

Review of Current Research

Precariousness in Migrant Work

According to a report by the International Labour Organization¹, growth of work insecurity has become a global trend in the last decades. Many people suffer from insecure and unpredictable working conditions. It was estimated in 2019 that 3.3 billion people worked without a contract². Together with increasing difficulties to find a job and insufficient social protection, these issues have become one of the main sources of experienced insecurity. In consequence, the International Trade Union Confederation³ have sounded the alarm, pointing out how bad conditions of work are all over the world and even the World Bank Group⁴ appeals to the politicians for more worker protection.

MARIAN BANAŚ, ANTONI WONTORCZYK, MICHAŁ KULISZ

Introduction

The problem has become increasingly relevant after the COVID-19 pandemic, which marked a new chapter in the area of work environment. Yet another

grow in unemployment and employment insecurity has become a major societal problem with many workers, struggling to secure themselves and their families⁵.

¹ International Labour Organization, *From precarious work to decent work*, 2012, <<https://www.ilo.org/media/162721/download>> (access 5.5.2024).

² International Labour Organization, *World employment and social outlook—Trends 2019*, 2019, <https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—dcomm/—publ/documents/publication/wems_670542.pdf> (access 5.5.2024).

³ International Trade Union Confederation, *Global poll: Governments 'failure to address low wages and insecure jobs threatens trust in politics and democracy*, 2018, <<https://www.ituc-csi.org/ITUC-Global-Poll-2018>> (access 5.5.2024).

⁴ World Bank Group, *World development report 2019* [PowerPoint slides], 2019, <<https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/808261547222082195/WDR19-English-Presentation.pdf>> (access 5.5.2024).

⁵ V. Hopner, D. Hodgetts, P. King, S. Carr: *From crimmigration to [re]integration following the removal of 'undesirable' people from Australia to New Zealand*. [in:] F. M. Moghaddam, M. J. Hendricks, *Contemporary immigration: Psychological perspectives to address challenges and inform solutions*. "American Psychological

This uncertainty has become even more acute after the acceleration of artificial intelligence development. Although most researchers have expected positive outcomes of AI in the evolution of the work process⁶, workers tend to see more negatives than positives in AI implementation in their workplace⁷. Finally, the worsening state of this problem is also influenced by armed conflicts around the world, particularly in the Middle East and, in recent years, in Ukraine and Gaza.

All this makes the issue of workplace insecurity and uncertainty one of the most essential societal problems in today's global world. It has become an important contemporary challenge not only for social scientists, professional associations, social organizations, politicians and governments,

but also for the institutions controlling the creation, implementation and enforcement of law in the working environment.

One of the most alarming aspects of this problem, especially in the developed countries, is the issue of immigrant precarious job ownership, which the authors want to highlight in this article.

According to data estimated by the International Labour Organization⁸, migrant workers represented 5% of working population of their host countries in 2019. The worldwide stock of people working away from their homeland totalled 169 million, an increase by 5 million from 2017. In the European Union, in the year 2023 over 27 million inhabitants were non-EU citizens, 62% of whom were employed⁹. The United Nations estimates¹⁰ that migration

Association". Washington, 2022. p. 263-280; V. Bader, S. Kaiser: *Algorithmic decision-making? The user interface and its role for human involvement in decisions supported by artificial intelligence*, "Organization", No. 5/2019, p. 655-672; J. Liu, Y. Wang, Y. Zhu: *Climate for innovation and employee creativity: An information processing perspective*, "International Journal of Manpower" No. 4/2020, p. 341-356; H. Jiang, Y. Cheng, J. Yang, S. Gao: *AI-powered chatbot communication with customers: Dialogic interactions, satisfaction, engagement, and customer behavior*, "Computers in Human Behavior", No. 134/2022, 107329; M. H. Huang, R. T. Rust: *Artificial intelligence in service*, "Journal of Service Research", No. 2/2018, p. 155-172; A. Bhargava, D. Bhargava, P. N. Kumar, G. S. Sajja, S. Ray: *Industrial IoT and AI implementation in vehicular logistics and supply chain management for vehicle mediated transportation systems*, "International Journal of System Assurance Engineering and Management", 13(Suppl 1), 2022, p. 673-680; B. Abedin: *Managing the tension between opposing effects of explainability of artificial intelligence: a contingency theory perspective*, "Internet Research" No. 2/2022, p. 425-453; C. Crollic, F. Thomaz, R. Hadi, & A. T. Stephen: *Blame the bot: Anthropomorphism and anger in customer-chatbot interactions*, "Journal of Marketing" No.1/2022, p. 132-148.

⁶ V. Bader, S. Kaiser, op.cit.; J. Liu, Y. Wang, Y. Zhu, op.cit.; H. Jiang, Y. Cheng, J. Yang, S. Gao, op.cit.

⁷ M. H. Huang, R. T. Rust, op.cit.; A. Bhargava, D. Bhargava, P. N. Kumar, G. S. Sajja, S. Ray, op.cit.; B. Abedin, op.cit.; C. Crollic, F. Thomaz, R. Hadi, A. T. Stephen, op.cit.

⁸ International Labour Organization, *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant workers – Results and Methodology*, Third edition, International Labour Office, Geneva 2021, p. 5, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_808935/lang-en/index.html> (access 12.4.2024); Eurostat, *Migration and migrant population statistics*, 2024; Eurostat, *Migration integration statistics – labour market indicators*, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/indcx.php?title=Migran_intcgration_statistcs_%E2%80%93labour_market_indicators#:~:txt=Among%20pcrsons%20agcd%2020%E2%80%9364,%25%20and%2075.4%20%25%20for%20nationals> (access 12.4.2024).

⁹ *Migration and migrant population...*, op.cit.

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*. "United Nations", 2022, P. iii (preface), <<https://www.un.org/dvclopment/desa/pd/content/World-Population-Prospects-2022>> (access 18.1.2024).

will remain the sole driver of population growth in high-income countries during the next decades.

Due to the constantly growing migrant workforce, host countries' economies and societies face the increasing challenges of migrant integration. However the growing numbers of migrant workers are reported to experience various barriers on the labour market and in their workplace, impeding adaptation in the receiving country. Many of these difficulties can be defined by the term 'precarity'.

