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Research Article

A Policy Aimed at Social Security of the Precariat. Polish Experiences and Challenges from Social and Economic Perspective

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Abstract: The precariat is a new social category that exists in all countries around the world and consists of people who work in the gig economy and/or are employed under civil law contracts. One of the key factors that determines membership of the precariat is the uncertainty felt by individuals in the labour market as a result of, inter alia, being employed on flexible forms. The research aim of this article is to define the specificity of the Polish precariat and their sense of social security in the context of the current employment support and social policy of the Polish government. The utilitarian goal is to evaluate the Polish Deal programme currently proposed by the Polish government in terms of its strengths and weaknesses in order to reduce the precariat phenomenon and boost the Polish precariat's sense of social security. The article also attempts to demonstrate the effects of actions taken by the Polish government since 2015, which were aimed at improving the situation on the precariat labour market.

In order to determine the extent to which the current government in Poland affects the social security of the precariat and satisfies their needs by taking social welfare action and implementing indirect operations related to education, a questionnaire was used, conducted via the Internet, involving a survey panel of respondents. In this study, a stratified-quota sample selection was used, corresponding to the proportions of people working on the basis of various flexible forms of fixed-term employment and self-employment.

One thousand respondents employed on flexible terms participated in the study. The study was carried out at the turn of March/April 2021.

Keywords: employment; politics; precariat; social security; unemployment

1. Introduction

The changes occurring in the modern world have meant that the economy has adopted some traits of an “economy of impermanence”. This applies to forms of economic activity, technology, products and jobs alike. The source of this

phenomenon lies in technological progress, indicating that the trend of “impermanence” will continue to strengthen. Volatility and instability are also visible in the labour market. Growing competition in the economy increases the importance of flexible forms of employment that help employers to adapt quickly to changing market demand and reduce their

overheads. For employees, atypical forms of employment create opportunities to reconcile work and private life. A disturbing phenomenon on the labour market is the concept of making employment more flexible in order to transfer uncertainty and risk onto employees. As a consequence, the phenomenon of precarious employment – associated with mainly temporary, often low-paid jobs that lack certainty, security and prospects – is increasing [1].

In the Polish reality, the precariat constitutes almost 17% of people active on the labour market. These are largely young people just entering the labour market, for most of whom work based on civil law contracts does not offer them a sense of security or life stability. As a consequence, people in this situation often feel a sense of social insecurity. Actions taken by the current Polish government (the Law and Justice party) since 2015 have aimed to make systematic changes to the labour market by increasing the minimum wage and fostering social support programmes. These measures, combined with the favourable economic situation prevailing until the beginning of 2019, and the subsequent programmes supporting companies against collapse during the Covid 19 pandemic, had a positive impact on the labour market and the ease of finding employment on an indefinite contract. Therefore, this contributed to a reduction in precariat in Poland. In 2021, the Polish government introduced a programme called Polish Deal. Its aim was to increase the welfare of those receiving the lowest wages and to support young people in the labour market and society to offer them some stability in life. Certainly, the addressees of the aforementioned Polish government actions and of the Polish Deal programme outlined here are people previously employed under civil law contracts, and thus members of the precariat.

The precariat as a social problem has been noticed and commented on in Poland for at least a dozen years – by representatives of the mass media, as well as trade unions and academics. However, in comparison with Western European countries or the United States, there is a perceptible deficit of nationwide research into the issue of the precariat in society. It is worth analysing the problem of the precariat for at least several reasons. The worsening economic situation, the first unprecedented rise in inflation rates for three decades and the consequent sharply rising household spending will translate into an increase in the proportion of the precariat in society. It is not only pauperisation, but above all a deepening sense of uncertainty about the future, instability and the temporary nature of work or rented accommodation.

A growing sense of instability will turn into deepening anxiety and frustration among the precariat. The result will be a greater susceptibility of these people to populist slogans and an increase in public support for radical political groups. In the long term, the democratic order may be in danger. Another consequence of the increasing share of the precariat in society will be a decreasing level of tolerance and acceptance towards migrants and refugees. They will be perceived as contributing to economic decline, which

will exacerbate xenophobic attitudes. There is a perceptible deficit of nationally representative research on the problem of the precariat. In contrast, and this should be emphasised, Eurostat regularly carries out analyses on the phenomenon of the risk of in-work poverty.

The theoretical aim of the article is to present the precariat category and the concept of social security in a cross-sectional way.

The research objective of this article is to define the specificity of the Polish precariat and the extent of its feeling of social security as well as how the government might enhance it. The utilitarian goal is to evaluate the “Polish Deal” programme currently proposed by the Polish government in terms of its strengths and weaknesses for limiting the precariat phenomenon and increasing the Polish precariat’s sense of social security.

The article also attempts to illustrate the effects of actions taken by the Polish government since 2015, aimed at improving the precarious situation on the labour market.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Precariat – The Essence of the Concept*

The precariat consists of people hired or commissioned for individual jobs. After completion, they become unemployed, at least temporarily. They form a separate social and employee group [2]. The precariat can be identified by the characteristic structure of national revenue. During a period of rapid commercialization of the economy as a country develops, more and more new groups of people join the precariat. In this way, they lose traditional social benefits and do not receive corporate or state benefits as full-time employees. They lead a more vulnerable existence than people with even lower incomes than them but who have managed to retain traditional forms of social support (entitlement to social and health insurance) and are more exposed than full-time workers who earn a similar income but have access to a number of benefits resulting from full-time employment in an enterprise and to state aid. The point of the precariat is not their income earned at a given time, but the lack of social assistance in times of need, and the lack of corporate or state benefits provided, as well as additional private insurance or financial services to supplement cash earnings [3].

Guy Standing popularized the issue of the precariat and precarious work in the relevant literature. According to him, the concept of precariousness cannot be solely identified with the problem of the pauperization of economically active people [4,5]. One of the fundamental factors assigned to the precariat is, admittedly, low wages, which can indeed be measured on the basis of selected statistical indicators. However, the conceptual scope of this term is much wider. In general, precariousness means uncertainty.

