

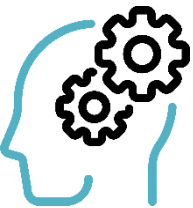
THE FOURTH WAVE OF PRECARISATION? POST-PANDEMIC CRISES AND LABOUR PRECARIITY IN POLAND

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OVERVIEW

- Conceptual framework: the various forms of embeddedness of precarity (J. Hardy)
- The drivers and the forms of precarisation in Poland after the system change in 1989
- Counter-movements against precarity in 2010s and workers' ways of managing precarity;
- The Covid-19 crisis: new and old forms of precarity
- Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

- Poland as the country which from early 2000s till the mid-2010s was the leader in the European Union in terms of the share of workers with temporary contracts in total employment;
 - What were the drivers of precarisation?
 - What were the counter-movements against the precarisation? (K. Polanyi)
 - How did the recent Covid-19 socio-economic crisis and further polycrises (A. Tooze) contribute to the reproduction and transformation of the nature of precarity?
- Data used from earlier research projects:
 - EC DG Employment (VS/2014/0534) “PRECARIR” project – 20 expert interviews with social partners
 - DFG-NCN PREWORK project (UMO-2014/15/G/HS4/04476) – desk research, 63 BNIs with young workers (18-35), CATI on N=1000 (18-30)
 - NCN COV-WORK project (UMO-2020/37/B/HS6/00479) - desk research, 50 BNIs, 15 FGIs (essential workers in education, health care, social care, logistics), CATI survey (N=1400, 18+)

DEFINING PRECARITY

What is precarity?

- Precarity as 'work for remuneration characterised by uncertainty, low income and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements' (Vosko 2000)
- Precarity as a deviation from what is considered standard and normal (employment) in a particular society (Castel, 2000; Dörre 2014)
- Precarity as new norm (Lorey 2015) vs. precarity as the basis for class formation and mobilisation (Standing 2011)

SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF PRECARIITY

- The embeddedness of precarity (Hardy 2016)
 - **Structural:** the relationship between precarity and spatiality and dynamism of capitalism – in Poland, in particular, related to system transformation and semi-peripherality producing constant demand for skilled, flexible, low paid workers
 - **Institutional:** the regulatory framework as well as norms and cognitive schemes/expectations connected to the ways of “normalizing” both standard employment and precarity;
 - In the Polish context, the roots of standard employment can be found in regulations of employment in interbellum Poland (employment contracts, as a type of service contracts, and civil law contracts co-existed). Next, it was introduced to the Labour Code in 1974 which with over 75 amendments persists until now (Florek 2015; Świątkowski 2015)
 - Civil law contracts and hybrid contracts (e.g. outwork contracts) existed also before 1989; in 1996, employment contracts were made a „default” / „expected” form of employment in the Labour Code
 - Flexibilisation of temporary employment contracts in 2002-03 (TAWs regulation, unlimited number of temporary contracts until 2004; again in 2009-2011 as a part of anti-crisis law); **the problem of labour law enforcement (!)**
 - **Agential:** workers’ ways of managing precarity at the individual and collective levels which can lead the reproduction and transformation of its structural and institutional basis (the micro-macro link) – including the normalisation of non-standard employment

THE FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN POLAND

Type of contract	Wages	Working time	Employment security	Contributions to (a) social security, (b) health security	Voice / collective organisation	Contracts classification
Open-ended employment contract	Minimum wage applies	Regulated by the Labour Code	Yes	Obligatory	Full trade union membership rights	(1) Standard labour employment
Temporary employment	Minimum wage applies	Regulated by the Labour Code	Limited (since 01.01.2016 – dependent on length of service)	Obligatory	Full trade union membership rights	(2) Non-standard labour employment
Part time employment contracts	Pro rata minimum wage applies	Regulated by the Labour Code (pro rata)	Yes	Obligatory (pro rata)	Full trade union membership rights	
Temporary agency work (2003)	Depending on the type of contract	Depending on the type of contract	Limited (short notice periods)	Depending on the type of contract	Union membership rights granted in case of	(1) and (2)
Freelance contract	Minimum hourly wage (since 1.01.2017)	Not regulated by the Labour Code	No	Obligatory (with exceptions)	Yes (since January 2019, restricted before)	(3) Non labour employment and self-employment
Specific-task contract	No minimum wage	Not regulated by the Labour Code	No	No / Sometimes	Yes (since January 2019)	
Self-employment	No minimum wage	Not regulated by the Labour Code	No statutory guarantees	Obligatory	Yes (since January 2019)	