Scholars referring to the concept of precarious work usually define it as an employment characterized by insecurity, risk and uncertainty. These conditions can be interpreted in various ways. For example, the International Labour Organization¹¹ defines precarious employment as a "work relation where employment security, [...] one of the principal elements of the labour contract, is lacking", focusing on job insecurity and temporality, often denoted in literature as flexibility of employment. Vosko¹² offers a broader perspective, defining precarious work as "uncertain, unstable and insecure", with risks of work delegated to the employee and "limited

social benefits and statutory entitlements", putting moreover emphasis on conditions of work performing and the aspect of insufficient rewards. The latter can have the form of financial compensation, as well as access to public social security and social status, all being resources determining security in daily functioning, within and outside the context of work.

Further aspects of employment precarity, frequently outlined in literature are vulnerability and lack of control. For instance, Daly, Schenker, Ronda-Perez and Reid¹³ in their definition of workplace precarity mention, after Benach *et al.*¹⁴ and Kiersztyn¹⁵, highly uneven power relationships which can take the form of 'powerlessness to exercise workplace rights' or 'helplessness against workplace authoritarianism'. Another facet of limited control is the staggering work-life balance. Long, undetermined and atypical working hours may put expectations on workers to fully engage in their vocational role and neglect other social roles, e.g. family membership, as well as limit the time for other individual activities, like resting and education.

A broad understanding of precarious work, integrating the perspectives

¹¹ International Labour Organisation, *Thesaurus*. <<https://metadata.ilo.org/thesaurus/-/1134031657.html>> (access 12.4.2024).

¹² L. F. Vosko: *Managing the margins: gender, citizenship, and the international regulation of precarious employment*, Oxford University Press 2010, p. 2.

¹³ A. Daly, M. B. Schenker, E. Ronda-Perez, A. Reid: *Examining the impact of two dimensions of precarious employment, vulnerability and insecurity on the self-reported health of men, women and migrants in Australia*, "International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health", No. 20/2020, 7540.

¹⁴ J. Benach, A. Vives, G. Tarafa, C. Deletos, C. Muntaner: *What should we know about precarious employment and health in 2025? Framing the agenda for the next decade of research*, "International Journal of Epidemiology", No. 45/2016, p. 232-238.

¹⁵ A. Kiersztyn: *Non-standard employment and subjective insecurity: how can we capture job precarity using survey data?* [in:] *Precarious Work (Research In the Sociology of Work, Vol. 31)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds 2017, p. 91-122.

mentioned above, was presented by Vives *et al.*¹⁶, who outlined six aspects of occupational precarity: temporariness, disempowerment understood as the limited possibility to negotiate employment conditions, vulnerability as defencelessness to authoritarian treatment, low and insufficient wages, limited workplace and social security rights, and powerlessness to exercise rights.

Workplace precariousness is usually contrasted with the standard employment relationships, prevalent in highly developed Western economies. These can be understood as full-time work directed by an employer at the employer's place of business and with regular pay and benefits¹⁷. The process of moving away from standard employment can be attributed to the liberalization and globalization of economies and labour markets, and the shift from fordist to post-fordist economies taking place in the last decades. Particular reasons for employing on a 'nonstandard' basis are usually as follows: cost reduction,

delegating employment and financial risks to workers, maximizing employers' flexibility and reduction of workforce¹⁸.

Although precarity is a condition relying on subjective perception of an individual worker, scholars have outlined several conditions of employment contributing to its development. Among them, one can mention the following: fixed-term and temporary contracts, employment by an agency or third party, low wages, contracted-out service, part-time work, limited workplace rights and protection, individual-level bargaining over employment conditions and last but not least, undeclared work¹⁹.

Migrants' job precarity

Research has shown that international migrants often perform insecure jobs²⁰ and have a higher degree of insecurity than native workers²¹. Moreover, while looking for employment, they are often offered low-skilled and low-paid jobs, regardless

¹⁶ A. Vives, M. Amable, M. Ferrer, S. Moncada, C. Llorens, C. Muntaner et al: *The Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES): psychometric properties of a new tool for epidemiological studies among waged and salaried workers*, "Occupational and environmental medicine", No. 8/2010, p. 548-555; J.G. Ruggie: *International regimes, transactions, and change: Embedded liberalism in the post-war economic order*, "International Organization", No. 36/1982, p. 379-415; A. L. Kalleberg, K. Hewison: *Precarious work and the challenge for Asia*, "American Behavioral Scientist", No. 3/2013, p. 271-288.

¹⁷ J. Benach, A. Vives, G. Tarafa, C. Deletes, C. Muntaner, op.cit.

¹⁸ A. L. Kalleberg, K. Hewison: *Precarious work and the challenge...*, op.cit.

¹⁹ L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky, S. Dyer: *Precarious work and economic migration: emerging immigrant divisions of labour in Greater London's service sector*, "International Journal of Urban And Regional Research" No. 1/2009, p. 3-25; A. Daly, M.B. Schenker, E. Ronda-Perez, A. Reid: *Examining the impact...*, op.cit.; International Labour Organisation, *Thesaurus*, op.cit.

²⁰ P. A. Landsbergis, J. G. Grzywacz, A. D. LaMontagne: *Work organization, job insecurity, and occupational health disparities*, "American Journal of Industrial Medicine" No. 5/2014, p. 495-515.

²¹ X. Liu, S. J. Bowe, A. Li, L. Milner, L. S. Too, A.D. LaMontagne: *Job insecurity: A comparative analysis between migrant and native workers in Australia*, "International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health" No. 16/2019, p. 4159; N. Nappo: *Self-perceived job insecurity and self-reported health: Differences between native-born and migrant workers based on evidence from the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey*, "Plos one" No. 4/2022, e0267252.

of their actual education and qualifications²². According to self-report data, migrant work is characterized by more deteriorated and dangerous conditions than natives²³ – carrying out in tiring or painful positions, at high speed or with vibrations and noise²⁴. Furthermore, migrants more frequently report working 10+ hours a day, with variable starting and finishing times, having no influence on deciding their days off, which impedes their work-life balance. As Dyer, McDowell and Batnitzky²⁵ note, a large group of migrants undertake long-shifted service works, trading-off their work-life balance.