The heterogeneity of non-standard forms of work, characterized by temporary jobs, performed for a predetermined period of time, casual or part-time work, does not have

to mean precarious or uncertain work. Usually it does, however, contribute to this phenomenon [6].

Insufficient income from work, not enough to provide any kind of well-being, is an important factor in the experience of the precariat [7]. Non-standard forms of employment increasingly go hand in hand with low wages (minimum wage), a lack of fringe benefits and protection against unfair dismissal (e.g., due to sickness) as well as work that is low in both quality and social prestige [8].

The precariat are used to living with unstable, precarious jobs. They work on the basis of temporary employment, on-call work, remote work or commissions from online platforms, etc. More importantly, they lack a professional identity or narrative that they could give to their life or any organization.

M. Knapieńska points out that the concept of the precariat combines several co-occurring features: “young age, low income, temporary employment or lack thereof, no life prospects and financial plans for the future, no accommodation, often no family and a reluctance to start one due to lack of life stability” [9].

Young people transitioning from the education system to the labour market space are particularly exposed to the problem of having to operate within the framework of “peripheral”, that is worse, employment. An employee remaining on the periphery of the labour market for an extended period runs a number of risks that should be considered not only on an individual basis, directly related to the working individual, but also in a broader, social and economic context. The precariat have unequivocally less favourable career development prospects – especially in terms of promotion to specialist or managerial positions within organizations. The adverse situation of the precariat on the labour market (including no sense of security and a lack of opportunities for professional development, plus low wages) compared to “core” employees adds to their sense of deprivation, which results in frustration. On the other hand, the lack of stable employment, manifested by temporary work, among others, “may affect other aspects of life, such as decisions about starting a family and having children” [10]. This, in turn, translates into low fertility rates and is related to the problem of depopulation. The occurrence of the precariat phenomenon in young people is the field of scientific interest of many European researchers. They are trying to determine the long-term consequences of this phenomenon for young people and its scale [11,12].

In Poland, young people, who are just entering the labour market, are at risk of being threatened by the precariat. Some of these people are not satisfied with this situation and have doubts about how their lives will turn out, including their future professional career. Other young people with part-time jobs feel comfortable in this situation.

They treat it as their life choice. They are convinced that they have the potential to obtain a job under an employment contract at any time. For now, however, they want to gain professional experience and enjoy life [13,14].

2.2. The Characteristics of the Polish Precariat

This article – referring to Eurostat data – attempts to show the dynamics of changes in the share of those at risk of poverty among the working population in Poland in recent years. Undoubtedly, the development of knowledge on the phenomenon of precarisation (and pauperisation), but, above all, the identification of the factors determining this phenomenon, would help to develop appropriate mechanisms aimed at reducing the scale of this social problem. One of the key determinants of the problem of precarisation is low wages, which is why this is an analysis of the poverty risk of economically active people in Poland – based on the data from the EU-SILC survey.

Thus, the characteristics of working people at risk of poverty in Poland are described. The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, abbreviated to EU-SILC, has been implemented since 2003 [15]. According to the Central Statistical Office, which is responsible for the survey in Poland: The main objective of the European Survey of Living Conditions of the Population (EU-SILC) is to provide data comparable for the European Union countries on the living conditions of the population. EU-SILC is the primary source of information used to calculate for the EU Member States, inter alia, indicators of income, poverty and social exclusion. The set of statistical indicators in this area, adopted at the Laeken European Council in December 2001, is intended to enable the monitoring of progress towards achieving the common objectives agreed by the countries of the Union to combat poverty and social exclusion [16].

Analysis of the data from the EU-SILC survey has revealed trends in the share of those at risk of poverty among the working population in Poland over the last ten years (2012–2021). In particular, the extent to which variables such as education level, working time, gender and household type affect in-work pauperisation was analysed (Tables 1 to 4).

It turns out that the variables that particularly affect the risk of in-work poverty are the level of education and the working time. It can be seen that the lower the level of education, the higher the risk of in-work poverty (Table 1). Another variable significantly affecting pauperisation is working time. Those working on temporary contracts are twice as likely as those working full time to be at risk of pauperisation (Table 2).

Table 1. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by educational attainment level in Poland (EU-SILC survey) [17].

Educational level	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)	25.6	27.7	28.6	30.6	28.0	23.2	23.3	20.4	26.9	20.5
Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)	12.3	12.9	12.9	13.6	13.3	12.2	12.2	12.0	11.8	11.9
Tertiary education (levels 5-8)	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.5	2.9	4.3	3.4	2.9

Table 2. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by working time in Poland (EU-SILC survey) [18].

Working time	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Full time	9.6	9.7	10.0	10.7	10.2	9.0	8.8	9.3	9.2	8.6
Part time	18.1	20.2	17.1	18.3	20.4	21.7	19.0	15.9	14.5	16.2

Table 3. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by sex in Poland (EU-SILC survey) [19].

Sex	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	10.4	10.7	10.6	11.2	10.8	9.9	9.7	9.7	9.6	8.9
Females	8.7	9.4	9.3	9.8	9.5	9.1	8.2	8.7	8.3	7.5
Males	11.8	11.8	11.7	12.4	11.9	10.6	11.0	10.7	10.7	10.2

Table 4. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by household type in Poland (EU-SILC survey) [20].

