

## PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: DETERMINANTS AND CHALLENGES THROUGH THE LENS OF HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to show how critical moments in recent world history – the Covid-19 pandemic, the fourth industrial revolution, and migration crises – have affected employment in social enterprises and, more broadly, in the third sector.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Analyses of international reports of global agencies, analysis of international studies on labour markets, analyses of situation of social enterprises from Poland in the perspective of historical institutionalism.

**Findings:** Precariousness in the labour market will be one of the most critical challenges of modern times. Informal jobs will grow at the same rate as formal employment as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although recent estimates suggest a return to informal employment for both women and men, the most severe effects of the pandemic will play out along pre-existing lines of inequality and marginality, causing the most severe consequences for those who were already most vulnerable to them.

**Social implications:** In the biggest risk of job insecurity are the social groups of less developed economies, where the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic is forcing a shift in corporate strategies toward cost-cutting and the search for labor savings. The global challenges of today's world mean that further research on the impact of exogenous shocks on job insecurity should be conducted.

**Originality/value:** Analysis of modern exogenous shocks in perspective of historical institutionalism (important for scientific theory with applied aspects for social and economic practice).

**Keywords:** precarious employment, social entrepreneurship, NGO, historical institutionalism, exogenous shocks.

**Category of the paper:** conceptual paper, general review.

## 1. Introduction

The term precarious employment (PE) does not have a widely accepted definition in Europe (European Parliament, 2016). Attempts to define PE take on an economic perspective, with researchers using the term to describe non-standard or temporary employment that may be poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and unable to support a household. PE includes all forms of precarious, contingent, and flexible work, as well as illegal, occasional, and temporary employment (European Commission, 2004). Among flexible forms of employment, researchers list such forms as home-based work, piecework, and freelancing, temporary employment, part-time employment, outsourcing, zero-hour contracts or platform work (Alberti et al., 2018; McKay et al., 2012; Mikołajczak, 2022).

In social terms, precarious employment is commonly defined as a job that combines several unfavourable characteristics of employment, such as job insecurity (e.g., temporary nature of the contract, uncertainty of the contractual relationship, underemployment and having multiple jobs), inadequate income for qualifications, and limited worker rights and weak social protection (e.g., lack of unionization, social security, regulatory support and workplace rights) (Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Siegmann, Schiphorst, 2016). There are also many studies in the literature identifying the social groups most vulnerable to PE, including mainly the poorly educated, expatriates, young people and women (Anderson, 2010). A similar situation exists in the case of employment in the third sector in Poland, which, on the one hand, generates employment flexibility through the project-based nature of its funding and activities, and on the other, makes it precarious (Klon/Jawor, 2022; Mikołajczak, Skikiewicz, Waligóra, n.d.).

A review of scientific research aimed at explaining the phenomenon of uncertainty in the labour market makes it possible to embed such research in various scientific theories, allowing a better understanding of the causes of job insecurity, which the modern world also faces. Among such causes, scholars mainly point to distortions resulting from technological advances, attempts to reduce production costs (Wright, 2013), involuntary layoffs, global inequalities, public reforms and political influences in developing economies (Novakova, 2020), as well as excessive bureaucracy, or limited resources (Mikołajczak, 2021b).

A great many authors attribute the reasons for labour market uncertainty to distortions generated by neoliberal economies. Their attempts to explain them on the grounds of the Marxist theory of labour-capital relations can be found, for example, in the works of Allen (2014), Umney (2022), Kalleberg (2009) or Standing (2011). In this context, various researchers stress that the exploitation of workers is an obvious consequence of the injustice of the capitalist system. According to the researchers, capitalist economies are subject to cyclical crises, leading to the degradation of the forces of production, high unemployment and growing insecurity (Allen, 2014). Kalleberg (2011) links precariousness or precarity with a decline of

the so-called “standard employment relation”, in particular in advanced capitalist countries during the neoliberal period. The author writes about “bad jobs”, “polarized” and precarious employment systems in the US, which is characteristic of this line of thought (see also Kalleberg, 2009). Similarly, Alchian (1950) argues. The researcher points out that an integral phenomenon of liberal economics is the uncertainty associated with the labour market. Standing (2011) sees the precariat as an emergent class, a class in the making that is internally divided at present. The author writes that:

