



# Precarious mobilities: occupational auto-mobilities, precarity and relationality amongst new truck drivers in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we advance debates on labour precarity by examining occupational auto-mobilities as a key site through which embodied and relational dimensions of precarity are produced. To do so, we empirically examine the experiences of newly qualified ('new pass')<sup>1</sup> truck drivers in the UK. Drawing on longitudinal qualitative interviews (2023–2025) with new passes, interviews with insurance and road haulage industry representatives, and observations of a social media group for new drivers (2023–2024), we show how new drivers are at the sharp end of precarious employment and everyday work, with the latter inseparable from their heightened exposure to corporeal harm and vulnerability. Conceptually, we bring insights on labour precarity in logistics into conversation with a Butlerian account of precarity and relationality to show how precarious *mobile* work emerges, is embodied, and navigated by new drivers through the entanglement of structural forces, discursive practices and lesser-known relational practices grounded in drivers' interdependence and ethical obligations to one another. We argue that the labour precarity faced by new truck drivers is actively generated by financialised insurance capital, the political-economic conjuncture of the UK haulage industry, and state policies related to driver training and licensing that reproduce norms of self-responsibility and risk-taking amongst truck drivers. By centring new truck drivers' everyday experiences, we demonstrate how 'smooth' and 'efficient' logistics flows are ultimately sustained by precarious employment, exposure to corporeal harm, and the unpaid, relational labour undertaken by drivers for each other.

## 1. Introduction

Precarity has become a pervasive condition of contemporary working lives. It is not, however, reducible to labour market insecurity alone. Feminist scholars and critical geographers have repeatedly emphasised the conceptual utility of precarity when approached as an instituted socio-political condition affecting both labour *and* life, foregrounding its generative potential (Ettlinger, 2007; Millar, 2017; Strauss, 2018). Seen through the lens of Judith Butler's work, however, precarity also names a condition in which the bodies of certain people are rendered more exposed to injury and harm, through uneven access to social, economic, and institutional supports (Butler, 2009; Puar, 2012). Understood in this

way, precarity encompasses a differentiated embodied exposure to harm instituted through power-laden arrangements. In this paper, we direct a Butlerian-framing of precarity towards an analysis of labouring lives, asking whose labouring lives are (made) more expendable. In drawing attention to unevenly distributed embodied exposure to harm and injury, this reading of precarity, when applied to work and employment, centres the corporeal dimensions of work (e.g., embodied exposure to risks and injury, suffering abuse, fear and burn-out) and its intertwining with labour precarity.

Mobile work provides a particularly apposite lens through which to examine these dynamics (Gregson, 2023). While employment-related mobility encompasses travel *to-and-for* work purposes and migration,

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<sup>1</sup> New pass' is a commonly used term in the truck driving industry, including by our research participants, to refer to newly licensed drivers. In the paper, we use the terms new pass/new passes and recent entrants somewhat interchangeably.

the term mobile work relates to occupations that rely on mobile workers. In mobile work, jobs are performed on the move, or require that workers are on the move in geographical space between multiple geolocations throughout the working day. Along with food delivery riders, transport workers are a classic case of mobile workers. Work involving the movement of goods and people intensifies embodied vulnerability for workers through their differentially distributed everyday encounters with space and infrastructures, and the day-to-day governance of their (mobile) working lives. In part this is because such work places working bodies within networked infrastructures that move people and goods. Working bodies here are situated on roads, railways, shipping lanes and air corridors, and inside cars, trucks, vans, trains and planes as they move physically, at varying speeds between places on open and closed networks. But the embodied vulnerability of transport workers is also a matter of the everyday governance of mobile working lives by logistics.

The dynamics of circulation in supply chain capitalism (Tsing, 2009) shape the working lives of many, if not all, transport workers. With respect to moving freight, those dynamics now insist on tightly choreographed just-in-time and on-demand delivery. As the logistical systems that govern movement promise ever-greater efficiencies and optimised movement through networked infrastructures, so working bodies face the challenges of delivering more goods to increasingly tightly defined schedules. Logistics, then, exerts a corporeal violence on mobile workers. By reducing the work of moving people and goods to seamless disembodied, but also always timely, flows criss-crossing geographical space (Cowen, 2014; Gregson, 2017), logistics not only renders that work invisible, in insisting that workers are always on time it also displaces the responsibility for being on time onto workers. Nowhere is this clearer than in occupational auto-mobility (Gregson, 2018), where workers are engaged in driving for a living, transporting goods across geographies; truck drivers, supermarket delivery drivers, and the van and delivery drivers providing 'last-mile' services to consumers are all subject to the corporeal violence of logistics. Our focus in this paper is on truck driving work.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a long-held truth about truck driving – when trucks stop moving, everyday life grinds to a halt. Labour shortages are one reason why trucks stop moving. Since 2000, truck driver shortages have been reported in many countries (IRU, 2025), leading governments to undertake actions to attract new workers. The acute nature of the driver shortage during the pandemic, however, meant an acceleration of activities to attract more drivers into the industry. In the UK, in line with the intense politicisation of immigration, policy interventions prioritised a younger, UK-based, 'domestic', non-migrant workforce and promised new passes 'well-paid careers' as HGV drivers (GOV.UK, 2021a). A 74% increase in the number of truck driving tests between 2020 and 2022 was celebrated, resulting from measures to 'simplify' testing and licensing processes (GOV.UK, 2022). But this policy response has created new challenges for workers. As we demonstrate in the paper, it has instigated new forms of precarity associated specifically with recent entrants to the UK truck driving labour force. Their experiences provide the empirical focus for the paper.

The paper draws on twenty months of qualitative, longitudinal interviews with 27 recent entrants into truck driving in the UK, an analysis of a UK Facebook group for new truck drivers, including 3 interviews with its moderators, supplemented by 8 interviews with representatives from the logistics and insurance industries. We reveal how UK new-entrant truck drivers' experiences are characterised by precarious employment conditions and enhanced exposure to corporeal harm and injury. We ground their experiences of precarious work in the 'occupational auto-mobilities' (Gregson, 2018) of truck driving work, emphasising how the everyday embodied experience of geographic mobility in a truck in networked infrastructures is itself key to understanding how precarity is produced, experienced, and managed among new entrant drivers.

