

PRECARITY: position statement and example research themes

In an era marked by the rapid integration of technology, data, and artificial intelligence (AI), precarity represents a crucial area of concern. With the rising debates about the insecurities of life, the imperative to understand and address the multifaceted implications of precarity has never been greater.

The impacts of technology are far-reaching, affecting various domains of society and often accentuating the precarity experienced by people, particularly those of particular socio-economic standings and/or those belonging to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Our objective is to elucidate the intersections between precarity, technology, data, and AI, with specific focus on four research strands: informal economies, insecure labour, migration, and intersectionality.

To foster research in this space, we intend to adopt a three-phase approach:

1. Establishing an initial understanding of research in the precarity space.
2. Conducting a workshop to elaborate on ideas and horizons based on phase one insights.
3. Implementing funding rounds and similar initiatives targeting key topics and issues.

The aim is to provide the foundation for fostering deeper understandings of precarity, both in general and specifically those that entail some involvement or are otherwise related to tech and data. We are particularly interested in issues around not only regarding the effects of technologies, such as the consequences experienced by those subject to decisions and analyses made by digital systems, but also issues of precarity as they relate to the production and operation of such systems, such as those around content moderation, image tagging, data labelling, software development, and so in.

Our initial research (report sent earlier) reveals alarming trends and numerous gaps in understanding the complex dynamics of the interaction of technology, data and AI and precarity. Therefore, we seek to promote an enhanced, interdisciplinary research focus, specifically through an intersectional lens accounting for gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and nationality among others. Through comprehensive examination of the latest literature and case studies, our initial report aims to shed light on the diverse ways in which technology both exacerbates and mitigates precarity. Our focus is not just to delineate the problem, but also to identify gaps in research and propose possible pathways for intervention and regulation.

In particular, we highlight the importance of an intersectional lens in our investigations and the need for interdisciplinary collaborations to avoid disciplinary silos and duplicate work.

The broader goal is to steer the trajectory of technology, data, and AI, and how it is built, used, and managed, towards enhancing lives, reducing vulnerabilities, and promoting socioeconomic progress for all, especially those in precarious situations. By uncovering the intricate links between precarity, technology, data, and AI, we hope to contribute to a more inclusive, secure future.

Exemplar research themes

Broader:

How are certain marginalised groups particularly affected by precarity arising from the widespread adoption of digital technologies

What is the impact of data-driven decision-making systems on the precarity in particular sectors and domains?

How does precariousness apply in the production of AI systems?

- Are those involved subjected to similar precarious conditions as those seen in other segments of the digital labour market (as outlined in our brief)?
- How does their precarious labour then intertwine with the precarity-causing consequences of some AI use-cases?

In what ways can regulatory frameworks be improved to better protect those in precarious positions insofar as they relate to technologies, especially within the tech-based platform economy?

Given the potential negative effects, how can any benefits of technology, data, and AI be harnessed to mitigate and counterbalance the precarity experiences by vulnerable groups?

More specific:

[labour] How does the widespread adoption of AI and digital technologies contribute to the increasing precarity in the labour market

[migrants + migration] How does the interaction of technology, platforms and precarity, particularly in terms of access to resources, job security and social stability, differentially impact migrant communities compared to long-term residents and citizens? How do these impacts vary when considering migrants from different backgrounds?

[domestic work] What is the role of technology in propagating precarity in domestic work, particularly among migrant female workers, and how does it influence the experiences of female gig workers considering the persistent gendered digital divide?

[Intersectionality + production] How does the intersectionality of variables like gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and nationality influence precarity in AI and data-driven sectors?

[platform – lived experience] What are the unique experiences of precarity among digital workers, such as those involved in online platforms like OnlyFans, particularly within the UK context?

[resources] How does the distribution and accessibility of resources, particularly in the context of technology, data, and AI, contribute to the precarity experienced by various demographic groups and sectors?