Type of household	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Single person	11.3	10.7	9.5	11.6	10.6	11.3	12.9	11.3	10.9	9.0
Single person with dependent children	10.5	15.6	14.8	16.6	23.1	15.0	14.9	16.2	13.1	11.0
Two or more adults without dependent children	7.0	6.1	7.6	6.7	6.4	7.4	7.4	7.3	7.4	7.5
Two or more adults with dependent children	12.6	13.7	12.5	13.6	13.2	11.1	10.2	10.6	10.6	9.8
Households without dependent children	7.6	6.7	7.9	7.5	7.1	8.1	8.3	8.0	8.0	7.7
Households with dependent children	12.6	13.7	12.5	13.7	13.4	11.2	10.3	10.7	10.7	9.8

The empirical data collected from the EU-SILC survey shows that men are more likely than women to be at risk of poverty among the economically active (Table 3). E. Kuźmicz, interpreting this phenomenon, argues that: "This is probably because women are the second income contributors to the household after men. Thus, even if they earn a small income in a bad job, but have a working partner whose earnings are correspondingly high, they are not at risk of poverty. In a situation where the man is the sole

breadwinner in a large family, his income, even if it is the national average, may place the entire household below the poverty line" [21].

In Poland, young people just entering the labour market are vulnerable to the precariat phenomenon. Some of these people are unhappy with this situation and have doubts about their life, including their future career. Other young people with part-time jobs feel comfortable. They treat the situation as their life choice. They are convinced

that they have the potential to obtain a job with an employment contract any time they like. For now, however, they want to gain some professional experience and enjoy life.

An analysis of data illustrating the proportion of people employed in the Polish economy with permanent contracts shows that between 2007-2019 there was an upward trend. At the same time, a growing proportion of temporary contracts, mainly fixed-term contracts, may be noticed in the employment structure. The observed trend is in line with the changes taking place in the contemporary labour market. The analysis of the data regarding the proportion of persons employed in the Polish economy with a contract reveals that between 2007-2019 approximately 55% of all people had a permanent contract.

Temporary employment and employment under civil law contracts mainly affect young people in the segment of employees aged 15-24. In the case of Poland, at least 60% of employees in this age group work on the basis of this form of employment. The EU-28 average of this age group employed on temporary contracts is 41% [22].

2.3. Social Security and Aspects Thereof

One of the pioneers of the use of the term social security was the American scientist Isaac Max Rubinow, who identified this term with the actions of the state against the threats of the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” – accident, disease, old age and unemployment [23].

Social security is a heterogeneous category which, in the absence of any consensus by various scientific disciplines as to the content that underlies this term, consequently leads to different interpretations. The term ‘social security’ you can use in three main senses:

- as a form of income maintenance, including social assistance but excluding forms of social protection which do not directly yield income for the recipients, like health insurance
- as social insurance, including health insurance but excluding other forms of income maintenance;
- as social insurance solely for the purpose of income maintenance [24,25].

In normative terms (resulting from legal regulations), the concept of social security should be understood as: social security (system retirement); state benefits in the event of unemployment, invalidity; social assistance; medical care and broadly understood family benefits, that is, all aspects of a persons life that ensure their decent existence and realization of the fundamental human right, which is the right to life and health. The state has become both the designer and supplier of benefits and aid programmes, thanks to which basic means of subsistence should be provided for people who, due to old age, disability or another objective condition, means they cannot take care of their own needs [26].

Social security is also related to the protection of human existence and meeting the individual needs of individuals (not only material, but also spiritual), and is related to the

creation of places to study and work, and protection in the event of the deterioration of health and old age. It is an interesting approach in the field of social security as it does not refer directly to state institutions, but rather focuses on the functions of society [27].

Social security can be understood as standing for financial assistance regardless of its form. Financial assistance mainly compensates a lack of funds; and if poverty is a broader concept than a mere shortage of money, social security can only deal with this to a limited extent. The nature of social security is that it does not provide goods, but money with which people can buy goods. This presupposes that people meet their needs by spending money and that goods are then distributed throughout the market [24]. An active participant in social security thus understood is the state and its agencies dealing with the management of this assistance and related cash flows.

Social security is also a derivative of models of financing social security operating in certain countries. In the case of Europe, two model systems can be distinguished for the functioning and financing of social insurance. These are the Bismarck model and the Beveridge system. The Bismarck model is based on social security contributions which finance various types of benefits and public services for the insured. The main elements of this system are:

- employees of companies or self-employed persons who are insured
- insurance financed through premiums, in an amount depending on the income earned
- premiums deducted from salary and additional income received by the insured [28].

However, the Beveridge system comes from its author William Henry Beveridge, who in 1942 presented a comprehensive report to the British Parliament on social policy. The report contained proposals to create a comprehensive social security system, including health care, workplace accident insurance, introduction of family assistance, maintaining a high and stable level of employment and protection against mass unemployment. These proposals were the cornerstone of the post-war organisation of the British social security system. The Beveridge system is based on the following assumptions that it:

- covers the entire population of residents
- is financed mainly from the state budget
- requires uniform, flat-rate contributions [28].

The purpose of the Bismarck system is to provide a standard of living, while the Beveridge system focuses on securing a minimum acceptable level of subsistence. Depending on how particular states function, social insurance systems tend to follow one of the models listed here or combine them.

The ‘Polish Deal’ program analysed later in this article refers largely to the above-mentioned the Beveridge model when it comes to the Polish government’s pursuit to increase the number of permanent and stable jobs, which should contribute to shrinking the precariat. It also refers to Bismarck model model in terms of the changes it intro-

duces.

In this study, it was assumed social security is treated as a function of the state and its organs related to the prevention and reduction of risks related to survival and quality of life in the economic and cultural sphere, and as actions taken by the state/government aimed at protecting human existence and satisfying the individual needs of individuals (not only material, but spiritual too), as well as creating places for study and work and protection in the event of the deterioration of health and old age.

Activities in these areas carried out by the government / state are important for the precariat because their living needs and life aspirations are satisfied at a low level. This state of affairs contributes to the low level of social security of this social group. Therefore, the state is required to take specific actions and implement programmes to improve this situation.

3. Research Methodology

In order to define the possible actions the current government in Poland could take, aimed at enhancing the precariat's level of social security, questionnaires were used, conducted via the Internet and involving a research panel of respondents. The research used a stratified-quota sample, corresponding to the proportions of people working on various fixed-term contracts or self-employed in Poland. The respondents answered 17 closed questions included in a questionnaire accessed via the Internet. 1,000 respondents participated in the research conducted during March-April 2021 via a research panel run by an external company dealing with commissioned market research.

