

## NON-STANDARD FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT AND THE NEED FOR STABILITY – THE PERSPECTIVE OF WORKING WOMEN IN POLAND

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**Purpose:** The aim of the paper is to empirically verify the scope to which women in Poland work in non-standard forms, as well as assessment of these forms in comparison to standard forms, taking into account satisfaction of the need for employment stability.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The article presents the results of quantitative research conducted using the CAWI technique. The research was conducted on a representative sample of 1000 economically active Polish citizens.

**Findings:** The research results show that on the labour market in Poland, working in non-standard forms of employment affects both women and men to a similar degree. In comparison to non-standard forms of employment, standard forms are considered to better satisfy the interests of employees. From the perspective of working women in Poland, work in standard forms better satisfies the need for employment stability.

**Research limitations/implications:** The research was conducted in Poland, therefore the results do not take into account forms of employment specific to other countries. There is a need to conduct research in this regard that would take into account the effect of factors that appeared after the study period. Going forward, it would also be necessary to take into account factors that will impact on the labour market, for example changes in legal provisions.

**Practical implications:** Taking into consideration the needs of employees is in line with the concept of sustainable human resources management. Ensuring employees work in stable conditions may be linked with greater investment by employers in their development and building their long-term employability, as well as having a positive impact on their well-being.

**Originality/value:** The research results are based on a representative sample that takes into account age and gender, contributing to knowledge on the use of non-standard forms of employment in Poland in relation to research results published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS). Demonstration of the lack of differences between women and men in assessing the fulfilment of employee needs, including the need for employment stability, points to a tendency

towards the blurring of differences between the functioning of women and men on the labour market.

**Keywords:** non-standard forms of employment, employment stability, employees, women on the labour market, gender.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Poland is indicated as a country with a high share of non-standard forms of employment, which – as claimed by some authors – results, among others, in high employee turnover and weaker ties with the workplace (Gortazar, 2018; Brana, 2019). On the Polish labour market, a particularly broad range of non-standard forms of employment are used: contracts based on civil law (including mandate contracts and contracts for specific work), employment through a temporary work agency, self-employment and also non-registered employment. Fixed term employment contracts are also used to be relatively large degree, resulting in less stable employment (Bąk-Grabowska, Grzesik, 2019). It is worth underlining that there are still problems with regard to monitoring the phenomenon of the use of non-standard forms of employment based on central statistical office (GUS) reporting, particularly with reference to forms based on civil law contracts (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2023, pp. 51-53). Non-standard forms of employment give employers more flexibility in the structure of employment. This benefit becomes particularly important in periods of increased uncertainty in conducting business (Bąk-Grabowska, Piwowar-Sulej, 2020). On the other hand, it has been shown that as a result of the use of non-standard forms of employment, many employees are exposed to increased uncertainty regarding employment and remuneration, as well as lower employability. In this context, the standard form of employment - a full-time work contract - is considered to be a necessary condition for ensuring labour protection (Kullmann, 2018).

The use of non-standard of employment can be addressed with consideration for the criterion of gender. It should be considered important to recognize whether women link non-standard forms of employment with decreased satisfaction of employee interests, including the need for stability of employment, as well as whether the opinions expressed by women differ from those of men. The aim of the article is therefore to determine the scope to which women in Poland work in non-standard forms of employment, to determine how they assess these forms of employment in comparison to standard forms (taking into account satisfaction of the need for employment stability), and to carry out a comparison with the situation and opinions expressed in the indicated scope by working men. To achieve the aims of the paper, analysis was conducted of empirical research results conducted on a representative sample of 1000 economically active Polish respondents.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Employment stability**

The results of research conducted by many authors indicate that employment stability is still an important value for employees, and also that employability should not be treated as its substitute. It is noted that stable employment builds employability, mainly due to the fact that long-term employment in a company requires investing in the employee, including developing their competencies (Peng et al., 2019). Developing competencies and long-term employment within a company strengthens the employability of employees and builds future employment security (Mateos, 2014). Meanwhile, employees with lower certainty of employment lose out twofold; their current situation is worse, and because employers invest less in them, their chances are reduced of future employment (Bernstrom et al., 2019). It can therefore be concluded that ensuring stable employment is beneficial for employees as it is connected with their placement in the zone of employment in which employers are more willing to invest in the development of employees, which in turn builds their employability and long-term security.

