

Flexible Forms of Employment in Poland - Challenges of the Contemporary Labour Market*

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Abstract

This article addresses the issues surrounding the transformation of the contemporary labour market in Poland, with a particular focus on the development and diversification of flexible forms of employment. The aim of this study is to analyze this phenomenon and evaluate the extent to which non-standard forms of work performance constitute an opportunity for socio-economic development, and to what extent they generate threats related to precariatization. The article utilizes the method of critical literature review as well as the dogmatic-legal method. The analysis covers alternative models of work to the traditional employment contract, such as civil law contracts, self-employment (B2B), temporary work, remote work, and platform work (the gig economy). The research results indicate the dual nature of flexibility: on the one hand, it optimizes costs and supports autonomy, while on the other, it shifts economic risk onto the individual, leading to the emergence of a new social category – the precariat.

Keywords: labour market flexibility, precariat, platform work, remote work, labour law

Introduction

The Polish labour market is currently undergoing a phase of intense structural redefinition. The traditional model of employment, based on a long-term, full-time employment relationship, is gradually giving way to agile, flexible, and project-based models. These transformations are no longer merely a temporary response to economic crises but are becoming a permanent feature of the modern business ecosystem in Poland. The market is turning into a space where the interests of organizations striving for cost and operational optimization intersect with those of employees seeking autonomy, temporal sovereignty, and the diversification of income sources. This transformation enables a bilateral optimization of contractual terms, responding to the diversified needs of both employers and personnel.

The high relevance of this issue in scientific discourse and economic practice is generated primarily by two complementary megatrends. The first is the advanced digitalization of business processes, which has decoupled the execution of professional tasks from geographical barriers. The second factor involves axiological reorientations within the demographic structure of the workforce. Generations entering the market prioritize operational autonomy, self-perfection, and the maintenance of psychophysical well-being within the framework of the work-life balance concept. From the perspective of organizations, the diversification of employment forms serves as a strategic tool for reducing fixed costs, stimulates the efficiency of recruiting high-class specialists, and increases institutional agility in the face of dynamic market fluctuations. However, the analyzed phenomenon is

characterized by deep dualism, constituting a source of both macro- and microeconomic benefits as well as significant structural dysfunctions.

The spectrum of flexible instruments encompasses diverse legal and organizational solutions, among which a key position is held by civil law contracts, self-employment (B2B relations), temporary work, distance (remote) work, and innovative forms of cooperation within the architecture of the platform economy (the gig economy). A distinctive feature of these models is the deregulation of service delivery conditions, the redefinition of the traditional employment relationship, and increased freedom in shaping the relations between the parties of a market transaction.

Although these models provide individuals with an opportunity to personalize their career paths and offer enterprises a method for rationalizing expenditures and accelerating adaptive processes, their widespread adoption carries significant systemic risks. In the literature on the subject, this process is increasingly criticized through the prism of the phenomenon of work precariatization, manifested by the erosion of social security, the destabilization of income continuity, and the limitation of vertical promotion prospects. A significant barrier is also formed by the legal asymmetry and the amorphous nature of the institutional status of individuals performing duties based on non-Code contracts, which results in the emergence of gaps in the systemic protection of labour rights. Furthermore, remote work, despite its obvious operational advantages, generates new challenges in the field of occupational psychology, implying risks of social alienation, mental health disorders, and the blurring of boundaries between the private and professional spheres.

This study constitutes a synthetic analysis of the conditions and development trends of flexible forms of employment in Poland. The analysis is based on four research pillars reflecting current market, legal, demographic, and macroeconomic perspectives: the *GIGbarometer 2026* report prepared by GIGLIKE and EY Poland, the publication *Modern Forms of Employment 2025* authored by Hays Poland and Dentons, an institutional handbook by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) dedicated to age management, and a 2024 report by the Polish Economic Institute (PIE) focused on work-life balance. The integration of these data allows for the delineation of a multidimensional picture of market flexibility in Poland at the turn of 2025 and 2026.

Contemporary Models of Flexible Employment

The previously indicated transformations occurring in the contemporary labour market contribute to the development of new forms of employment and the emergence of a category referred to as the precariat. According to Standing (2014), the precariat constitutes a collective of individuals functioning under conditions of unstable employment, irregular income, and limited access to labour rights. The emergence of this socio-professional group is linked to the transformations of the global economy, in particular the implementation of neoliberal labour market reforms, privatization processes, and the rise of flexible forms of employment. An essential element of this transformation is also the shift of responsibility for maintaining employment stability from employers and public institutions to the individuals performing the work. Therefore, the concept of the precariat serves to describe contemporary processes occurring in the labour market and enables the analysis of consequences resulting from employment insecurity.