*As a ‘dangerous’ class, it must become a class-for-itself to abolish itself. In other words, it must become sufficiently united to have the political strength to pressurize the state into creating the social and economic conditions that would remove its precariousness.*

Umney (2022), on the other hand, argues that the term precariat is sometimes used in a way that is too static when describing the experiences and situations of workers under capitalism. Drawing on the Marxist concept of the labour-capital relationship, the author stresses that categories and institutions are transformed and destabilized, and the social world often becomes incoherent or contradictory.

Important explanations for the PE phenomenon are provided by researchers of institutional theory. As the main cause of uncertainty in the labour market, the authors point to its progressive deregulation after the World War II in neoliberal economies, characterized by the reduction of the role of the labour unions, the financialization and globalization of economies, and the pursuit of greater flexibility in labour devoid of social security (Kalleberg, Vallas, 2018, p. 5). In the search for the causes of precarity, the authors point to exogenous shocks that have caused significant increases in precarious employment in neoliberal economies. For example, Standing (2011) writes that the precariat was growing under the hidden reality of globalization, which came to light with the 2008 the financial shock. As Llivanos and Papadopoulos (2019, p. 13) stress:

*The corrosion of national employment systems through the emerging superiority of enterprise-based agreements, over sectoral ones, constitute some of the most notable examples provided by institutionalists.*

Placek et al. (2022) also write about the idea of “exogenous shocks” which, according to the researchers, have an important place in current scientific thought, which draws inspiration from the idea of historical institutionalism. In this context, Pierson (2000) writes about “path dependency”. The author points out that under historical institutionalism, critical moments or turning points shape the basic contours of social life.

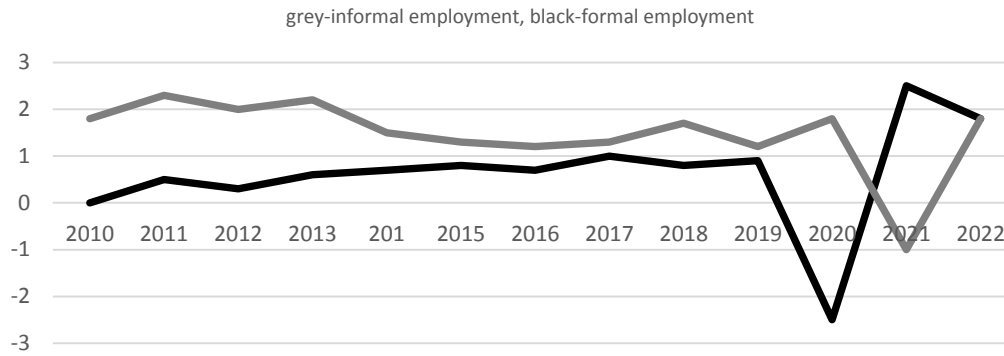
## 2. The role of exogenous shocks on labour market uncertainty

### 2.1. COVID-19 pandemic

One of the most serious exogenous shocks currently facing modern society is the Covid-19 pandemic (Placek et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic forced public administrations in many countries to impose sanitary restrictions and regulations that significantly hindered or prevented the smooth operation of entities in all sectors of the economy. Due to the pandemic, the financial situation of most of them deteriorated significantly. According to GUS in its report *Non-profit Organizations during the COVID-19 epidemic (March-August 2020)* non-profit organizations predicted that more than one-third of the total number of such institutions would be prone to experiencing financial deterioration, and a reduction in employment levels was predicted by 14.4 percent of the total number of non-profit organizations in Poland (Gardziński, 2021). The initial survey findings regarding the COVID-19 restrictions revealed the extensive magnitude of the crisis within the Polish social economy sector. Research conducted by OWES indicated that fundamentally the entire sector was grappling with substantial challenges in maintaining ongoing economic activity, thereby affecting social outcomes such as the employment of marginalized individuals. Furthermore, there were anticipations of employment cuts, liquidity loss, and up to 27% non-profit organisations foresaw the potential for liquidation (Krenz, 2021).

