

### 'The Degree of Despair': The Disjointed Labour Market, the Impact of the Pandemics, the Expansion of Precarious Work among Youth and Its Effects on Young People's Life Trajectories, Life Chances and Political Mentalities - Public Trust; The Case of Greece

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## **‘The Degree of Despair’.**

### **The Disjointed Labour Market, the Impact of the Pandemic, the Expansion of Precarious Work among Youth and its Effects on Young Peoples’ Life Trajectories, Life Chances and Political Mentalities - Public Trust. The Case of Greece**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the expansion of precarious forms of employment (temporary, seasonal, part-time jobs etc) and on the impact this expansion has on young peoples’ key determinants of life course. Based on both secondary quantitative-data analysis and primary qualitative research, the paper analyzes the state of play regarding precarious work among youth both in the EU and (mainly) in Greece, while it highlights the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent Recession in the abovementioned. The paper also explores the various aspects and facets of the impact of precarious employment in young peoples’ life trajectories. Key findings include: a) the strong correlation between precarious employment, social vulnerability and risk of poverty, b) the fact that, during the pandemic, the “labour market slack” in Greece hit young people aged 15-24 more than people aged 25-54, further widening their



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precariousness, c) that there is a wider tendency to expand and "normalize" the forms of precarious employment among youth, concerning, especially, the combination of declared and undeclared work, d) that a new labour market dualization is formed, e) that both the pandemic and the subsequent restrictive measures have had a significant impact on the majority of precarious young people, effectively causing a rupture in their already precarious life course and f) that all the abovementioned have a severe impact on key determinants of political behavior - mentalities as well as on public trust among young people. The paper is based on an ongoing Research Project, co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund- ESF) through the Operational Programme «Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014-2020» in the context of the project "Precarious Work and Youth in today's Greece: secondary quantitative analysis, qualitative filed research and research-based policy proposals" (MIS 5048510).

**Keywords:** Precarious employment, pandemic, youth, labour market dualization, precarious life trajectory.

## 1. Introduction

Greece has been one of the countries of the European Union, that was affected the most by the multi-parameter 2007/8 Economic Crisis and Recession. The strict fiscal measures taken in the framework of the implementation of the Memoranda had a major impact on the economy, employment and labour market, increasing dramatically the Greek unemployment rates, especially youth ones, deregulating the labour market, expanding inequalities and threatening the country's social cohesion and social fabric (Matsaganis, 2013). The current pandemic and the subsequent Recession have further intensified the abovementioned.

It is worth noting that in many countries, as in the case of Greece, young people constitute one of the age groups that have been significantly affected by the economic crisis, whereas they have also been impacted by transformations taking place in the labour market, including the expansion of precarious work (Green, 2017).

## 2. Theoretical Insights

The term "precarious work" conceptually means the form of work that is characterized by uncertainty, insecurity and instability, and in which employees have limited social benefits and protection and an increased risk of losing their job (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018: 1 as cited in Papadakis et al., 2020). Even though precarious work

*"is not necessarily new or novel to the current era; it has existed since the launch of paid employment as a primary source of sustenance"*

(Kalleberg, 2009: 2),

the economic boom of the 1990s, especially in the United States, widened the gap between rich and poor people and resurfaced inequalities in job quality, expanding precarious employment as well (Kalleberg, 2011).

According to ILO (2011), precarious work and specifically precarious forms of employment can be categorized into two main clusters, based on the type of contractual arrangements:

i. The duration of the contract, characterized by limitations, e.g. seasonal work, temporary work etc.,

ii. The terms/nature of the employment relationship, e.g. triangular and disguised employment relationships etc. (ILO, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that the extent and the intensity of precarious work among the countries depend on several parameters such as for instance, social institutions, the growth rate of the country and its culture (Kalleberg, 2009). Regarding the latter, as Vallas & Prener (2012) point out

*"work structures do not develop and survive in a cultural vacuum. Rather, discursive formations [...] occupy significant cultural space, impinging on the view workers adopt toward the employment relationship and even toward themselves."*

(p. 348).

