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Intersecting the future of work and creative economy in the Global South

Malli, a 29-year-old from New Delhi who describes herself as a digital creative, deeply struggles to find a decent job. After finishing high school, Malli gathered first content creation experience through initiating her own video channel accompanied by a food blog, and she got enrolled in multiple online certification courses for web programming. Later, she decided to go to university and pursue a master's degree in creative arts. However, she never lost her passion for web design which led her to freelance and build websites for smaller e-commerce companies across India while studying. After finishing her studies with an excellent grade, Malli tried to secure a stable income, but none of the larger companies in her area wanted to hire a permanent worker, as employing freelancers through digital platforms is way cheaper and the companies do not have to offer them any social security or health insurance. As a result, Malli considers going abroad, or back to university for a degree in business administration.

What sounds like an individual dead end could be more common than one might think. Already today, creative industries are large and exhibit a strong potential for creating employment, as well as for becoming a driver of innovation and growth, as the demand from middle- and high-income markets for outputs of the creative economy continues to rise. For example, in India the creative industries already account for approximately 8.3% of overall employment, while more broadly, the region of Asia & Pacific accounts for the greatest share in global production and employment with an annual contribution of \$743 billion of revenue and 12.7 million jobs. While employment in the creative industries can largely be described as precarious, significant growth rates induce that creativity can be considered as a key skill for the 21st century which revolves around the idea of imagination. invention, and ingenuity as a general-purpose instrument to accelerate quality growth, increase productivity, and navigate future labour markets. Thus, creativity can indeed be a competitive advantage for countries in the Global South which are currently still operating on the periphery of the global knowledge economy. But as Malli's example shows much remains to be done for leveraging the full potential of and securing decent employment in the creative economy in the Global South.

At the same time, economies and labour markets in the Global South are facing profound opportunities and challenges induced through exponential digital technological change. Evidence from countries reveals that digital technological

change offers new opportunities for employment, upward mobility, and business models, but at the same time seems to surpass human adaptability – an imbalance calling for social and institutional adjustments to foster the right skills and adequate human competence to meet these challenges. Additionally, demographics could be working in favor of the Global South, as changes in the population's age structure give rise to a particularly large work force. On the other hand, the 'demographic dividend' is unlikely to be reaped if capacities are inadequate and the right policies are not in place. Against this backdrop, countries in the Global South tend to be equipped with weaker institutional capacities and capabilities to adapt to these changes which creates a dangerous dynamic in the context of accelerating demographic change and digitalization as Malli's example is vividly showing.

So, what does Malli, a 29-year-old digital creative from the Global South, need from policy makers within the G20 and beyond for securing a decent job in the future? Above all, Malli requires a "new social contract" for the creative jobs of a digital tomorrow which could be established around the following three main pillars: overcoming the digital divide for securing equal access to employment opportunities; guaranteeing fair labor standards and equal remuneration for the provision of digital services as a prerequisite for decent work; and fostering an enabling digital environment built on labor market reforms considering new employment statuses, upskilling opportunities for negatively affected workers,

and a rethinking of platform ownership (focusing on security, fairness, transparency), which currently creates imbalances in power and value distribution globally. A focus on youth should be considered as a framework condition for a new social contract for the creative jobs of a digital tomorrow due to the beneficial demographic dynamics, as well as rural-urban migration by youth in the Global South. Ultimately, rethinking economic policies and development approaches as practiced in the past according to the insights from our virtual dialogue series could help in empowering Malli and so many other (digital) creatives in the Global South.

Reference

The three-parts virtual dialogue series was supported by the GIZ Global Project Culture and Creative Industries which improves employment and income opportunities in partner countries of German development cooperation, the GIZ 'Future of Work' measure which advises partner countries of German Development cooperation on the opportunities and risks related to the future of work, and CIPPEC – an independent nonprofit organization based in Argentina that works on better building public policies.