Last but not least, various forms of flexible employment are reported to occur frequently in organizations employing migrants. Among them, one can find numerous reports of using zero-hour contracts²⁶ and demanding employees to reapply for

the job cyclically every few months²⁷, not to mention undocumented employment²⁸.

Factors associated with precarious employment

As stated by Hodge²⁹, “people are not precarious, and they do not only experience precarity, but rather they are made precarious through interactions with others”. It is therefore not the worker himself, but rather the interaction with his environment, comprised of various persons and institutions, leading to precarity of employment.

An example of such an interaction is the employee-employer relationship, in which both are constantly negotiating the conditions of work. In such context, both sides are in possession of particular resources influencing their bargaining power and use, more or less consciously, their convictions and beliefs to determine their negotiating

²² N. Nappo: *Self-perceived job insecurity...*, op.cit.; P. Trevena: *Why do highly educated migrants go for low-skilled jobs? A case study of Polish graduates working in London* [in:] B. Glorius; I. Grabowska-Lusińska, A. Kuvik: *Mobility in transition*, Amsterdam University Press 2009.

²³ E. Q. Ahonen, V. Porthé, M. L. Vazquez, A. M. García, M. J. Lopez-Jacob, C. Ruiz-Frutos, et al.: *A qualitative study about immigrant workers perceptions of their working conditions in Spain*, “Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health” No. 63/2009, 936-942; E. Ronda-Perez, F.G. Benavides, K. Levecque, J.G. Love, E. Felt, R. Van Rossem: *Differences in working conditions and employment arrangements among migrant and non-migrant workers in Europe*, “Ethnicity & Health” No. 6/2012, p. 563-577.

²⁴ E. Ronda-Perez, F.G. Benavides, K. Levecque, J.G. Love, E. Felt, R. Van Rossem: *Differences in working conditions...*, op.cit.; E. Q. Ahonen, V. Porthé, M. L. Vazquez, A. M. García, M. J. Lopez-Jacob, C. Ruiz-Frutos, et al.: *A qualitative study about immigrant...*, op.cit.; N. Ollus: *Forced flexibility and exploitation: Experiences of migrant workers in the cleaning industry*, “Nordic journal of working life studies” No. 1/2016, p. 25-45; A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs: A critical meta-synthesis of qualitative findings*, “Applied Psychology” No. 1/2023, p. 85-105.

²⁵ S. Dyer, L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky: *Migrant work, precarious work-life balance: What the experiences of migrant workers in the service sector in Greater London tell us about the adult worker model*, “Gender, Place & Culture” No. 5/2011, p. 685-700.

²⁶ S. Scott: *Informalisation in low-wage labour markets: A case study of the UK food industry*, “Population, Space and Place” No. 7/2017, e2043.

²⁷ *ibid.*; A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs...*, op.cit.

²⁸ E. Ronda-Perez, F. G. Benavides, K. Levecque, J. G. Love, E. Felt, R. Van Rossem: *Differences in working conditions...*, op.cit.

²⁹ E. Hodge: *Making Precarious: the construction of precarity in refugee and migrant discourse*, “Borders in Globalization Review” No. 1/2019, quote from p. 84.

position. Consequently, those who possess less resources become more vulnerable in the context of labour market. For instance, Lübke³⁰ found that workers with low educational level and less occupational experience were more exposed to job insecurity. A similar vulnerability is often experienced by disadvantaged groups associated with negative prejudices, e.g. racial minorities, whose conditions of work were described as more precarious³¹. International migrants frequently fall into both mentioned categories, as their work-resources are limited and judgment by their employer is often characterized by mistrust and false convictions. However, it is crucial to note that the migrant workers are a heterogeneous group and therefore differ in particular characteristics, which may impact one's occupational status. Particularly, migrant workers vary in their work-related credentials. An example of such factor is language proficiency. As found in a study by Amit, Ultra and Song³², limited knowledge of the local language was the main cause mentioned by migrants for impaired

communication with co-workers. Besides limiting social interactions, lack of language knowledge also leads to difficulties, e.g. in using equipment and facilities, which can impair work-safety³³. Without the ability to communicate effectively with the supervisor, co-workers and clients, the employee loses an important resource, which potentially affects his position on the labour market. Furthermore, in a situation of exploitation by the employer, not knowing the local language leaves the worker powerless. Inability to understand the local labour code or to contact authorities makes signalling misbehaviour difficult, not to mention searching through the local labour market and applying for different job offers. These examples of obstacles shed a light on how the situation of a migrant worker can differ depending on the level of his language proficiency. Indeed, as research evidence shows, language barriers reduce opportunities to obtain quality employment³⁴ and lengthen the process of obtaining the desired job³⁵. According to Bloch³⁶, who interviewed migrants living in the United

³⁰ C. Lübke: *How self-perceived job insecurity affects health: Evidence from an age-differentiated mediation analysis*, "Economic and Industrial Democracy" No. 4/2021, p. 1105-1122.

³¹ A. L. Kalleberg, S. P. Vallas (ed.), *Probing precarious work: Theory, research, and politics* [in:] *Precarious work*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds 2017, p. 1-30; J. Campos-Serna, E. Ronda-Pérez, L. Artazcoz, B. E. Moen, F. G. Benavides: *Gender inequalities in occupational health related to the unequal distribution of working and employment conditions: a systematic review*, "International Journal for Equity in Health" No. 12/2013, p. 1-18.

³² L. M. Amit, V. U. Ultra Jr, Y. W. Song: *Link between migration status and occupational health and safety of Filipino migrant workers in South Korea*, "Philippine Journal of Science" No. 2/2020, p. 451-462.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ V. Parutis: *"Economic migrants" or "middling transnationals"? East European migrants' experiences of work in the UK*, "International Migration" No. 1/2014, p. 36-55; A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs...*, *op.cit.*

³⁵ K. Frank: *Immigrant employment success in Canada: Examining the rate of obtaining a job match*, "International Migration Review" No. 1/2013, p. 76-105.