Matilla-Santander et al. (2021b) highlight at least 5 critical ways in which the pandemic crisis has affected and will continue to affect precarious workers around the world: (a) precarious employment will increase, (b) precarious workers will become more precarious, (c) precarious workers will face unemployment without official dismissal, (d) precarious workers will face severe stressors and dramatic life changes that (e) PE could be detrimental to controlling Covid-19 or could generate new outbreaks. The authors point to the need to develop a new social contract in which the work of all workers is recognized and protected through adequate labour contracts, job security and social protection in the new economy, both during and after the Covid-19 crisis.

According to an International Labour Organization Survey (ILO, 2020a), informal employment grew at a fast pace in 2021-22 after heavy losses registered in 2020. The survey results show that formal employment grew faster than informal employment between 2010 and 2019, leading to a gradual reduction in the rate of informal employment by 5 percentage points. The pandemic shock further affected informal jobs, causing an additional reduction in the share of informal employment. In 2021, the trend reversed dramatically, with growth in informal employment recovering fully from 2020 levels, while formal employment did not. Moreover, ILO researchers estimate that informal jobs will grow at the same rate as formal employment in 2022, jeopardizing further formalization of employment. ILO research shows that this global trend is being driven by low- and lower-middle-income countries (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Annual growth rate of formal and informal employment 2010-2022

Source: own elaboration based on data from the International Labour Organization. For estimates based on the ILO forecasting model, see Gomis et al., *The ILO Nowcasting Model: Using High-Frequency Data to Track the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Labour Markets*, *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, 38, No. 3, 815 – article correspond to the previous edition of the model) and the online Technical Appendix 1 for a brief methodological overview (see more [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_859255.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/briefingnote/wcms_859255.pdf), p. 4).

In Polish non-governmental organizations, a notable portion of staff members are engaged through flexible and temporary employment arrangements. This situation, exacerbated by the pandemic crisis, could potentially result in long-term exclusion from the job market for these individuals. Moreover, the apprehension of losing skilled personnel prompts NGOs to offer their employees permanent contracts. However, the COVID-19 pandemic might alter this dynamic, leading NGOs to increasingly favour flexible employment arrangements as a cost-saving measure, aligning with the preferences of NGOs' leaders (Mikołajczak, 2021a).

## 2.2. Fourth industrial revolution

According to many researchers, the fourth industrial revolution, also referred to as Industry 4.0 (Dantas et al., 2021; Kravchenko, Kyzymenko, 2019) or the Gig Economy (Vallas, Schor, 2020), is fundamentally changing the way humanity lives, works and interacts.

According to Kalleberg and Vallas (2018, p. 5), the fourth industrial revolution has reduced capital requirements for labour, accelerating capital mobility and the management of global commodity chains. In addition, it has expanded the ability of investors to monitor value creation at the enterprise level.

Combined with the Covid-19 pandemic, the digital revolution has enabled companies to use digital platforms as an organizational structure. The emergence of gig workers or crowdworkers has turned workers into independent contractors who can be forced into risks previously handled by companies (de Ruyter et al., 2019; Webster, 2016). This leads to a redistribution of risk from the state and employers onto citizens themselves (Ferguson, 2013), as well as a drift toward informal and part-time employment (Mikolajczak, 2022). Farrel et al. (2020) point out that machines are increasingly doing the work that humans once did. Farrel (2015) claims that "The workplace of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is not a 'place' at all but a network of spaces".