The paper makes three contributions to scholarship at the intersection of labour geography and critical logistics. First, in bringing a Butler-

ian understanding of precarity into the domains of (mobile) work and employment, it broadens debates in labour geography, demonstrating the importance of a multi-scalar, *mobile*, embodied theorisation of precarious life and labour beyond the well-established cases of migrant workers and knowledge workers (Strauss, 2018). More broadly, a Butlerian understanding of precarity helps spotlight socio-politically *instituted* exposure to corporeal harm and injury as an important facet of precarious work. Such a framing highlights the shortcomings in apolitical analysis of truck drivers' poor health, often framed as behavioural deficiencies or occupational risks that can be managed at the scale of the workplace (see, for example, Guest et al, 2020).

Second, the paper highlights the critical yet under-studied role of the insurance industry in structuring experiences of precarity amongst logistics workers (for an exception see Bolton, 2024). It, therefore underscores Booth's (2021) call for geographers to engage more seriously with the spatial politics of insurance. Third, the paper engages with scholarship in labour geography that has emphasised the importance of paying attention to the situated, everyday acts of – constrained – worker agency (Carswell and De Neve, 2013; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Dutta, 2020; Nowak, 2022), and contributes to thinking on the intersections and overlaps in (mobile) workers' agential practices (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2023).

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we develop a conceptual framework bringing together discussions on precarious work in logistics, the material, discursive constitution and worsening experiences of truck driving work, and engaging with a Butlerian understanding of precarity and relationality in dialogue with labour geography debates on precarity and agency. Section 3 provides an account of the research methods, data collection and analysis. Section 4 turns to an empirical examination of the precarity experienced by new truck drivers in the UK. After providing an overview of the road haulage industry in the UK and recent policy changes to ramp up training and licensing processes (4.1), we then discuss the multi-scalar production of precarity for new drivers (4.2), its everyday, embodied experiences (4.3) and their navigation of precarity (4.4). In Section five we conclude.

## 2. Conceptualising a mobile labour geography of occupational auto-mobility through precarity and relationality

Logistics is generally understood as a business science that organises and manages the movement of goods with the primary aim of maximising cost efficiencies (Chua et al, 2018). Troubling its a-political positioning as a management science, critical scholarship exposes the domination, dispossession, and labour exploitation inherent in the logistics operations that sustain complex supply chains and contemporary capitalism (Chua et al., 2018; Cowen, 2014). Fierce competition between firms, power inequalities, and the struggle to appropriate value by cutting costs, transferring risks, and thereby improving 'efficiencies' are fundamental to the operation of supply chain capitalism underpinned by logistical flows (Tsing, 2009; Bolton, 2024). Actors such as mega-retailers and large manufacturers use their power to dictate terms and prices to less powerful actors further along the chain, including warehousing and transport operators. These firms, in turn, must find ways to cut costs to remain in business – often by pushing wage rates down and introducing measures that intensify labour to meet 'just-in-time' supply chains (Moody, 2019; Gregson, 2018).

Against this background, it is unsurprising that workers in warehousing and road transport – two of the most labour-intensive logistics functions (Vugrin & Brentler, 2021) – endure precarious employment conditions (Zanoni and Miszczyński, 2024; IRU, 2023). A large body of recent scholarship on warehouse workers (Zanoni and Miszczyński, 2024; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2019; Gutelius & Theodore, 2019) and platform-based delivery workers (Avagianou et al., 2025) highlights racialised and migrant labour regimes, alongside the widespread prevalence of sub-contracting, temporary and zero-hour contracts, and the digital mediation of labour processes as means to keep labour costs low.

The result is the intensification of work, most notably those parts of it that entail physically moving the goods (see for example [Gutelius, 2015](#); [Delfanti, 2021](#); [Bonhomme and Muldoon, 2025](#)). A key component in moving the goods is truck driving work. Truck drivers circulating goods by driving heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) for a living constitute a core part of the logistics workforce and exemplify workers engaged in ‘occupational auto-mobility’.

Critical scholarship has examined the macro political-economic conditions leading to worsening conditions among truck drivers. The deregulation of haulage industries in the 1980s ([Monios, 2019](#)), the financial fragility of the sector, dominated by micro- and small-sized companies with wafer-thin profit margins and subordinated to more powerful actors, and the ‘race-to-the-bottom’ dynamics that firms engage in to remain competitive have resulted in sharply falling wage rates, longer working hours, and weakened bargaining power in the US, UK and Europe ([Bonacich and Wilson, 2008](#); [Hilal, 2008](#); [Gregson, 2017](#)). These dynamics, coupled with low unionisation rates ([Smith, 2001](#)), mean there is little worker protection. In an effort to enhance transport efficiencies, the platformisation of truck driving in some countries reveals a further immiseration of drivers, who work extremely long hours for low rates and are increasingly exposed to market-driven competition and discipline ([Wei et al., 2024](#)).

A sizeable body of scholarship focuses on the gendered norms and practices underpinning truck driving work. Trucking is a highly gendered occupation in that it is both male-dominated (91–98 per cent) and associated with hyper-masculine traits such as an appetite for danger, risk-taking, autonomy, independence and endurance ([Barber, 2019](#); [Eastman et al., 2013](#)). While the threat to one’s perceived autonomy as a trucker is central to [Levy’s \(2015\)](#) account of an in-cab digital monitoring device, [Aho \(2018\)](#) argues how ‘respectable trucking masculinities’ are constructed by Finnish truckers who emphasise endurance and overwork to distinguish themselves from newcomers. Exploring gendered experiences of truck driving in the UK through the materialities and spatialities of the work, [Hopkins and Davidson \(2023\)](#) show how these masculine traits are also reproduced by women drivers who perform self-reliance to ‘fit in’. Masculine norms thus structure the everyday practices of truck driving, and normalise drivers’ exposure to danger, over-work, physical exertion and burn-out, with this in turn structuring surplus value extraction ([Rivoal, 2019](#)).

Infrastructures for mobile logistics workers, such as motorway services, toilets, and safe parking spaces, further serve to reinforce self-responsibility and risk-exposure amongst drivers. In the UK, this is evident in the lack of investment in adequate, affordable, and clean roadside infrastructures ([Hopkins et al., 2024](#)). Absent, inadequate, or prohibitively expensive privately-owned infrastructures disregard the safety, food, rest and sanitation needs and rights of mobile working bodies ([Gregson, 2018](#)), effectively shifting the responsibility of meeting everyday social reproduction needs onto workers themselves, while simultaneously devaluing it. Poor quality and expensive roadside infrastructures also force drivers to stop in unsafe spots such as laybys, exposing them to stress, physical violence and danger from freight and fuel thefts ([RHA, 2024b](#)). Long-standing infrastructural inadequacy, thus, also relies on, and reinforces, endurance and self-reliant subjectivities amongst truck drivers.