Within this framework, in recent years, there has been a growing evidence-based trend that posits the view that the fact that young people work in precarious forms and posts of employment, seems to be related with persistent and established pathogens of the labour market of a country, such as, for instance, the deconstructed labour market and the high unemployment rates in Greece and the skills mismatch in Italy (Lodovici & Semenza, 2012). Furthermore, precarious work seems to be expanded by the employers themselves, who find gaps in the labour legislation or circumvent the regulatory framework in order to favor themselves and their businesses (ILO, 2011).

Even though the EU has recently attempted to combat precarious work by implementing initiatives such as the "European Platform Tackling Undeclared Work" (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016), however the impact of the economic recession on the labour market and the emergence of Mega-Trends (such as globalization, digital economy, social changes etc.), which have been gradually established

over the years, have completely transformed the operational structure of labour markets and work schemes, altering the working conditions, expanding precarious forms of employment, and changing, as a consequence, the mechanisms of social welfare systems in Europe (Eurofound, 2020a).

Within this context, Eurofound has recorded and highlighted seven phenomena-emerging transformations in the area of the European labour market, namely i. Flexibilisation, ii. Part-time work, iii. Temporary contracts, iv. Self-employment, v. Polarization, vi. New business models and vii. Rising insecurity. Furthermore, Eurofound has pointed out that the COVID-19 crisis has increased potential employment risks for workers with precarious contracts (Eurofound, 2020a). The abovementioned result in seven key-challenges for the future of labour in the EU, that are directly or indirectly associated with the intensity and extent of precarious work in Europe (Eurofound, 2020a).

### 3. Research Methodology

The Research Methodology of the Project is based on triangulation (Patton, 2002). More specifically, secondary quantitative analysis is combined with primary qualitative research (mixed methods), while the primary qualitative research is based on the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As far as the secondary quantitative analysis is concerned, data from valid and up-to-date national and European databases were used (National Institute of Labour & Human Resources - Labour Market Diagnosis Mechanism, Labour Market Monitoring Mechanism in the Region of Crete, Hellenic Statistical Authority, Eurostat, Eurofound etc.). This has allowed the processing and analysis of secondary quantitative data (Vartanian, 2011), in order to map the current state of play and the socio-economic framework in terms of precarious work and their correlation to the life trajectory of young people in Greece.

Concerning the Field Research of the Project, a primary qualitative research was conducted on young people aged 18-29, in three (3) Administrative Regions of Greece, namely Crete, Central Macedonia and Attica due to the significant differences that exist between them in terms of: i. The impact of the ten-year economic crisis and recession ii. The unemployment rates and iii. The characteristics of the local economy and labour market.

The sampling method was based on the snowball sampling technique (Tsiolis, 2014), as, according to Biernacki & Waldorf (1981: 141), it "...yields a study sample through referrals

*made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest*". Moreover, semi-structured interviews and narrative interviews were used as data collection tools of the primary qualitative research, while the coding procedure of the Grounded Theory (Tsiolis, 2014) was used for the analysis of the qualitative data, resulting in the core categories (Charmaz, 1997).

In terms of Ethics Approval for the Qualitative Research, the Research has been approved by the Committee of Research Ethics and Deontology of the University of Crete (Decision 22/05-02-2020), while all participants in the interviews were provided with an analytical consent form, entailing all relevant Project information, in order to read and sign it prior to the interviews.

#### *The Identity of the Field (Qualitative) Research:*

The primary qualitative research was conducted in the period from September to October 2020.

30 interviews were conducted (24 semi-structured interviews and 6 narrative interviews). 10 interviews (8 semi-structured and 2 narrative interviews) per Administrative Region.

Regarding the participants, 15 men and 15 women participated in the qualitative research.

The qualitative research was conducted on young people aged 18-29, and the majority of them belong to the age group of 25-29 years.