The research results presented in this article are part of a broader study related to the political preferences of the Polish precariat. The research examined particular issues such as general interest in politics, willingness to vote in elections to the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland and presidential elections, and the political identity of the respondents. The overriding theme was how the respondents evaluated the action taken by the Polish government aimed at limiting the phenomenon of the precariat in Poland. Some relevant aspects in this regard included their the assessment of assistance given to entrepreneurs to create permanent jobs and the scope of support provided by the Polish government to the precariat to set up their own businesses. The research also looked at what forms of assistance from the Polish government are expected by the precariat, which – from their point of view – would change their life situation and thus enhance their sense of social security.

The research looked at the political preferences of the Polish precariat and their determinants – that is the current and potential actions of the Polish government to limit the phenomenon of the precariat, with a particular emphasis on changes within education and the specific forms of assistance expected by the Polish precariat in order to alleviate their life situation and thus boost their level of social security.

Because of the topic of this article, the issues of the current political preferences of the Polish precariat will be discussed in general terms, taking into account their relevance to the subject matter. Further on in the considerations, answers will be presented relating to the degree and scope of the actions of the Polish government to improve the living conditions of the Polish precariat and thus enhance their sense of social security.

The topic of the conducted research also included forms of assistance from the Polish government expected by the precariat, which in their view would significantly change their life situation and therefore enhance their sense of social security. This issue is relevant when it comes to building and maintaining a sense of social security among the Polish precariat. This article draws from the results of the aforementioned studies related to this issue, which bears relevance for the topic discussed in the article.

In addition, critical analysis based on desk research was made of the assumptions of the 'Polish Deal' programme, as implemented by the current Polish government. The analysis takes into account the impact of the aforementioned programme on the Polish precariat's sense of social security.

From the point of view of methodology, the researcher may use different approaches to discovering truth and/or knowledge, bearing in mind the research goal. When collecting empirical material, the methodology of mixed research (MMR) was used. This combines many methods of solving research problems in an appropriate and principled way, including the collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of quantitative and qualitative data [29–31].

This approach refers to the methodology of triangulation based on the assumption that no single applied method is able to capture, explain or facilitate the understanding of human experience and the phenomena of life in its multiple dimensions. This assumption leads to the application of a polymethodological approach. The triangulation strategy expresses a desire for solutions that yield a comprehensive, thorough and critical understanding of the studied phenomena. This is achieved by combining various methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in one study. Triangulation, as a qualitative research strategy, consists in using multiple methods or data sources to comprehensively understand the research problem or test the accuracy of the assumptions by converging information from various sources [32].

By using the methodology of mixed research, a greater methodological flexibility is achieved that facilitates a better understanding of the nuances of specific phenomena [33]. Another advantage of triangulation is the lower risk of interpretation error. Triangulation allows researchers to overcome personal biases and limitations arising from a single methodology. By combining different methods in one study, researchers can partially overcome the inaccuracy of using only one method [34].

For the purposes of this study, sources underwent triangulation consisting in the use and comparison of data from

various representatives of the Polish precariat participating in direct research carried out by the author of this study, as well as opinions and analyses of experts in the field of finance, accounting and law, which helped demonstrate the impact of the Polish Deal programme on the Polish precariat's sense of social security. The desk research method was used to collect the above-mentioned opinions and expert opinions.

The adopted research approach also applied triangulation of methods, which involved comparing data collected by means of a survey and research based on secondary data.

4. Research Results

4.1. *The Precariat and their Expectations towards the Government in the Context of Social Security*

Treating social security as the protection of human existence and satisfying the individual needs of individuals (not only material, but also spiritual) as well as the creation of places to study, work and protection in the event of the deterioration of health and old age, a significant part of such action is carried out by the government and its institutions. In the conducted empirical research, these elements were treated as determinants of the political preferences expressed by the Polish precariat. These issues were reflected in the question regarding the support and promotion of entrepreneurs who create relatively permanent jobs on an indefinite basis, giving employees a sense of stability and thus an increase in their sense of social security. Another important issue regarding social security the respondents were asked about the scope of state assistance for the precariat to start up their own business. The last issue relevant to the issues discussed was exactly the kind of help the precariat expects from the government.

The first of the above-mentioned questions concerned the respondents' acceptance of action taken by the Polish government regarding tax relief for entrepreneurs who employ workers for an indefinite period. With regard to this issue, the respondents, as a whole and within individual groups, responded positively to such a solution. On aver-

age, over 60% responded positively to this type of action undertaken by the Polish government.

Further questions asked the respondents for their assessment about how much assistance the government has offered to the precariat for opening their own business. Regardless of age groups, the respondents expressed a negative opinion – the range of negative responses across most age groups was around 49–60%. Respondents over 65 years of age were the most negative. When it comes to positive responses, it was a similar story across all age groups—17–21% on average. The exception in this area was respondents over 65, who gave no positive answer at all. On the other hand, 25% of all age groups offered a neutral “Don't know”. By contrast, 34.5% of respondents from the 55–64 age group gave a “Don't know” as well as 28.6% of respondents from the group aged over 65.

From the point of view of the social security experienced by the precariat, the scope of assistance expected from the Polish government is relevant. The most significant expectation expressed by the precariat in this area is state aid to help them to open their own business and a universal basic income (see Fig. 1).

The first form of assistance mentioned was indicated by 46.8% of all respondents, and the second by 34.9%. Another form of assistance that the respondents (26%) selected was an educational programme to help them become an entrepreneur. The final form of assistance expected from the state, as indicated by the respondents (21%), was an educational voucher to study something of personal interest. An option was given to indicate no expectation on the part of the precariat for any state assistance. This was selected by 18.9% of the respondents. Women appeared to have a greater need for help, according to an analysis of the responses. Potentially, they report a greater willingness to take advantage of material aid from the state to open their own business, a universal basic income and an educational voucher. On the other hand, men, to an even greater extent than women, expect state support to help them open their own business, and were more likely than women to declare that they expect nothing from the state to improve their living conditions or change their professional situation.

