is not only:

How can we maintain this person's income?

It is also:

How can we maintain this person's status as an active member of society?

For this reason, ERS seeks progressively to replace a logic based solely on assistance with a logic of paid participation.

5. FROM BENEFIT TO WORK

The central concept can be expressed simply.

Passive model:

Unemployment.

Financial benefit.

Inactivity.

ERS model:

Employment displacement.

Entry into an ERS

Work or training.

Salary.

Transition.

The difference is not merely administrative.

It is a difference in conception.

In the first model, the person appears mainly as a recipient of public resources.

In the second, the person appears as a worker and a participant in society.

For this reason, one of the founding principles of ERS is the following:

A benefit intended to address unemployment should, when conditions allow, be capable of being transformed into dignified remuneration for work performed or for a training process designed to restore the person's productive capacity.

The specific legal conditions must be determined by each state and by the applicable legislation.

But the social principle is unequivocal:

The objective is not to pay someone not to work.

The objective is to use the resources intended to protect that person so that he or she can continue working, learning and participating.

6. HIGHER PURPOSE: PRESERVING SOCIAL PEACE

The purpose of ERS is not to create profitable enterprises in the traditional sense.

Nor is it to replace the private sector.

Nor is it to create artificial jobs indefinitely.

The higher purpose is:

PRESERVING SOCIAL PEACE.

Social peace should be understood here as a society's capacity to undergo major economic and technological transformations without creating a permanent divide between those who benefit from them and those who are displaced by them.

Inequality, loss of opportunity, a sense of uselessness and prolonged exclusion can generate growing social pressure.

When a state responds only to consequences, it may end up devoting increasing resources to containing problems that could have been prevented.

ERS proposes acting before technological displacement becomes permanent social exclusion.

7. THE THREE HUMAN PILLARS OF ERS

Although social peace is the higher purpose, the model rests on three human pillars.

7.1. DIGNITY

A displaced person should not be regarded as a permanent social cost.

That person should retain the possibility of contributing and of receiving remuneration for doing so.

7.2. PURPOSE

Work is not only a source of income.

It also provides daily structure, recognition, social relationships, learning and a sense of belonging.

ERS should preserve that dimension.

7.3. TRANSITION

An ERS should not become a final destination when there is a reasonable possibility of moving into another activity.

It should function as a bridge:

From the job that was lost towards the work that is possible.

8. WHAT IS A SOCIAL RETURN ENTERPRISE?

A Social Return Enterprise is a productive organization whose main objective is not to maximize economic profit, but to generate social solutions by incorporating displaced or unemployed people into productive activities, training and employment-transition processes.

Its return is measured primarily by the social value generated.

That value includes, among other things:

People returning to work.

People acquiring new capabilities.

People regaining autonomy.

People subsequently entering the private labour market.

Goods and services produced.

Public resources used productively.

A reduction in prolonged unemployment.

And stronger social cohesion.

An ERS is, by definition, an organization oriented towards the people who form part of it at every level of its structure.

9. WHO PARTICIPATES IN ERS

The workforce will consist primarily of:

People already receiving public unemployment-related benefits.

Unemployed people who do not qualify for those benefits.

And people whose jobs are threatened by technological transformation and who can be incorporated preventively into transition programmes.

The model should not necessarily wait until a person has become completely excluded.

When it is possible to identify in advance a technological transformation that threatens a particular activity, the transition may begin before final displacement occurs.

10. PREVIOUS WORK AS A STARTING POINT

Joining an ERS does not mean ignoring the experience a person has accumulated.

On the contrary:

Previous experience is one of the organization's principal assets.

Whenever possible, the person will perform functions similar or related to those previously performed.

When this is not possible, the person may enter training processes to develop new activities.

Accumulated experience should not be discarded.

It should be analysed to determine which knowledge and capabilities can be transferred to new needs.

11. TRAINING AS PART OF WORK

Training will not be regarded as an activity separate from work.

Hours devoted to education, improvement, updating, the development of new skills and preparation for new occupations may form part of paid time within the ERS model.

This changes a traditional conception:

Learning does not mean ceasing to work.

In an economy undergoing permanent transformation:

Learning is a way of working for the future.

People who choose to pursue a completely different activity may be assessed through mechanisms designed to determine their aptitudes and interests for that new direction.

12. PRODUCTION AS A FINANCING MECHANISM

Government organizations continuously consume goods and services.

A significant share of those needs is currently met by private companies through contracts financed with public resources.

ERS organizations may participate in that market.

