



## **Lonely in a crowd.**

# **Do young precarious workers need trade unions, do trade unions need young precarious workers?**

Young precarious workers in Poland and Germany:  
a comparative sociological study on working and living conditions, social  
consciousness and civic engagement

***PREWORK***

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# Background note on the project

Project PREWORK, funded by NCN and DFG (“Beethoven”) has the following aims:

- ❑ to explore various **‘objective’ dimensions of working and living conditions** of young precarious workers in PL and DE
- ❑ to investigate **quantitatively** impact of unstable working and living conditions on various dimensions of precarious workers’ social consciousness (CATI surveys in PL and DE, 18-30 y.o., N=1000) – completed, analysis underway; to be further expanded by PAPI survey in PL (18-30 y.o., N=1000, forthcoming)
- ❑ to understand the relationship between national patterns of unstable employment and life strategies/career patterns of precarious workers in PL and DE, as well as on potential forms of their collective mobilization (**biographical narrative interviews**, N=120, 18-30 (35) y.o.; non-standard employment, unemployed and in precarious forms of VET), so far: 45 in PL, 41 in DE, ongoing data analysis
- ❑ **Project duration:** 2016-2019

# Precarity & changing employment

## Social institutions

Precariousness  
(as basic human condition  
of ontological insecurity, see  
e.g. Butler)

## Labour market institutions

Precarity (as “a vital  
uncertainty with respect to  
the sustained access to the  
essential resources for the  
full development of the life  
of a subject” (Precarious  
lexicon) – work, welfare,  
income, housing, social  
protection etc.)

## Workplace institutions

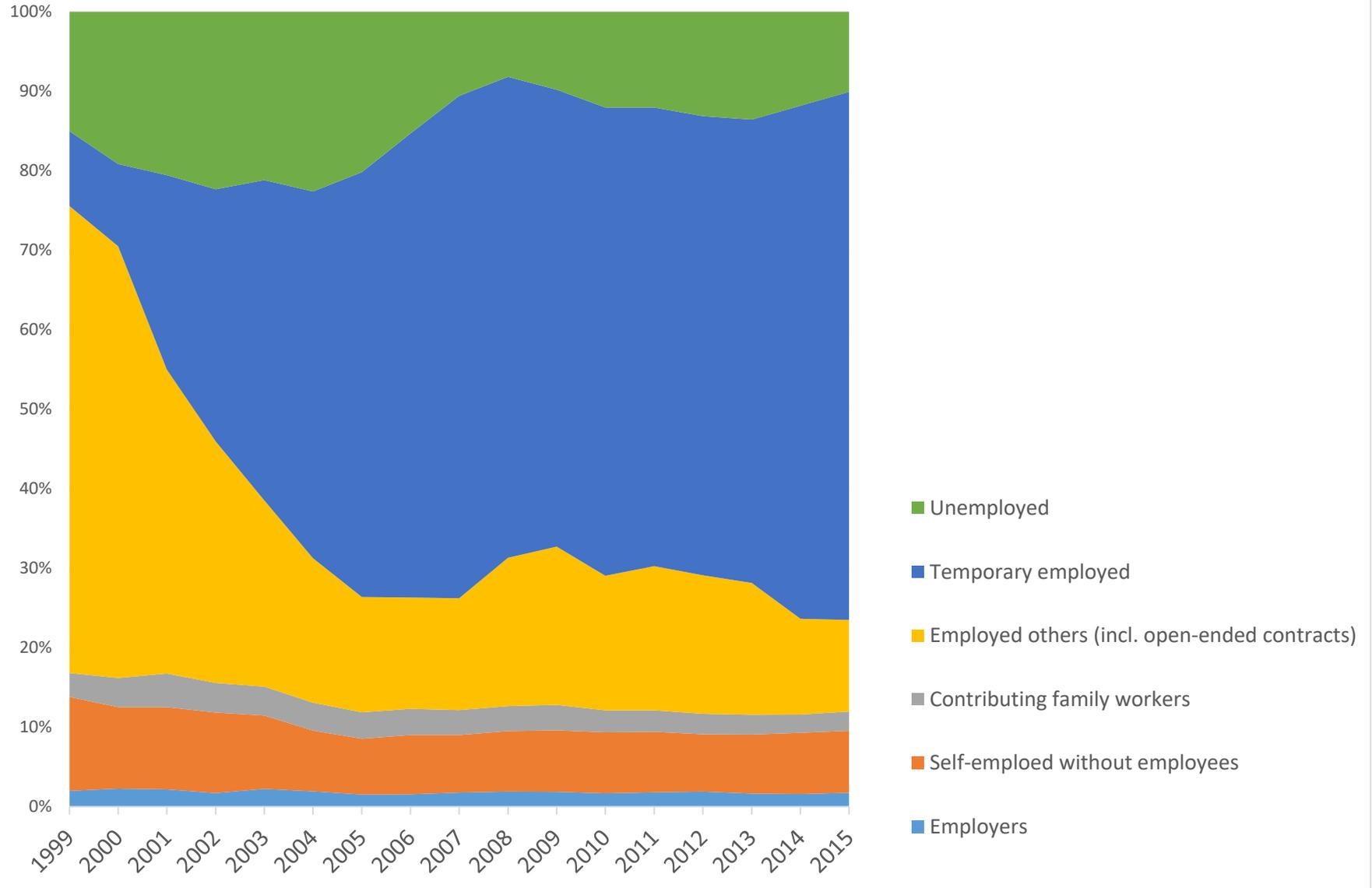
Precarious employment  
(insecurity in pay, job  
security, social status and  
career progression, as well  
as unavailability of collective  
voice – Kalleberg, Vosko et  
al.)

