

Over the past decades, in many countries there has been an increasing interest among sociologists and economists in the issue of labour market insecurity. This is related to the proliferation of the so-called non-standard or flexible forms of employment. The latter include, among others: fixed-term employment contracts, civil law contracts (contracts of mandate or specific-task agreements), and temporary work agency employment. According to many researchers, the changes described above contributed to a significant deterioration in the quality of jobs by decreasing workers' sense of security and limiting their privileges. They have also been interpreted as marking the end of the model of life-long full-time employment, ensuring economic security for employees and their families. Similar concerns were expressed in Guy Standing's reflections on the transformation of the class structure of society, involving the emergence of a "precarariat", a new social class consisting of low-wage workers employed on temporary contracts without access to the social benefits system, struggling with economic uncertainty and a sense of temporariness. Despite common claims of the importance of the problem of labour market uncertainty and its potentially far-reaching social consequences, researchers still face difficulties in clearly defining employment precarity for the purpose of systematic, quantitative analysis.

The objective of this project is to test research hypotheses regarding the size and characteristics of precarious employment, its causes and consequences, in a cross-national perspective. In order to overcome the limitations of previous research on non-standard employment contracts and job / labour market uncertainty, we propose a conceptualization of precarious employment as a career sequence, consisting of periods of recurring fixed-term employment separated by spells of unemployment, combined with low and / or unstable incomes. The analysis of this phenomenon is possible by an examination of career sequences using data from panel studies, which survey the same respondents over many years. To enable such analyses, as part of the project, we will create a new panel dataset called Cross National Biographies - Young (CNB-Young), which will contain biographical data for people aged up to 35 from four countries: Poland, Germany, Great Britain and the USA. These will be data from the following surveys: the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN), the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the British Household Longitudinal Study – Understanding Society (UKHLS), and the U.S. NLSY79 Young Adult Survey. To ensure comparability of data from different surveys and collected in different countries, their harmonization is necessary. Harmonization involves constructing control indicators reflecting biases in the original data and recording changes made to the source variables. We will assess the quality of harmonization with statistical tests of the completeness of variable transformation and comparability of variables.

CNB-Young will be the first cross-national quantitative dataset covering the full employment histories of respondents starting from their first job, as well as their education, changes in household composition, income, and health / well-being. In addition, the project will gather relevant contextual data characterising the legal regulations and institutional settings, selected based on their relevance to the subject of this study, in all the four countries included in this project. These data will be coded as new variables in a separate cross-national dataset capturing differences and changes in labour market regulations, industrial relations, welfare provisions, and educational systems.

The study will apply statistical analyses to produce new and policy-relevant knowledge on how the interplay of various individual characteristics and institutional factors affect workers' chances of moving into secure employment, or mitigate the possible negative life-course outcomes of early career instability. They will also allow to assess the ways in which micro-level changes in the employment patterns of individuals are reflected in macro-level changes in the social structure

The expected products of our research include scholarly publications in leading academic journals and conference papers reporting our findings with regard to the precarization of employment among young adults in the studied countries. The harmonized CNB-Young dataset that the project will generate will, for the first time, enable a comparative analysis of such patterns and relationships from the perspective of multi-year biographies. This dataset will be made available to the international academic community. Our research activities will also generate methodological innovations, by developing harmonization procedures appropriate for biographical data.