The principle is:

If an ERS can produce a good or provide a service that the state needs, with appropriate quality, continuity and conditions, it may become a supplier to the state.

The purpose is not to create artificial demand.

It is to identify needs that already exist and that currently generate public expenditure.

Therefore:

State.

Expenditure that already exists.

ERS

A good or service.

Plus work.

Plus training.

Plus social value.

13. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The existence of ERS does not imply the disappearance of private suppliers.

When an ERS cannot adequately meet a state need, the state should retain the possibility of using private suppliers.

Competition should be based on transparent criteria.

An ERS should demonstrate that it can provide the necessary conditions of quality, price, continuity, supply capacity, compliance and transparency.

The conceptual advantage of an ERS should not be an obligation for the state to purchase from it, but the additional social value it generates when it can meet an existing need under appropriate conditions.

14. A NEW DISTRIBUTION OF THE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT MARKET

This model will necessarily produce a transformation in certain markets supplying the state.

Private companies that have traditionally supplied certain goods or services may encounter new competition.

This should not be concealed.

It is a natural consequence of introducing ERS organizations as new participants.

Private companies, like any economic organization, will need to compete, seek new customers, develop new products, reduce costs, innovate, specialise and reinvent themselves when necessary.

The objective of ERS is not to eliminate the private sector.

It is to introduce a new way of producing social value by using, whenever possible, part of the public demand that already exists.

15. DOUBLE RETURN

An ERS can simultaneously generate two types of result.

Productive return:

It delivers to the state or to third parties a necessary good or service.

Social return:

It also produces employment, income, training, experience, autonomy, employment transition and integration.

A private company may deliver a service.

An ERS aims to deliver that service while using the process to produce social integration.

That is the meaning of social return.

16. FINANCING PRINCIPLE

The model begins with a budgetary reality:

States already devote considerable resources to addressing unemployment.

ERS proposes studying the possibility of redirecting part of those resources towards a system in which the person receives remuneration linked to productive work, training, career transition and transition activities.

The financing of an ERS may also be supplemented through public resources, foundations, nonprofit organizations, institutional agreements, income derived from the production of goods and services, and other mechanisms compatible with its social purpose.

When resources from existing unemployment allocations are insufficient to provide dignified remuneration and guarantee the necessary operation of the system, the state may provide the difference.

17. THE FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMIC CRITERION

An ERS should not be evaluated like a traditional company whose success is determined exclusively by the profit it generates.

Its fundamental question is not:

How much money did it make?

It is:

How much social value did it produce with the resources used?

The primary economic reference will be the expenditure the state already bears in addressing the unemployment situation that the model seeks to transform.

The additional costs of the system must also be measured, but not in order to turn ERS into a traditional commercial enterprise.

The principle is:

Economic profitability is not the objective.

Economic sustainability is a condition for achieving social return.

18. FROM BENEFIT TO SALARY

The central conceptual transformation can be expressed in this way.

Benefit:

The state provides resources because the person is unemployed.

ERS:

The state allocates resources so that the person can perform socially useful work or train for a new activity.

The intended result is for the beneficiary to stop perceiving himself or herself as someone who passively lives on public resources.

The person becomes:

A paid worker participating in an activity that is useful to society.

The psychological and social difference between these two situations is one of the essential foundations of the model.

19. ERS AS A BRIDGE TO THE PRIVATE LABOUR MARKET

An ERS should not aim to retain its participants indefinitely.

One of its most important successes will be enabling a person to leave the ERS because he or she has obtained a new employment opportunity.

For this reason, mechanisms will be established for skills assessment, training, practical work, internships, links with companies, employment intermediation and subsequent follow-up.

The ERS should become a source of trained human talent for new productive needs.

20. PARTICIPATION BY PRIVATE COMPANIES

Private companies may participate voluntarily through programmes involving education, practical work, internships, training, skills assessment and recruitment.

When a company offers a training or learning position, mechanisms may be established to provide public support for remuneration, according to the applicable conditions and legislation.

The ultimate objective will be the participant's permanent incorporation into the company that provided the training or, when this is not possible, into another organization that requires the participant's capabilities.

The company in which the internship took place will have priority as a potential employer, when appropriate.

21. ERS AS A TALENT PIPELINE

The model produces an additional positive consequence.

Private companies gain access to people who already have work experience, have been assessed, have received training, have demonstrated particular capabilities, understand the productive environment and have been observed during a practical work process.

ERS can therefore become a mechanism connecting:

Displaced people.

Training.

Experience.

Companies that need talent.