Concerning the educational level (higher educational level of completion) of the participants, 16 were Tertiary Education graduates, 4 hold a postgraduate degree, 8 were Upper Secondary Education graduates and 2 were graduates of Post-Secondary Education.

The vast majority of the participants were single without a child.

Many of the participants live alone. However, there were several participants who still live with their parents for livelihood-economic reasons.

At this point it is necessary to point out that the names listed next to the quotation of the excerpts of the semi-structured and narrative interviews, are pseudonyms, in order to preserve the interviewees' anonymity.

Finally, in our research we have utilized the method of Grounded Theory, as it allows issues to emerge without forcing them into already existing notions (Charmaz, 1995). According to the Straussian version of Grounded Theory, through the process of open coding, the emerging data are organized into categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Then, during axial and selective coding, the already formed categories are interconnected, and a core category is identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

## 4. Results and key findings of the secondary quantitative research, emphasizing the Pandemic Impact

### 4.1. The state of play during the decade 2010-2019, in Europe.

In 2019 the rates of part-time and temporary employees in the EU member states were much higher for young people, who were also at a greater risk of poverty than those employed full-time or permanently. Moreover, the gender gap in part-time employment was large. More specifically:

During the decade 2008-2018 (Eurofound 2020a) the rates of part-time employment in all its types (permanent, fixed-term, self-employed) increased in most EU countries.

The gender gap regarding part-time workers (Eurostat, 2020f) was very large during the last decade (2010-2019). As illustrated in Figure 1, in 2019, the share of people aged 15-24 who worked part-time in the EU28 was 25.5% for men and 40.9% for women. The highest proportions for both men and women were recorded in the Netherlands (males: 72.9%, females: 86.6%) and Denmark (males: 53.1%, females: 74.2%).

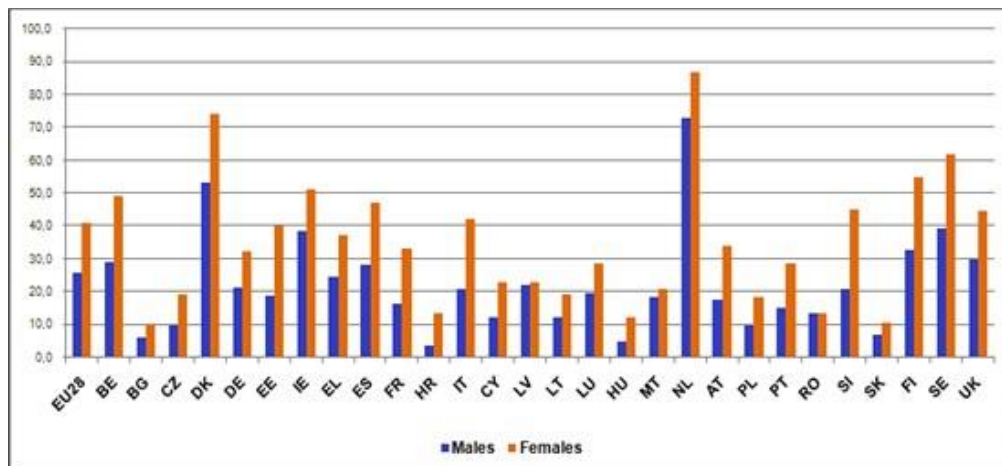


Figure 1.

EU28, 2019, Part-time employment share by sex, age group 15-24 (% of total employment (Source: Eurostat, 2020f)

According to Eurostat (2020i), in 2018, part-time workers in the EU28 were twice the risk of poverty than those employed full-time. Moreover, during the years 2010-2018 the



poverty risk rates (Eurostat, 2020c) recorded in part-time employment, were consistently higher for workers aged 16-24 than for those aged 25-54, with differences ranging from 1.6 to 3.3 percentage points.