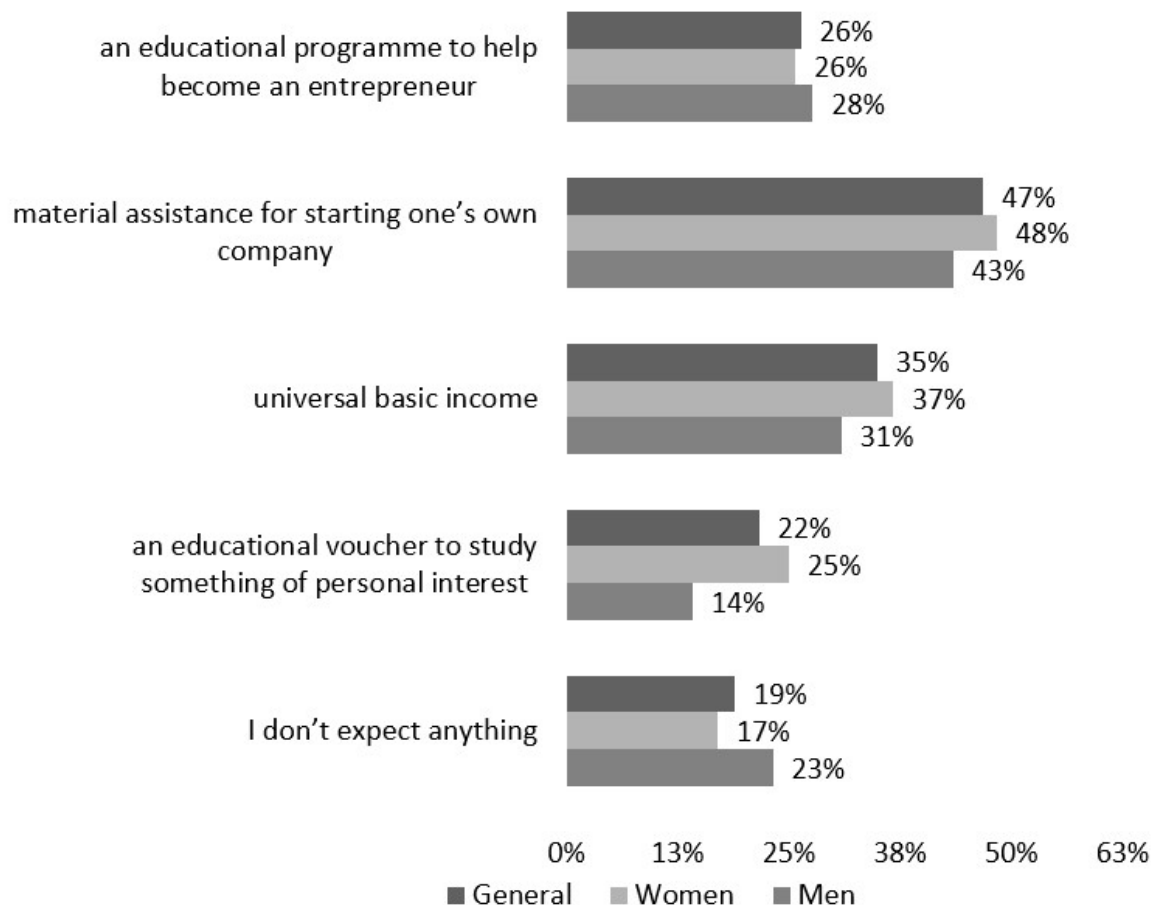


Figure 1. Expected forms of state assistance that the surveyed precariat feel may contribute to enhanced social security.

4.2. Social Policy Directions of the Government in Poland and the Effects

The abandonment of the liberal economy model in favour of a more social economy in Poland, observable since 2015—that is when Law and Justice came to power—and related to the implementation of large social projects (including the flagship 500+ programme to support families with children), has undoubtedly influenced the reduction of poverty in Poland. Extreme poverty in Poland in 2014–2019 decreased from 7.4% to 4.2% [15]. The social benefit that households began to receive also reduced the scale of the phenomenon of the working poor in Poland. This is related, inter alia with defining the phenomenon of the working poor, which also takes into account disposable income—the amount of a households available income.

The new model of economic policy also embraced a number of measures related to the labour market to improve the situation of people with the lowest incomes. A number of actions can be indicated that were taken during the first term of office after the ruling Law and Justice took power in Poland, and which referred directly or indirectly to the improvement of the situation of professionally active people on the labour market. The following can be

mentioned as examples:

- A regular increase in the minimum wage. In 2015, the minimum wage for work in Poland was PLN 1,750, while in 2021 it had increased to PLN 2,800 (an increase of 60%). By comparison, in 2008–2014 the increase in minimum pay was less (an increase from PLN 1,126 to PLN 1,680, i.e., by 49.2%), [35];
- In 2015, the ratio of the lowest salary to the average salary was 43%, but after five years this ratio had increased to 50% [36];
- As of January 2017, the provision stating that in the first year of work a graduate could be paid 80% of the minimum wage, and 90% in the second year of work, no longer applied;
- From January 2017, a minimum hourly rate for work was introduced (PLN 13), and after four years this rate increased to PLN 18.3 (a 40.8% increase);
- Since August 2019, persons under the age of 26 have been exempt from income tax (zero PIT applies to earnings not exceeding PLN 85,528 per year);
- From October 2019, the personal income tax rate was reduced from 18% to 17% for an amount not exceeding PLN 85,528, which benefited all working people [37]

At the same time, it should be highlighted that the actions taken by Law and Justice were not only aimed at achieving important social goals related to improving the situation on the labour market for people exposed to pauperization despite the fact that they work. This type of legislation also had a political dimension and served to strengthen the current electorate and, above all, was aimed at gaining additional political support, especially among young people. It is the young people entering the labour market who expect quick employment stability [38] and hope for an improvement in remuneration, which—as practice shows—can also be achieved by reducing the tax burden, as proposed by the ruling party.