³⁶ A. Bloch: *The labour market experiences and strategies of young undocumented migrants*, "Work, Employment and Society" No. 2/2013, p. 272-287.

Kingdom, non-English-speakers' career opportunities were reduced to working in "co-ethnic enclave employment", with a great dependency on co-ethnic employers. As shown by Aiyar *et al.*³⁷, language proficiency plays also a significant role in determining the compensation value of a migrant worker. The importance of language acquisition was confirmed by Liu *et al.*³⁸ who found that migrants who knew their host country's language prior to arrival had increased their job security over time less than those, who did not use it before. The authors explain it with the effect of language proficiency acquisition over time, as well as the acculturation process³⁹. Besides giving the opportunity for acculturation and acquisition of better language proficiency, time and length of stay may also influence the knowledge of the host-country's labour market, it may enable establishing social and professional networks, as well as acknowledging one's credentials. As shown within a meta-synthesis by Bazzoli and Probst⁴⁰, lack of recognition of foreign credentials was identified by various researchers as a barrier for job security for migrant workers. One must note, however, that even acknowledged foreign education does not ensure

better employment to the same degree it would in the case of a native worker. Not only some diplomas may be considered irrelevant in the context of the host country (e.g. history diploma of a foreign country), but also education even in highly demanded professions is not always a warrant of a quality employment. Namely, although many immigrants have significant human capital, as skills, work experience, but also certifications and diplomas, they are often not recognized as "equivalent to local human capital"⁴¹. For instance, Currie⁴² reports that even acknowledged diplomas among foreign medical staff in the United Kingdom were discredited, as employers preferred to hire workers with locally acquired education. Moreover, Liu *et al.*⁴³ found that higher educated migrant workers had similar job insecurity levels to migrants with lower education. In addition, those with high school or lower educational attainment reached similar job insecurity to native workers after 5 years of stay, whereas those with higher education did not reach a similar degree of insecurity even after 11 years. This was a surprising finding, considering that previous research on general working population had indicated that higher levels of education had

³⁷ M. S. Aiyar, M. B. B. Barkbu, N. Batini, M. H. Berger, M. E. Detragiache, A. Dizioli, P. Topalova, *et al.*, *The refugee surge in Europe: Economic challenges*, "International Monetary Fund Staff Discussion Note" No. 16/02/2016, p. 1-50.

³⁸ X. Liu, S. J. Bowe, A. Li. L. Milner, L. S. Too, A. D. LaMontagne: *Job insecurity: A comparative analysis...*, *op.cit.*

³⁹ M. L. Fang, E. M. Goldner: *Transitioning into the Canadian workplace: challenges of immigrants and its effect on mental health*, "Canadian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences" No. 1/2011, p. 93-102.

⁴⁰ A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs...*, *op.cit.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² S. Currie: *De-skilled and devalued: The labour market experience of Polish migrants in the UK following EU enlargement*, "The International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations" no 1/2007, p. 83-116.

⁴³ X. Liu, S. J. Bowe, A. Li. L. Milner, L. S. Too, A. D. LaMontagne: *Job insecurity: A comparative analysis...*, *op.cit.*

been associated with more job security⁴⁴. Aiming to explain these results, the authors state that overqualified workers may be perceived by their potential employers as less proficient for the mismatched job. Moreover, the sense of status inconsistency, a “discrepancy between the position a person holds in one domain of their social environment comparative to their position in another domain”, may cause additional stress for the overqualified worker⁴⁵.

Besides work-related credentials, another factor possibly differentiating the occupational situation of a migrant worker are demographic variables unrelated to performing work duties. The interaction of migrant status with belonging to other handicapped groups may create a more complex pattern of precarity, called double disadvantage⁴⁶. One such factor is gender. As Daly *et al.*⁴⁷ report, female migrants were more likely to experience vulnerability at work. Men, on the other hand, were less likely to report working in jobs characterized by high security and more likely in jobs with moderate insecurity than women. Considering

the skill level of work, in a study of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom, 51% female migrants were reported to perform low-skilled jobs, compared to 35% male workers⁴⁸. Furthermore, among manual migrant workers, male employees differed more than their female counterparts from native workers in exposure to negative working conditions⁴⁹. According to the same study, manual female migrant workers however were more likely to work without a contract, with three times more chances of undocumented employment than female ones. Another demographic factor possibly influencing migrants' occupational position is age. Mrozowicki and Trappman⁵⁰ report that migrant workers aged 25-35 experience precarious working conditions more frequently than their older counterparts. On the other hand, migrant workers approaching senior age claim that they are often perceived as “no longer useful or productive” by their employers and therefore facing a risk of discontinued employment⁵¹.

Apart from the characteristics of an individual, the decisions of state authorities

⁴⁴ P. A. Landsbergis, J. G. Grzywacz, A. D. LaMontagne: *Work organization, job insecurity...*, op.cit.; K. Näswall, H. De Witte: *Who feels insecure in Europe? Predicting job insecurity from background variables*, “Economic and Industrial Democracy” No. 2/2003, p. 189-215.

⁴⁵ N. Stehr: *Status consistency: the theoretical concept and its empirical referent*, “Pacific Sociological Review”, No. 2/1968, p.95-99.

⁴⁶ M. Boyd: *At a disadvantage: The occupational attainments of foreign born women in Canada*, “International migration review”, 4/1984, p. 1091-1119.

⁴⁷ A. Daly, M.B. Schenker, E. Ronda-Perez, A. Reid: *Examining the impact...*, op.cit.

⁴⁸ M. Milewski, J. Ruszczak-Żbikowska: *Motywacje do wyjazdu, praca, więzi społeczne i plany na przyszłość polskich migrantów przebywających w Wielkiej Brytanii i Irlandii*, “CMR Working Paper” No. 35/93, University of Warsaw, Centre of Migration Research (CMR), Warsaw 2008.

⁴⁹ E. Ronda-Perez, F. G. Benavides, K. Levecque, J. G. Love, E. Felt, R. Van Rossem: *Differences in working conditions...*, op.cit.