Employment stability can also have a positive impact on employees well-being, related both to their physical and mental health. It has been shown that ongoing employment uncertainty connected with work in non-standard forms is strongly linked to employees' greater mental anxiety (Burgard, Seelye, 2017), and has a negative effect on mental health (Huenefeld, Koepfer, 2016). A significant number of studies have confirmed that work in unstable forms of employment also has a negative impact on employees' physical health, although some ailments may be moderated by the stress experienced by employees (Virtanen et al., 2005a; Virtanen et al., 2005b; Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2015).

### **2.2. The factor of gender in research into non-standard forms of employment**

The results of a significant number of studies indicate that preferences, assessment and even the health consequences related to work in non-standard forms may differ depending on the gender of the employee.

An important issue in assessing non-standard employment forms from the perspective of women that has been addressed in many studies is combining professional employment with family life, as well as the context of women's racial and ethnic identity, education and number of children. It has been shown that women who are responsible in their culture above all for the care of children and the family as a whole (e.g. Roma women) have an employment rate lower than the national average and are employed mainly in non-standard forms (Preoteasa, 2013). Research conducted in the United States has shown that women from certain racial and ethnic groups have a higher probability of experiencing unstable employment (Weisshaar, Cabello-Hutt, 2020). Women, especially those less well educated, are more inclined than men to enter a career path characterized by instability and lower social security, which leads to a more

precarious type of career (Struffolino, 2019). The percentage of women on the labour market who simultaneously fulfil the role of mothers varies depending on education. Mothers with higher education have a greater chance of employment and work in stable forms of employment, but even amongst this group there are relatively high indicators of employment in non-standard forms (Pilkauskas et al., 2016).

Sometimes it is argued that work in non-standard forms may be beneficial for women and may help them in combining professional life and family life. However, many of the latest research results show that such a view of the gender factor is no longer valid. Both women and men feel that they must adapt their family life to professional needs. This transformation - according to research - mainly affects middle class families (Rincon, Martinez, 2020). It has been shown that the issue of work-life balance should not be limited to women carrying out caring duties as this is no longer related only to gender roles (Pasamar et al., 2020).

In terms of employees' well-being related to their mental and physical health in the context of work in non-standard forms, some research points to the importance of the gender factor (Artazcoz et al., 2004). It has been noted that work in unstable forms is more damaging to the mental health of women than to that of men (Santin et al., 2009). In research conducted in South Korea, symptoms of depression were only observed in women employed in unstable forms, while such symptoms were not observed in men (Kim et al., 2012). However, research results are not unequivocal, as German researchers (Pfortner et al., 2019) who looked into determining tendencies with regard to the co-existence of health self-assessments with various dimensions of precarious employment, taking into account the criterion of gender, showed that employment uncertainty had a greater impact on the health of men.

In light of the approaches presented above, it can be seen that work in non-standard forms of employment carries the risk of decreased employment stability, lack of continuity and an increase in the intensity of features of precarious employment, which is also related to poorer employee well-being, manifesting itself in employees' mental and physical condition. It is women above all, in light of the review presented above, who are at risk of suffering these detrimental consequences. This allows us to pose hypotheses regarding the importance of gender in the scope of the application and perception of non-standard forms of employment. However, it is worth noting that the research results in the field of analysis are not unequivocal and depend on the context.