People working on civil law contracts (e.g., contracts of mandate) also benefited from the action taken. Minimum hourly rates were introduced for the first time. The measurable effect of these actions was a reduction of pauperization among employees. Greater stability of employment and an increase in salaries, in turn, implies a reduction in the precariat problem—that is broadly understood employee insecurity. The initiated measures were so effective that Poland recorded a reduction in the risk of poverty among the employed.

Indeed, statistical data show that in Poland the proportion of people aged 18–64 at risk of poverty in Poland fell from 11.3% to 9.9% in the period between 2015 and 2019.

The actions of the Polish government are part of the direct instruments aimed at reducing the poverty of professionally active people, including the precariat [39]. In addition, limitations began to be imposed on the flexibility of the labour market in Poland. A provision was introduced in the Labour Code, which in Poland acts as a form of legislation, whereby a third employment contract is transformed into a contract for an indefinite period [40]. Therefore, the practice of concluding numerous fixed-term contracts with the same employee was restricted.

These activities turned out to be effective because the proportion of working people in Poland who are at risk of poverty is systematically decreasing. At the same time—as should be emphasized—the problem of the precariat may have been exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which will end up determining the processes evolving in the economy. This is especially true for employees of industries forced to restrict their operations due to successive waves of the pandemic.

In 2019, the parliamentary elections in Poland were won once again by Law and Justice. Poland began to be governed by the coalition of the United Right, with the vast majority held by Law and Justice. In 2020—in connection with the global COVID-19 pandemic—the government mainly focused on a policy of combating the epidemic and supporting entrepreneurs who, due to lockdown, were forced to limit or suspend their operation for some time. The Anti-Crisis Shield was introduced, which was based on five pillars: 1. protection of jobs and the security of employees, 2. offering financial support to entrepreneurs, 3. health protection, 4. bolstering the financial system, 5. public investments. In

total, the Polish government allocated PLN 312 billion to protective measures, including PLN 30 billion to safeguard jobs and give employees security [41]. It is worth noting that the first pillar of the Anti-Crisis Shield was the protection of jobs and the security of employees, which proves that supporting the labour market is especially important for state policy.

At the same time—regardless of the provisions of the Anti-Crisis Shield—politicians from Law and Justice also started to develop a strategy to support the recovery of the economy and society from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The main assumptions of the so-called Polish Deal were announced on 15 May, 2021—during the Law and Justice Convention. The programme postulates were to be announced in March 2021, but due to the third wave of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the party's convention was happened two months later. The name of the Polish programme refers to the American “New Deal” economic reforms, which were implemented in the United States in order to limit the effects of the great depression that took place in 1929–1933. Of course, the assumptions of the Polish Deal are fundamentally different from the “New Deal” programme, although the main objective of both projects is similar—to minimize the effects of a crisis. In the case of the Polish Deal, it is obviously a question of limiting the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3. The Main Assumptions of the ‘Polish Deal’ Programme

The main assumptions of the ‘Polish Deal’ programme are: an increase in the Gross Domestic Product; a reduction in taxes for 18 million Poles; an increase in state investments to create new jobs; the construction of apartments without the need to have own contribution; an increase in the purchasing power of retirees by exempting pensions up to PLN 2,500 from income tax PIT.

The law introducing the Polish Deal was passed on 29 October and signed by President Andrzej Duda on 17 November 2021. In 2022, this will herald some rather significant fiscal changes for both individuals and entrepreneurs.

The Polish Deal introduces many changes. Inter alia, the act raises the tax-free threshold to PLN 30,000 and the first income threshold up to PLN 120,000, after which the tax rate is 32%. The Polish Deal offers so-called relief for the middle class. The beneficiaries will be full-time employees, who earn an annual income from an employment contract of PLN 68,412 to PLN 133,692, as well as those running a sole proprietorship who pay tax according to the tax scale.

The changes also apply to pensioners. From 2022, pensions up to PLN 2,500 will be exempt from tax. This means that pensioners will only pay tax on amounts in excess of PLN 2,500.

The Polish Deal also introduces changes that will be unfavourable to some Poles. One example is the rise in the health insurance premium to 9%, without being able to

deduct it from income tax.

In 2022, the minimum wage will increase from PLN 2,800 gross to PLN 3,010 gross. However, the minimum hourly rate will be PLN 19.70 gross. This means that many Poles will enjoy an increase in pay.

The numerous tax changes brought in by the Polish Deal will affect Polish net salaries. Politicians have proposed raising the income tax-free amount to PLN 30,000. According to the ruling party, this means an increase in the progressiveness of the tax wedge—lower taxes for people with low and middle incomes. Additionally, the tax threshold will be raised from PLN 85,000 to PLN 120,000 [42].

This, in turn, should translate into more money in the pockets of the middle class. In order to boost the labour market, the United Right also proposed facilitating the combination of work and family life, including making it easier to work part-time. Young people are more likely to enter the labour market because employment offices will help plan their future career paths, and participants in the programme will be able to use a training voucher to upgrade or change their qualifications.

The government also wants to regulate remote work, which employers and employees have been striving for since the beginning of the pandemic. There is to be a provision stipulating that office duties may be performed anywhere. In addition, the issue of a lump sum being young mothers are to receive personalized support from employment offices. Offices will focus on helping women in sectors that allow them to work from home more often and combine family responsibilities with work (e.g., IT, professional services). In this regard, employment offices will organize training courses combined with childcare. An additional financial package will be introduced for parents—that is, PLN 12,000 for parents to use flexibly to cover the costs of caring for a second child between the age of 12 and 36 months of age. Parents will be able to choose between PLN 1,000 per month for a year or PLN 500 per month over two years. They will also be able to decide how to spend these funds [43].