One of the key characteristics of the precariat is not exclusively the specificity of the work performed, but primarily the lack of stable institutional frameworks regulating the relationship between the worker and the labour market (Czakoń, 2017). This implies functioning under conditions of limited predictability regarding the rules defining labour rights and obligations, continuity of employment, and the scope of social protection. Consequently, individuals belonging to this group independently bear the consequences of fortuitous events, such as illness, unexpected interruptions in work performance, or crises caused by changing economic situations or health issues.

Employment instability remains closely linked to the prevalence of fixed-term contracts, civil law contracts, and other forms of work performance devoid of long-term employment guarantees. These forms are associated with the risk of irregular income and limited labour protection, including, among others, weaker protection against dismissal, obstructed access to leave, or limited pension entitlements (Rafalska, 2017). As a result, a significant portion of economic risk is transferred to the employee, whereas in the traditional employment model, this responsibility was largely assumed by the employer and the state.

Flexibility of employment signifies a departure from the standard work model based on an employment contract concluded for an indefinite period, performed on a full-time basis, and under stable employment conditions (Labour Code, 1974 as amended). Flexible forms of employment constitute an alternative to the classical

employment relationship, increasing the adaptive capacities of both employers and employees to changing economic and organizational conditions. It should be emphasized that labour flexibility is not homogeneous and encompasses a wide range of organizational solutions whose economic and social consequences vary. Equating flexibility exclusively with negative phenomena constitutes an oversimplification. Indeed, individual forms of flexible employment differ in terms of the scope of employee protection, the level of stability, and the consequences for occupational security, and their occurrence does not always lead to an increase in employment insecurity.

The most important flexible forms of employment include temporary work, employment implemented outside the classical system of labour law, and solutions based on institutional or digital mediation, among others, through employment agencies and internet platforms. These forms depart from the traditional, long-term relationship between the employee and the employer. They are characterized by greater volatility in work organization and a lack of guarantees regarding the continuity of employment and income. At the same time, it should be noted that not every form of flexible employment leads to occupational insecurity (Mrozowicki, Czarzasty, 2020). The degree of labour protection, employment stability, and working conditions remains differentiated, which translates into heterogeneous social and economic effects.

In the study edited by Owczarek (2018), which refers to the classification of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the following new forms of work were distinguished:

- employee sharing,
- job sharing,
- interim management,
- casual work,
- remote work,
- voucher-based work,
- portfolio work,
- platform work,
- collaborative employment.

An example of a flexible form of employment is work performed through a temporary employment agency. In this case, a modification of the traditional employment relationship occurs, alongside a division of responsibility between the entities participating in the employment process. This relationship is tripartite in nature and includes the employee, the temporary employment agency, and the user enterprise. The agency performs the function of the formal employer responsible for concluding the contract and employing the worker (Gołaszewska-Kaczan, 2013). Conversely, the organization of daily work, including the setting of schedules and the scope of duties, remains within the domain of the enterprise utilizing the services of the employed individual. This causes the employee to function under conditions of double organizational dependence, while simultaneously dispersing responsibility for working conditions between two entities. Such a structure can complicate the identification of responsibility for employment conditions and the enforcement of labour rights, and consequently weaken the sense of occupational security and foster long-term employment insecurity.

Along with the development of digital technologies, platform work, referred to as the *gig economy*, is also gaining increasing importance. This model is based on performing work through digital platforms that organize the service delivery process and allocate tasks. In contrast to traditional forms of employment, there is no single permanent employer here, and the rules of work performance as well as the remuneration system are determined by the platform or the client. The individual performing the work executes single assignments made available via internet applications, without remaining in a permanent employment relationship. Examples of platform work include courier and transport services carried out via mobile applications (Kowalska-Musiał, Ziółkowska, 2025). A characteristic feature of this form of employment is the irregularity of remuneration, the amount of which depends on the number and type of completed tasks. The lack of a guarantee of a stable income, as well as the transfer of responsibility for the consequences of illness, downtime, or a periodic lack of orders to the worker, mean that the gig economy can be associated with a high level of economic and occupational insecurity.

When analyzing flexible forms of employment, it is impossible to omit remote and hybrid work. In this case, the legal basis for performing work is of key importance, as both forms are frequently implemented within an employment relationship. This implies the retention of the fundamental elements of the traditional employment model, such as income stability, legal protection, and social security. Unlike temporary or platform work, remote work does not necessarily lead to an increase in employment insecurity, as its flexibility relates primarily to the place of performing professional duties rather than the durability of the employment relationship itself.

