Evaluation of Employment and Self-Employment Policy:
Methods and Conditions of Relevance

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Abstract

This article begins with an overview of public policy evaluation techniques in economics and extends its scope through a comparative analysis of employment and self-employment public policy studies conducted in contrasting contexts. The study draws attention to the growing importance of behavioral economics in policy evaluation, particularly how integrating insights from other branches of economics and social science disciplines—such as sociology and psychology—enhances our understanding of the social and cultural variables influencing public policy perception and effectiveness. The research focuses on the context of atypical employment contracts and the increasing precarization of labor markets, using the Moroccan experience as a case study. In light of the pandemic, which has further strained labor conditions, the authors emphasize the need to account for evolving socio-economic realities and advocate for a convergence between employment and self-employment policies. The specific problem addressed is the current disconnect between quantitative evaluations and the lack of consideration for qualitative, cultural, and social variables in public policy analysis. To address this issue, the article proposes a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to public policy evaluation. The methodology includes a comprehensive literature review and a comparative study, benchmarking international best practices. Through this approach, the authors demonstrate how considering cultural and social dimensions can enhance the relevance and efficacy of employment policies, particularly in economies characterized by high informality and precarious employment conditions. The findings underscore the importance of developing adaptable and context-specific public policies that reflect the complexities of local economic, social, and cultural environments. The article contributes to the field by offering new insights into the conditions under which public policies in employment and self-employment can be evaluated more effectively, proposing

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that policy relevance lies in the convergence of interdisciplinary approaches and the careful consideration of evolving socio-economic contexts.

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Introduction

Ensuring full employment is one of the objectives of economic policy. This is the situation where there is no difficulty in finding employment and any observed unemployment is only frictional or temporary and short-term. However, underemployment is observed when a person works below legal standards, receives a low salary, or has productivity below what they could achieve. Underemployment is therefore a phenomenon that can be observed even in self-employment.

Self-employment is often called independent or autonomous work. However, for employment statisticians, it can be divided into three subcategories: self-employment without employees, self-employment with employees, and unpaid family workers. The first subcategory corresponds to self-employed workers, while the second refers to what are commonly called employers.

One of the difficulties in estimating public policy evaluations is calculating the societal value of services rendered, that is, whether public spending (including taxes, etc.) has improved the well-being of the population.

In theory, the content, implementation, or impact of a public policy can be evaluated. The key concepts are defined by mainly English-speaking authors such as Rein Martin (1976), etc. In terms of the evaluation objective, Michael Hill (2005) distinguishes between "analysis of policy" and "analysis for policy." According to this author, evaluation should support the proper implementation of the public policy in question. This is far from the concept of control or sanction often associated with public policy evaluation; it is now a decision-making aid tool.

According to William Dunn (2016), the causes and consequences of public policy must be analyzed. However, Warren Walker (2000) emphasizes studying public policy from a more procedural and systemic approach. For Michael Kraft, it is sufficient to analyze a few criteria, such as effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and feasibility.

The following will first present, in a summary manner, the principles of major economic theories regarding the evaluation of public policies in general.

In a second point, the importance of considering culture and qualitative methods in the analysis of public policies is highlighted. Following this, scientific evaluation studies of employment policies, and then self-employment policies, are presented for illustration purposes. Afterward, the significance of evaluating employment and self-employment public policies in the Moroccan context is demonstrated. Finally, this article emphasizes the importance of context analysis and its contingencies (such as the case of COVID-19), and the need to consider convergence for a relevant analysis of public policy.

2. The Major Economic Methods of Public Policy Evaluation

In economics, two major evaluation methods are to be considered: randomized experiments and natural experiments.

Randomized experiments are often deemed more relevant as they rely on random selection from a sufficiently large population to ensure comparability between the treatment group and the control group. The first group receives the public program or action, while the second group, with the same characteristics as the first, does not. For example, a program (taxation, insurance, free services, etc.) is applied to a random sample (treatment group). This operation is complex and costly, and it sometimes raises ethical and equity issues (imposing on vulnerable subjects, etc.). However, its results are highly reliable.

