

Introducing Labour Economics Letters

Emilio Congregado¹ & Raúl Ramos²

¹ University of Huelva, Spain

² University of Barcelona, Spain

Abstract

This paper aims to contextualize the emergence of this new publication, define its scope, justify the reasons for launching it, and outline the guiding principles for its operation.

Keywords

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1. A Brief Institutional History

The emergence of **Labour Economics Letters** is best understood as the latest step in a long-standing collective effort to consolidate, renew, and internationalise labour economics research rooted in the Spanish and European academic traditions. Far from being an isolated initiative, the journal builds upon nearly three decades of institutional development, scholarly exchange, and intellectual accumulation associated with the **Jornadas de Economía Laboral** (JEL), the **Revista de Economía Laboral** (REL), and the **Asociación Española de Economía del Trabajo** (AEET) [1].

The **Jornadas de Economía Laboral** were first organised in 1995 under the intellectual leadership of **Luis Toharia**, with the explicit aim of creating a forum where rigorous academic research could be openly discussed in close connection with labour market institutions, data producers, and policy actors. From their inception, the JEL combined several defining features that would later shape associated publication outlets: openness to work in progress, methodological pluralism, a strong applied orientation, and an unusually constructive academic environment. Over time, these meetings evolved from a relatively small national workshop into a fully-fledged biennial conference attracting hundreds of contributions, increasingly international participation, and a growing share of papers written in English.

The **Revista de Economía Laboral**, launched in the early 2000s and initially hosted by the Universidad de Oviedo, emerged as a natural extension of this ecosystem. Its objective was to provide a stable publication outlet for high-quality research in labour economics, particularly research presented at the JEL or developed within the AEET community. REL adopted from the outset an online format, anonymous peer review, and a broad conception of labour economics, encompassing both theoretical and applied work. In 2015, the journal entered a new phase under the direct editorial responsibility of the AEET, reinforcing its role as the Association's flagship journal and expanding its scope through special issues and thematic sections.

Throughout this period, the **Asociación Española de Economía del Trabajo** played a crucial institutional role. Formally established in 2005, the Association provided

formal governance, continuity, and visibility to a research community that had already proven its vitality. It also fostered intergenerational renewal—through initiatives such as the **AEET Prize in Labour Economics**, the **Lluís Fina Prize** and the **Luis Toharia grants**—and encouraged international integration, particularly through sustained collaboration with sister associations such as the **Associazione Italiana degli Economisti del Lavoro** (AIEL).

The cumulative evidence emerging from the analysis of the JEL between 1995 and 2017 clearly documents this trajectory. The number of contributions, authors, and participating institutions increased steadily; co-authorship became the norm; international collaborations expanded; and research topics evolved in close correspondence with economic cycles, institutional reforms, and social challenges. In this sense, the history of labour economics research in Spain mirrors broader transformations in the discipline at the international level: greater empirical sophistication, stronger reliance on microdata, closer engagement with policy evaluation, and increasing interdisciplinarity.

Labour Economics Letters is conceived as a continuation of this tradition and as a strategic response to a new publishing context defined by a surge in submitted manuscripts and prolonged peer-review timelines.

2. Why Labour Economics Letters? The Case for Short, Fast, and Rigorous Applied Research

The creation of a new journal inevitably raises a fundamental question: why another outlet in a field already served by a wide range of generalist and specialised journals? The answer lies not in redundancy, but in differentiation. Labour Economics Letters is designed to fill a specific and increasingly relevant niche at the intersection of speed, rigor, and applied relevance.

Over the past two decades, the publication landscape in economics has undergone profound changes. On the one hand, the discipline has experienced a dramatic increase in the availability of high-quality microdata, advances in econometric methods, and the diffusion of quasi-experimental approaches. On the other hand, publication processes in many leading journals have become longer, more complex, and increasingly demanding in terms of length, scope, and incremental contributions. While these developments have undoubtedly raised average standards, they have also created frictions—particularly for timely, policy-relevant research and for concise methodological or empirical contributions.

The “letters” format responds directly to this tension.