### **3. Research methodology**

The research was conducted using the CAWI technique on a group of 1000 professionally active respondents. The research was representative with regard to the gender and age of working Polish citizens. Preparation of the distribution of the sample was carried out using

a conversion factor based on Population Economic Activity Survey (BAEL) data. The research was conducted on a sample of  $N = 1000$ . The size of the sample was calculated using the following parameters: (1) population size: 15,828,000; (2) fraction size: 0.1; (3) confidence level: 0.95. The research used random-stratified sampling, thanks to which it is possible to draw conclusions within the scope of individual categories (layers). Selection of companies for the sample was based on a stratified proportional sampling scheme. The research was conducted between 2019 and 2020.

For the purposes of the research, the following forms of employment were distinguished: (1) indefinite period employment contract, (2) fixed term contract, (3) mandate contract, (4) other forms of contract based on the civil law code (e.g. contract for specific work), (5) running one's own business (self-employment), (6) employment through a temporary work agency, (7) employment with no contract: unregistered employment, (8) other solutions. Of the forms listed above, the first two are considered to be standard. The standard forms were identified based on the criterion of a traditional employment relationship (employment contract based on the provisions of the labour law) and the directness of the employer employee relationship (Leighton et al., 2007; Capelli, Keller, 2013).

In order to achieve the adopted aim of the paper, verification was undertaken of the following hypotheses:

H1: More women than men currently work in non-standard forms.

H2: More women than men have experience with work in non-standard forms (within their professional career to date).

H3: In the opinion of women, work in standard forms better satisfies the interests of employees than work in non-standard forms.

H4: In the opinion of women, in practice, work in standard forms better satisfies the need for employment stability than work in non-standard forms.

#### **4. Presentation and analysis of research results**

The research results were subjected to statistical analysis using descriptive statistics and statistical tests. The research shows that in the study period, the percentage of women and men working in non-standard forms was at a similar level (see Table 1). Work in non-standard forms of employment is undertaken by 19.05% of women and 19.15% of men.

**Table 1.***Respondents' forms of employment*

Gender	Employment in non-standard forms		Employment in standard forms		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Woman	84	19.05	357	80.95	441	100.00
Man	107	19.15	452	80.86	559	100.00
Total	191	19.15	809	80.90	1000	100.00

Source: results of own research.

In statistical analysis of the frequency of employment in non-standard forms and the frequency of such employment depending on gender, no significant differences were found ( $p > 0.05$ ): chi squared test  $\chi^2(1) = 0.001401$ ,  $p = 0.970$ . The results of the statistical analysis show that current employment in non-standard forms does not depend on gender.

As regards experience with working in non-standard forms of employment, the percentage of women and men was at a similar level (see Table 2), that is 42.18% of women and 46.15% of men. In statistical analysis of the frequency of experience of employment in non-standard forms and the frequency of experiencing such employment depending on gender, no significant differences were found ( $p > 0.05$ ): chi squared test  $\chi^2(1) = 1.58$ ,  $p = 0.0210$ . This means that experience with working in non-standard forms of employment does not depend on gender.

**Table 2.***Experience with working in non-standard forms of employment*

Gender	Experience		Lack of experience		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Women	186	42.18	255	57.82	441	100.00
Men	258	46.15	301	53.85	559	100.00
Total	444	44.40	556	55.60	1000	100.00

Source: results of own research.

The data obtained in the research also shows to what degree work in standard and non-standard forms satisfies the needs of employees. Assessment was conducted using a five-point scale (1 - definitely not, 5 - definitely yes). Both women and men assessed that work in standard forms of employment satisfies employee needs to a greater extent. In the opinion of women (see Table 3), work in standard forms better satisfies the interests of employees than work in non-standard forms (U Mann-Whitney test,  $U = 61565.5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In the opinion of men (see Table 3), work in standard forms better satisfies the interests of employees than work in non-standard forms (U Mann-Whitney test,  $U = 108134.5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3.***Satisfaction of employee interests in the opinion of women and men*

Gender	Form of employment	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	U Test, asymptotic significance
Women	Standard forms	3.60	4	0.95	U = 61565.50 p < 0.001
	Non-standard forms	2.94	3	1.00	
Men	Standard forms	3.55	4	1.00	U = 108134.50 p < 0.001
	Non-standard forms	2.97	3	1.03	

Source: results of own research.