Within the framework of natural experiments, at least three methods can be distinguished: the difference-in-differences method (Carbonnier, 2014), the regression discontinuity design (Fack, 2005), and the instrumental variables method.

2.1   Difference-in-Differences Method

The difference-in-differences method (Carbonnier, 2014) involves comparing a treatment group (which has undergone the policy and whose situation has changed) to a control group (which has not undergone the policy but was eligible). The control group serves as a "counterfactual" for the treatment group. Therefore, the comparison is made between a treated group and a non-treated group that could have been the treated group if the intervention had not occurred.

This method addresses the challenge of comparing "with" and "without" policy situations for the same group (and selection bias) and the difficulties of comparing "before" and "after" situations for the same group (which introduces a temporal bias). It also allows for comparisons between matched subsets drawn from both groups (treatment and counterfactual), specifically those that are identical based on certain characteristics defined according to the evaluation needs. The differences to consider are those inherent to time and treatment.

The first difference concerns the "before" and "after" situations for both treated and non-treated groups to eliminate selection bias. The second difference estimates the effect of the treatment. The basic formula for the difference-in-differences method can be expressed as follows:

— Suppose A and B are the outcome variables for the treatment group, before and after the treatment, respectively.

— And C and D represent the outcome variables for the control group, before and after the

treatment.

The difference-in-differences can thus be represented by DD = (B − A) − (D − C).

Another representation of this technique is possible in the form of a regression:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T + \delta_0 P + \delta_1 T P + \varphi_0 X_i + \mu$$

In the model presented:

- Y represents the dependent variable (the outcome of interest).

- T is a binary variable indicating group membership (T=1 for the treatment group and T=0 for the control group).

- P is a binary variable for the period (P=0 before the program and P=1 after the program).

- TP represents the interaction term between the program and time.

Its coefficient δ_1 indicates the effect of the program. Finally, X represents all the explanatory variables used in the model.

However, using the difference-in-differences estimator requires checking for the presence of an Ashenfelter Dip (a decline or drop) which could bias the results.

2.2. Regression Discontinuity Design

The regression discontinuity design (Fack, 2005) involves conducting the evaluation only around a threshold that qualifies individuals for the treatment under the policy. Thus, the technique assumes that the characteristics of those treated, who are very close to the threshold required, are identical to those of individuals just above this threshold but who did not receive the treatment.

2.3. Instrumental Variables Method

The instrumental variables method involves identifying an instrumental variable that allows distinguishing the treatment group from the counterfactual group. The instrumental variable is one that is strongly correlated with the profile of policy beneficiaries but has no influence on the outcome of applying the same policy. This variable should be non-manipulable by the individuals concerned.

In the study of the influence of maternal status (motherhood) on active labor market participation (Angrist & Evans, 1998), the chosen instrumental variable could be the sex of the children for

mothers with two children. Two possibilities are presented by the authors: "same-sex children" and "different-sex children." The instrumental variable in this study is binary as it does not have a direct influence on mothers' labor market participation. The authors observed that women with two children of the same sex were more likely to seek a third child, which negatively affected their labor market participation. According to them, this is the causal effect of having a third child.

3. Importance of Culture and Contribution of Behavioral Economics

Econometric techniques or those involving qualitative methods have been developed to serve this field of intervention, which is increasingly attracting researchers from various disciplines. However, experimental and quasi-experimental techniques remain the most commonly used. It is only recently that there has been a focus on the importance of qualitative and multidisciplinary approaches in understanding the impacts and effects of public employment policies in general.

All stakeholders in a society are governed by laws, customs, ways of thinking, and behaviors that influence the implementation and execution of public policies themselves. The cultural variable inherent to these models should be considered.

The use of insights from behavioral economics (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973) allows economists to combine different types of analyses. Indeed, behavioral economics aims to integrate non-material and non-monetary aspects to understand and explain phenomena, enabling econometric models to move beyond purely economic variables inspired by traditional theories of homo economicus and rational choice.