**Emergent, processual, historical and relational nature of precarity  
and its relationship with institutional and class orders**

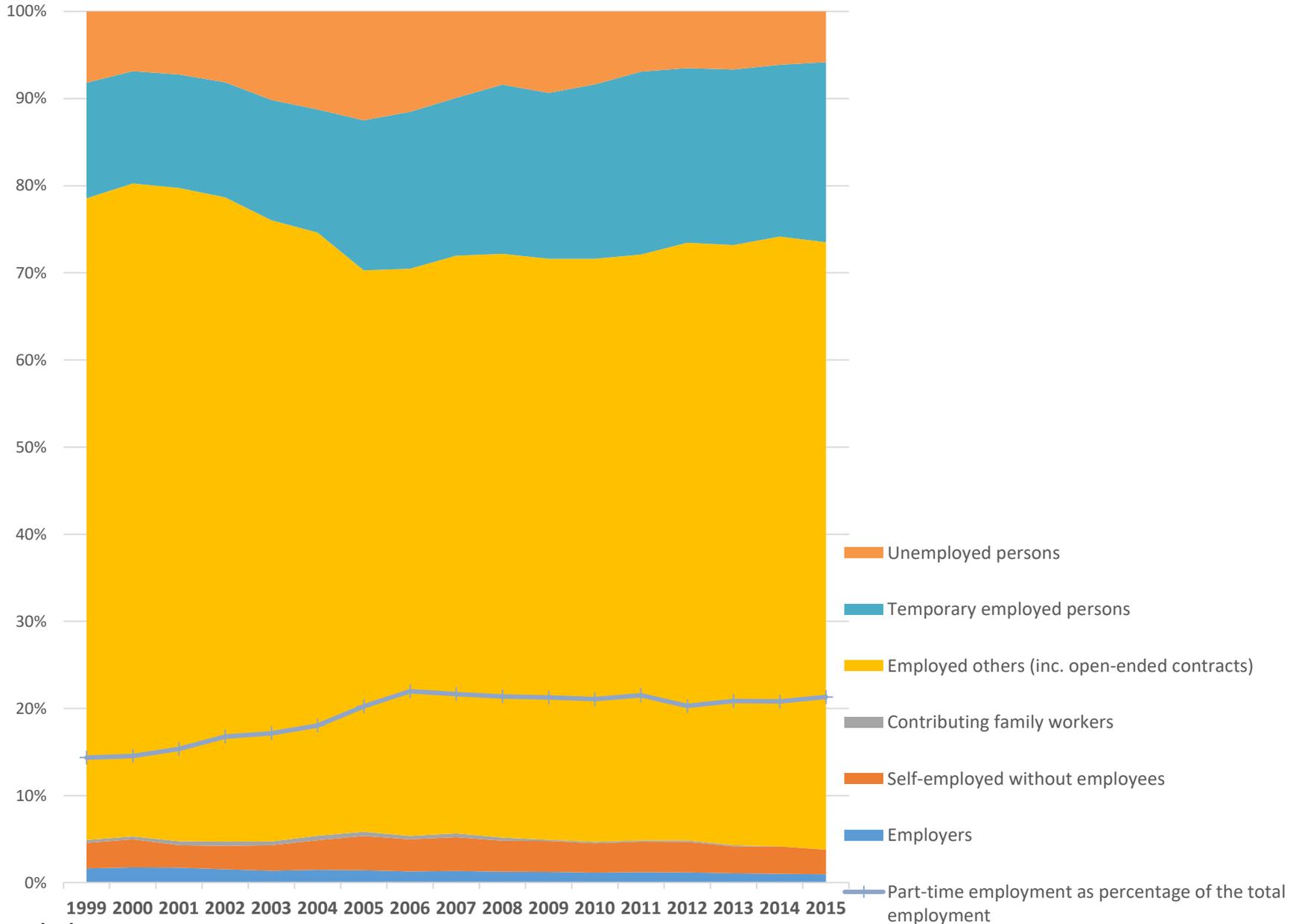
# Non-standard employment in Poland

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Civil contracts (GUS) (thous.)</b>	547	1,013	1,350	1,320	1,260	1,300 (est.)
<b>Civil contracts (MF) (thous.)</b>	796	894	916	974	1,040	ND
<b>Fixed-term contracts (% employment contracts) (LFS)</b>	27.3%	26.9%	26.6%	27.2%	29.0%	27.9%
<b>Self-employment (thous. and % of all in employment) (LFS)</b>	2,346 (14.7%)	2,376 (14.7%)	2,292 (14.7%)	2,220 (14.1%)	2,282 (14.2%)	2,316 (14.2%)