According to pessimistic predictions, many current jobs will be lost due to the automation and robotization of production processes, and Industry 4.0 will lead to a huge net loss of jobs. The author argues that there is also a threat of lower wages as jobs are gradually lost to automation and robots. However, when it comes to social enterprises, the extent of automation remains inadequately assessed due to the challenge of integrating modern production elements into entities primarily engaged in service provision directly to society. Expanding the concept of social entrepreneurship, robotization, along with other production and service innovations, tends to occur incidentally, often through the adoption of best practices from the open market or from social enterprises operating abroad. Consequently, in the context of Poland, it's more accurate to discuss the dissemination of best practices in automation rather than framing it as an intrinsic aspect of social entrepreneurship itself (Mikołajczak et al., n.d.).

In quantitative terms, the alarming results of the above studies are not supported by data presented at the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018). As the WEF's research showed, there was projected to be a structural decline of 10% in the number of certain types of occupations by 2022. However, this would be fully offset by the creation of new jobs and the emergence of new occupations (up 11%). In 2018, about half of core occupations, which account for the majority of employment in all industries, would remain fairly stable until 2022. Thus, it was estimated that 75 million jobs could be displaced by the above trends, while 133 million additional new positions could emerge simultaneously.

The report also stated that by 2022, the importance of groups of new roles would increase significantly, while other groups of occupational profiles would become increasingly redundant. Across all industries, by 2022, groups of new occupations would increase their share of employment from 16% to 27% of our respondents' total employee base, while the share of declining roles would decrease from the 2018 level of 31% to 21% (see Table 1). In purely quantitative terms, the estimates of employers in the report therefore showed that by 2022, the structural decline in employment in certain types of occupations (down 10%) would be fully offset by job creation and the emergence of new occupations (up 11%) (WEF, 2018).

**Table 1.**

*Share of stable, new and redundant roles 2018 vs 2022 (projected)*

<b>Occupational roles</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2022</b>
Stable roles	48%	48%
New roles	16%	27%
Redundant	31%	21%
Other	5%	4%

Source: own elaboration on the basis of the WEF 2018 World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Survey 2018, pp. 5, 8. Data set contains 313 unique responses by global companies from a wide range of industry sectors, collectively representing more than 15 million employees; analysis is based on a diversified sample with a focus on balanced representation of company-level responses for 20 developed and emerging economies collectively representing about 70% of global GDP (see more: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2018.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf)).

While the quantitative job forecasts presented by the WEF were optimistic to some extent, the issue of job insecurity for workers being replaced by robots raises a number of concerns. Questions remain open about the processes for workers at risk of uncertainty acquiring the right competencies and skills. How to reduce the likelihood of being replaced by a robot and the sense of uncertainty associated with it is the subject of much discussion among economists and sociologists. Researchers point out that it is necessary to meet the needs of aging populations and maintain security and privacy requirements, while at the same time taking into account economic aspects. Researchers emphasize that in the new economic model, capital is crucial in the first place, with a properly educated workforce second. It is necessary for employees to adapt to technological changes, which are occurring at a very fast pace. As research indicates, 65% of children currently entering primary school will be working in entirely new types of employment in the future that do not yet exist (WEF, 2016). There is an urgent need to address the impact of new technologies on labour markets through updated education policies aimed at rapidly upgrading the education and skills of people of all ages (WEF, 2018).

Another critical challenge and context confronting social enterprises involves the attitudes and skills of both individuals and economic actors regarding the adoption of modern technologies for market operations. This challenge is observed along the spectrum of digital exclusion vs. digital nomadism, while also being linked to broader labor market trends, including automation and robotization. In literature, digital exclusion is considered a dimension of social exclusion, with two distinct forms: exclusion due to limited access to computers and the internet, and exclusion originating from a reluctance to embrace modern technologies (Kujawski, 2018). Those who remain outside the digital realm are unable to engage in various facets of social life and market competition, thus thoroughly missing out on its benefits (Mikołajczak et al., n.d.).

On the other hand, digital nomadism is a concept primarily associated with the younger demographic, who, unlike previous generations, shape their attitudes towards work, leisure, and technology usage differently. A digital nomad is an individual who, leveraging their digital skills and resources, enjoys greater lifestyle flexibility compared to earlier generations. (Mikołajczak et al., n.d.).