4   Case Studies in Public Employment Policy Evaluation

Several studies have focused on youth employment integration programs around the world. Most of these (Kontos, 2008; Wang, 2008, etc.) used quasi-experimental methods to demonstrate impacts that are not always easy to detect.

Table 1: Comparison of Two Studies Evaluating the Impact of Employment Policy

Research Reference	Problem Identified and Policy Evaluated	Questions and Objectives	Evaluation Method	Results
Crépon B, Duflo E, Gurgand M, Rathelot R, Zamora P (2014) Do labor market policies have displacement effects: Evidence from a clustered randomized experiment. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 128 :531-580	Long-Term Unemployment Among Highly Educated Individuals in France Private Mediation Program for Job Search Assistance for These Young Unemployed Individuals.	Does this program promote stable employment? The objective is to measure the effect of the program on the professional outcomes of the beneficiaries and to assess the likelihood of being employed at the end of this program.	Impact Evaluation A quasi-experimental evaluation method with randomization: a treatment group (followed by the temporary employment agency) and a control group (not followed). The method is counterfactual, based on the assumption that both groups would have had the same outcomes in the absence of the intervention.	An effect of "musical chairs" or displacement effect between job seekers has been observed in numerous American, Danish, and other studies. Companies prefer to hire the young individuals who are supported, at the expense of others. This has favored the treatment group in comparisons. Recommend an efficiency evaluation (results/costs).
Benoteau I (2015) What Are the Effects of Aid-Contract Recruitment on Career Trajectories? DARES Study Document: 192. (In French)	Unemployed Individuals Facing Social and Professional Difficulties in Accessing Employment Several Parallel Programs.	Do these programs favor short-term recruitment and medium-term integration of their beneficiaries?	Impact Evaluation Using the Quasi-Experimental Method The statistical methodology employed is propensity score matching, which creates a treatment group and a control group.	Variable effectiveness of the programs depending on the duration and content of the contract and the type of employer. The study recommends appropriate targeting to avoid the risk of windfall effects.

Source: Authors.

To analyze a public policy in the employment sector, a multidisciplinary approach must be employed to appreciate the various dimensions of the potential effects of the policy or program in question. The effects of the policy are not always direct and may impact other aspects not initially targeted by the policy itself, such as pollution levels, living standards, and the well-being of both targeted and non-targeted individuals, the legal framework, etc.—effects that are not always easy to quantify.

The basis of the evaluation is to consider the state of non-existence of the policy in question. In terms of relevance, it is often forgotten to compare this situation with the scenario of implementing the policy.

5.   Studies in the Field of Public Policy Evaluation of Self-Employment

Studies focusing on self-employment have predominantly emphasized self-employment, especially in the informal sector, which continues to represent a significant labor market even in some developed countries (China, England, etc.). Many recommendations suggest the need to include this sector in public policies, moving away from those aimed at its eradication and replacing them with policies that promote its formalization. At this level, studies based on qualitative and biographical approaches are strongly encouraged.

In the field of self-employment, public policy studies appear to be less prominent. The informal sector, which provides employment to a large number of individuals, especially in developing countries, was long considered a problem to be eradicated. Today, programs have been launched aimed at formalizing the sector, which contributes to reducing unemployment in the labor market. Young people and women seeking employment often find themselves in this sector under generally precarious working conditions (supported by data).

In many countries (including France and Morocco), the status of self-employed individuals has been introduced with the goal of formalizing the informal sector. Internationally, studies related to self-employment are less common compared to those addressing wage and professional integration programs for young people and women.

The following table presents a few studies on self-employment in countries with contrasting living standards. The informal or undeclared sector is not exclusive to developing countries; even developed countries like China and England experience similar issues.