Short papers—typically focused on a single empirical result, methodological insight, or well-defined policy question—play a crucial role in many scientific fields. In economics, however, such formats remain relatively underdeveloped outside a small number of outlets. Labour Economics Letters explicitly embraces this tradition, recognising that intellectual value is not proportional to page length, and that clarity, precision, and replicability are often enhanced by concision.

Speed is the second defining pillar of the journal. Labour markets are shaped by shocks—technological, demographic, institutional, and macroeconomic—that require rapid analytical responses. The COVID-19 pandemic, the diffusion of artificial intelligence, the energy transition, or the recent inflationary episode are only the most visible examples. In such contexts, excessively long publication lags risk rendering research obsolete or irrelevant for policy debates. LEL therefore commits to a fast but demanding peer-review process, with clearly defined timelines and an emphasis on decisive editorial judgments.

Importantly, speed does not imply superficiality. On the contrary, the journal's editorial philosophy is grounded in methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability. Submissions are expected to meet high standards in terms of data quality, identification strategies, and robustness. The brevity of the format places an even greater premium on analytical discipline and careful exposition.

A third distinctive feature of Labour Economics Letters is its **explicit orientation towards applied research**. This does not exclude theory, but it prioritises contributions that engage directly with observable labour market phenomena, institutional settings, or policy interventions. In this respect, the journal aligns closely with the intellectual tradition embodied by the JEL and the AEET: research that speaks to real labour markets and real policy choices.

Finally, LEL aims to serve a broad and diverse audience. Beyond academic economists, the journal addresses researchers in related disciplines, analysts in public institutions, and policy practitioners. The letters format, combined with accessible writing and a focus on concrete questions, facilitates this dialogue across professional and disciplinary boundaries.

3. Present and Future Frontiers in Labour Economics: A Multidisciplinary Perspective

The launch of Labour Economics Letters coincides with a moment of profound transformation in labour markets worldwide. These transformations challenge traditional analytical frameworks and call for renewed dialogue

between economics and neighbouring disciplines. In this context, the journal seeks not only to disseminate results, but also to contribute to shaping the research agenda of labour economics in the years to come.

First, **technological change** -particularly digitalisation, automation, and artificial intelligence- is reshaping the demand for skills, the organisation of work, and wage structures. While the economics of technological change has a long tradition, recent developments raise new questions about task substitution, job polarisation, algorithmic management, and the boundaries between employment and self-employment. Addressing these issues requires combining microdata analysis with insights from organisational studies, computer science, and sociology.

Second, labour markets are increasingly **heterogeneous**. Gender gaps, migration, ageing, and educational inequalities interact in complex ways, often mediated by institutions such as collective bargaining systems, minimum wages, and social protection schemes. Understanding these interactions calls for intersectional approaches and for careful attention to institutional detail—an area where applied labour economics has a comparative advantage.

Third, the **evaluation of labour market policies** remains a central challenge. Active labour market policies, minimum income schemes, employment protection reforms, and family policies continue to generate intense debate. Advances in causal inference have greatly improved the credibility of policy evaluation, but they have also highlighted the limits of external validity and the importance of contextual factors. Short, focused empirical contributions -of the kind LEL seeks to promote- can play a crucial role in accumulating evidence across settings and time periods.

Fourth, **the boundaries of labour economics are expanding**. Health economics, education economics, urban economics, and political economy increasingly intersect with labour market analysis. Issues such as mental health at work, work-life balance, housing constraints, or the political consequences of labour market insecurity illustrate the need for multidisciplinary perspectives.

Finally, **data itself is evolving**. Administrative records linked employer-employee datasets, platform data, and experimental surveys open new possibilities but also raise ethical, legal, and methodological challenges. Transparency, reproducibility, and responsible research practices are therefore integral to the future of the field.

Labour Economics Letters positions itself at the heart of these debates. By encouraging concise, rigorous, and timely contributions, the journal aims to lower barriers to

entry for innovative ideas, facilitate cumulative knowledge building, and strengthen the connection between research and policy.