The numerous tax changes brought in by the Polish Deal will affect Polish net salaries. The government has made a salary calculator available for working out 'take-home pay'. Who will gain and how much, and who will lose? Assuming that an employee is not a participant in the Employee Capital Plans programme, works from home and does not have children under 18 years of age, they will gain a maximum of PLN 5,600 gross from the changes introduced [44]. After this amount is exceeded, this remuneration will decrease compared to the current one.

A number of the proposals in the Polish Deal of Poland aim to change the labour market. First of all, income relief is offered to people who earn their living as an employee. The relief will not apply to workers employed under civil law contracts. The clear aim of this relief is to encourage the conclusion of employment contracts, which is not without significance for small and medium-sized enterprises.

At the same time, in order to fight the 'shadow economy',

the government proposes to assign the employer revenue in the amount of correctly defined revenue from the employment relationship where it turns out that the employer has employed an employee illegally or has been misrepresenting their earnings (part of the salary paid 'under the table'). The consequence of this change will be to only charge the employer tax costs if irregularities are found [45].

While the Polish Deal was being worked out, information emerged that civil law contracts would be completely abolished or it would become less favourable to offer them. However, the provisions of the Polish Deal do not foresee such a situation. The principles of premiums for contracts of mandate have not changed, nor have the rules of being subject to social insurance in the case of those who are employed but also run a business. The potential source of loss in this case is the inability to take advantage of the so-called middle-class relief, which compensates for the costs of health insurance. It may be assumed that those who earn relatively little on a civil law contract will benefit, and those with medium or high earnings will lose out. Contributions arising from a contract of mandate are collected in different ways depending on whether the cooperation was concluded with one's own employee, a non-working person, student, etc. The Polish Deal will not change that [46].

Some of the assumptions of the Polish Deal presented above will have an impact on the standard of living and social security of the precariat.

From their point of view, increasing the income tax-free amount may represent an opportunity for people currently in low-wage jobs, often casual and usually in the shadow economy, to transit to legal work.

Creating opportunities for professional and personal development for anyone willing may also be an opportunity for the precariat to improve their lives and boost their social security. Improving access to funds for upgrading qualifications may stimulate the participation of this group of people in the labour market and make it easier to find and keep a job. The programme to increase the employment stability of young people, who usually make up a significant part of the precariat, by investing in their skills and providing comprehensive professional support, is relevant from the perspective of the mismatch between the education structure and the needs of the labour market and the willingness of the precariat to undertake further education connected with business and related to their own interests too.

The Polish Deal programme announced that the use of civil law contracts would be limited by charging full premiums for contracts of mandate. In fact, the rules for contributions arising from contracts of mandate have not changed. They may be disadvantageous to people who earn high incomes from them because with this form of employment they cannot take advantage of the so-called relief for the middle class. This solution may push people working under civil law contracts to set up sole proprietorships and thus work or run a business based on the so-called lump sum with preferential tax rates.

In addition, as the tax relief for people with incomes

between PLN 70,000 and PLN 130,000 is only intended for employees, the conclusion of a contract of mandate may turn out to be extremely unfavourable—with comparable amounts of income, it may lead to significantly lower take-home pay. This phenomenon may also limit the scale of the precariat in Poland, but may also lead to an increase in the scale of the occurrence of the so-called the shadow economy [43].

How the government treats employees regarding the so-called ‘health contribution’ compared with people running a business for whom this contribution is to be higher also indicates that the government wishes to push people out of self-employment into employment contracts. In some cases, this may be difficult since these people chose this form of work, not for fiscal reasons, but because there was simply no job for them on an employment contract [43]. The newly introduced Polish Government programme treats employees and sole proprietors in the same way as far as the amount of the health insurance premium is concerned. This is a positive change compared to its original assumptions, according to which a higher health insurance premium was to be paid by sole proprietors in comparison to full-time employees.

5. Discussion

The responses collected during this research illustrate the discrepancy between the expectations of the Polish precariat and the extent to which they are satisfied, and the actions taken by the Polish government. These expectations concern greater material assistance from the Polish state for establishing one’s own business. They also concern changes in education—in particular, expectations regarding the introduction of school subjects that develop entrepreneurship, creativity and self-esteem, which are essential skills for becoming an entrepreneur and running one’s own business. As can be seen from the research conducted, the Polish precariat also have specific expectations of the state and how it might support them. So far in the Polish reality, the above-mentioned expectations and needs regarding social security have not been sufficiently met by either the previous nor present government. This situation may influence the potential political preferences of the respondents.

These trends indicated above are acknowledged by the current Law and Justice government. The Polish Deal programme represents an attempt to satisfy the needs of the Polish precariat, and has been adopted by the Sejm and signed by the President of the Republic of Poland.

The Polish Deal programme announces that the use of civil law contracts will be limited by charging full premiums for contracts of mandate, followed by the introduction of one employment contract. This solution may contribute to limiting the scale of the precariat phenomenon, but may also force people working under civil law contracts to set up one-person companies and work in this way. This phenomenon may apply to people who earn high incomes from

contracts of mandate because they are not covered by the so-called relief for the middle class to compensate for the increase in the premium paid for health insurance. This phenomenon may also limit the scale of the precariat in Poland, but may also lead to an increase in the scale of the so-called shadow economy. On the other hand, the Polish Deal programme does not, in principle, take into account the performance of work based on specific-task contracts. This could indicate that their taxation will be maintained at the same level as present and may foster conditions that perpetuate the precariat phenomenon in Poland.

A potential chance for the precariat to find permanent employment may be job offers connected with the investment projects implemented by Polish municipalities under the auspices of the Polish Deal programme. The question remains open as to whether many new and permanent jobs will actually be created in this way. Potentially, foreign entities may make investments that generate jobs. Here, however, the issue of Poland’s investment appeal comes into play, taking into account the new conditions for running a business imposed by the Polish Deal programme. A positive outcome here would be a premise to justify the actions proposed by the Polish government when introducing the Polish Deal.