Table 2: Comparison of Three Self-Employment Evaluation Studies

Research Reference	Problem Identified and Policy Evaluated	Questions and Objectives	Evaluation Method	Results
Kontos M. (2008) The biographicalembeddedness of women's self-employment. Motivations, strategies and policies. In: Apitzsch U., Kontos M. (eds) Self-EmploymentActivities of Women and Minorities.	Situation of Women in the Labor Market and Primarily in Self-Employment.	How do self-employment support policies influence women's experiences?	The use of a biographical approach with life stories.	Quantitative analysis and evaluation should be complemented by qualitative ones. For example, entrepreneurship is embedded in the biographical process of self-employed women.
Colin C. Williams (2005), The undeclaredsector, self-employment and public policy, in : International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior&Research	Demonstrate the Importance of Considering Undeclared Work in England as a Creator of Jobs and Wealth.	What is the Influence of Perceptions of Undeclared Work on Public Policy Approaches?	Use of a Qualitative Approach Based on 861 Face-to-Face Interviews	Undeclared work creates added value and allows for self-employment with a calculated risk by the involved actors. Public policies should stop viewing the undeclared sector as one to be eradicated and instead consider solutions for formalizing it, as it is a significant source of self-employment creation.
Fang Cai, Meiyan Wang, (2008), A CounterfactualAnalysis on Unlimited Surplus Labor in Rural China. In China & World Economy.	Study Differences in Income and Other Factors Among Self-Employed Farmers in Different Regions of China	Given the technological advancements associated with urban areas, is there a difference in income between rural and urban areas?	Use of Counterfactual Method	Contrary to common belief, there is no significant difference in income between rural and urban areas, and the income disparities are not significant.

Source: Authors

These studies highlight the importance of considering the informal sector as a provider of self-employment, which policies should no longer ignore. Methodologically, in addition to traditional evaluation techniques, qualitative methods are increasingly used to understand the phenomenon in its multidimensionality. Observation, life stories, and semi-structured interviews were among the survey techniques used to identify the main impacts on the target population. Quantitative approaches can be applied either after or alongside qualitative ones, depending on the evaluation needs, information availability, and accessibility to the target population and stakeholders.

In evaluating a public policy, the cultural aspect is crucial as it helps to understand the attitudes and behaviors of different stakeholders. Evaluation practices are not always well-regarded and may be perceived as control followed by sanctions or as interference in matters where one was not invited. Therefore, the cultural aspect can obstruct the process and should be considered in research.

Self-employment is seen as a viable and resilient new business (Meager, Nigel & Peter Bates, 2001).

Traditionally, quantitative methods have been used, covering a wide range of programs. However, the biographical approach in self-employment evaluation enriches research in this area. This evaluation method is targeted and oriented toward a group of program beneficiaries (Schmid et al., 1996).

It allows for the analysis of the cumulative effects of self-employment in interaction with other policies likely aimed at different social groups. This approach recognizes that the labor market behavior does not exist in isolation from society and other active policies. Here, self-employment is seen not only as an act embedded in networks and social relations (Granovetter, 1973, 1995), or in economic and legal contexts (Kantos, 2008), but also as part of a biographical process. The individual biography, as a process, can touch on various aspects related to identity and personal development (Kupferberg 1998).

6.   Usefulness of Employment Policy Evaluation in the Moroccan Context

In the field of employment, the current situation is bleak. High activity and unemployment rates indicate a mismatch between supply and demand. A closer look at the unemployment rate reveals its urban nature and its greater impact on women and highly educated youth. The Moroccan economy, characterized by the predominance of small family businesses and the informal sector, absorbs more unskilled labor than skilled labor.

The negative effects of the adjustment plan adopted in the early 1980s are still felt today. The liberal approach advocated in the late 1990s (privatization, entrepreneurship, etc.) led several state programs to turn to self-employment as a solution to the inability of the state and private sector to absorb the annual influx of job seekers.

In 2016, the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (CESE) published a report titled "Self-Employment: A Lever for Development and Integration of the Informal Sector." Self-employment is one aspect of self-employment in Morocco. According to the High Commission for Planning's national employment surveys, self-employment encompasses not only employers or self-employed workers but also cooperative members or associates. In 2014, self-employment involved 32.5% of the Moroccan active population, with a low proportion of women (14.4%) and equal representation between urban and rural areas. Those working for themselves accounted for more than 85% of self-employment, with 74.5% having no formal qualifications.