In all EU28 countries (Eurostat, 2020f), the proportion of employees in temporary employment recorded in 2019 was much higher for young people. As reported by Eurostat (2020j), in the second quarter of 2019, almost half (42.8%) of employees aged 15-24 were employed under a temporary contract. More specifically (Figure 2), the share of such contracts for employees aged 15-24 was more than three times higher than that for employees aged 20-64 (EU28: 42.6% for the age group 15-24 vs. 12.6% for the age group 20-64). In 9 out of the 28 EU countries, more than half of the employees aged 15-24 worked on a temporary basis in 2019.

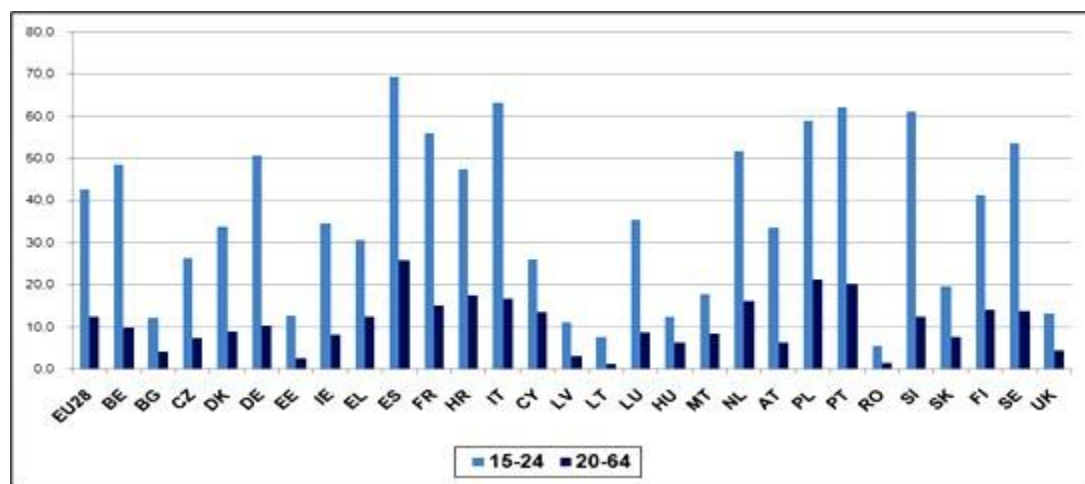


Figure 2:

EU28, 2019, Temporary employment share by age group 15-24 & 20-64 (% of total employment) (Source: Eurostat, 2020f)

During the years 2010-2018, the risk of poverty in temporary employment increased considerably in the majority of EU28 countries (Eurostat, 2020d). The risk was almost three times higher for employees with temporary jobs, than for those with permanent jobs (Eurostat, 2020i).

#### 4.2. Precarious Work among Young People, in Greece



In Greece, during the period 2010-2019, there was a significant increase in the proportion of young part-time workers, whilst the share of young temporary employees was much higher than that of the other age groups. Additionally, the gender gap in part-time employment was considerable.

With regard to the 15-24 age group (Eurostat, 2020h), Greece was the EU Member State, with the highest youth unemployment rate in recent years. This trend was continuous between 2012 and 2019 apart from the year 2013 (Papadakis et al., 2020).