While much scholarship focuses on experienced truck drivers, this paper draws attention to the experiences of recent entrants into truck driving work. As newcomers, they lack the accumulated tacit and material knowledges that seasoned drivers rely on to navigate the embodied demands and infrastructural inadequacies that are intrinsic to occupational auto-mobilities. Moreover, as workers yet to fully normalise and reproduce sedimented masculine norms, their accounts highlight dimensions of labour precarity, especially embodied vulnerability to injury and harm, that remain largely obscured in existing research. As we show, it is here that a Butler-inspired understanding of precarity, as a politically induced, unequal exposure to embodied vulnerability becomes analytically productive. Such a framework

effectively engages Butlerian understandings of precarity to contexts of work, employment and political-economy (see Butler, n.d.), while also foregrounding overlooked linkages in human and labour geography between multi-scalar political-economic dynamics, and gendered, embodied constructions of labour and differentiated worker identities ([Amoore, 2020](#); [McDowell, 2015](#)).

### 2.1. Precarity, relationality and agency in labour geography

Critical scholarship identifies two main approaches to precarity ([Waite, 2009](#); [Mallett, 2020](#)). One conceptualises precarity as economic insecurity emerging primarily if not exclusively from labour market conditions where precarity is associated with insecure labour regimes, poor pay, work intensification, and heightened exploitation that exacerbate structural inequalities of class, caste, gender, race, and migrant status ([Choonara, 2020](#); [Stingl, 2021](#)). The other approach draws on [Judith Butler \(2004\)](#) who conceptualises precarity as an ontological condition – a shared exposure to corporeal harm, injury and vulnerability on account of being human. [Butler \(2009: 25\)](#) distinguishes the existential condition of precariousness from *precariety*, which they define as the ‘politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differently exposed to injury, violence and death’. Crucially, for [Butler \(2012, 2016\)](#), precariousness and precarity can generate relationality: the recognition of shared vulnerabilities and their systemic production can foster interdependence, solidarity, and even collective action.

While scholarship, including in labour geography, has attempted to bridge these two approaches to precarity ([Neilson and Rossiter, 2005](#); [Lewis et al., 2015](#)), attention to how multi-scalar political-economic conjunctures relate to notions of individuality, embodied vulnerability and relationality/interdependence remain underdeveloped (for an exception see [Allison, 2013](#)). Foregrounding the intertwined precarity of labour and life on-the-move, alongside the relational practices that drivers depend upon to cope with precarity allows us to broaden theorisation at the intersections of mobility and precarity beyond migrant worker-focused framings that dominate labour geography literature (for e.g. [Waite, 2009](#); [Lewis et al., 2015](#); [Strauss and McGrath, 2017](#)). A shift towards mobile workers such as truck drivers uncovers how multi-scalar political-economic dynamics link with material infrastructures, mobile spatialities, including ‘moored’ logistical spaces encountered by mobile workers, and gendered discourses such as self-sufficiency and risk-taking to produce everyday, precarious occupational auto-mobilities. Furthermore, in the context of mobile working bodies, a Butlerian reading of precarity also provides a framework for analysing how shared, embodied fear and vulnerabilities create space for lesser-known ‘ethical encounters’ ([Butler, 2012](#)) grounded in care, empathy and interdependence amongst truck drivers.

Decentering collective, organised acts of worker agency resisting capital, labour geographers demonstrate how workers enact less spectacular, everyday forms of agency – often ‘constrained’ ([Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011](#)) – and shaped by structural power inequalities, cultural meanings attached to work, and the broader, social, spatial environments that workers are embedded in ([Carswell and De Neve, 2013](#); [Liu and Wang, 2022](#); [Nowak, 2022](#)). As scholars remind us, workers are social beings with complex identities that shape and are shaped by economic and cultural landscapes ([Tufts, 2009](#)). While [Katz’s \(2004\)](#) disaggregated understanding of agency – resilience, reworking and resistance – has been widely used by labour geographers, as [Coe and Jordhus-Lier \(2023\)](#) remark, analyses of agency are most rewarding when conceptualisations of agency are shown to intersect and co-constitute one another, and when agential acts are understood as processual, progressive and oriented towards future possibilities ([MacLeavy et al., 2021](#)).

Advancing this line of enquiry, we analyse how drivers’ collective acts of care and interdependence generate ‘ethical encounters’ ([Butler,](#)

2012) on online fora, these interactions grounded in a shared recognition of being exposed to corporeal vulnerability as truck drivers, and especially as recent entrants to the occupation. While foregrounding practices of care and relationality, we remain attentive to its limits in challenging the normalised precarious work conditions structuring occupational auto-mobilities. However, even while we suggest that such everyday relations of care and dependence constitute a form of resilience in the face of normalised precarity, we also suggest that these acts rework worker subjectivities, with drivers departing from hegemonic masculine norms, acknowledging vulnerability and adopting less individualised (mobile worker) subjectivities.

### 3. Methodology

Between July and December 2023, 27 truck drivers (10 women and 17 men), aged 18–60, were recruited to take part in a cohort-based longitudinal qualitative study comprised of three repeat interviews spaced 6-months apart. Despite attempts to enhance the ethnic diversity of our sample – by reaching out to training schools and agencies, and by contacting truck drivers on Facebook – our attempts yielded little success. All participants were white; 26 were British and one Hungarian. Unlike in the US context, where the extant literature on truck drivers is largely based, the UK's truck driving workforce comprises predominantly white (94%), male (98%), British (83–85%) workers (RHA, 2025). All the research participants had qualified in 2022/3 as either Class-1 (n = 21; able to drive articulated lorries up to 44-tonnes) or Class-2 (n = 6; rigid lorries over 7.5 tonnes) truck drivers. They were either employed (n = 23) or actively seeking employment at the time of recruitment (n = 4). We recruited new entrant drivers through a popular online forum for UK truck drivers ('TruckNetUK'), truck driver Facebook groups, and through a database of truck drivers derived from a national survey conducted by the research team (anonymised ref) who had consented to taking part in further research. Informed consent was received from all participants in line with institutionally approved ethics procedures.

Of the 27 participants, 24 (15 men, 9 women) and 20 participants (14 men, 6 women) continued into the second and third rounds of interviews in 2024 and 2025. Round one interviews (40–90 min) were conducted through video calls to establish trust and rapport. Rounds two and three (lasting between 20 and 60 min) were more flexibly designed, to maximise retention, and were a mix of voice notes, phone calls or video calls, depending on the participant's preference. Round one interviews focused on participants' educational and employment histories, motivation to become a truck driver, the training process, finding employment, everyday working conditions (if employed), the impact of truck driving on their health, personal and social relationships, and their short-term career goals. Follow-up interviews discussed participants' progress in the job market, their changing perceptions and experiences of work (and its intersections with life), and participants' decisions to quit (or remain) in truck driving. The longitudinal sample ultimately included participants who remained in truck driving (n = 12) and who quit truck driving (n = 8), suggesting that the sample was not biased towards those who remained in the sector. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant identity. All worker participants were provided supermarket vouchers in recognition of their time.