⁵⁰ A. Mrozowicki, V. Trappmann, *Precarity as a biographical problem? Young workers living with precarity in Germany and Poland*, “Work, Employment and Society”, No. 2/2021, p. 221-238.

⁵¹ M. Amrith: *Ageing bodies, precarious futures: the (im)mobilities of 'temporary' migrant domestic workers over time*, “Mobilities” No. 2/2021, p. 249-261.

determine the legal status of one's migration, influencing their position on the labour market. Such immigration control measures not only determine the circumstances of entering the host country but also enable control of duration and conditions of an individual's stay. As pointed by Anderson⁵², state authorities "produce status" by assigning a particular type of visa, determining therefore how long and where (e.g. in which sector) an individual may be legally hired. If one wishes to prolong his or her stay, such a visa must be regularly renewed, which is often conditional upon presenting an employment contract to the authorities. Such a situation makes the migrant worker dependent on the employer, who may decide not to prolong a time-fixed contract.

An even more precarious situation may be faced by those employed with no contract or with undocumented stay. With no possibility of documenting their work and therefore no legal protection, no ability to compete fairly on the labour market, as well as facing constant danger of being deported, such individuals become even more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation⁵³. This situation of over-dependence may be used by employers. For instance, when one decides to formulate a demand for better wages, the employer might not

only terminate the employment, as in the case of documented workers, but also threaten to inform the authorities about the illegal stay⁵⁴. Moreover, by employing undocumented migrants, employers are able to cut costs by circumventing rights of such a worker as social security (healthcare and rent), minimum wage, paid sick leave or holiday. Furthermore, undocumented migrant employment is often characterized by being temporary, low paid, with potential job search limited to particular positions and sectors⁵⁵. Although working 'off the book' may have the advantage for the employee to earn more due to avoiding social security contributions and unlimited overtime, undocumented work limits the migrants' security and increases vulnerability. Last but not least, undocumented workers lose the opportunity to undertake employment in the public sector. Public organizations usually offer more family friendly policies, better predictability about work patterns and to some extent the possibility to control one's work schedule and shifts. This contrasts with frequent migrants' experiences in the private sector, where the timetable was often changed without earlier notice or consultation⁵⁶.

Another factor which may play a determining role in shaping migrants' situation

⁵² B. Anderson: *Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers*, "Work, employment and society" No. 2/2010, p. 300-317.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs...*, *op.cit.*

⁵⁵ A. Bloch: *The labour market experiences and strategies...*, *op.cit.*

⁵⁶ J. Hyman, D. Scholarios, C. Baldry: *Getting on or getting by? Employee flexibility and coping strategies for home and work*, "Work, Employment and Society" No. 4/2005, p. 705-725; S. Dyer, L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky: *Migrant work, precarious work-life balance...*, *op.cit.*

on the labour market are social networks. Such relationships may have an interpersonal character: family, friends, communities, professional acquaintances, as well as be based on organizations, e.g. work agencies, universities or non-governmental organizations supporting refugees⁵⁷. Maintaining ties with other migrants and organizations may be supportive in various ways. First and foremost, such relationships serve as a source of information about the host country, its law and administrative policies, housing market, etc. provided by those already possessing the needed knowledge and experience⁵⁸. In the context of labour market, information about the conditions of work in particular organizations or branches may be delivered to potential jobseekers by other migrants. Moreover, such contacts may have a crucial role in mediating between the migrant looking for employment and an organization with vacancies. However, it should be mentioned that, as identified in interviews with seasonal migrant workers, in such circumstances the worker who

recommended another employee for work was often held personally responsible for his performance, which was a mechanism of shifting responsibility from the employer to the employee⁵⁹. Importantly, it should be noted that different types of contacts may play a different role in supporting an individual migrant on the labour market. For instance, interpersonal relationships can mediate in finding an employer, especially in ethnic niches of local economies⁶⁰, whereas organizational ties may be more helpful in acknowledging one's credentials⁶¹. Finally, migrant networks can deliver emotional support to an individual. The situation of migration to a different country is often perceived as stressful, e.g. due to cultural differences and the need for adaptation⁶², distance from family and relatives⁶³ or possible discrimination by native co-workers and supervisor. A network of people functioning in a similar context, who face the same problems and have gained experience in coping with them, can give the most accurate support. In the short run, such a group may also

⁵⁷ M. V. Poros: *The role of migrant networks in linking local labour markets: the ease of Asian Indian migration to New York and London*, "Global networks" No. 3/2001, p. 243-260.

⁵⁸ M. Pourmehdi, H. A. Shahrani: *The role of social media and network...*, op.cit.; P. Trevena: *Why do highly educated migrants...*, op.cit.

⁵⁹ J. Stachowski, K. Fiałkowska: *'Living on the edge'?: A comparative study of processes of marginalisation among Polish migrants in rural Germany and Norway* [in:] *International Labour Migration to Europe's Rural Regions*, Routledge, London/New York 2020. p. 104-20.

⁶⁰ M. Pourmehdi, H. A. Shahrani: *The role of social media and network...*, op.cit.

⁶¹ M. V. Poros: *The role of migrant networks...*, op.cit; E. Turska, A. Mochacka: *Acculturation strategies and work engagement among Polish migrant workers in Great Britain*, "The New Educational Review" No. 45/2016, p. 273-284; D. L. Sam, J. W. Berry: *Acculturation: When individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds meet*, "Perspectives on Psychological Science" No. 4/2010, p. 472-481.

⁶² S. Dyer, L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky: *Migrant work, precarious work-life balance...*, op.cit.

⁶³ K. Jones: *'It was a whirlwind. A lot of people made a lot of money': The role of agencies in facilitating migration from Poland into the UK between 2004 and 2008*, "Central and Eastern European Migration Review" No. 2/2014, p. 105-126; J. H. Friberg: *Culture at work: Polish migrants in the ethnic division of labour on Norwegian construction sites*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies" No. 11/2012, p. 1914-1933.

be a substitute for various social relationships, if one's family and friends stay in the sending country and new acquaintances in the host country have not been made yet. In the long run, however, relying exclusively on relationships within migrant groups may impede successful adaptation to the host country's society⁶⁴.

