

ANNEX

What is precarious work?

Precarious employment is a very wide issue. The way you perceive it, the way you feel it, the way you experience it is very personal. It relates to the direct job situation in the plant, in the company (the kind of contract you received, the way you are paid, the information you get, ...) but also to your position in the wider society (how is your job looked upon, how well respected, how is it considered, ...).

In any case jobs can always be considered as precarious if they are jobs:

- with little or no job security
- with low and unsecured wages
- without social security (concerning pension, health insurance, unemployment payment)
- without protection against dismissals
- without vocational training
- with little or no health and safety at work
- with no trade union representation

In fact you can be in a precarious employment situation in any company, at any given moment. For instance you can have an insecure contract with a temporary agency, with lesser pay than the comparable worker inside the company where you are working, with no safety equipment, with no social security, ... but you can find yourself also in a insecure employment situation in a company where the workers are more and more changed into temporary agency contracts.

Precarious employment can also have its effects in the society where we are living. What to think about a worker who has three part time contracts, which are jointly identical to a 38 hours week, being paid a normal salary and covered by social security, but who cannot get a loan to buy a flat, since the bank manager considers his part time jobs too insecure?

So defining in short precarious employment is difficult. But in any case we can already state the following:

Precarious work is a term used to describe non-standard employment which is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and cannot support a household. In recent decades there has been a dramatic increase in precarious work due to such factors as: globalization, the shift from the manufacturing sector to the service sector, and the spread of information technology. These changes have created a new economy which demands flexibility in the workplace and, as a result, caused the decline of the standard employment relationship and a dramatic increase in precarious work. An important aspect of precarious work is its gendered nature, as women are continuously over-represented in this type of work. But also younger people and migrant workers are generally over represented.

Precarious work is frequently associated with, but CANNOT be considered identical to the following types of employment: "part-time employment, self-employment, fixed-term work, temporary work, on-call work, home working, and telecommuting." All of these forms of employment are related in that they depart from the standard employment relationship (full-time, continuous work with one employer), but they are not in all cases to be considered precarious, since a good legislation and/or good collective agreements can secure these contract forms.

Each form of precarious work may offer its own challenges but they all share the same disadvantages: low wages, few benefits, lack of collective representation, and little to no job security. There are four dimensions when determining if employment is precarious in nature:

1. the degree of certainty of continuing employment
2. control over the labour process, which is linked to the presence or absence of trade unions and professional associations and relates to control over working conditions, wages, and the pace of work;
3. the degree of regulatory protection
4. income level."