Source: the PRECARIR project, Mrozowski, Maciejewska 2016

FOUR WAVES OF PRECARISATION

The waves of precarisation	Drivers	Key (symbolic) forms	Counter-movements
1 st wave (late 1980s-early 1990s)	Neoliberal shock therapy	Employment insecurity, high unemployment, informal employment	Limited; fighting unemployment “by any means”
2 nd wave (late 1990s – late 2000s)	EU accession and pre-accession public sector and labour law reforms	Temporary employment contracts, TAWs, bogus self-employment	Trade unions and radical social movements
3 rd wave (late 2000s – 2020)	Global financial crisis and anti-crisis measures	Temporary employment contracts and civil law contracts	Trade unions; the EU and since the mid-2010s – the governments;
4 rd wave (2020s +)	Post-pandemic polycrisis, immigration, and the normalisation of “gigs”	Insecurity across standard and non-standard forms Gig work via platforms (rather symbolic)	Mostly the government, partially the EU; greater focus on job quality

DYNAMICS OF TEMPORARY CONTRACTS (15-74)



Source: Eurostat LFS

COUNTER-MOVEMENTS AGAINST PRECARITY (2000-2020)

Instruments	Achievements	Challenges
Trade union organising and servicing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- US-model of organising adopted by Solidarnosc in late 1990s- Protest-based organising, milieu-based and radical unionism; COZZ in 2020s	Anti-union employer strategies Limited union interest (lack of resources) and workers interest in joining the unions
Collective bargaining and social dialogue	Covering some TAWs by CB in MNCs and soft measures in others	Limited importance, low CB coverage (approx. 15%)
Political and litigation instruments (national and international)	Legal changes in 2015+ <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Decrease in temporary contracts- Removing legal barriers to organise self-employed and civil-law workers	Dangers of political coalitions for trade union autonomy Lack of sustainability
Media-oriented instruments; building societal union power	Bringing the problem of precarious work to public attention through large scale campaigns	Lack of political work on the meaning of organising

Source: the PRECARIR project, Mrozowicki, Maciejewska 2017

NORMALISATION OF PRECARIITY

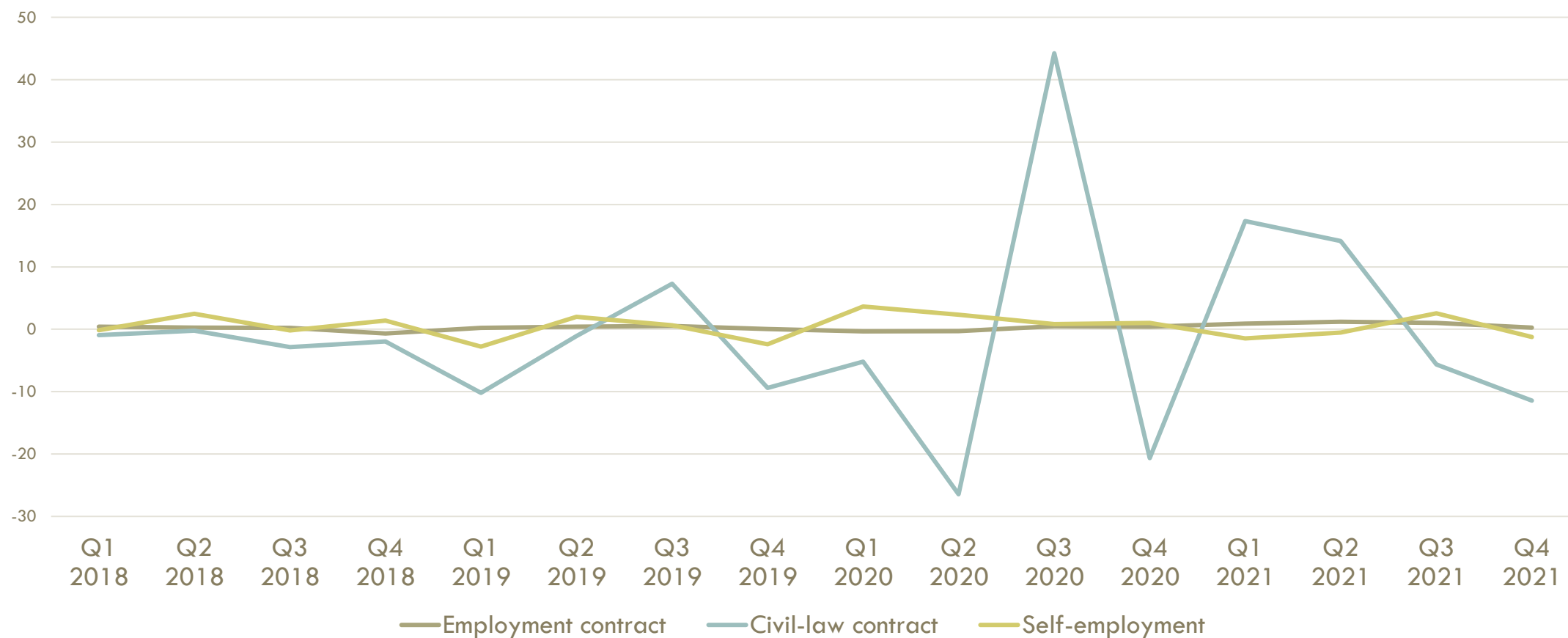
- Precarity (among young people aged up to 35) has been increasingly 'normalised', that is, taken for granted as an inevitable feature of life (the results of the PREWORK project, Mrozowicki, Trappmann 2020).
- Precarity has been rarely seen as biographical problem not just within the 'creative', high-skilled milieu, but also among some lower-skilled, but resourceful workers ('bricolageurs')
- Precarity was seen as problematic in case of older cohort of informants, as well as in case of growing life precariousness (unsupportive social networks, biographical predicaments etc.) → support for generational explanations
- Critique of precarity has been more likely in case of those who developed political consciousness in the course of their lives