4. Rationale and Editorial Standards for a Rapid Open-Access Labour Letters Journal

Rapid, policy-relevant evidence on labour markets must reach academics, policymakers, and technical audiences quickly and reliably. Decisions about minimum wages, unemployment insurance, active labour programs, platform regulation, telework rules and reskilling initiatives often cannot wait the one-to-two years typical of traditional journal publication cycles. At the same time, many important findings in labour economics are dispersed across generalist journals and working-paper series; there are relatively few outlets dedicated specifically to high-quality, applied labour research that combine methodological rigor with timely relevance. A Letters-style journal devoted to labour economics would fill this gap by offering short, tightly focused contributions that report credible causal findings, replications, rapid evaluations of institutional changes, and methodological notes with direct policy application. To be useful for policy design and redesign, such a venue must emphasize speed without sacrificing clear statements of identification, pre-analysis planning where appropriate, and transparent access to code and (to the extent legally possible) data or well-documented synthetic or de-identified alternatives.

The journal would operate under a double-blind peer-review model with an editorial triage that quickly filters out out-of-scope or weakly identified submissions. Target review windows (e.g., 6–8 weeks to initial decision) and a single major revision round for most papers would be enforced; reviewers would receive focused guidance and checklists emphasizing core causal identification, robustness checks, and data-access statements. The editorial office would perform an automated minimal reproducibility check before final decisions and require authors to post replication scripts and accompanying materials in a public repository or provide secure-enclave access instructions. Optional registered-report tracks and in-principle acceptances for protocols (especially policy evaluations and RCTs) would prevent publication bias and accelerate dissemination once results are available. Each published Letter would be accompanied by a one-page policy note that summarizes the finding, clarifies the strength and limits of identification, outlines uncertainty, and highlights practical implications for policymakers.

The Association of Labour Economics (the proponents) commits the journal to open science and broad public access: the journal will be fully open access and will not charge submission fees. This commitment ensures that

policymakers, practitioners, researchers in low-resource settings, and the public can access evidence without financial barriers. No submission fees remove a common disincentive for scholars -particularly those in less-resourced institutions or countries- to submit timely policy work. The Association will also support fee waivers or publishing grants where processing charges for open access are unavoidable for production, and will prioritize alternative funding (societal sponsorship, institutional support, and philanthropic backing) to preserve no-fee submission and universal access.

This rapid Letters format need not imply any erosion of academic rigor; indeed, it can reinforce and even raise methodological standards in several concrete ways. First, strict double-blind peer review and an editorial board of specialists in theory, micro and macro empirical methods, econometrics, and data science preserve conventional gatekeeping that enforces methodological quality. Second, the format's focused scope forces authors to present their identification strategy, key robustness checks and data-access information concisely and transparently, reducing opportunities for hidden flexibility and selective reporting. Third, mandatory transparency requirements -pre-analysis plans when relevant, public replication code, and de-identified or synthetic datasets or secure-enclave access protocols -improve reproducibility and make verification straightforward for reviewers and readers. Fourth, rapid editorial triage and standardized reviewer checklists concentrate reviewer effort on the most critical issues (identification validity, robustness to alternative specifications, and data provenance) rather than on peripheral exposition, producing more consistent and comparable reviews. Fifth, offering registered reports and in principle acceptances directly address publication bias by evaluating research designs on their merits before results are known, thereby incentivizing rigorous design rather than attractive outcomes. Sixth, the journal's commitment to minimal automated reproducibility checks and to requiring replication materials before acceptance reduces the incidence of irreproducible results reaching publication. Seventh, short policy notes linked to each Letter help policymakers interpret the evidence cautiously, explicitly stating external-validity limits and potential spillovers -thereby encouraging authors to be precise about the scope of inference.

Operational safeguards further reconcile speed with rigor. Reviewer incentives (recognition, modest honoraria, editorial fellowships) and explicit short deadlines foster timely but careful reviews; editorial triage prevents overburdening referees with poorly framed submissions; and an online continuous-publication model ensures that accepted work is posted immediately with DOIs. Data confidentiality constraints are addressed through clear data-availability statements, use of secure research environments, and the release of synthetic datasets or reproducible code that documents all preprocessing

steps. The journal is explicitly designed to complement, not replace, longer in-depth articles: authors are encouraged to expand concise Letters into full articles for conventional journals while the Letters provide prompt, peer-reviewed evidence that can inform policy in real time.

