



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
Business School

## Call for papers - EAWOP Small Group Meeting

### Precarious Employment and Work

#### Understanding the underlying psychological and social processes

University of Glasgow, Adam Business School, United Kingdom

4-6 September 2023

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#### Conference Theme and Scope

Precarious employment and precarious work refer to unstable, short-term, and often part-time work that does not consistently offer social and legal protections (Allan et al., 2021). Such work can trigger feelings of precarity and insecurity for employees and can be considered in terms of both objective and subjective precariousness (Seubert L. et al, 2022). According to the International Labour Organization (2022), in 2019, 60% of the world's working population (i.e., two billion people) worked within the informal sector, a sector characterised by a lack of labour rights, social protection and decent working conditions. Hence the majority of workers globally are engaged in precarious work. There is over-representation amongst developing and emerging economies, where 93% of all informal work globally is represented (ILO, 2018), however, precarious employment is also widespread in salaried and formal economies, where labour market changes of recent decades have advanced a shift from standard to atypical employment, promoting insecure employment relationships and increased risk for precarization among workers (Benach & Muntaner, 2007).

The implications of the rise of precarious work are significant: meta-analytic evidence shows that precarious employment negatively impacts workers' health and well-being (Rönblad et al., 2019). Because precarious employment is characterized by low wage levels,

insecurity and lack of rights and protection (Kreshpaj et al., 2020), affected workers are more vulnerable to external shocks, such as economic or pandemic crises, which makes it difficult for them to escape poverty (Searle & McWha-Hermann, 2021). Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic further worsened the situation for precariously employed workers globally (Gunn et al., 2022; Matilla-Santander et al., 2021). Furthermore, precarious employment not only affects individual workers, negative consequences occur also at organizational (e.g., injuries and occupational accidents; Koranyi et al., 2018) and societal levels (e.g., increased sickness absence; Oke et al., 2016).

While the global pervasiveness of precarious employment is clear, the rising prevalence in countries of the Global North is mirrored in increasing reference to precarious employment topics in the public and scientific discourse (Betti, 2018). This discourse positions precarious employment as a relatively new phenomenon that emerged as a result of the depletion of welfare systems in Western economies and the spread of atypical employment relationships. However, such a position has been criticized for ignoring the fact that precarious work has always been the norm in the Global South (Betti, 2018; Seubert L. et al., 2022). Moreover, within social welfare systems of Western Europe, secure and stable jobs with full integration into social security systems (standard employment relationships) could only be realized because of the historically gendered nature of unpaid care and housework (Mitropoulos, 2005; Suliman & Weber, 2019). There are also important insights on how workers experience their precarious jobs and what they value about it, despite enduring hardship. For example, precariously employed care workers experience meaning, are proud of making an important contribution to society and report to be satisfied with their jobs (Hopfgartner et al., 2022). There may therefore be much more we can learn from indigenous communities and through exploration beyond formal work contexts about the nature of precarious work.

Previous research across various disciplines has proposed multidimensional conceptualizations of both objective characteristics of precarious employment relationships and associated subjective experiences (Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Brinkmann et al., 2006). Lines of research have been established in various scientific fields, including economy, sociology, legal expertise, anthropology, political science, labour history, political theology and philosophy (Vij, 2019). Historically, the field of psychology has dealt extensively with single aspects of precarious employment and their negative consequences for health and well-being, most notably job insecurity (Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte et al., 2016; Sverke et al., 2019). A psychological research tradition investigating precarious employment as a multidimensional concept is lacking (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014; Rönnblad et al., 2019).

More recent, emerging research has begun to consider precarious work in parallel with decent work, and there is considerable potential in this line of work (e.g., Blustein, et al, 2022; Seubert C. et al., 2021).

This small group meeting on precarious employment will constitute a vehicle to bring this pressing issue to greater attention within the field of work and organizational psychology. We aim to explore the phenomenon as a multidimensional concept and thus extend the understanding of precarious employment beyond job insecurity, to consider as a multilevel concept, positioned within historic, economic, and social context. The small group meeting also addresses recent calls from WOP and related fields to investigate precarious employment with a psychological lens (Allan et al., 2021; Seubert C. et al., 2019).

A recent study on precarious employment in Europe found that two out of three salaried workers are precariously employed (Matilla-Santander et al., 2019). The researchers examined four dimensions: ability to exercise rights, vulnerability, disempowerment and temporariness and considered any workers rating high on any one of these dimensions as being in precarious employment. These figures suggest it is crucial that researchers explore the implications of precariousness for workers and their organisations. They also highlight the need for greater understanding and conceptual clarity related to the dimensions of precarious employment, and how it is conceptualised. Considering precarious work in context, we note higher levels of precariousness in Eastern and Southern Europe than in other areas (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014), amongst women (particularly young women), migrants and those with low levels of education (Buckingham et al., 2020). Furthermore, specific sectors and jobs that are very important for society but lack recognition are particularly prone to precariousness and exploitation (e.g., construction, cleaning, care, agriculture, food, hospitality, sex work; Lewis et al., 2015).