PANDEMIC AND PRECARIITY: THE 4TH WAVE?

- Despite some cassandric predictions, the pandemic and a series of lockdowns that followed have not resulted in an economic breakdown;
- Very strong public intervention provided a cushion, yet at the expense of rapid rise in public debt
- Gradual decline in the share of civil-law contracts due to regulatory efforts was interrupted by the pandemic (support of those with civil-law contracts was individualised and limited to one-time compensation of some 1200 EUR)
- Pandemic demonstrated the role of precarious, civil-law contracts and dependent solo-self employment as labour market buffers

THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Quarterly % change in the number of workers by the type of work situation



PANDEMIC AND PRECARITY: WHAT'S NEW?

- Health-related risks and precariousness: the inequalities between those working 'online' and 'on-site' frontline essential workers, often with precarious contracts (e.g. in logistics, gig work, social care)
- The importance of the 'essential work' discourse and 'war' rhetoric for justification of deteriorating job quality in essential frontline services;
- Pre-pandemic precarity (and precariousness) reproduced and magnified by pandemic: young, minority, female workers more affected
- Pandemic precarity becomes a biographical problem if it overlaps with broader precariousness and interacts with other biographical problems
- The importance of the 'pandemic phasing' – the gradual 'normalisation' of pandemic in subsequent waves → a potential for collective mobilisation?

(PRECARIOUS) WORKERS PROTESTS

- No increase in strikes and industrial disputes in 2020 accompanied by protests beyond company premises (e.g. White Village 2.0, street protests of nursing home workers, organising and quasi-strike of couriers, blockades of Amazon deliveries)
- Scepticism of unions regarding the support of workers with civil-law contracts from the Labour Fund
- Some discontent observed among the precarity-threatened groups such as dependent solo-self employment manifesting in a bottom-up social movement called Business on Strike – now an ultra-liberal, anti-systemic party.
- "Voting with workers' feet" (Meardi) - the exodus of teaching staff and in health care personnel accelerated by the pandemic and the deteriorating job quality across various categories;

REFERENDUM STRAJKOWE



Sources: Facebook profiles of OZZ IP, Konfederacja Pracy, Strajk przedsiębiorców

NORMALISATION 2.0?

- New precarity experience: even more normalisation (hypothesis)?
 - low unemployment and labour market shortages: precarity reinterpreted as choice?
 - institutional conversion of civil-law and temporary employment contracts in 2015+
 - worsening of job quality during covid-19 regardless of contracts
- Potentials of opposition against precarity
 - Post-pandemic polycrisis increasing precariousness in the sphere of reproduction (rising debts & living costs due to inflation?)
 - no major changes in socio-economic consciousness, but growth in support of stable contracts for all (Gardawski et al. 2022)

CONCLUSIONS

- Standard employment as a norm institutionalized since (at least) the period of interbellum Poland and reinforced during state socialism, co-existing with civil-law contracts.
- After 1989, four waves of precarisation and countermovements against it led by trade unions, social movements and, more recently, the state
- Slowdown and partial reversal of the expansion of temporary contracts as well as conversion between temporary employment contracts and civil-law contracts – e.g. in terms of social security contributions, minimum wage, representation rights (see: Muszynski 2019)
- Pandemic slowed down, but has not stopped the state- and unions-led policies aimed at combating precarious employment (e.g. state support of self-employed and civil-law workers)
- Still, a general trend in socio-economic consciousness and life strategies is related to the normalization of non-standard employment as transitory, expected aspect of biographical experiences, especially those of young people

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