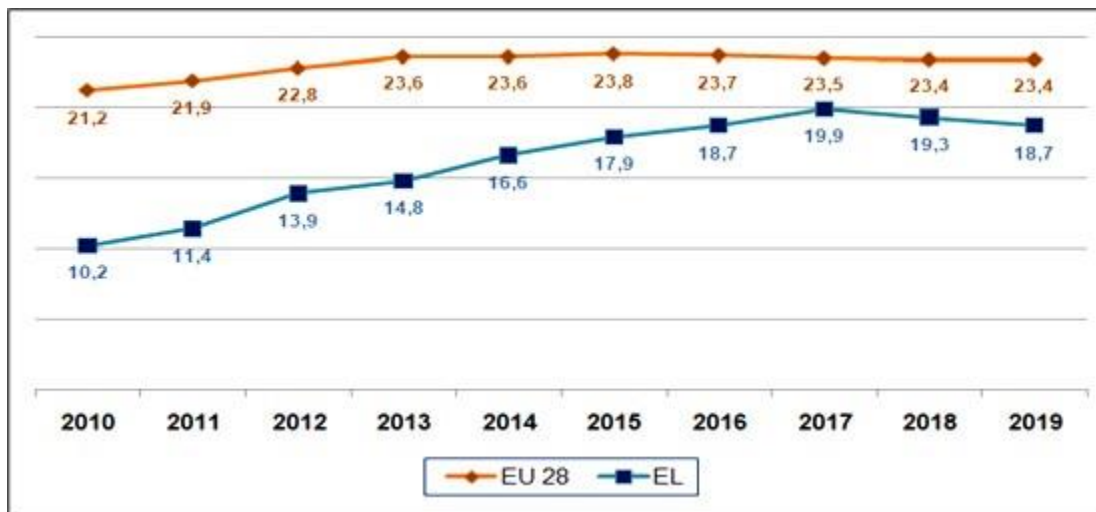


Figure 3.

Greece and EU28, 2010-2019, Part-time employment, age group 15-29 (% of total employment) (Source: Eurostat, 2020e)

As shown in Figure 3 (Eurostat, 2020e), in the period from 2010 to 2019 in Greece, part-time employment rate for workers aged 15-29 rose significantly, approaching the EU28 rate. In 2019, the part-time employment rate in Greece was higher than in 2010 by 8.8 p.p., while one out of five 15-29 year-olds used to work part-time.

Figure 4 (Eurostat, 2020e) illustrates that throughout the period 2010-2019, part-time employment was much more common among women in both age groups (15-24 and 25-64). The proportion of women working part-time not only was substantially higher, but also

increased more than that of men. In 2019, the part-time employment rate for 15-24 year-olds was at its peak, with about a quarter of men and two-fifths of women working part-time.

During the period 2010-2019, part-time workers with educational attainment corresponding to ISCED level 3-4 had a predominant share. In 2019, more than four-fifths of young people aged 15-24 were upper secondary and post-secondary education graduates (Eurostat, 2020a).

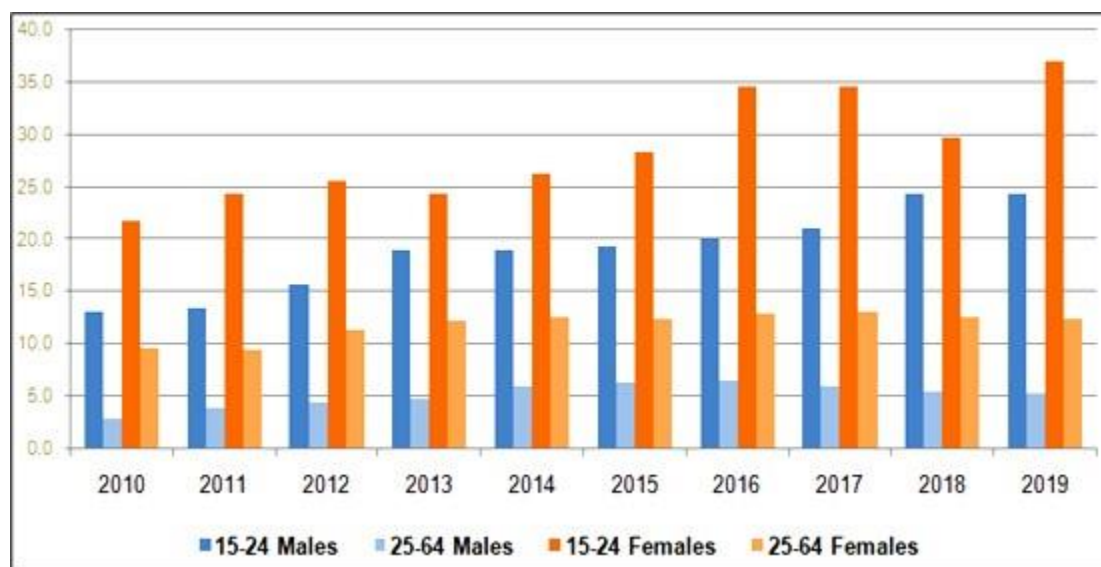


Figure 4.