An iterative approach, alternating between the thematic coding of driver interviews and further data collection, was adopted. The initial interviews recurrently brought up post-2021 policy changes to truck driver licensing norms, the inadequacies of the driver training programme, and obstacles posed by the insurance industry, an unanticipated finding that needed further research. This led to interviews in 2024 with driver recruitment and training personnel in small and extra-large haulage/logistics companies (n = 4) and with a consultant in the insurance industry. Driver interviews also revealed a dependence on online groups to learn skills and cope with everyday uncertainties and vulnerabilities. A specific Facebook group that our research team had

been a member of since April 2023, and from which we had recruited several interview participants, came up in many interviews. This prompted a more sustained weekly observation of posts (December 2023–October 2024).

Membership of this Facebook group was granted by the administrator by being fully transparent about our research project, our intent to recruit participants and to learn more about how new drivers were navigating the industry. To strike a balance between participation and non-intrusiveness in the group, our project account sometimes 'reacted' to posts, posted comments on a handful of posts and shared emerging findings through research blogs and policy briefs to remind participants of our presence. Nevertheless, to ensure members continued to find it a safe space to ask questions that were critical to their everyday working lives, our position was more aligned to that of a non-intrusive observer than an active participant. To 'thicken' online social media research (Gagneux, 2019) and better understand the history and ethos of the Facebook group, reflective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with its founder and two moderators (n = 3). As agreed with the group moderators, posts and comments are not quoted verbatim but are paraphrased, retaining key words or phrases (e.g. 'I'm really embarrassed to be asking this...') to protect member identity.

Data analysis took an inductive approach. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and uploaded to NVivo. Initial coding generated 27 nodes, which were refined and consolidated into 7 higher-order analytical themes, of which four emerged as pertinent to our theoretical approach for this paper: labour market precarity emerging from 'insurance', the inadequacy of fast-track training and licensing; the embodied risks and vulnerabilities drivers were exposed to and their reliance on social media to navigate these. The analysis of Facebook group posts exposed the significance of the everyday materialities of truck driving (e.g. reversing, strapping loads, using the tachograph), the embodied, affective experiences of mobile work and life on the road, and a shared recognition of corporeal vulnerability among truck drivers, particularly among new passes.

### 4. Mobile labour, embodied precarity and the negotiation of shared vulnerabilities

#### 4.1. A brief introduction to the UK's road haulage industry

Despite being critical for the UK's economy – moving over 80% of the UK's freight (RHA, 2024a), road haulage is a financially fragile industry. Micro businesses (<10 employees) make up 95% UK road haulage (Allen et al., 2023). Latest available figures show that the average fleet size of UK hauliers is 5.3 vehicles, with average profit margins ranging between 2–3 percent across the industry (DfT, 2021; RHA, 2024c), compared to 8.8% for private non-financial corporations (ONS, 2024a). The highly fragmented composition of the industry, coupled with thin margins, makes hauliers extremely sensitive to the smallest cost increases. Their struggles to survive financially became particularly acute between 2022–2024 amidst high inflation rates, fuel price increases due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and a further shrinking of revenue due to lower freight volumes from depressed consumer demand (RHA, 2024b; RHA, 2024c). As evidence of the financial fragility of the industry, in 2023, 494 haulage firms became insolvent, exceeding the number of haulage company bankruptcies during the 2008–9 financial crisis (RHA, 2024c).

There are approximately 270,000 truck drivers in the UK (DfT & Opperman, 2024). As in many parts of the world, the UK's truck driving industry faces severe challenges in recruitment and retention of drivers: the workforce is ageing, with over 65% aged above 46 (ONS, 2024b) and only 18% under 35 – compared to 31% under 35 in the wider UK workforce (MAC, 2021). Drivers' reasons for exiting include the everyday stress of work, low hourly wages, and long hours of work; truck drivers work 10.5 hours (per week) more, and earn 14% less (median hourly wage) than the average employee (DfT, 2024).

Additionally, the poor quality of roadside facilities and poor work-life balance are key factors pushing drivers to leave or consider leaving the industry (Hopkins et al., 2024).

During the acute driver shortages of 2021, government and industry estimates revealed a shortfall of between 40,000 and 100,000 truck drivers (Pocock, 2021). Driver shortages were attributed to the compounding effects of an ageing workforce not replaced by younger entrants, COVID-19-related reductions in truck driver training and testing capacity, changes to tax legislation that prompted self-employed British truck drivers to quit, and the UK exiting the European Union on 31 January 2020, which resulted in a reduction of 16,000 EU drivers over the next year (Pocock, 2021). In late 2021, the UK Department for Transport announced the introduction of 33 measures to ease the labour shortages in truck driving, a majority of which were geared to ensure uninterrupted supply chains and increase, quantitatively, the pool of licensed truck drivers in the labour market (GOV.UK., 2021b). Campaigns to recruit new drivers into the industry emphasised high earning potential (e.g., claims of £50,000 per annum), the availability of work soon after qualifying their license and stable, well-paid careers in road haulage. Very importantly, to rapidly expand the supply of licensed drivers, the government liberalised truck driver licensing by removing the phased acquisition of truck driving licenses and diluting testing procedures, making driver training and testing less rigorous (GOV.UK, 2022).

In the following 3 sub-sections, we examine how the state of the industry combined with quantitatively driven policy measures and finance capital (insurance) coalesced to create precarity for new passes.

#### 4.2. Insurance, policy and the production of precarity

‘Well, obviously, the media and all these training providers online, all just shout and scream about the driver shortage, ‘personnel required’, from news, everywhere you look, it’s a huge driver shortage in Britain, and you can go and do your training, the government will pay for your training and you’ll have a job in a day. It’s all brilliant, that, but you do your training, you get your license and nobody wants new passes because of the insurance premiums. We’re too expensive for companies. Some of them [haulage companies] can’t actually get insurance on you due to specific insurance policies.’ (Harry, truck driver, male, 25yrs)

Harry was a new pass driver who qualified in mid-2023. He describes how new passes who qualified and entered the truck driving labour market in 2022/3 were surprised to find themselves unwanted by the haulage industry, routinely rejected for jobs because of the sharp increase in vehicle insurance costs if they hired young (<25 years) and/or inexperienced drivers - the very drivers the government had explicitly sought to attract with their fast-tracked training and licensing policy.