In addition to the most frequently analyzed forms of flexible employment, such as temporary and platform work, the literature on the subject also points to other solutions deviating from the standard model of full-time employment. An example is on-call work, within which the employee does not have a fixed schedule or a guaranteed number of working hours but remains ready to undertake duties upon receiving notification from the employer. Flexible forms of employment also include work performed at irregular times or places, part-time employment, and the job-sharing model prevalent in large organizations, which consists of two employees sharing a single job position (Wratny, 2022).

Conditions and Trends of Flexible Forms of Employment in Poland

The Polish labour market is undergoing a phase of intense structural redefinition. The traditional model of employment, based on a long-term, full-time employment relationship, is gradually giving way to agile, flexible, and project-based models. These transformations are no longer merely a temporary response to economic crises but are becoming a permanent feature of the modern business ecosystem in Poland. The market is turning into a space where the interests of organizations striving for cost and operational optimization intersect with those of employees seeking autonomy, temporal sovereignty, and the diversification of income sources.

This analysis is based on four research pillars reflecting current market, legal, demographic, and macroeconomic perspectives: the *GIGbarometer 2026* report prepared by GIGLIKE and EY Poland, the publication *Modern Forms of Employment 2025* authored by Hays Poland and Dentons, an institutional handbook by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) dedicated to age management, and a 2024 report by the Polish Economic Institute (PIE) focused on work-life balance. The integration of these data allows for the delineation of a multidimensional picture of market flexibility in Poland at the turn of 2025 and 2026.

The contemporary discussion on labour market flexibility requires a precise conceptual distinction between individual models of external and non-standard employment. In market practice, flexibility is implemented on three main planes: legal (form of contract), temporal (dimension and distribution of working time), and spatial (place of service delivery). As indicated by the Hays Poland and Dentons report, the most popular modern forms of external employment include B2B contracts (self-employment), temporary work, as well as process and service outsourcing. On the other hand, from a macro-social perspective, flexibility also includes intra-standard modifications, such as flexible working hours or part-time work. The newest element of this puzzle is the popularization of the *GIG economy* phenomenon, in which independent professionals execute short-term, precisely defined project tasks.

The PIE report (2024) introduces a crucial international context into this architecture based on OECD and Eurostat data, which explains why flexibility is so desired in Poland and yet difficult to implement. According to the Better Life Index (OECD), the work-life balance of Poles is one of the worst in the European Union – Poland obtained a score of just 6.5 points out of 10 possible, outpacing within the EU only Austria and Ireland. This situation results directly from the fact that Poles dedicate significantly more time to professional work than most Europeans. The average Pole works an average of 40.4 hours per week, which represents the second-highest result in Europe (after Greece) and is a value nearly 3 hours higher than the average for the entire European Union (37.5 hours). At the same time, Poles rest and take care of themselves for an average of 14.7 hours per day (approx. 61% of the day), which places our country below the OECD average. Furthermore, in Poland, the percentage of people working part-time is just 5% (compared to as much as a 17% EU average). As noted by PIE experts, such a low share of part-time work stems from financial barriers (the difficulty of supporting a family on a partial salary) and a deeply rooted conviction among employers that one full-time position should belong to one person.

One of the fundamental conditions determining the development of flexible forms in Poland is the deep demographic crisis associated with the ageing of the workforce. The PARP analysis unequivocally proves that Polish enterprises face the necessity of implementing age management strategies to maintain operational continuity. In this context, employment flexibility becomes a key tool for the activation and retention within organizations of two extreme age groups: mature workers (50+) and the youngest individuals just entering the market. For workers of pre-retirement and retirement age, flexible forms of work constitute an adaptive mechanism. PIE data confirm the social significance of this phenomenon: the possibility of working part-time allows for reconciling employment with caregiving responsibilities and health problems - 29% of women (child/family care) and 11% of men (own illness or disability) point to these reasons as key when reducing working hours. A lack of flexibility on the part of employers, results in premature retirement and transition to benefit-based deactivation within this group. PIE data prove that the low level of flexibility in Poland leads directly to the

exclusion from the labour market of individuals who, for family reasons, are unable to work a full 40 hours per week.