In short, a double-blind, transparency-focused, open-access Letters journal in labour economics - operating without submission fees- can deliver the timely, policy-relevant evidence that decision-makers need without compromising scientific standards. By combining rapid editorial processes, rigorous peer review, mandatory reproducibility practices, registered-report options, and clear policy translation, and by removing financial barriers to submission and readership, the journal strengthens the discipline's ability to inform policy promptly, equitably, and credibly.

5. Editorial Board and International Advisory Board

The editorial team of Labour Economics Letters is international, balanced, and academically distinguished. The Editor-in-Chiefs, Emilio Congregado (University of Huelva) and Raúl Ramos (University of Barcelona), are supported by an experienced team of Associate Editors from Spanish and international institutions (José María Arranz; María Begoña Cueto; María de los Ángeles Davia; Concepción Román Díaz; Herbert Schuetze). The Editorial Board is a select group of recognized academics who cover the full range of JEL codes in labour economics and contribute to rigorous peer review and manuscript selection.

Distinct from the Editorial Board, the International Advisory Board brings together some of the most outstanding authors in the field -including Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes, Manuel Arellano, Lorenzo Cappellari, Jesús Crespo-Cuaresma, Frank Fossen, Simon C. Parker, Andre van Stel and many others- providing strategic guidance, helping set intellectual priorities, and fostering global visibility and standards.

Leveraging this international and gender-balanced leadership, the journal will actively promote rapid publication of concise, high-quality pieces that map the state of the art and the frontiers of knowledge across labour economics, using the advisory board's expertise to encourage incisive surveys, frontier reviews and policy-relevant syntheses alongside original letters.

Table 1: Editorial Board

Editors-in-Chief: Emilio Congregado, University of Huelva (Spain) Raúl Ramos, University of Barcelona (Spain)
Associate Editors: José María Arranz, University of Alcalá (Spain) María Begoña Cueto, University of Oviedo (Spain) María de los Ángeles Davia, University

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theoretical, empirical, and interdisciplinary approaches.

However, these journals predominantly publish full-length articles -whether theoretical contributions, rigorous econometric analyses, or in-depth policy studies- which often entail relatively long review and publication timelines. This creates a gap within the field for a complementary outlet that prioritizes speed and concision without sacrificing analytical rigor.

In this context, a letters-format journal in Labour Economics would occupy a distinctive and valuable niche. Positioned at the intersection of the aims and scopes outlined above, such a journal would focus on short, high-impact contributions—concise empirical findings, methodological innovations, policy-relevant insights, and timely analyses of emerging labour market developments. Its defining feature would be the rapid dissemination of results, enabling scholars to communicate novel evidence and ideas quickly to both academic and policy audiences.

By emphasizing brevity, strong identification strategies, and immediate relevance, this type of journal would complement the existing ecosystem rather than compete with it. While traditional journals remain the primary venue for comprehensive and fully developed research, a letters journal would serve as a fast-moving channel for cutting-edge contributions, fostering timely debate and accelerating knowledge diffusion in Labour Economics and related fields.

Labour Economics Letters is both a product of history and a response to change. It inherits a rich intellectual tradition shaped by the JEL, the REL, and the AEET, while deliberately adapting to new research practices and societal demands. Its ambition is modest in form but demanding in substance: to provide a fast, rigorous, and visible platform for applied labour economics at a time when such research is more necessary than ever.

6. Concluding Remarks

Across leading outlets such as Labour Economics (Elsevier; EALE), Journal of Labor Economics (University of Chicago Press), Industrial and Labor Relations Review (Cornell ILR / SAGE), British Journal of Industrial Relations (Wiley; BUIRA), Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society (Wiley), Work, Employment & Society (SAGE; BSA), European Journal of Industrial Relations (SAGE), Journal of Human Resources (University of Wisconsin Press), Social Policy & Administration (Wiley; SPA), Journal of European Social Policy (SAGE), International Journal of Manpower (Emerald), and International Labour Review (ILO / Wiley), there is a clear convergence around the study of labour markets, employment relations, human capital, inequality, and labour and social policy, using a wide spectrum of

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