Last but not least, an individual's motivation and attitudes may also have crucial influence on one's occupational situation. According to a report from in-depth interviews, conducted among migrants in the United Kingdom, there is an awareness that the highest demand for migrant workers can be found in low-skilled positions, which are unattractive to the native workforce. Knowing this, migrants' expectations about their position on the local labour market remain low, at least at the beginning of their stay. Especially those who have low language proficiency, low level of education, or less knowledge about the local labour market, share a low self-esteem concerning their occupational position⁶⁵. According to Parutis⁶⁶, who conducted in-depth interviews with Polish and Lithuanian migrants in Norway, their occupational ambitions however grow in time, as they start looking for jobs associated with better social status. As an individual

builds his attachment to the host country with the length of his stay, expectations tend to grow. This is based on the fact that in most liberal democracies long duration of stay entitles claims for obtaining particular rights, acquired through permanent residence status or citizenship⁶⁷. For those individuals, insecure employment ceases to be an acceptable state. Adverse conditions and temporariness of employment may be, however, accepted by those who plan their stay and employment for a limited period, remaining unattached to the employer⁶⁸. Others may accept it if they perceive such conditions only as a step of a broader plan to advance on the labour market, perhaps when they acquire better language proficiency, social network or accommodation opportunities. Considering work-related ambitions, Trevena⁶⁹ names three groups of London-based Polish migrants, differing in their motivation to undertake work in a foreign country. Drifters migrate for non-material reasons, such as the experience of life in a global metropolis, learning the local language or travelling. As a rule, they arrive in the UK without well-developed credentials or good language proficiency. They usually aim to find employment as soon as possible, therefore choose the positions

⁶⁴ R. Sawyer, G. Chen: *The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation*, "Intercultural Communication Studies", No. 21/2012, p. 151-169; A. Bloch, *The labour market experiences and strategies...*, op.cit.; P. Trevena, *Why do highly educated migrants...*, op.cit.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ V. Parutis: 'Economic migrants' or 'middling transnationals'..., op.cit.

⁶⁷ B. Anderson: *Migration, immigration controls...*, op.cit.

⁶⁸ M. J. Piore: *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labour and Industrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press 1979; K. Filipek, D. Polkowska: *The latent precariousness of migrant workers: a study of Ukrainians legally employed in Poland*, "Journal of International Migration and Integration" No. 1/2020, p. 205-220.

⁶⁹ P. Trevena: *Why do highly educated migrants...*, op.cit.

which are immediately available, consequently, usually low-skilled jobs. In the course of time, Drifters usually do not seek any promotion to higher-skilled positions because work is perceived by them only as a second-tier issue, leading to achieve their primary goals. The second group, Career seekers, treat their employment as their central issue. By migrating, they aim to gain new experience, credentials and develop their careers. After taking initial low-skilled positions, they seek to find a well-paid, stable job with perspectives on further promotions. A similar goal is pursued by the last group, the Target earners, who migrate to find well-paid jobs, aiming to achieve their goal, usually located in their host country, which requires high financial resources.

Consequences of precarious work

Consequences of detrimental employment and working conditions may affect the individual migrant on the level of economic wellbeing, work–life balance, mental and somatic health, as well as influence functioning of the employing organization. Migrants' responses to the aforementioned adverse working conditions range from concern at abuse and exploitation to fear of wage reduction or employment termination⁷⁰. Immigrants with undocumented status additionally face the fear

of deportation, with possibilities of coping even more limited than those of documented migrants. This feeling of insecurity is usually persistent in time. According to results from a study on non-English-speaking workers in Australia, although disparities in job insecurity between migrants and native workers decreased in time, they only reached a similar level after over 11 years post arrival. For highly educated migrants, this difference persisted even longer.

Prolonged perceived insecurity is a stress factor, which impedes the individual's mental resources⁷¹. If combined with long/irregular working hours, thus with limited time left beyond work, it can translate migrants' precarity from work to other aspects of life, causing for instance a loss of work–life balance. Prolonged insecurity deprives a migrant of any predictability needed to engage in long-term relationships⁷² and plan further education or permanent settlement. In consequence, an individual faces barriers in building his own social network, losing hereby the chances of mental and informational support. Moreover, in the case of employment within the ethnic economy, by having contact only or mostly with other migrant workers social integration into the host country's society may be impeded⁷³. Another challenge is faced by those who bring abroad both their work and family roles. Dyer

⁷⁰ B. Anderson: *Migration, immigration controls...*, op.cit.

⁷¹ *ibid.*; E. Martinescu, M. R. Edwards, A. C. Leite, G. Randsley de Moura, A. G. Marques, D. Abrams: *The interactive effect of job skill level and citizenship status on job depression, work engagement and turnover intentions: A moderated mediation model in the context of macro-level turbulence (of 'Brexit')*, "Human Resource Management Journal", 2022, p. 1-17.

⁷² A. Nobil Ahmad: *Dead men working: time and space in London's (illegal) migrant economy*, "Work, employment and society" No. 2/2008, p. 301-318

⁷³ A. Bloch: *The labour market experiences and strategies...*, op.cit.

*et al.*⁷⁴ describe strategies which migrants undertake to maintain their roles as parent and spouse, which often requires role renegotiation. This can, for instance, take the form of segregation of duties (e.g. one person earns funds for the family, the second takes care of the household and children) or sharing childcare within many members of a nuclear family.

Prolonged employment in precarious conditions can further affect the migrant's health. Among particular impacts of precarious employment conditions on somatic health one can name e.g. developing cardiovascular diseases, elevated risk of diabetes and hypertension⁷⁵. Possible mental health consequences are, for instance, burnout⁷⁶, depression⁷⁷ and suicidal thoughts⁷⁸. Lübke⁷⁹ names a few possible ways of how job insecurity may lead to the worsening of health condition. Firstly, prolonged stress reactions, resulting from insecure employment and, in turn, precarious financial situation, can affect health directly, e.g. through deregulation

of hormonal mechanisms⁸⁰. Job insecurity can moreover lead to perceived loss of control over one's life circumstances. The notion of perceived personal control refers to the degree to which an individual believes to have the ability to face challenges occurring in life. A conviction of lack of control is a condition which can lead to negative health consequences, e.g. through stronger psychological stress response and less health-related behaviours⁸¹.