**Structure of the economically active Polish population aged 25-29**



## Structure of the economically active German population aged 25-29



# Trade union density

Year	PL	DE
1999	20,5	25,3
2000	17,5	24,6
2001	15,5	23,7
2002	14,1	23,5
2003	18,8	23,0
2004	19,0	22,2
2005	18,1	21,7
2006	16,3	20,7
2007	15,6	19,9
2008		19,1
2009	14,6	18,9
2010		18,6
2011	13,6	18,0
2012	12,7	17,9
2013		17,7

# Basic trade union strategies towards precarious workers

- ❑ **Inclusion:** union strategy to include/integrate employees in precarious situations into their constituency and serve as broad interest representation organizations without making specific differences between precarious and regular workers.
- ❑ **Exclusion:** union strategy to serve as interest representation organizations for “insiders” only and exclude workers in precarious employment.
- ❑ **Separation:** union strategy to separate workers in precarious employment from the rest of their constituency and to treat them as a particular group.
- ❑ **Reduction:** union strategy that aims to bridge the divide between precarious and regular employees by reducing precariousness (e.g. through regulations that decrease the incentives to resort to precarious work).
- ❑ **Elimination:** trade union strategy aiming at eliminating all forms of precarious work in the economy. This may encompass inclusion as well as separation, but these strategies are perceived to be temporary on the way towards a full elimination of precarious employment.

# Union strategies and instruments targeting young precarious workers

- collective bargaining,
- influencing national policies and legislation through social dialogue or campaigning,
- litigation in court,
- organizing precarious workers and providing them with services,
- mobilization and campaigns to influence public opinion.

# Non-standard workers in Poland: who can speak on their behalf, and why hardly no one?

(1)

- **Unlawfully restricted right to association** – the Trade Unions Act limits the right to join trade unions **to employees** only. NSW are thus denied any legal possibility to gain union protection. Even though this particular regulation was found unconstitutional already in 2012, the regulations are yet to be amended
- **Workplace-centred unionism** – the Trade Unions Act requires that a basic unit of trade unions (workplace-level union) comprises at least 10 eligible employees, and there are no farther conditions to fulfil, only formal registration of a new organisation with the court of law. In effect the volume of registered unions has inflated: in 2015 there were 19.5 thousand registered unions, of which 12.9 thousand active (GUS 2015).
- **Conflict-driven industrial relations model and competitive pluralism** – Polish trade unionism has been haunted for decades by political cleavage between post-Solidarity (Solidarność) and post-communist (OPZZ) camps, which seemed to be gradually healing (with the model passing through different stages: from competitive pluralism through consultative etatism to cooperative pluralism) until the government shift in 2015, which provoked concerns about potential return of competitive pluralism or neo-etatism.

# Non-standard workers in Poland: who can speak on their behalf, and why hardly no one?

## (2)

- **Structure of employment** – roughly 96% of all economic entities in Poland employ less than 10 persons (microenterprises), and their total share in employment amounts to 40%, so that field is practically impenetrable to trade unions (due to legal conditions outlined above)
- **Deterioration of collective bargaining and moderate regard for non-standard workers by social dialogue bodies** – collective bargaining plays marginal role, with modest volume of collective agreements, low number of employees covered, and little impact collective bargaining has on employment relations. At the same time, tripartite social dialogue, which is seen as a form of institutional compensation for underdevelopment of collective bargaining in Poland has been rather inattentive to the issues related to NSE, and the crucial cases discussed by the central level tripartite bodies over past several years were initiated by the government (e.g. minimum hourly wage for those working on the basis of civil law contracts).
- **Legal incapacity of trade unions to efficiently represent non-standard workers** – trade unions do not explicitly exclude non-standard workers from membership, and number of key nationwide organisations claim to actually associate such members. However, union representatives openly admit they have very little room to maneuver when there is an emergency situation and the rights of non-standard workers vis-à-vis employers need to be defended, apart from legal consultancy unions can provide their affiliates.

# Some empirical results (preliminary)

*Trade unions should have influence on labour market and economy*

**PL**

- Agree 50.2%
- Neither agree nor disagree 23.5%
- Disagree 25.0%

N=1,000

**DE**

- Agree 49.5%
- Neither agree nor disagree 22.4%
- Disagree 26.3%

N=1,000

More about the project:

<http://prework.eu>