From the point of view of the Polish precariat’s social security, the Polish Deal programme may also pose a threat. The problem may be an overall decrease in the number of jobs in the Polish economy. One outcome of implementing this programme may be that the number of vacancies for temporary work in non-governmental organizations and the hotel and catering industry, whose employees were usually employed under civil law contracts, may fall.

In addition, the increase in labour costs resulting from the Polish Deal could spur entrepreneurs to look for ways to cut costs and reduce employment via automation and artificial intelligence.

A significant threat to the social security of the Polish precariat may be a deterioration of their standard of living as a result of the current level of inflation in Poland, which additionally may be due to the increase in the minimum wage in Poland from 1 January 2022, which is also an element of the Polish Deal programme that is being introduced. The increase in the minimum wage may result in a hike in the prices of products and services to compensate employers for higher labour costs arising from the Polish Deal programme which will be passed on to consumers, who are also precariat workers. On the other hand, as a result of government proposals, the lowest earners will have additional financial resources to spend on consumption, which will aggravate the inflationary phenomena and negatively affect their standard of living in the medium and long term, and thus their sense of social security.

An additional negative factor that may offset the potential benefits of the Polish Deal programme is Russia’s current aggression against Ukraine. This situation causes economic instability, breaking logistic chains, which contributes to the increase in the prices of products and services in

Poland, which is certainly felt by people belonging to the Polish precariat. The resulting inflation eliminates the original assumption of the Polish Deal Programme one of the goals of which was to increase the wealth of Polish society. In the present situation, it may be, at the very least, difficult or impossible to achieve.

The influx of war refugees from Ukraine to Poland will have an impact on the labour market. Despite the potential for the short-term creation of 500,000 to 700,000 new jobs in Poland, it is difficult to determine how this will affect the possibilities of better (full-time) employment for the current precariat. Regarding the issue of employing Ukrainians, despite the fact that employers will find it easier to hire them, they will be employed illegally without formalities, even despite simplified procedures. This is especially possible for small companies, where it will also be easiest to hire refugees [47]. This situation may have a negative impact on the level of social security of the Polish precariat, consolidating their current way of life with no prospects for better and permanent work.

6. Conclusions

The research objective of this article was to present the specificity of the Polish precariat and their expectations regarding action taken by the Polish government in order to enhance their sense of social security. A general analysis of the specificity of the Polish precariat and the results of direct research conducted by the author of this article, offering an evaluation of the current actions undertaken by the Polish government to support the Polish precariat and presenting their expectations in this regard, proved most helpful in achieving the stated objective. The conclusion of this analysis is that the Polish government is taking steps to meet the needs of the Polish precariat. However, in the opinion of the respondents, the measures are insufficient or fall below their expectations. This may indicate that the Polish precariat have high life aspirations or that they are impatient, which is a feature of Generation Z, who are young people, just entering the labour market and constitute a significant proportion of the precariat. The current expression of action in this field is the Polish Deal programme run by the current Polish government.

This study treats social security as a function of the state and its bodies as related to the prevention and reduction of risks related to survival and quality of life in economic and cultural spheres, and as actions taken by the state/government to protect human existence and meet the individual needs of individuals (not only material, but also spiritual) including those related to the creation of places to study and work, and protection in the event of health deterioration and in old age. This approach corresponds to the results of direct research presented in this article, concerning the needs and expectations of the Polish precariat, as well as assessing selected and preferred activities from its point of view, which representatives of the precariat expect from the Polish government. The analysis of the Pol-

ish Governance program currently implemented in Poland, carried out in the article, also refers to the above-mentioned understanding of the category of social security. It treats them broadly, not limiting it to the issues of social security or the retirement system.

The research aim of this article was to present the specificity of the Polish precariat and their expectations in terms of the actions taken by the government to increase their sense of social security, currently reflected in the 'Polish Deal' programme proposed by the present Polish government. The utilitarian objective of this article was to evaluate this programme in terms of its efficacy in reducing the precariat phenomenon and increasing this social group's sense of social security. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the Polish Deal contains elements that may positively affect the reduction in the number of people employed under flexible forms of employment and have a positive impact on their level of social security. These are measures that restrict the use of civil law employment contracts in Poland and favour full-time employment. This solution may contribute to limiting the scale of the precariat phenomenon, but may also force people working under civil law contracts to become self-employed and work in this way. An important element of the programme under discussion that may positively impact the precariat's level of social security is the educational assistance to be offered by employment offices which will be related to running a business. These activities may provide an opportunity, especially for young people, to find a fixed-term job.

A beneficial element of the proposals is child benefit—that is, money given to parents for each child for the first two years of life. For people with families who work in the gig economy, this could be an important form of support and stabilize income as the family grows.

The programme discussed also features some potential disadvantages. It imposes higher overheads on the self-employed, which may throw a bucket of cold water over sole proprietorships or may lead to their transfer to neighbouring countries, such as the Czech Republic, which offers more favourable tax solutions than Poland [48].

This programme also has potential disadvantages related to increased labour costs. It may lead to a decrease in the number of startups in Poland and encourage companies to invest in new technologies and robots, which may consequently reduce the number of jobs, and may adversely affect the social security of the precariat.

Moreover, there is a great risk that the initially assumed benefits for the precariat resulting from the introduced Polish Deal programme will be cancelled due to the political and economic situation related to Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. The current conflict in Ukraine is contributing to an increase in inflation in Poland and the incoming war refugees become participants in the Polish labour market. Their number and willingness to take up work may constitute a barrier to finding a better (full-time) job for the Polish precariat and thus not improve their life situation, which they hoped for in connection with the introduction of the state's

Polish Deal programme.

The considerations outlined in this article have their limitations. They do not take into account the negative changes in the economic environment that occurred at the end of 2021, related to the first symptoms of inflation growth in Poland, which are currently gaining momentum—i.e., at the end of 2022. The conducted analyses, in principle, did not take into account the impact of the growing number of refugees from Ukraine, related to Russia's invasion of this country, on the social security of the Polish precariat.

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