Finally, insecurity over one's employment can also impact health through reducing family satisfaction among those who transfer their work-stress into their family. As an example, individuals concerned with the stability of their employment may communicate with their relatives in a more hostile and ill-tempered way⁸².

Nevertheless, it should be noted that international migrant workers differ in particular demographic characteristics. This may impact not only their employment conditions, but also differently

⁷⁴ S. Dyer, L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky, *Migrant work, precarious work life balance...*

⁷⁵ M. Virtanen, S. T. Nyberg, G. D. Batty, M. Jokela, K. Heikkilä, *et al.*: *Perceived job insecurity as a risk factor for incident coronary heart disease: systematic review and meta-analysis*, "BMJ" 2013;347:f4746.

⁷⁶ J. Bosman, S. Rothmann, J. H. Buitendach: *Job insecurity, burnout and work engagement: The impact of positive and negative affectivity*, „SA Journal of Industrial Psychology” No. 4/2005, p. 48-56.

⁷⁷ T. J. Kim, O. von dem Knesebeck: *Perceived job insecurity, unemployment and depressive symptoms: a systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective observational studies*. "International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health", 89, 2016, 561-573.

⁷⁸ A. Milner, K. Witt, A. D. LaMontagne, I. Niedhammer: *Psychosocial job stressors and suicidality: a meta-analysis and systematic review*, "Occupational and Environmental Medicine" No. 4/2018, p. 245-253.

⁷⁹ C. Lübke: *How self-perceived job insecurity affects health: Evidence from an age-differentiated mediation analysis*, "Economic and Industrial Democracy" No. 4/2021, p. 1105-1122.

⁸⁰ B. B. Arnetz, S. O. Brenner, L. Levi, R. Hjejn, 1. L. Petterson, *et al.*: *Neuroendocrine and immunologic effects of unemployment and job insecurity*, "Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics", No. 2-4/1991, p.6-80.

⁸¹ S. C. Thompson, S. Spacapan: *Perceptions of control in vulnerable populations*, "Journal of Social Issues" No. 4/1991, p. 1-21.

⁸² C. Lübke: *How self-perceived job insecurity affects health...*, *op.cit.*; J. H. Larson, S. M. Wilson, R. Beley: *The impact of job insecurity on marital and family relationships*, "Family Relations" No. 2/1994, p. 138-143.

influence health outcomes as well, even if conditions of work and employment are similar. According to results of a study by Nappo⁸³, workplace precarity has more profound health-related consequences for male migrants and older workers. No relationship between education and health was found, which was surprising, considering findings of positive impact of higher education on health made for the general population⁸⁴.

Besides consequences for individuals, precarious employment impacts the functioning of the hiring organization as well. There may be of course some clearly identifiable short-term advantages of providing an unstable employment to the worker. Some ostensible profits for hiring an undocumented employee, as cheaper labour costs, have been identified earlier in this article. Moreover, employing migrants with regulated status, with a visa conditional upon obtaining a work contract or provided by agencies, enhances labour retention without limiting the ability to fire, due to low legal protection of a migrant worker. According to a case study of a UK-based hotel⁸⁵, different forms of flexible employment (e.g. paying on a piece rate) have brought the organization a number of ostensible advantages, as the employees

could be called to work or laid off relatively easily with no legal barriers. Nevertheless, scholars have identified some negative consequences which affect the performance and work safety of an organization deciding on flexible, thus precarious employment. Some of them can be attributed to the fact that in some fields migrants learn to use precarious employment to their advantage. When a job offers adverse working conditions, low pay, insecurity and few development opportunities, there are relatively low chances that the worker develops attachment or commitment to the organization. If there are no circumstances limiting migrant worker's mobility and enough different job offers are available, the worker may not see any contradictions in changing the employer at any time, leaving vacant positions⁸⁶. Those who decide to stay may decide to form unions to increase their collective bargaining power in negotiations with the employer. Even without the legal representation of recognised unions, there have been reports of undocumented migrant workers forming their own unofficial unions⁸⁷. Besides potential personnel issues, providing precarious employment leads to decrease in performance. According to Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt⁸⁸, apart

⁸³ N. Nappo: *Self-perceived job insecurity and self-reported health...*, op.cit.

⁸⁴ E.g. C. E. Ross, C. L. Wu: *The links between education and health*, "American Sociological Review", 1995, p. 719-745.

⁸⁵ L. McDowell, A. Batnitzky, S. Dyer: *Precarious work and economic migration: emerging immigrant divisions of labour in Greater London's service sector*, "International Journal of Urban and Regional Research", No. 1/2009, p. 3-25.

⁸⁶ K. Filipek, D. Polkowska: *The latent precariousness...*, op.cit.; B. Anderson: *Migration, immigration controls...*, op.cit.

⁸⁷ D. Però: *Indie unions, organizing and labour renewal: Learning from precarious migrant workers*, "Work, Employment and Society" No. 5/2020, p. 900-918.

⁸⁸ L. Greenhalgh, Z. Rosenblatt: *Job insecurity: Toward conceptual clarity*, "Academy of Management Review", No. 3/1984, p. 438-448.

from turnover intentions, workers tend to react to job insecurity with lower work effort and resistance to change. Last but not least, within their meta-synthesis, Bazzoli and Probst⁸⁹ identified mistrust in management as a key barrier regarding communication between precarious migrant workers and their employers. Such a lack of trust may even lead to avoiding reporting hazards and accidents to state control institutions due to the fear of being identified by the supervisor and losing one's employment⁹⁰.

Finally, it should be emphasized that, although migrant workers are often aware that their employer maltreats them, they lack the knowledge of the host country's labour code and labour market practices to determine if this treatment is in violation of particular law and standards⁹¹.