Greece, 2010-2019, Part-time employment by sex and age, 15-24 & 25-64 (% of total employment) (Source: Eurostat, 2020e)

In the private sector (ELSTAT, 2020a), over the latest years, part-time and rotating employment recruitments *exceeded by far those of* full-time employment. During the period 2010-2018, out of all part-time workers, more than half did not change their employment status, about one in four went into full-time employment, while one in ten became unemployed.

In Greece, during the period 2010-2018 (Eurostat, 2020c), part-time employees were twice the risk of monetary poverty than full-time employees. During this period a fluctuation was recorded as regards the risk of poverty rate in part-time employment: from 29.4% in

2010, it rose to a peak of 30.3% in 2016, and then started to fall gradually. In 2018 it reached 24.6%, a particularly high rate.

In the last decade (2010-2019), the share of temporary employees aged 15-24 was about three times higher than the share of the 25-54 and 55-64 age groups. Figure 5 (Eurostat, 2020f) indicates that throughout the abovementioned period, both in Greece and in the EU28, the share of temporarily employed young people was much higher than the share of the other two age groups. In Greece, the percentage of temporarily employed young people aged 15-24 reached its highest point in 2013 (33.3%) and then, after a gradual decline until 2018, began to increase again, reaching, the last quarter of 2019, 31.6%. In 2019, the duration of most temporary employment contracts for young people in Greece was from 4 to 12 months (as cited in Papadakis et al., 2020).

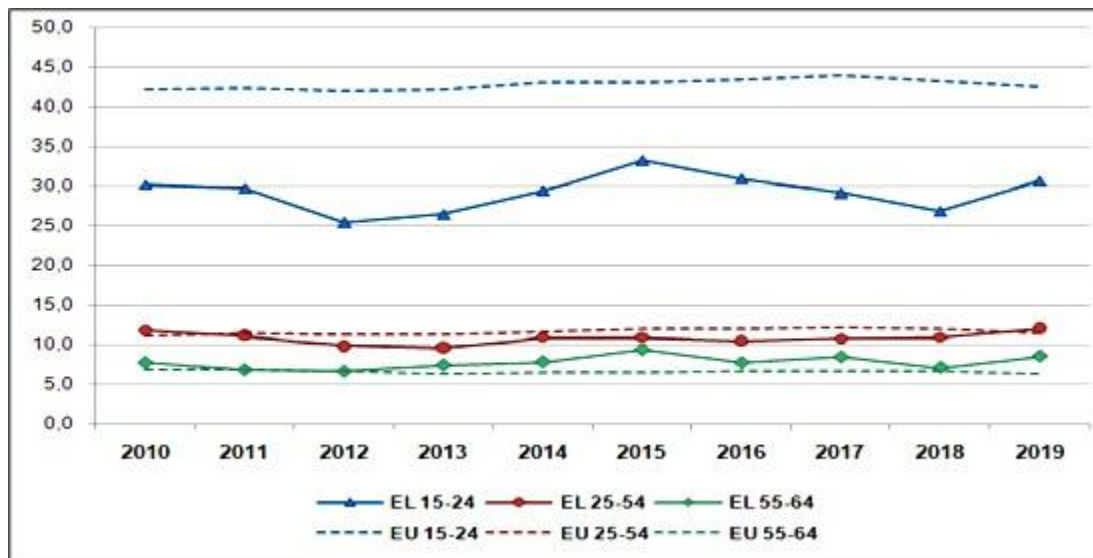


Figure 5.

