

PLENARY PANEL

Precarity, Inequality, Migration, and Worker Agency in a Changing Political Economy

Patrizia Zanoni, *Hasselt University*

Gabriella Alberti, *University of Leeds*

FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2026

13:30-14:30

LECTURE THEATRE 0.17

Whither precarity? Labour flows, surplus populations, and failing social reproduction under late capitalism

In her speech, Patrizia Zanoni will argue that precarity should no longer be conceptualized as the mere deterioration of the standard employment relation of large segments of the labour force, who are formally free but too weak in their relation with the employer. In late capitalism, precarity is not produced by market exchange, but through the multiplication of coercion. Such coercion unevenly and intermittently extracts value from labour, increasingly turning it into a surplus population whose social reproduction is no longer guaranteed by the wage.



Patrizia Zanoni comes from the Alps, has four kids and strong opinions. She is a Full Professor of Organization Studies at the School of Social Sciences of Hasselt University (Belgium), which she co-founded and where she teaches sociology of work and organization, grand challenges, and diversity and social change. Her research draws on contemporary strands of Marxism (e.g., feminist Marxism, Open Marxism, Black Marxism, critical border theory) to investigate work, difference and value in and beyond capitalism. She also writes regularly on alternatives and on building academic infrastructures to foster social change. Between 2020 and 2025, she was one of the Editors in Chief of *Organization*. In 2022, she received an Emma Goldman award from the Flax Foundation for her work on inequality. None of the above could have happened without the generous support of her family, her partner and the Italian and Belgian welfare states.

Migration and Precarious Work: The Contested Terrain of Mobility in Multi-crisis UK

Professor Alberti's plenary note will address an ongoing global challenge and increasingly central topic in the sociology of work concerning the intersection of migration management and the growth of precarious work. She will focus on the case of the UK as a country that has faced overlapping socio-economic crises, the exit from the EU and ongoing political instability. Drawing from her long standing research on migrant labour in low-paid sector and her recent book that centres migrant agency to questions of international mobility and labour turnover (Alberti and Sacchetto 2024), she will discuss recent changes that have affected the British immigration regime and its turbulent effects on labour markets and employment relations. Her main argument is that without understanding the unsettling nature of migrant mobility power across borders and occupations, and the actions of state and

employers juggling contradictory mobility dilemmas, it is impossible to explain the constant changes in migration regulations and their effects on the politics of precarious work. Applying a “de-national lens” (Anderson 2021) to the field of labour sociology, she will also argue that the field of social reproduction represents a critical terrain to re-building solidarities for migrants and non-migrant precarious workers increasingly pushed to the margins of the welfare state. Migrants and disenfranchised citizens’ livelihoods and their legitimate presence in the territory are made increasingly uncertain and conditional on their “contributory” affordances, amidst the intensifying politicisation of migration as significant social cleavage within and beyond processes of racialisation.

Gabriella Alberti is Professor of International Labour Migration at Leeds Business School. Her research interests span across the sociology of work, migration and employment relations, focusing on international mobility, intersectionality, platform work, trade unions strategies towards precarious migrants, community organising and trade union renewal. She has published in international journals including *Work Employment and Society*, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, and the *Global Labour Journal*. She is editor of *Work Employment and Society*. Her recent UKRI research project ‘Labour Mobility in Transition’ investigated responses to post-Brexit migration regulation across food manufacturing, warehousing, hospitality and social care. She is a member of the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change and leads the Leeds Migration Research Network at the University of Leeds. She has recently published the co-authored book: *The Politics of Migrant Labour*: Bristol University Press (2024) and the co-edited collection “Migration and Social Reproduction” (Edward Elgar 2025).