Risk is central to the workings of the insurance industry (Christophers, 2015). As with all forms of auto insurance, it is the vehicle (i.e. truck/s) that is insured by haulage firms – but the cost of premiums depends on how the insurance industry models driver risk and assigns risk to different categories of drivers. Irrespective of the motor vehicle, younger drivers are assigned a ‘high risk’ category. A consequence for young and inexperienced truck drivers is that their employment incurs high premiums for haulage businesses. The dominant participant narrative, then, shows the effects of the categorisation of drivers into ‘risk classes’ (Krippner and Hirschman, 2022), if hauliers wished to hire new pass drivers, they had to pay higher excess charges and/or costlier premiums for enhancing their risk exposure. A ‘micro’ haulier known to the project, owning 5 trucks, offered a telling example, wherein his insurance premium with all drivers aged above 40 was £1,700/vehicle per annum in 2024. Hiring anyone below 25 would push it up to £ 5,500/vehicle per annum. That, he declared, would put him out of business. For the majority of micro, small and medium firms in the UK’s haulage industry, already reeling from increasing operational costs

(e.g., from fuel prices, and insurance premiums, RHA, 2010; RHA, 2024b; RHA, 2024c), hiring young and inexperienced drivers is a cost that most are unable to absorb.

Large, multi-national logistics and haulage firms are more shielded from the cost hikes incurred by hiring new passes because these firms ‘self-insure’, that is, they pay their insurers a higher excess on each vehicle. However, these companies also reported having their own in-house licensing/training programmes for aspiring drivers, from which they hire new drivers. One recruitment manager of a multi-national haulage and logistics firm categorically reported that their policy was *not* to hire new drivers who were trained ‘outside’, as the quality of training that drivers received was ‘rather poor’. Thus, it becomes clear to see why the new passes in our research, and more widely, struggled to find work across the industry, with very few companies willing to take them on. But, as we now show, the quick-fix policies implemented by the Conservative government in late-2021 (which remain unchanged at the time of writing this article) to ease truck driver shortages further worsened the perception of risk associated with new pass drivers.

Specifically, these policies removed the phased licensing for truck drivers, which required drivers to first receive a Class-2 truck license and only then become eligible to train for a Class-1 license. The late-2021 changes contradict insurance industry advice, that insists on implementing phased licensing for motor vehicle drivers (ABI, 2012). The removal of phased licensing meant that anyone with a car driving license could become a Class-1 truck driver with a week of practical training – usually under 20 h. While this boosted truck driver licensing numbers, it ignored the complex, incremental, embodied skills that truck driving requires, while also disregarding the safety of new drivers and their exposure to corporeal risks emerging from lower quality training. A road haulage insurance industry consultant sympathised with new drivers’ struggles to find jobs but rationalised why hauliers did not want to hire someone ‘who’s only ever driven a car’. In his eyes, they were ‘mitigating risks’ and decreasing the risk profile of their firms by not hiring young and inexperienced drivers, thus keeping insurance costs to a minimum.

The use of the term ‘mitigating risks’ is itself telling. It speaks to how the materiality and mobile spatiality of truck driving fold into how risk is understood in road haulage work. Trucks cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, and their wheels need to keep turning for firms to earn money. Their mobility therefore is not just central to firms’ profits but also critical to servicing the sizeable financial loans that secure these capital goods. As the largest class of vehicles on the road, trucks have powerful engines and they weigh up to 44-tonnes – 22 times heavier than the average car. Collisions incur huge costs and liabilities, even when accidents do not involve (an)other vehicle/s or transport infrastructure (e.g., railway bridge strikes). At the same time, trucks on the road may be transporting valuable and/or dangerous freight goods (including explosives, inflammables, toxic materials) across varied terrains, night and day and in extreme weather conditions. Freight is insured for carriage, but if the freight being carried is damaged or stolen then those costs are borne by the haulier’s insurer. For these reasons, haulage firms want to hire what they deem to be skilled, responsible and mature drivers.

Driver training programmes are the formal way through which new drivers gain the skills needed to work as a truck driver. Yet our participants were unequivocally critical of the training they received, particularly noting its ‘fast-track’ pedagogical methods, ‘It simply teaches you to drive forward, not much else’ (Amy, female, 21). To ease the burden on Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) examiners and to increase the number of tests completed, the reversing component of the test was ‘simplified’, and responsibility for testing was put on the training school itself (GOV.UK, 2022). Participants recounted how this skill was taught over an hour or two, ‘just to pass the test’ (Emma, female, 58) – a ‘ridiculously simple test bearing no reality to the actual situations and spaces in which trucks are reversed’ as Stephen (male, 48) put it. Schools seemed more interested in churning out new passes and advertising their high pass rates than equipping drivers with the real-life

skills needed to be a truck driver. Tellingly, Stuart (male, 27) recounted how his Class-1 training instructor had stuck yellow tape on parts of the steering wheel on the day of his reversing test to help him know exactly when to stop turning, so that he could pass the test on his first attempt.

Experiences of being rejected for jobs on the grounds of 'being too expensive to insure' and suffering low levels of confidence due to their poor practical truck driving skills translated to new drivers becoming vulnerable to labour exploitation. Being unemployed was not an option for a majority of participants who had spent between £2,000 and £3,500 on training to embark on a new career. Participants commonly said, 'I just needed a job'; 'I'm not thinking about the money, I just need work experience', 'Beggars can't be choosers', when asked about their expectations from a job. So, it was common to find participants taking jobs offering poor wages (£12-13/hr), accepting driving jobs that did not require a truck license, accepting temporary or zero-hour contracts through third-party recruitment agencies, agreeing to work under informal labour relations and accepting the financial risks of their employment. A powerful example of new passes swallowing financial risks was of 21-year-old Amy, who was offered a truck driving job conditional upon her acceptance to pay the excess on her company insurance if her truck met with an accident. She recognised it as a 'risk' but accepted it as the alternative was continued unemployment.

In circumstances of structural exclusion from direct employment, a common pathway was for new entrant truck drivers to turn to recruitment agencies or accept casual jobs, stitching together a patchwork of poor quality jobs, simply to gain work experience. Agencies usually signed drivers onto temporary contracts for a few weeks or a few months, or hired drivers on zero-hour contracts. In these circumstances, new pass drivers were largely unaware of their insurance status. Even when directly employed, labour informality was a normalised reality. Being paid in cash, 'not being on the books', and not having written contracts were conditions that new passes were forced into accepting to gain work experience and become less risky in the future, in the eyes of hauliers and their insurers.