Further analysis was conducted once the answers had been aggregated into two groups: 'Yes' (definitely yes and rather yes) and 'Other' (hard to say, rather not, definitely not). Statistical analysis of opinions on the possibility of satisfying employee interests in standard forms of employment depending on gender did not demonstrate the existence of a significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ): chi squared test  $\chi^2(1) = 2.247375$ ,  $p = 0.134$ . Simultaneously, statistical analysis of opinions on the possibility of satisfying employee interests in non-standard forms of employment depending on gender did not demonstrate the existence of a significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ): chi squared test  $\chi^2(1) = 0.227277$ ,  $p = 0.633$ . The analysis shows that opinions on the possibility of satisfying employee interests in both standard and non-standard forms of employment do not depend on gender.

Taking into consideration employment stability, one of the key elements of employee interests, analysis was conducted of the opinions of the women and men participating in the study (see Table 4). Assessment was conducted using a five-point scale (1 - definitely not, 5 - definitely yes).

**Table 4.***Satisfaction of the need for employment stability in the opinion of women and men*

Gender	Form of employment	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	U Test, asymptotic significance
Women	Standard forms	4.49	5	0.70	U = 67274.50 p < 0.001
	Non-standard forms	3.99	4	0.93	
Men	Standard forms	4.25	4	0.91	U = 111498.50 p < 0.001
	Non-standard forms	3.73	4	1.08	

Source: results of own research.

In the opinion of women (see Table 4), work in standard forms better satisfies the need for employment stability than work in non-standard forms (U Mann-Whitney test,  $U = 67274.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In the opinion of men, work in standard forms better satisfies the need for employment stability than work in non-standard forms (U Mann-Whitney test,  $U = 111498.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Further analysis was conducted once the answers had been aggregated into two groups: 'Yes' (definitely yes and rather yes) and 'Other' (hard to say, rather not, definitely not). The logistic regression model with a two-valued dependent variable: satisfying the need for stability in non-standard forms of employment (the answers 'Yes'/'Other'), and the dichotomous independent variables: gender, current employment (standard/non-standard form) and experience with employment in non-standard forms (Yes/No), has no predictive power (each predictor is not statistically significant).

## 5. Summary

The results of the research show that in Poland, work in non-standard forms of employment affects both women and men to a similar degree. Both current employment in non-standard forms as well as experience with employment in non-standard forms (within the professional career to date) do not depend on gender (hypotheses 1 and 2 are rejected). Analysis of respondents' opinions shows that in comparison to non-standard forms of employment, standard forms are considered to better satisfy the interests of employees. In neither case does this assessment depend on gender (hypothesis 3 was rejected). From the perspective of working women in Poland, work in standard forms better satisfies the need for employment stability than work in non-standard forms, with men expressing the same opinion (hypothesis 4 was rejected).

The results of the above research, conducted on a representative sample of working Polish citizens, is in line with the latest approaches to the issue of gender with regard to the use of non-standard forms of employment, indicating a marginalisation of the importance of the gender factor. Neither the scope nor the perception of non-standard forms of employment on the Polish labour market depend on the gender of employees. At the same time, it was shown that standard forms are considered by employees to fulfil their needs to a greater degree, including the need for stability. Referring to earlier findings, it is worth underlining that ensuring employees (both women and men) work in stable conditions may be linked with greater investment by employers in their development and building their long-term employability, as well as having a positive impact on their well-being.

The research was conducted in Poland, therefore the results do not take into account forms of employment specific to other countries, for example hypersufficient employment in Brazil (Zbucka-Gargas, Da Rocha, 2022) or zero-hours contracts in the UK (Farina et al., 2020). The use of non-standard forms of employment is determined by legal provisions. Currently, work is underway to implement a *Directive on improving working conditions in platform work* (European Commission, 2021). Implementation of the directive will result in the principle of the presumption of employee employment, which may limit considerably the use of non-



standard forms of employment. This will create a new situation on the labour market that should be a subject of interest to researchers.

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