In addition to agriculture and commerce, liberal professions were also represented in this type of employment. In terms of job creation, self-employment contributed to an average of 15,000 positions annually between 1999 and 2014, primarily among self-employed individuals (82%), employers, and cooperative members (9%). However, several national surveys have highlighted the precarious nature of jobs created in the self-employment sector, rarely leading to improved living standards and adequate social coverage (National Survey on living conditions, HCP – 2007).

The informal sector is also a significant source of employment and self-employment in Morocco. In 2007, informal production units provided a total of 2,216,116 jobs, with an employment rate of 53% in commerce, 21.5% in industry, 19% in services, and 9% in construction.

Public policies supporting self-employment have traditionally focused on entrepreneurship as a source of job creation and development leverage, especially since the end of the Structural Adjustment Plan. However, several programs have failed. For example, the Credit for Young Entrepreneurs program launched in 1987 (implemented in August 1988) and the Moukawalati program launched in the 1990s. Between 1988 and 2000, 10,613 entrepreneurs received a total of 5.4 billion dirhams, creating a total of 41,230 jobs. However, these results fell short of the expected 2,000 to 3,000 jobs per year. Additionally, as of May 31, 1998, the banks involved in the program (with 25% funding) reported that 2,270 files, or 32% of the total, had overdue payments, with 503 files in litigation.

Nonetheless, the state continues to rely on self-employment to maintain socio-economic balances. The informal sector remains a major concern within the national employment strategy. Regarding women's employment, CESE notes their low participation in self-employment, generally limited to activities supported by the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) launched in 2005, which boosted the creation of cooperatives in Morocco.

Since 2015, the self-employment status was introduced, aiming to combat unemployment and, more importantly, to formalize the informal sector. Several other programs have been launched (Idmaj, Infitah, Imtiaz, Moussanada, Rawaj, etc.), but with mixed results. Various reasons for these failures have been suggested, such as lack of support and guidance, difficult access to financing,

absence of regular accounting management, high real estate costs, etc. These programs have often lacked rigorous evaluations regarding effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence.

Often, comparisons were limited to quantitative goals versus expected results. No evaluations estimating externalities, for example, have been conducted. In terms of sectoral and territorial focus, employment policy is now aiming to integrate the informal sector.

7. For a Relevant Evaluation of Employment and Self-Employment Policy

7.1 Consideration of Contextual Elements and the Example of the Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis on Employment

2020 was a year of global crisis and for Morocco. According to the World Bank report, 2020 saw a deceleration in growth rates by 1.5 percentage points, an unprecedented decline in over a decade for Morocco. Additionally, related to the impact of the Coronavirus, the same report indicates that the overall budget deficit is expected to deteriorate to over 6% of GDP in 2020. The weight of public debt is projected to reach 73% of GDP.

The Coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the already challenging situation of the Moroccan economy, which was also suffering from the effects of drought at the beginning of the year.

According to the Haut-Commissariat au Plan, by April 2020, 142,000 businesses had halted operations partially or completely, representing 57% of businesses nationwide. In the tourism sector, this rate reached 89%, followed by the textile and leather industries, mechanical industries, and construction sector. These businesses had to reduce employment by 726,000 positions, accounting for 20% of the workforce in the formal sector.

The informal sector likely faced even greater impacts. According to the national survey on the informal sector published in 2018, based on a survey conducted in 2013, informal employment accounted for 2.4 million people, representing 36.3% of non-agricultural employment nationwide.

In response to the Coronavirus crisis, the Economic Watch Committee (CVE) decided to compensate employees registered with the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) (1,000 dirhams for half of March and 2,000 dirhams for April, May, and June) whose employers had announced the cessation of their business activities. From March 15 to April 1, 2020, the Minister of Employment reported a total of 113,000 businesses and more than 700,000 employees in a situation of temporary activity suspension.