Flexibility with respect to the youngest generations has a completely different underlying basis. Young specialists exhibit a reluctance toward rigid corporate structures. The GIG economy is becoming a natural professional environment for them, in which loyalty to a single employer brand is replaced by loyalty to their own development. The decision to forego a traditional full-time job in favour of project work is rarely the result of economic coercion today – it is highly intentional. According to the *GIGbarometer 2026* report, the main motivators inclining specialists to choose the GIG model include higher net earnings, spatio-temporal autonomy, and the freedom to choose projects.

However, it is worth contrasting these declarations with the nationwide scale of applying individual forms of flexibility, examined by PIE on a sample of 1000 enterprises:

- Flexible working hours: this is the most popular solution in Poland, which as many as 46% of companies implement or plan to implement. It is predominantly the domain of micro- and small enterprises (52% and 49% of indications, respectively).
- Part-time work: declared by 42% of enterprises.
- Remote or hybrid work: offered by 36% of companies. Here, a strong dependence on the size of the organization occurs - nearly half of large enterprises utilize remote work, while for the entire country, the average share of employees working from home is 13%.
- The four-day work week: remains on the margins of the market - it is implemented or planned by a mere 2% of Polish enterprises, while as many as 69% categorically reject such a possibility.

The barriers for flexible workers remain the lack of social safety nets, the risk of financial instability, and the necessity of permanently conducting self-marketing. For employers, the implementation of modern forms of external employment is primarily an element of a strategy to build an agile organization and quickly acquire niche competencies without the need to go through long-term permanent recruitment procedures. PIE research provides unambiguous, percentage-based evidence that employers perceive real business benefits from making structures more flexible:

- Acquisition and retention of talent: over 80% of entrepreneurs in Poland believe that flexible methods of work organization allow for acquiring and retaining valuable employees in the company.
- Productivity growth: as many as 77% of companies indicate that flexible working hours directly increase the productivity of employed persons.
- Cost reduction: 72% of entrepreneurs confirm that the implementation of remote or hybrid work significantly limits the operating costs of the enterprise itself.
- Social inclusion: 55% of companies perceive that offering part-time work constitutes a facilitation in employing workers with disabilities.

The most critical and dynamic area influencing the shape of flexible forms of employment in Poland consists of legal and tax conditions. The report developed by Hays in cooperation with the Dentons law firm sheds a bright light on the growing risk of the reclassification of B2B contracts into an employment relationship by the National Labour Inspectorate and the Social Insurance Institution. Experts indicate that risk criteria include, among others, rigid management and supervision, the imposition of a fixed place and time of work, and the absence of a substitution clause in civil law contracts.

To these regulatory risks are added the momentous effects of the amendment to the Labour Code of 26 April 2023, which implemented EU directives: on transparent and predictable working conditions and the *work-life balance* directive. Although these regulations were aimed mainly at protecting full-time employees (in particular, parents of children up to 8 years of age), they exerted a profound impact on the entire structure of flexibility in Poland. The PIE report (2024) evaluated the effects of these regulations and points to two clear, positive market trends:

- Activation of fathers: the implementation of the non-transferable part of parental leave for fathers brought an immediate effect - the share of men utilizing parental leave drastically increased from just approx. 1% in the first quarter of 2023 to nearly 6% in the fourth quarter of 2023.
- Decline in sickness absence: facilitating the application of flexible working time organisation and improving access to care leave translated into employee health - in 2023, employees spent an average of 3 days less per year on sick leave (L4) compared to 2019.

Employers asked by PIE about actions of the greatest importance for building work-life balance pointed to the necessity of establishing work priorities (75%), offering additional days of care leave (68%), and a flexible approach to the time and place of work (65%).

Interest in modern forms of employment exhibits strong sector specificity, which is confirmed by convergent conclusions from the Hays and PIE reports. In the engineering, IT, information, and communication sectors, the contractual model (B2B) and remote work have become the market standard. PIE data confirm that more than half of the companies from the “Information and communication” and “Professional, scientific, and technical activities” industries commonly offer remote and hybrid work as well as flexible working hours. Companies rarely recruit experts permanently, preferring to purchase their unique know-how for the duration of a project.

The financial sector opens up increasingly to flexibility. While operational accounting departments still rely on full-time positions, in areas such as auditing or controlling, the *interim management* model and project work are dynamically gaining popularity. According to PIE, the finance and insurance industry belongs to the leaders in implementing hybrid work within the segment of large enterprises.

The logistics sector is characterised by immense seasonality; therefore, the dominant model of flexibility here is temporary work and process outsourcing delivered by agencies. In turn, in the administrative and office area, flexibility manifests itself mainly through the outsourcing of reception functions and office support, which allows for the reduction of fixed costs.