On the other hand, findings are presented by researchers who are optimistic about the changes resulting from Industry 4.0 for the labour market. They claim that Industry 4.0 will create new jobs and fields of employment, and thus increase the employment rate. For example, Karacay (2018) argues that Industry 4.0 requires all workers, even those with low skills, to have an ICT skill set. At the same time, the author emphasizes that Industry 4.0 requires that the necessary skills of workers include more than basic skills. Thus, in addition to hard skills, an employee should have soft skills such as collaboration, communication and the autonomy to perform their tasks in hybrid operating systems. Also, Bonekamp and Sure (2015) point out that in today's complex world of work, adaptability is becoming the most important ability for employees, so in order to succeed in their jobs, employees need to get into the habit of

continuous learning, not only in their own profession, but more broadly through an interdisciplinary perspective.

Although the OECD's (2016) report also finds concerns that automation and digitization in recent years could eventually lead to a jobless future, the report's authors are reassuring in that it is not entire occupations that are disappearing, but individual tasks that are being automated by technology. The OECD researchers also argue that this approach could lead to an overestimation of job automation, as occupations labelled as high-risk often still contain a significant share of tasks that are difficult to automate.

### 2.3. Migratory movements

The biggest migratory shock in recent European history are the migratory movements caused by the Russian Federation's aggression in Ukraine. According to an ILO (2022a) study, an estimated 7 million people have been internally displaced within Ukraine. The refugee outflow has had an asymmetric impact on the Ukrainian labour market. The ILO estimates that some 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees, mostly women, were employed in Ukraine before fleeing the aggression, representing 10.4% of the country's total labour force before the conflict. Employment losses in Ukraine resulting from refugees fleeing the war are not evenly distributed across occupational groups. Before the war, the main occupations filled by current refugees included office support workers, service and sales workers, specialists, and technicians, and related professionals. In terms of economic activity, about 16% of Ukrainian refugees worked in education before their departure, and another 7% in health and social services (see Table 2).

**Table 2.**

*Previously employed refugees (percentage of total pre-conflict employment by occupation in Ukraine)*

Occupation	Percentage
Clerical support workers	19.1%
Service and sales workers	14.3%
Professionals	14.3%
Technicians and associate professionals	13.6%
Managers	11.4%
Basic occupations	8.6%
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	4.2%
Craft and related trades workers	3.7%
Plant and machine operators	2.8%

Source: ILO (2022a) Monitor on the world of work. Tenth edition. Multiple crises threaten the global labour market recovery, p.15. ILO estimates based on Ukraine Labour Force Survey 2021 and UNHCR Ukraine Refugee Operational Data Portal (see more: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_859255.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/briefingnote/wcms_859255.pdf)).

The refugee outflow is likely to have had a large impact on the labour force in these sectors and occupations in Ukraine. Three host countries, Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic - all of which faced labour shortages in certain sectors before the pandemic - account for 61% of



Ukrainian refugees registered for temporary protection or similar national protection programs in Europe. As far as the previously employed refugee population is concerned, the highest number of refugees relative to the national labour force are found in the Czech Republic and Poland (1.8%). In all other host countries, Ukraine's previously employed refugee population represents less than 1% of the national labour force.