Greece and EU28, 2010-2019, Temporary employment rates by age groups, 15-24, 25-54 & 55-65 (Source: Eurostat, 2020f)

In the period 2010-2019, more than half of young people aged 15-24 chose a temporary job because they could not find a permanent one (Eurostat, 2020g). On average,

the percentage of 15-24 year-olds in involuntary temporary employment during the years 2010-2019 in Greece was much *higher than the EU28* average (56.4% vs. 31.9%). Moreover, in Greece (Eurostat, 2020d), over the years 2010-2018, temporary workers' risk of poverty was more than double, comparing to permanent workers.

#### 4.3. The impact of COVID-19 and resulting recession pandemic in precarious work in Greece

Throughout 2020, Greece was among the EU countries with the highest rates of labour market slack, the consequences of which were more severe among young people. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic crisis on the labour market was broad and deep, resulting in *increased employment precariousness*. In particular:

In the third quarter of 2020, Greece was the EU27 M-S with the highest unemployment rate (15.9%) in terms of the extended labour force. In addition, Greece was among the countries for which the largest gender gap was identified. Unemployment of women in Greece reached, in the third quarter of 2020, 19% while that of men was 13.4% (Eurofound, 2020b). According to ELSTAT (2020c), the highest unemployment rates are observed in women, people up to the age of 24 and those who have not completed primary education. Moreover, in the third quarter of 2020, the percentage of part-time workers was 8.2%, while the percentage of people with a temporary contract was 7.2%.

In its Labour Force Survey (LFS), Eurostat (2021b) investigates labour market slack and the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, both at EU27 level and nationally in the respective member states for the extended labour force, which includes: (a) the unemployed, (b) the part-time underemployed and (c) the potential workforce.

Figure 6 (Eurostat, 2021b) depicts the fluctuation of the labour market slack as regards young people aged 15-24 of the extended workforce, for the years 2019 and 2020 in Greece and the EU27 (on a quarterly basis). It is obvious that during 2019 and 2020, the rates of labour market slack in Greece were much higher than those of the EU27 average. In all three quarters of 2020, Greece was among the countries with the highest rates of labour market slack (49.4% in the first quarter, 50.2% in the second quarter and 48.2% in the third quarter).