Based on the integrated research materials, a full summary of the balance of opportunities and risks for labour market participants can be made (Table 1).

Table 1: benefits and barriers of implementing flexible forms of employment

Perspective	Benefits (Opportunities)	Barriers (Risks)
Employer / Organisation	- Transformation of fixed costs into variable costs - Reduction of company fixed costs by 72% thanks to remote work - Increase in productivity by 77% thanks to flexible hours - Effective attraction and retention of talent (over 80% of indications) - Reduction of employee sickness absence by an average of 3 days per year	- Very high risk of PIP audits and reclassification of B2B contracts - Specificity of activity making flexibility impossible (from 15% to 30% of companies in the country) - Difficulty in building a coherent culture and team loyalty - Necessity of implementing rigorous IT security procedures
Employee / GIGer / Contractor	- Higher net revenues thanks to B2B tax optimisation - Full spatio-temporal autonomy and sovereignty - Better protection of mental and physical health through work-life balance - Increased access to care leave and involvement of fathers (increase from 1% to 6%)	- Lack of classical social safety nets (paid annual leave) - Risk of financial instability (competency and project gaps) - Risk of market exclusion in the absence of company consent to part-time work - Professional burnout resulting from the fact that Poles work the longest in the EU (40.4 h)

Source: own elaboration based on the analyzed reports

As can be seen, in the case of employers, benefits of an economic and operational nature dominate, such as the reduction of fixed costs, increased productivity, and an improved ability to acquire and retain talent; however, they are accompanied by significant regulatory and organizational risks, including the possibility of audits and the reclassification of contracts, as well as difficulties in building a coherent organizational culture. From the employee's perspective, this model fosters autonomy, income optimization, and the improvement of work-life balance, but simultaneously entails a limitation of social security and increased employment instability. The entirety points to a clear trade-off between flexibility and security, characteristic of contemporary labour market transformations.

Discussion and Conclusions

The conducted analysis allows for the formulation of the conclusion that flexible forms of employment constitute a highly ambivalent phenomenon that cannot be evaluated in an explicitly dichotomous manner. They represent a fundamental market response to globalization and technological processes, offering instruments necessary to maintain the competitiveness of enterprises and providing employees with tools for the autonomous shaping of their career paths. From a social perspective, however, the progressive process of deregulation and precariatization remains a key threat. The transfer of market and economic risk from institutions and employers directly onto the employee without providing adequate institutional safety nets leads to the deepening of social inequalities and the erosion of social security. An exception against this background is remote work, which skillfully combines spatial flexibility with legal and labour security.

To minimize the negative consequences of flexibility, legislative intervention aimed at harmonizing standards of legal protection, regardless of the form of work performance, is essential. Future research should focus on monitoring the effectiveness of new EU and national regulations (e.g., in platform work) in the context of their impact on employee well-being and the stability of social security systems.

Four fundamental conclusions can be indicated that will determine the shape of the Polish labour market in the coming years:

- The transition from choice to macroeconomic necessity: under conditions of a deep demographic crisis (PARP) and the fact that Poles are one of the most hard-working nations in Europe (PIE), flexibility ceases to be a branding benefit. It is becoming the only effective tool for preventing the occupational exclusion of women, parents, and older individuals who are unable to work within the rigid regime of 40 hours per week.
- Empirically proven business profitability: PIE research data definitively dispel the myth that flexibility reduces efficiency. Indicators showing a 77 percent increase in productivity due to flexible working hours and a clear decline in the annual number of days on sick leave prove that employee well-being (work-life balance) directly translates into the financial result of the organization.
- A legal turning point and the era of transparency: the flexible market in Poland has entered a mature and strictly regulated phase. The simultaneous pressure from PIP on eliminating fictitious B2B self-employment (Hays & Dentons) and the implementation of the provisions of the work-life balance directive (PIE) imposes an obligation on companies to conduct a transparent and fully legal employment policy. The era of reflexively pushing employees onto civil law contracts without granting them real autonomy is irrevocably passing.
- The challenge of the specificity of activity: although flexibility brings measurable benefits, the Polish labour market struggles with a structural barrier - from 15% to even 30% of enterprises (depending on the form of flexibility) declare that the specificity of their activity (e.g., assembly line production, brick-and-mortar retail) completely prevents the implementation of remote work or flexible working hours. Success will be achieved by those companies that can flexibly manage hybrid and dual teams, differentiating the approach to production workers and project contractors (GIGers) in a manner that is fair and secure for the organization.

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