Thus, the global, financialised insurance sector, rather than a benign backdrop (Christophers, 2015; Booth, 2021) to road haulage's operations – in conjunction with the financial fragility of UK's haulage industry, and quick-fix policy prescriptions to address driver shortages – produced precarious employment for new drivers. In trying to shed the classification of 'risk' branded onto them by the insurance and haulage industry, participants were pushed to accumulate work experience by making themselves vulnerable to being exploited by the haulage industry. For new drivers, this not only meant absorbing the risks and costs that the insurance industry and a fragile haulage industry transferred to them, but also contending with the shortfalls of a reconfigured skills training programme.

In the next section, we show how multi-scalar political-economic dynamics, in which capital and state actors – driven by quantitative, market-based rationalities that deem new pass drivers more expendable (Butler, n.d.) – intertwine with the masculinist, individualising norms structuring truck driving work to heighten new pass drivers' exposure to embodied vulnerability and harm.

### 4.3. Occupational auto-mobility and embodied precarity

Colin (40, male) was desperate for a job after four months of being unemployed. Despite having passed his Class-1 license on the first attempt, finding a job was impeded by 'insurance issues'. During our first call in July 2023, he was happy to have secured a Class-2 driving role with 'cowboys', a derogatory term used widely in the industry to describe firms with little respect for legalities or rules. Despite being directly hired by a small haulage firm, he was working quasi-informally, as his contract had no details of his employee entitlements. However, what bothered Colin more than his informal labour relation was being 'kinda compelled' to drive a 'road unsafe' truck; repeated requests to his employers to have it repaired went ignored.

'You're stuck. You're trapped. It is a death trap, and I know I'm risking my life driving it. But you can only complain so much before they get angry with you and fire you.'

Colin's reflection of being 'stuck' and 'trapped' evidences a position of precarity related both to his poor labour market position and embodied exposure to injury from driving a truck unfit for the road. It was common for new passes to be allocated poor quality, run-down 'kit' (truck), as companies did not want to risk allocating newer, better, more expensive trucks to new passes, thus transferring the embodied risks of driving road unsafe vehicles onto them. Colin's worry about being fired for asking for his truck to be repaired shows how the threat of losing one's job acted as a disciplining mechanism for new passes, making them endure potentially life-threatening conditions of occupational automobility that endanger themselves and other road users.

Exposure to corporeal danger, vulnerability and the lack of accountability by employers was especially stark for participants who relied on recruitment agencies to find work, that was usually temporary or on a zero-hour basis. Jack (20, male), a Class-2 qualified truck driver, faced a series of job rejections for 'being too young to insure', and eventually accepted a zero-hour agency job in the run-up to Christmas in 2023, working for a low-cost parcel delivery company. Agency workers like Jack are a flexible workforce that logistics capital relies upon to regulate labour flow in accordance with seasonal fluctuations in consumer demand. Although Jack was grateful for finding some work experience, he was unhappy about the dangers he was exposed to, especially as someone who was called to work night shifts:

'There's no one in the yard to even show you your truck. Many times, we've just had to match keys left on a table to trucks to just figure out which key belongs to which truck. My truck has loads of warning lights in it. I don't even know what they mean. No one teaches you anything. I go into pitch-dark depots, in the middle of nowhere, driving a faulty truck with a company phone number that reaches an automated line. It can be quite scary. But you just have to cope, really'.

Despite agencies being varied in their operations and practices, Jack's experience reflects the generalised understanding of how driver agencies operate, often with a remarkable lack of accountability for drivers' safety and well-being. Jack's experience also makes clear the embodied-materialities and spatialities of truck driving work – being a lone night-time worker, un/loading in 'pitch dark depots', located usually in remote areas, and the affective (fear-inducing) experience of this type of work, compounded by working with faulty trucks with no maintenance support.

Although new drivers were forthcoming about their vulnerabilities and fears, they also demonstrated a growing resignation and a habituation to these experiences, seeing these as being par for the course of being a truck driver. This is evident in Jack's remark above – 'you just have to cope, really'. Similar responses from other participants testified to the internalisation of the need to be resilient and autonomous or independent. 'I was shown the truck, 'here are your keys, you're going to Scotland'. That was it', said Harry (25, male), recounting his first truck driving job; 'No, you're just expected to get on with it' replied Amy (21, female) when asked if she was provided with any formal on-the-job training. Peter (62, male), a Class-1 driver directly employed by a well-known e-commerce firm, spoke at length about the poor maintenance of trucks in his firm due to their cost-cutting efforts. Stress and anxiety were an everyday experience for Peter, not only from the time pressures of just-in-time deliveries, but also from his vulnerability to injury and danger as an older, slightly frail driver with a chronic health condition. His 44-ton truck regularly flashed warning lights – 'I see those warning lights in the cab and think okay what is it now...But I just have to lose that thought. I have to lose that thought and keep going'.

The burden of embodying resilience also weighed heavily on new pass women truck drivers, who felt the need to work harder to prove

themselves worthy of a job. 58-year-old Emma's experiences spoke to this. 'It's like you've got to be grateful to anyone giving you a job', she said when we first spoke in June 2023, reflecting on her experience as a new pass woman driver who faced 'sexism and ageism' in the industry. By our third interview in 2025, she was in her fifth agency job. Emma recounted her most recent experience as an agency driver being made to work 13–15-hour shifts, her employers cramming in ever more 'runs' (trips), some of which involved transporting goods classified as 'dangerous'. When asked if she could not have complained to a line manager about being overworked, especially while transporting dangerous goods, she said:

'I already stuck out like a sore thumb for being a woman and older. I just wanted to keep my head down and show I can complete tasks. I was knackered doing these 15-hour shifts...[carrying combustible gas up hilly terrains] I was tired, scared, and so anxious I would roll over them hills...Intellectually, I knew they [allocated trips] were impossible to finish, but as a new pass, you keep pushing, you want to show you can complete tasks.'

Emma demonstrates how gender and age, in addition to being a new pass, made her push herself to accept working conditions that exposed her to physical danger and burnout. She brought up not only the physically demanding nature of 15-hour shifts but also the mental stress of working those hours while carrying hazardous material up steep terrain in the midlands. She endured these dangers to counter her hyper-visibility ['stuck out like a sore thumb'] as an older woman in a male-dominated occupation and to 'show' [employers/co-workers] that she was capable of doing the job.