This SGM seeks to explore the complex intertwining of precarious forms of employment and their subjective experiences in various jobs, organizations, industries, countries and societies. We aim to apply a global perspective on precarious employment, inviting perspectives on and from both Western welfare systems of the Global North (e.g., Europe) and developing and emerging economies of the Global South, shedding light on how precarious employment manifests and how subjective experiences vary in different contexts (Seubert C. et al., 2021; Seubert L. et al., 2022). We therefore encourage submissions from various disciplinary fields able to inform a psychological perspective on precarious employment. Studies may describe any industry, country or geographical region. Conceptual papers and rigorous empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods) papers are welcome.

We particularly invite studies that apply a critical perspective (e.g., underrepresented populations in WOP; non-Western perspectives, examining contexts, underlying processes/ideologies).

This SGM seeks to shed light on the processes leading to precarious employment at micro (e.g., gender, migration), meso (e.g., specific industries, sectors prone to precariousness and exploitation), and macro (e.g., social security systems and lack of thereof) levels to enhance the means of mitigating and preventing precarious employment. This SGM aims to develop novel conceptual, empirical and methodological advances in our understanding of precarious employment with a psychological lens through the following questions (being exemplary but far from exhaustive):

- How can precarious employment be conceptualized and operationalized within the context of psychological research?
- Which objective and subjective dimensions of precarious employment are relevant under which conditions?
- How do workers perceive and experience precarious employment, including critical contextual factors?
- What are the reasons why workers endure the hardship of precarious employment? Despite enduring hardship, what do precariously employed workers value at their jobs (e.g., experiencing meaning, positively contributing to society)?
- What are the manifold (individual, family, organisational, societal) consequences of precarious employment?
- What are the underlying processes (e.g., ideological premises)?
- What are the micro processes that contribute to or ameliorate taking up precarious employment? Which additional mechanisms may play a role?
- What are the organizational factors and processes that contribute to or mitigate precarious employment?
- What role do Human Resource Management policies and practices and other contextual factors play in amplifying or reducing precarious employment?
- Which policies and practices can help and what are the factors that could stop the “slippery slope” of keeping precariously employed workers entrapped in poverty?
- What strategies can be employed at micro, meso and/or macro levels to address and reduce precarious employment?

## **Meeting format, location and date**

The SGM will take place over three days with sessions organised thematically. The program will include academic research talks as well as policy makers and practitioners talk and poster sessions. Ample time will be provided for discussions and networking. In particular, the extended discussions planned at the end of each session will participants the space to co-generate questions and to discuss the next steps to bridge the gap between research, organizational practice, and policy. There will also be keynote presentations: Associate Professor Blake A. Allan (University of Houston, USA), has already confirmed to be keynote speakers for the proposed SGM. We will also include a keynote from The Poverty Alliance or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, with whom the organisers have longstanding working relationships.

The format of this SGM (20-25 participants) is designed to foster extensive discussions, constructive feedback as well as research collaboration around precarious employment. The presentations will be selected through a competitive process in which submissions are reviewed by the organizing committee. We are also planning to give two awards: one to the best Policy-focused Paper and one to the best Early Career Paper.

### **Provisional programme**

- Day 1.** 12.00-14.00 Registration and Informal welcome reception  
14.00-14.30 Setting the scene. Introduction and Aim of the SGM  
14.30-16.00 Research talks and policy makers' and practitioners' talks  
16.30-17.30 Extended discussion: bridge the gap
- Day 2.** 9.00-10.30 Research talks  
11.00-12.00 Extended discussion: bridge the gap  
13.00-14.15 Interactive Poster session  
14.30-16.00 Research talks  
16.30-17.30 Extended discussion  
20.00 Conference Dinner
- Day 3.** 9.00-10.30 Research talks  
11.00-12.00 Extended discussion: bridge the gap  
13.00-14.15 Interactive Poster session  
14.30-15.30 Research talks and Policy makers' and practitioners' talks  
16.00-17.00 Final Discussion: Next Steps and SGM Awards

### **Date and place of meeting**

The SGM will be hosted at the University of Glasgow, UK, 4-6 September 2023.

## Conference fees

The conference fee is 100 EUR for all participants (reduced student fees is 50 EUR). This registration fee includes two lunches, all coffee breaks, a welcome reception and a conference dinner.

## Submission of abstracts

Participants are invited to submit paper extended abstracts (up to 2,000 words) by **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023** by sending an email to [lisa.seubert@uibk.ac.at](mailto:lisa.seubert@uibk.ac.at). Submissions should include a title page including all the authors details and an extended abstract to be structured as follows: purpose/contribution, design/methodology, results, limitations, implications, and originality/value. In the abstract, authors should also indicate how their paper fits the scope of the SGM. Submitted abstracts will be reviewed and selected by the organizing committee. Participants will have the opportunity to submit their work either as an oral or poster presentation and will be notified about the acceptance of their paper by **June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023**.

## Special issue

We are planning a special issue at a journal with more detail at the SGM.

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