A recent survey of Ukrainian refugee employment conducted by the UNHCR (2022) found that 28% of respondents had obtained paid employment or were self-employed in host countries. This is well below employment rates among the pre-war refugee population, indicating the challenges for refugees in securing employment. Recognition of skills and qualifications, access to language courses and access to childcare were identified as key barriers to securing employment (ILO, 2022a, pp. 13-18). Given the circumstances faced by social enterprises during the war, particular attention is warranted regarding employment. Research conducted by Gardziński suggests that a significant portion of Polish social enterprises, around 47%, maintained the same level of employment, while 28% experienced an increase, and 20% saw reductions in staff numbers (2023). This contrasts with findings from a survey conducted during the pandemic, where 61% reported no change in employment, 16% reported an increase, and 20% experienced reductions. Interestingly, amid the conflict in Ukraine, the majority of social enterprises (66%) did not rely on volunteers, while 30% experienced an increase in volunteer numbers (Gardziński, 2023). When questioned about hiring refugees from Ukraine, 38% of Polish social enterprises affirmed the opportunity, while 8% cited benefiting from financial support programs as a reason for doing so. Conversely, 21% of social enterprises did not encounter the chance to employ refugees, and 14% responded negatively due to insufficient resources or lack of access to them. Approximately 14% of social enterprises did not expect to employ individuals from Ukraine, and 4% cited various other reasons for being unable to hire refugees (Gardziński, 2023). A key challenge for EU member states is rapid and effective integration of the refugees into the labour market. Key measures include improving access to jobs and training, as well as the need to recognize existing skills and invest in new skills (especially vocational education and training, and work-based learning). According to ILO experts, Ukrainian refugees have some characteristics that facilitate their integration prospects (e.g., high levels of education, existing social networks and the right to employment under temporary protection), but also some that hinder them (the increased burden of childcare for women who have had to leave their partners). Primary challenges perceived by Polish social enterprises in their operational environment influenced by Ukrainian migrations include significant financial instability, adverse macroeconomic conditions such as elevated inflation and energy crises as well as burdensome bureaucracy. Additionally, they face obstacles in fundraising, ensuring stable employment for their workforce, and navigating excessive formalities when accessing funds (Gardziński, 2023).

### 3. Conclusions

The results of the analyses in this paper indicate that informal jobs will grow at the same rate as formal employment as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although recent estimates suggest a return to informal employment for both women and men, the most severe effects of the pandemic will play out along pre-existing lines of inequality and marginality, causing the most severe consequences for those who were already most vulnerable to them. Those at risk of job insecurity are the social groups of less developed economies, where the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic is forcing a shift in corporate strategies toward cost-cutting and the search for labor savings. The pandemic has also caused increased migration. Since many of the jobs held by migrant workers during the pandemic are temporary, informal or unprotected, it is important to monitor the broader socioeconomic impact in order to protect their rights and reduce the vulnerabilities they face.

The increasing digitization of global markets in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution also has a significant impact on labor market uncertainty. As shown, employment in the form of casual labor and the "gig" economy mainly affects young workers and low-skilled workers. Automation of their jobs is higher compared to high-skilled workers. Therefore, many researchers recommend that in the future attention be focused on the growing inequality and the provision of adequate training, especially for low-skilled workers. As numerous studies point out, Industry 4.0 requires workers to have more than basic competencies. In addition to hard skills, an employee should have soft skills such as collaboration, communication and autonomy to perform their tasks in hybrid operating systems. Adaptability to changing employment conditions and the habit of continuous learning, not only in one's profession, but more broadly through an interdisciplinary perspective, must be the standard in employees', especially social entrepreneurs, approach to employment. Unfortunately, studies show that few employees receive training that adapts them to current challenges, nor is the development of digital competencies the focus of business. Meanwhile, retraining and upskilling need more attention among company managers.

Another determinant of the increase in precarious employment examined in this study is the contemporary migration shocks caused by pandemic on the one hand and armed conflicts on the other, among others, in Ukraine. Analysis of research in this area indicates that migrants are among the workers most vulnerable to precarious employment and job loss. They are often the first to be fired, especially since they are more likely to occupy precarious jobs. The research underscores the need for instruments to safeguard migrants against precarious employment.

The global challenges of today's world mean that further research on the impact of exogenous shocks on job insecurity should be conducted. The scientific literature provides numerous studies of the inevitability of the next crises - energy or climate - which will force public policymakers, international organizations and researchers to think more deeply about

instruments aimed at reducing job insecurity in order to maintain the competitiveness and sustainable growth of global economies.

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