This can help address two apparently contradictory problems at the same time:

Unemployment on the one hand, and a shortage of qualified workers on the other.

22. THE STATE

The state has a fundamental role, but it does not necessarily need to administer every ERS directly.

Its principal functions may include establishing the legal framework, providing resources, facilitating the use of existing resources allocated to unemployment, purchasing goods and services where appropriate, facilitating training, establishing standards, supervising, evaluating results, guaranteeing transparency and promoting employment transition.

The state should act as facilitator, financier, purchaser and evaluator, while avoiding a model that depends exclusively on state bureaucratic structures.

23. INDEPENDENCE AND CONTINUITY

A fundamental issue for the viability of the model is preventing its existence from depending exclusively on the will of a particular political administration.

ERS organizations should be capable of surviving changes of government, changes of public officials, changes in political orientation, economic cycles and administrative changes.

It will therefore be advisable to develop institutional structures capable of preserving the methodology, evaluating results and guaranteeing continuity.

Politics may change.

The social need remains.

24. GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

Every ERS should have clear mechanisms for administration, auditing, evaluation, control of resources, participant selection, contracting, purchasing and measurement of results.

Social return cannot become an excuse for inefficiency.

On the contrary:

The greater the social purpose, the greater the requirement for transparency and evaluation.

The use of public resources requires demonstrating that those resources generate the intended social result.

25. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL

The same technology that creates part of the problem can become a fundamental tool for addressing it.

Artificial intelligence may be used to identify occupations undergoing transformation, anticipate the need for new capabilities, analyse employment profiles, detect transferable capabilities, suggest training pathways, identify employment opportunities, connect workers with companies, anticipate future human-resource needs and evaluate the results of the system.

Technology should not be presented as the enemy of the worker.

It should be used to increase people's capacity to adapt.

26. THE PRINCIPLE OF PREVENTION

The model should not be limited to intervening after unemployment has already occurred.

A genuinely preventive policy should attempt to identify:

Which jobs are being transformed.

Which people are exposed.

Which capabilities they possess.

And which new capabilities will be required.

In this way, a person could begin the transition before permanently losing his or her activity.

The objective is to reduce the time between:

A job that disappears.

And a new job that becomes possible.

27. MEASURING SOCIAL RETURN

ERS organizations should develop specific indicators.

These may include:

The number of people incorporated.

The number of people trained.

The number of people who complete a career transition.

The number of people who subsequently enter private employment.

Retention in the new job.

Goods and services produced.

Contracts obtained.

The value of production.

Public resources used.

Cost per participant.

Average transition time.

Worker satisfaction.

Company satisfaction.

And the satisfaction of purchasing organizations.

But there will be a higher indicator:

How many people succeeded in recovering or maintaining meaningful productive and social participation?

That is the measure that distinguishes an ERS from a conventional company.

28. WHAT AN ERS MUST NOT BECOME

To preserve its essence, an ERS must not become:

A disguised subsidy.

A bureaucratic structure.

A permanent holding place for unemployed people.

A traditional state-owned company.

An organization intended to compete artificially by destroying the private sector.

A clientelist mechanism.

A political structure.

Or a way of maintaining indefinitely jobs that have no social usefulness.

ERS exists to produce, train and transform.

Not to administer exclusion indefinitely.

29. THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-EXCLUSION

Nor should it be assumed that every person must immediately perform a conventional productive activity.

There will be situations in which a person first needs training.

In others, the person will need to undergo a career-transition process.

In still others, the person may be able to begin a new activity directly.

The system should be flexible enough to recognise these differences.

What is essential is that an active path exists.

30. A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Humanity cannot expect technological progress to stop in order to preserve particular forms of employment indefinitely.

But neither can it accept that progress is considered sufficient when millions of people are left without a recognisable social role.

The challenge is to build a third alternative:

Do not stop technology.

Do not abandon people.

Transform the transition.

ERS represents a proposal for institutionalising that transition.

31. SOCIAL PEACE AS A PREVENTIVE INVESTMENT

The cost of preventing a social fracture may be significantly different from the cost of attempting to repair it after it has occurred.

A society that simultaneously loses employment, income, expectations, professional identity, institutional trust and future prospects may experience consequences that extend far beyond the labour market.

For this reason, investing in employment-transition mechanisms should not be considered solely as social expenditure.

It can be understood as a preventive investment in stability and social cohesion.

32. THE PRINCIPLE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Technological transformation cannot be the exclusive responsibility of the state.

It should involve governments, companies, workers, educational institutions, universities, social organizations, foundations and research centres.

Companies that develop and use transformative technologies form part of the new productive reality.