Limitations in migrant precariousness research

Possible issues in migrant workplace-precariousness research can be identified, starting from the level of the concept's definition. As pointed by Anderson⁹², there is an issue among scholars to define the phenomenon of precarious employment. The author warned that precarity might even become a 'catchall term', meaning 'everything and nothing at the same time'.

Although some aspects reoccur in most attempts to conceptualize precarity (e.g. insecurity, vulnerability), scholars have not agreed on a single definition of the concept. Rather, the variance of forms of precarity by sector and by country contributes to the fuzziness of the construct⁹³. Moreover, as Filipek and Polkowska⁹⁴ argue, uncertainty and instability may be differently understood by researchers, members of the host society and migrants, since they represent different social contexts and cultures, and they differ in their experiences of the labour market. In consequence of the described conceptual dispute, one can identify a multitude of methods applied to measure precarity and its contributing factors. This limits the possibility to compare results among different studies⁹⁵.

The second group of limitations concerns methodological issues. One example of such barriers is the problem of causality attribution of the studied interactions. It should be noted that the vast majority of studies concerning migrant precariousness are based solely either on cross-sectional data or in-depth interviews. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the generalizability of findings is often limited since most studies are narrowed down only to one, economically well-developed host country and

⁸⁹ A. Bazzoli, T. M. Probst: *Vulnerable workers in insecure jobs...*, op.cit.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² B. Anderson: *Migration, immigration controls...*, op.cit.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ K. Filipek, D. Polkowska: *The latent precariousness...*, op.cit.

⁹⁵ X. Liu, S. J. Bowe, A. Li, L. Milner, L. S. Too, A. D. LaMontagne: *Job insecurity: A comparative analysis...*, op.cit.

only one or few particular occupational groups⁹⁶. Furthermore, most findings are based only on respondent declarations. In such cases, conclusions may be drawn only about migrant workers' subjective perception of workplace precarity, but not about objective conditions of employment. A Danish study showed that immigrant cleaners reported experiencing better psychosocial working conditions than their native counterparts⁹⁷, which the authors explained as an effect of lower expectations. In a Polish study, Ukrainian migrants rated their working conditions positively and, unlike native workers, they did not share concerns or discontent about their jobs⁹⁸. The authors, similarly, explained the results as an effect of comparison with the worse working conditions experienced in the sending country, e.g. technology, organization and salaries.

Finally, a frequent issue in the literature concerning health outcomes of precarious work is the lack of identification of underlying mechanisms which cause them. Many studies are limited to linking health solely with "migrant status" or particular working conditions without identifying mediators

or moderating factors. A similar issue has been identified in the research on health outcomes of precarious work in disadvantaged ethnical groups⁹⁹. As Nappo¹⁰⁰ points out, one of the problems in the literature on health issues and job insecurity is a possible reverse causality. Most studies provide only correlational data without estimating the causal effect. Therefore, there may be a possibility that unhealthy people tend to find employment in insecure jobs or, on the other hand, negative health events cause people to expect job loss.

Conclusion

Studies carried out in recent years show that young people, women, and immigrants are particularly vulnerable to precarious work, which consequently affects their health¹⁰¹ and socio-economic functioning. International, national, and local organizations should step up their efforts to provide social protection for workers exposed to precarious work and to promote legal solutions that act against this situation. Their efforts should be directed towards identifying whether people's labour rights are being respected and seeking solutions to prevent social exclusion.

⁹⁶ N. Nappo: *Self-perceived job insecurity and self-reported health...*, op.cit.

⁹⁷ K. Olesen, I. G. Carneiro, M. B. Jorgensen, M. A. Flyvholm, R. Rugulies, et al.: *Psychosocial work environment among immigrant and Danish cleaners*, "International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health", No. 85/2012, p. 89-95.

⁹⁸ K. Filipek, D. Polkowska: *The latent precariousness...*, op.cit.

⁹⁹ A. Daly, M.B. Schenker, E. Ronda-Perez, A. Reid: *Examining the impact...*, op.cit.

¹⁰⁰ N. Nappo: *Self-perceived job insecurity and self-reported health...*, op.cit.

¹⁰¹ H. Scott-Marshall, E. Tompass: *The health consequences of precarious employment experiences*, "Work 38", 2011, 369-382; B. J. Gray, C. N. Grey, A. Hookway, L. Homolova, A. R. Davies: *Differences in the impact of precarious employment on health across population subgroups: a scoping review*, "Perspectives in Public Health", No. 1/2021, p. 37-49; K. Kennedy, B. Hallowell: *Peace building in practice: Creating shared security at all levels*, "Behavior and Social Issues" No. 1/2021, p. 209-214.

The issue of unfair and insufficient wages, constantly experienced by disadvantaged groups in countries of relative economic welfare, is a relevant problem as well¹⁰². The emphasis of the discussion should be shifted from setting minimum wage to establishing a living wage and increasing pay equity. Unfortunately, so far, in discussions regarding labour and social policies, the emphasis has mainly been put on the problems of middle-level workers or the minimum wage, whereas rights of undocumented workers and those working with limited rights were often omitted. Therefore, a new perspective on the problem of people's labour force participation and a development of a new research paradigm are needed. Lately, scholars are

increasingly discussing sustainable livelihoods as a new challenge for societies in the 21st century¹⁰³. This raises the question of what role nation states, supranational organizations, and institutions controlling public expenditure should play in this process.

MARIAN BANAŚ

President of the Supreme Audit Office

Prof. ANTONI WONTORCZYK

Institute of Applied Psychology, Unity of Labour Psychology and Organisation, Jagiellonian University

MICHAŁ KULISZ

Jagiellonian University

¹⁰² A. Furnham: *Pay secrecy*, "European Business Review", 2019, p. 69-72 <<https://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/pay-secrecy/> [access 5.5.2024]; International Labour Organization, *Global wage report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps*, 2018, <https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wems_650553.pdf> [access 5.5.2024].

¹⁰³ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises. 2011 Edition, 2011, <<https://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/48004323.pdf>> [access 5.5.2024]; K. Bohnenberger: *Is it a green or a brown job? A taxonomy of sustainable employment*, "Ecological Economics", 2022, 107469.

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