The CVE also planned temporary financial aid (*Tadamon*: Solidarity in English) for families who lost their informal jobs due to the state of emergency, in two phases: The first phase included Ramediste family heads (those with the Ramed card: Régime d'Assistance Médicale)

(approximately 3.9 million families until May 12, 2020) and the second phase included non-Ramediste family heads.

However, by May 27, 2020, claims from individuals excluded from the informal sector support had reached over two million; after processing, only 800,000 applications were accepted, raising the number of beneficiaries to over 4 million heads of households.

7.2   Importance of the Consistency Criterion in Public Actions

Today, more than ever, policy formulation must take into account potential states of crisis and economic realities. Beyond the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, the criteria of coherence, complementarity, and synergy of public actions have become urgently important for strengthening resilience and stability in the labor market.

Evaluation should no longer be a final stage following policy formulation and implementation; it can and should be part of the preliminary phase, assessing the relevance of policies before they are even developed. This involves comparing needs (context indicators) with expected objectives (result targets). This preliminary evaluation stage is crucial for determining whether a public policy should even exist. It should be subjected to as broad a public debate as possible to incorporate all viewpoints.

In terms of public policy effectiveness, comparing objectives to actual results requires an objective and up-to-date information system. However, the consequences of a public policy are multiple and sometimes difficult to pinpoint. Generally, we distinguish between results, effects, and impacts.

Measuring results is relatively straightforward when there is an available and updated information system that allows for calculating pre-defined indicators. This simply involves determining whether the studied public policy achieved its pre-defined objectives, usually quantified in numbers and indicators. For an employment program, for instance, the employment insertion rate of its beneficiaries might be one of the result indicators.

"Effects" of a public policy are more general than its results. Effects are not necessarily quantifiable and are based on the achievement of results. In the employment field, for example, these effects might include the impact of professional insertion on the beneficiaries' standard of living, on increased household consumption and savings, or on overall economic growth. These effects are hard to quantify. If the goal of an employment policy is to achieve youth employment, economic growth might be a positive externality, while a windfall effect from a subsidy could be a negative externality. These positive or negative externalities may affect third parties or domains not initially targeted by the policy.

When evaluating the effectiveness of a public policy, "impacts" result from comparing the policy's objectives with its effects. This involves demonstrating the causal link between public action and observed changes on the ground. The question to address is: "Are these effects a consequence of the public action?" One method to address this issue, isolating the effects specific to the policy in question, is the "counterfactual" approach, which compares a treated group with a non-treated or counterfactual group. The goal is to detect effects that would not have been observed had the policy not been implemented. However, careful attention is needed to prove this causal link between public action and the effect in question.

The efficiency criterion is also crucial because public authorities do not have unlimited resources and are continually faced with choices between different options. These choices, beyond their budgetary consequences, must be evaluated considering "opportunity costs" — the societal value that the best alternative, which was not chosen, would have generated.

Additionally, comparing costs and outcomes should also consider the status quo — the situation if the intervention had not occurred. In cases where a public policy fails, the status quo might be the best option considered.

In summary, the process of evaluating public policies is multidimensional and complex. It involves defining effects over time (short, medium, or long-term) and considering various possible externalities (pollution, windfalls, etc.), as well as comparing with other policies carried out or abandoned (to estimate opportunity costs, for example). This requires vigilance and a multidisciplinary approach from the evaluator.

With the development of econometric and qualitative survey techniques, public policy evaluation has become a tool for decision-making. Today, evaluation encompasses not just the analysis of causes and consequences but also the understanding of entire processes. Evaluation can now occur before the policy is launched (ex-ante evaluation), during its implementation (ongoing evaluation), or after its completion (impact studies, for example).

At the international level, numerous impact studies have been conducted on policies promoting the employability of youth and women. The methods and techniques used are generally mixed (qualitative and quantitative) but often emphasize econometric techniques known as counterfactuals. The following tables present some studies with a comparison between the identified problem, the question raised, the method used, and the validated research results.

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