

Precarious work the 'new normal'

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According to the Director of Murdoch University's Asia Research Centre, the global trend towards insecure, short-term employment is the new status quo, making addressing the challenges it produces vital.

Professor Kevin Hewison said precarious work was at the heart of an ongoing international research project across 10 countries, exploring its form, prevalence and effects.

"Precarious work is increasingly common and is expanding on a global scale, replacing what has long been regarded as standard employment," Professor Hewison said.

"This expansion is associated with social, economic and political changes that have operated for several decades as production has also been globalised.

"Greater capital mobility and heightened international competition has led to unrelenting pressure on prices, which results in buyers continually looking for new producers who offer lower costs, including for labour.

"Employers and government have been forced to become more competitive to attract and maintain investment, and they have done this in part by limiting or reducing the permanent workforce and maximising employee flexibility.

"Global production chains effectively demand that countries compete for investment and that workers compete for jobs on a global basis."

The precarious work project has held forums in the USA, South Korea and Taiwan and is currently looking at how governments, NGOs and unions are dealing with change and how they might restore a balance between capital and labour.

Professor Hewison said workers in Asia were increasingly turning to government to improve the social security net, and said flexible, portable support such as superannuation, social welfare and [universal health coverage](#) were for protecting workers under the new model.

"Businesses and governments need to work together to make work less precarious, which involves employment benefits that go with the job, not tied to a company," he said.

"We've seen superannuation-like schemes being introduced in middle-income economies like Thailand, with even independent vendors such as hawkers able to have contributions matched by the government.

"We know that superannuation has been a successful policy in Australia, where trends such as the boom in FIFO work can be viewed as precarious."

Professor Hewison said precarious work was very much the new normal in the US, where a number of companies urged attention to universal healthcare to improve competitiveness and remove the heavy burdens of healthcare responsibilities from their books.

He said supporting workers was a necessity, noting that unaddressed issues of insecurity lead to family and social issues, problems related to stress and potentially political instability.

"The anxiety, anger and alienation of uncertainty can be harnessed by different groups for various ends, not all of them progressive," he said.

More information: Read the full report:
[kevinhewison.files.wordpress.c ... n kalleberg-2013.pdf](#)

Provided by Murdoch University

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