These experiences resonate with Butler's conceptualisation of how political and economic systems and the lack of support structures institute conditions of precarity such that they unevenly expose populations to corporeal injury and harm (Puar, 2012; Butler, 2009). The offloading of financial costs and embodied risks onto new drivers not only reduced costs for firms, but can also be read as inducting new truck drivers to become habituated to cultivating self-responsibility, endurance and risk-taking subjectivities. Similarly, the short-cut training and licensing policy, in place of a potentially well-designed and sustained on-the-job training programme, reflects the cavalier attitude of state actors who assume new drivers will simply 'learn' the job by exposing themselves to undue stress, labour exploitation and embodied risks, illustrating how state structures too reproduce and benefit from individualised, risk-taking subjectivities amongst truck drivers.

By early 2025, eight of the 20 participants – including Colin, Jack and Emma – had quit truck driving, all of them frustrated by the lack of career progression and burn-out due to stress and poor working conditions. The remaining 12 participants were still working as truck drivers during the final round of interviews due to being financially dependent on the job. They relied on networked strategies of coping with precarity, by relying on fellow truck drivers on online social media platforms for emotional and practical support. In the following section, we explore how online spaces of support emerged in response to the shared vulnerability of being a truck driver and equip drivers with resources to cope with, and potentially reduce, their experiences of precarity.

#### 4.4. Online, networked spaces of learning and care

With severe inadequacies in the training programme, only made worse by state policies to fast-track truck driver licensing, the lack of on-the-job training, the desperation to find and remain in jobs and the normalised expectation to 'just get on with it', many of our research participants found practical and emotional support in online spaces. Participants relied on and followed more experienced truckers on TikTok, watched instructional 'How to' YouTube videos to make up for the rushed training and testing process, and turned to online social media, particularly Facebook, to learn skills essential to being a truck driver. These practical skills included how to reverse a truck, how to use the

tachograph card<sup>2</sup>, how to secure loads, how to use curtain siders, how to bend the trailer in an articulated truck, how to drive safely on wet roads, during high winds, or frosts and snow, and how to ensure the safety of oneself and the load in a multiplicity of spaces and situations (e.g. safe places to park-up for the night).

Apart from being spaces to learn practical skills, social media groups were also spaces to exchange care and to acknowledge one's corporeal fears and vulnerabilities as a (new) truck driver. Emma brought up her reliance on a women-only trucker Facebook group and recounted how this community had boosted her morale to not give up when she kept being rejected for jobs. Another online space mentioned by several participants was a Facebook group for new truck drivers in the UK. With over 16,000 members as of July 2025, this all-gender group offered a wealth of practical guidance and had also become a space where new passes could share their fears and vulnerabilities with other drivers, including more experienced drivers and fellow new passes.

Harry admitted to checking this Facebook group for new posts daily to learn from other members' posts and replies. The group was especially valuable to him as a tramper ('tramping' is a form of truck driving involving living and sleeping in the truck for consecutive days/nights):

'It's fantastic. I mean, there might be 50, 60, 70 questions go in a day, and you don't see one not answered, they all get answered, and nine times out of ten, properly, and intuitively, and they'll explain. They won't just say – say, you're asking about reversing into a bay an artic [articulated truck], you're struggling with, they don't just say, 'Well, you point it this way and reverse'. It'll [the post will] go through it, 'If you try going in from this angle, or if you do this and make an adjustment, you might find it better.' So, they're kind of very in-depth.'

Aaron, the group's founder, who is in his mid-late 20s, explained to us that he started the group in 2022, motivated by his own experiences as a new driver, getting his Class-2 and 1 licence in the middle of the pandemic. As a 'noob' driver (how more experienced drivers often derogatorily referred to new drivers), he recalled facing 'negativity' from older drivers when he reached out for help on a popular Facebook group for truckers in the UK. Queries from new drivers like himself were often met with dismissive, even hostile, responses from more experienced drivers who reinforced masculine tropes of self-sufficiency. Aaron also spoke about the formation of the group as a response to the ever-present exposure of truck drivers to corporeal danger:

'One of my fears really is I go into a services one night, I close my curtains, anything can happen. You can get carbon monoxide poisoning from the night heater. If you're parked up on a layby you could get broken into, you could have fuel stolen. If they wanted to, because obviously most trucks have a night heater, they could cut the exhaust of the night heater, aim it in towards the cab and kill that driver or at least put him to sleep, they could take the whole load. If something happens to me in the night, it's only the company that's going to go, 'Well, I've checked the tracker and that truck hasn't moved.' That's the only way you find out if something's happened. That is the sad reality for truckers...'

Realising that new truck drivers lacked supportive spaces 'free of negativity and ridicule', he started the group as a means to support new passes through the many risks and uncertainties they faced alone, on and off the roads, which were only compounded by the quick-fix solutions that rendered new passes poorly skilled, and an undesirable and exploited group of workers. He defined his Facebook group 'as a safe space for new drivers to find the right information' and explained the care with which he had selected his group of moderators over six

<sup>2</sup> Tachograph cards are digital records of driver activity, including, driving times, breaks, rest periods and working activities, that drivers must mandatorily maintain.

months: he had someone from a union background, someone driving nights ('because the issues that come up for night-time drivers are different'), a woman truck driver, someone with neurodivergence to assist drivers with these and similar issues, and someone who could respond to drivers' mental health issues and connect them to resources. Chris (28, male), a research participant, when asked what made him an active member of the group who readily offered advice and practical information to others, responded that the group had been 'indispensable' for him due to the 'non-existent industry government support' for new pass drivers and he wanted to do the same for others in his position. Jamie (male, late-20 s), a truck driver and moderator of the group added, 'this group is filling in the gaps left open by policy and industry'.

Apart from imparting practical skills via comments, links to videos, pinned manuals and guidelines about driving and regulations governing truck driving in the UK, this group also attempted to address the hyper-masculinity associated with truck driving as an occupation. Dan (male, mid-50 s), truck driver and a moderator of the group, discussed how new drivers especially suffer from the normalised 'air of macho in truck driving'; the 'I am the best, I know everything' attitude that is prevalent among many experienced truck drivers, who sometimes responded to questions on this site from new passes with 'ridicule' and 'mocking'. Jamie also reflected how their group has been referred to as 'snowflakes' by some older truckers, those 'who are used to the old way of writing' – ridiculing and emasculating members for sharing vulnerabilities and fears. These reactions from older drivers evidence how showing vulnerability can provoke resistance, for it assumes vulnerability as an 'essential identity' and denies individuals a sense of 'mastery' (Butler 2016: 21–26) over their skills, capacities and bodies.

