

21 September 2026

The Underemployed project is underway!

Dear all,

We're happy to share that the UNDEREMPLOYED project at the University of Zurich is off to a good start. You have all expressed interest in this project in one way or another. In this first newsletter, we'd like to introduce the team, give you a sense of what we'll be doing over the next four years, and point you to a new paper that was just published in Geoforum.

What will we be doing?

UNDEREMPLOYED explores the situation of people who have jobs but cannot get enough paid hours and/or whose work schedules are fragmented and unpredictable. It is a cross-sectoral study of workers in cleaning, retail, care work, and education. We will collect data through time-use diaries and in-depth interviews with workers, employers, and decision-makers in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland – the three European countries with the highest shares of part-time work. Our aim is to:

1. **Understand the problem:** Build foundational knowledge about time-related underemployment across sectors and national contexts.
2. **Find out why it happens:** Identify norms, practices and policies that foster or constrain underemployment.
3. **Suggest solutions:** Develop recommendations to reduce underemployment and improve the situation of affected workers.

You can find out more about the project [on our website](#) (soon also in German and Dutch).

Who is involved?

Since June, our team has been complete! The research is conducted by Christina Bosbach in the UK, Jeroen Merk in the Netherlands, and Jennifer Steiner and Christiane Meyer-Habighorst in Switzerland. We are all part of the Labour Geography Group at the University of Zurich. The project is led by Karin Schwiter, and it is funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, based on an awarded ERC Advanced Grant 2024.

New paper out!

"Underemployed but overworked: reframing the paradox of underemployment through the lens of racial capitalism" by Reta Barfuss and Karin Schwiter

This article reframes time-related underemployment through the lens of racial capitalism. Rather than seeing it merely as an effect of neoliberalisation, the article examines how processes of othering intrinsic to capital render particular communities especially exploitable. The insights emerge from interviews with workers in Zurich's

commercial cleaning sector that PhD researcher Reta Barfuss conducted. You can find the full text [here](#).

That's all for now – thank you for your interest in our project! We'll be back with more updates as the research develops. Feel free to reach out to us at any time via underemployed@geo.uzh.ch.

Warm regards,

Christina Bosbach, Christiane Meyer-Habighorst, Jeroen Merk, Karin Schwiter, and Jennifer Steiner