Educational institutions should help prepare the capabilities that will be needed in the future.

The state should create the conditions.

And people should have genuine opportunities to adapt.

33. A PROPOSAL THAT DOES NOT CLAIM TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

ERS does not need to know exactly which professions will disappear in ten, fifteen or twenty years.

It needs to recognise something simpler:

Transformation will occur, and mechanisms capable of responding to it will be necessary.

The model must be adaptable.

The productive activities of an ERS may vary according to the country, region, city, government needs, economic structure, participants' capabilities and technological development.

For this reason, there is no single ERS

There is an ERS model adaptable to each society.

34. THE CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis that must be tested can be expressed as follows:

If part of the resources currently allocated to addressing unemployment can be transformed into remuneration for socially useful work, training and employment transition, and if ERS organizations can simultaneously produce goods and services that the state already needs, then it will be possible to transform part of the social cost of unemployment into productive participation, preserving people's dignity and strengthening social peace.

That is the hypothesis.

It should not be accepted simply because it appears attractive.

It must be demonstrated.

35. THE PRINCIPLE OF REALITY

The project should not promise that every displaced person will immediately find a new profession.

Nor should it promise that every ERS will be economically self-sufficient.

Nor that unemployment will disappear.

The proposal is more concrete:

To create a social mechanism that makes it possible to manage the transition more effectively.

Success does not consist of denying the problem.

It consists of reducing its human and social consequences.

36. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

Modern societies built systems of protection against different social risks.

Technological transformation now raises a new question:

What happens when economic progress itself makes certain work capabilities unnecessary long before people are able to develop others?

The answer cannot be limited to saying:

Learn something else.

There must be a structure that enables people to do so.

ERS aims to become part of that structure.

37. NON-NEGOTIABLE PRINCIPLES

Every implementation of the model should respect the following principles.

One.

The person comes before the structure.

Two.

The ultimate purpose is to preserve social peace.

Three.

Technology should not be fought. Its social consequences should be managed.

Four.

Unemployment should be addressed before it becomes permanent exclusion.

Five.

Income should, whenever possible, be accompanied by participation.

Six.

Training forms part of transition work.

Seven.

The purpose of ERS is not to maximize economic profit.

Eight.

Production should respond to real needs.

Nine.

The state may be a customer, but it does not necessarily have to be the direct administrator of every ERS

Ten.

The private sector should continue to participate under transparent conditions.

Eleven.

Transition into private employment is one of the desirable outcomes.

Twelve.

Every public resource used should be transparent and open to evaluation.

Thirteen.

An ERS should not become a permanent structure of dependency.

Fourteen.

The professional experience of displaced people is an asset.

Fifteen.

The model should be adaptable to the characteristics of each society.

38. THE IDEA IN A SINGLE SENTENCE

If the entire project had to be explained in one sentence:

Social Return Enterprises propose transforming part of the social cost of technological unemployment into work, training and productive participation, in order to preserve people's dignity and purpose and, through them, social peace.

39. FINAL DECLARATION

Humanity is facing a technological transformation that cannot be stopped.

Artificial intelligence and new technologies will change activities, professions, companies and markets.

Some occupations will disappear.

Others will change.

New activities that we do not yet know will emerge.

The challenge is not to prevent that process.

The challenge is to prevent millions of people from becoming trapped in the space between the work that no longer needs them and the work they are not yet prepared to perform.

A society cannot measure its success only by the amount of technology it is capable of developing.

It must also measure its capacity to accompany people through the consequences of that development.

That is why Social Return Enterprises are proposed.

Not to replace the state.

Not to destroy private enterprise.

Not to perpetuate benefits.

Not to generate economic profit as their purpose.

But to build a mechanism through which a person who has been displaced can once again feel needed.

So that person can work.

So that person can learn.

So that person can produce.

So that person can regain autonomy.

So that person can return, whenever possible, to the labour market.

And, fundamentally, so that person does not feel that society's progress came at the cost of turning him or her into someone who could simply be discarded.

Because the challenge of the next technological revolution will not only be to determine what machines can do.

It will be to determine what society will do with people when machines can perform the work those people once performed.

The answer proposed by Social Return Enterprises is:

Do not abandon them.

Do not turn them into spectators.

Do not reduce their existence to receiving a financial transfer.

Give them an opportunity to continue participating.

Because a society that succeeds in advancing technologically without abandoning those who are displaced does not merely protect its workers.

It protects itself.

And that is the true meaning of Social Return.

PRESERVING SOCIAL PEACE.