The fear, and almost expectation, of being mocked by fellow truck drivers, and the contrasting ethos of 'respect' and 'value' that shape interactions within this Facebook group were reflected in posts that often began with phrases like, 'I'm really embarrassed to be asking this...', 'Okay, I feel stupid not knowing this...'. Responses to such posts reassured the author that nothing is embarrassing or stupid about their question, reminding them – and the broader group – that they were all there at some point in their careers and answers could be useful even to seasoned truckers. One particularly memorable post related to a new, middle-aged male truck driver's fear and anxiety of night-time driving. Comments to the post included those that shared the drivers' fears, deployed humour to boost the driver's confidence (pointing to the lack of traffic during nights and the freedom to make reversing mistakes without being laughed at) and practical tips to overcome the fear.

Importantly, this group also supported drivers' concerns about social reproduction or habitation on-the-move (Gregson, 2018). New drivers asked and received advice on how to prepare for tramping (tramping involves sleeping in one's truck for days or weeks on end), where to park safely and which roadside services or laybys to avoid due to poor quality toilets, inadequate space or safety issues. Drivers new to tramping were offered advice on how to take care of their health, food habits and mental health, concerns deemed effeminate by most other truck driver online groups. Following Butler (2012: 324), these networked online exchanges can be seen to be creating 'ethical encounters', ones which are rooted in a recognition of the shared embodied vulnerabilities both inherent to truck driving and actively produced due to systemic lapses and the normalised poor conditions structuring occupational auto-mobility, especially for new passes.

These relational, networked, yet in many ways individualised, agential practices of drivers blur classifications of worker agency as 'resilience' or 'reworking' (Katz 2004). It is important to acknowledge that an online space of care and learning such as this one – and the unpaid labour that sustains it – cannot by itself change the very structures and social relations that expose drivers to risk and corporeal vulnerability, especially amongst a workforce with low levels of unionisation (Smith, 2001). However, in making admissible conversations around bodily vulnerability, truck drivers on these online fora, several of whom were our research participants, were also re-working toxic,

hegemonic masculine norms of endurance, self-sufficiency, risk-taking, and challenging the disavowal of vulnerability and induced precarity, conditions that capital and state actors have long benefitted from. In that sense, these acts of resilience suggest changing subjectivities that depart from (neo) liberal subjectivities resting on self-responsibilisation and a refusal of vulnerability (MacLeavy et al., 2021; Butler, 2016). What remains to be seen is if resistance, 'as a social and political form, that is informed by vulnerability' (Butler 2016: 25), can emerge from these networked practices of care and inter-dependence.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has advanced an embodied and relational understanding of precarious work, taking as our case the occupational auto-mobilities of an important sub-group of truck drivers, newly qualified drivers working in the UK. Against a backdrop of supply chain capitalism, a financially fragile UK road haulage industry and political-economic conjunctures (Brexit, COVID-19, fuel price increases), our findings reveal the overlooked role of insurance capital in producing precarious conditions of work for recent entrants into truck driving. Deemed 'high risk', and therefore excluded from insurance coverage or whose coverage comes with expensive premium costs for haulage firms, newly qualified drivers are faced with the reality of an industry unable to absorb the financial cost of employing them. We also show how state actions that diluted truck driver training, testing and licensing procedures in the aftermath of the 2021 acute shortages of truck drivers, exacerbated newly passed drivers' classification as 'high-risk' by capital (insurance and haulage).

Together, these dynamics have generated a pool of workers who are 'too expensive to insure', and as a result, endure poor bargaining power in the labour market. They experience heightened labour exploitation, including an uneven exposure to corporeal danger and harm (Butler, 2009). We also highlight the constitutive role of masculine-coded discourses such as self-reliance, endurance and autonomy underpinning truck driving work, and how these subjectivities are reinforced by capital and state actors. Their heightened, yet simultaneously normalised, anxiety and vulnerability to embodied harm create relational dependencies, with new truck drivers negotiating systemic precarity by relying on each other, and more experienced truck drivers for informal, online forms of care, practical education and advice on social media platforms. This article has showed how labour precarity and its negotiation sit at the intersection of multi-scalar political economic conjunctures that produce precarious employment conditions (e.g., insecure contractual terms, lack of legal protection/s), the material and infra-structural arrangements structuring occupational auto-mobilities of mobile workers, and the gendered norms that constitute worker subjectivities and everyday work experiences.

Our findings extend human and labour geography in three ways. First, responding to calls to be more attentive to the spatial politics of insurance (Booth, 2021), we demonstrate how insurance relates to the everyday experiences of precarity for mobile workers engaged in occupational auto-mobility, contributing to a small body of work that highlights how insurance capital exacerbates the expendability of precarious logistics workers (Bolton, 2024). Second, we advance labour geography scholarship's engagement with precarity (Waite, 2009; Lewis et al., 2015; Strauss, 2018) by extending understandings of mobility beyond its relation to migrant workers, highlighting how material and infra-structural conditions governing the everyday mobilities of recent entrants into truck driving are rendered precarious by capital and state actors. Mobilising a Butlerian understanding of precarity as a politically induced, differentiated and unequal exposure to embodied harm (Butler, 2016), we bring questions of gender and corporeality into analysis of mobile work and employment under supply chain capitalism, thereby responding to calls to engage seemingly 'cultural' dimensions with political-(economic) thinking in geography (Amoore, 2020).

Finally, our findings contribute to debates on worker agency by

demonstrating how situated, everyday forms of ‘constrained’ (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011) agential practices emerge from a shared recognition of corporeal vulnerability and instituted precarity (Butler, 2009; Butler, 2016). Our findings speak to recent calls to explore worker agency as co-constitutive and intersectional, encompassing individualised and collective forms, and acts of resilience and reworking (Jordhus-Lier and Coe, 2024). Nonetheless, while appreciating the future potential of shared vulnerability and acts of resilience (MacLeavy et al, 2021; Butler, 2016), we recognise how certain bodies are disproportionately vulnerable to dangerous, life-threatening mobilities, used to enable the smooth, uninterrupted movement of goods and ultimately the reproduction of the everyday lives of consumers.

At a time when rising right-wing populism in the UK attributes deteriorating labour conditions to migrant workers, our paper provides evidence to show that it is the structural actions of capital and the state that are pushing workers into precarious conditions, even in industries suffering labour shortages. We show that increasing the supply of ‘domestic’ (non-migrant) labour in privatised, fragmented industries with low levels of unionisation (Smith, 2001) and long-standing poor working conditions does not, in itself, solve labour shortages nor automatically improve labour standards.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Kaveri Medappa:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Nicky Gregson:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Debbie Hopkins:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Project administration, Methodology. **AC Davidson:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Al James:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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The data that has been used is confidential.

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