

Vulnerability at Work: Organizing for the Margins

1. Introduction of the topic

Vulnerability at work is often associated with particular social groups, such as migrants, refugees, ex-offenders, and people with disabilities or serious health conditions, but membership in these groups does not automatically make individuals vulnerable. At the same time, workers who are not members of these groups might be vulnerable too (Restubog et al., 2023), as vulnerability arises from the interaction between personal resources, organizational practices, and wider societal conditions. Workers become vulnerable when they are exposed to physical, psychological, or social harm and lack the means to protect themselves within a given work context. Hence, contemporary vulnerability must be understood against a backdrop of overlapping global crises, including economic instability, geopolitical conflict, climate change, and technological disruption. These interconnected pressures fragment labour markets, weaken social protections, and erode collective support systems, disproportionately affecting workers at the margins. Migrants and other marginalized groups are especially exposed as they navigate unstable systems with limited institutional backing, intensifying existing inequalities. At the organizational level, vulnerability is shaped by precarious employment arrangements and unattempted or failed initiatives to address structural barriers. However, individuals experience these conditions differently depending on their personal resources. Financial security, social support, psychological resilience, and strong networks may serve as buffers for some workers, while others with fewer resources may feel compelled to accept unsafe or exploitative work. Therefore, vulnerability emerges when organizational risks intersect with limited personal capacity to cope or resist, within the broader societal conditions. Yet, vulnerable workers are not passive; they actively navigate and sometimes challenge the societal and organizational conditions they face. Their experiences and activities reveal how organizational structures and cultures produce vulnerability, while also offering insight into more inclusive forms of organizing. This workshop seeks early-stage contributions that explore new forms of organizing, voice mechanisms, governance structures, and solidarities capable of bringing those at the margins into the centre of organizational concern.

2. Preliminary workshop format

- 10:00–10:30 – Welcome and introductions
- 10:30–12:00 – Research snapshots: Short Presentations during which participants introduce ongoing projects (conceptual ideas, preliminary findings, or methodological innovations), followed by short Q&A rounds
- 12:00–13:00 – Lunch and informal networking
- 13:00–14:00 – Thematic small-group discussions on shared research challenges (e.g., methodological challenges, regional particularities, multi-level and multi-actor theorizing); each group formulates 2–3 key insights or open questions to bring back to plenary
- 14:00–14:45 – Plenary exchange and future directions; groups share insights; discussion of emerging research opportunities, potential joint projects, and ideas for sustained collaboration
- 14:45–15:00 – Closing remarks and next steps

3. Application Procedure

Participants are invited to submit a short abstract (max. 300 words) of an ongoing or planned research project related to the workshop theme as well as short author bios via the EGOS website by March 31st. Abstracts will be reviewed by the convenor team and invitations to the workshop will be sent out accordingly. For questions, please contact lena.knappert@wu.ac.at.

4. Convenor Team

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References

Restubog, S. L. D., Schilpzand, P., Lyons, B., Midel Deen, C., & He, Y. (2023). The vulnerable workforce: A call for research. *Journal of Management*, 49(7), 2199-2207.