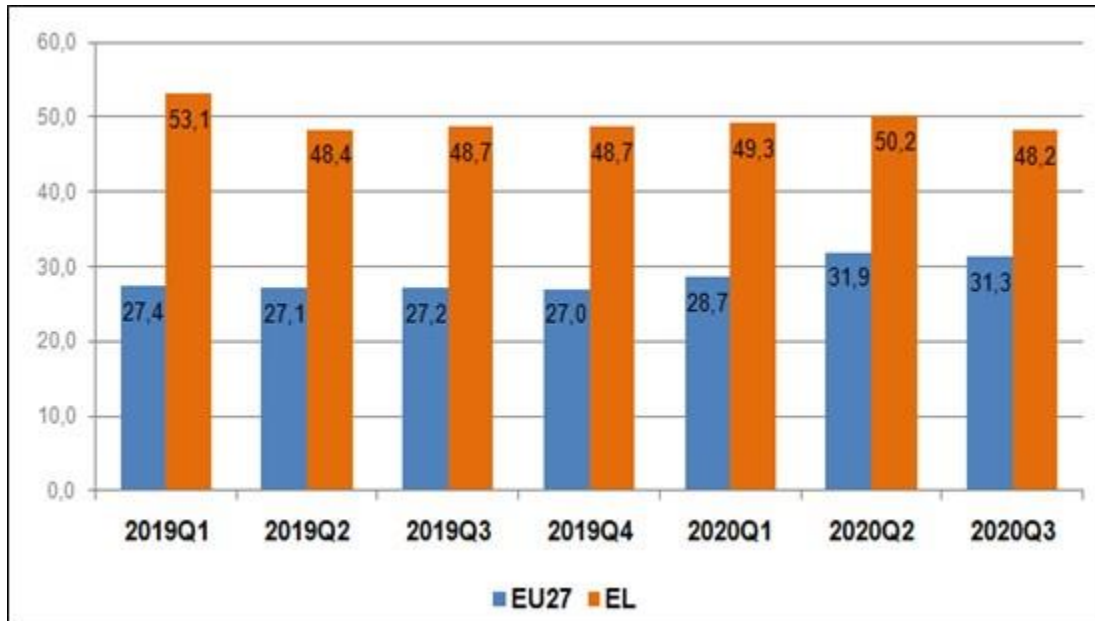


Figure 6.

Greece and EU27, first quarter of 2019 - third quarter of 2020 Age group: 15-24 of the extended workforce Labour market slack (%), (Source: Eurostat, 2021b)

Figure 7 (Eurostat, 2021b) refers to one of the three subcategories of the extended workforce, the part-time underemployed, aged 15-24 and 25-54 in Greece and Europe in the years 2019 and 2020. In Greece, throughout the period 2019-2020, young people aged 15-24 seem to have been hit hardest by the labour market slack compared to people aged 25-54, with differences ranging from 3.7 to 6.6 percentage points. It is also obvious that the labour market slack for both age groups in Greece was much higher than that of the respective EU27 averages.

The difference regarding the 15-24 age group was much greater and ranged from 3.4 to 7 percentage points, while the respective difference for the 25-54 age group ranged from 1.4 to 2.1 percentage points.

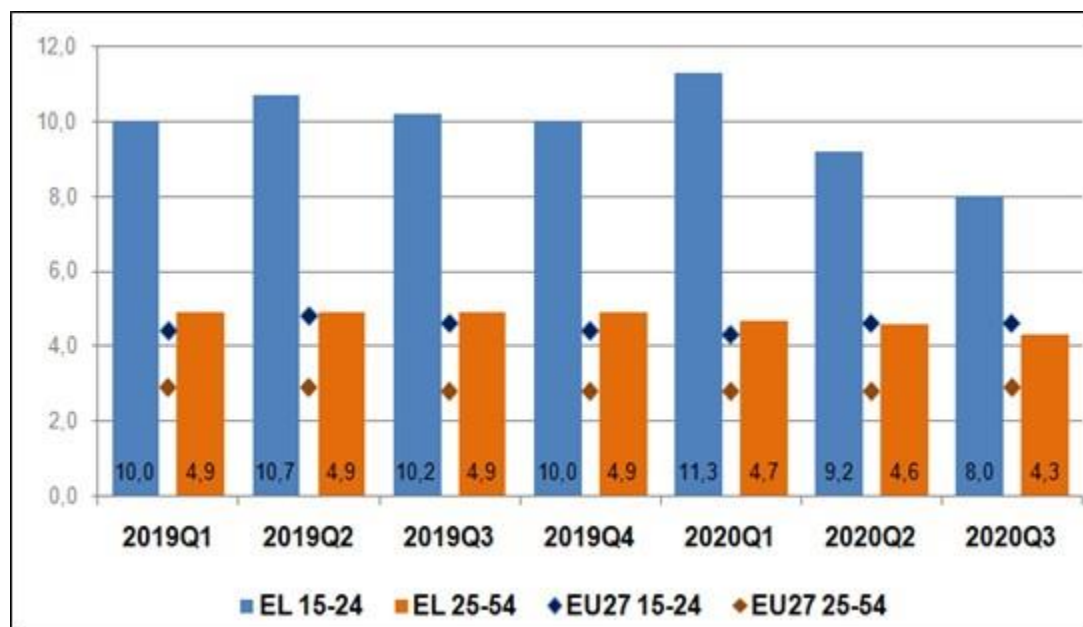


Figure 7.

Greece and EU27, first quarter of 2019 - third quarter of 2020, Age groups: 15-24 & 25-54 of the extended workforce Labour market slack of underemployed part-time workers (%)

(Source: Eurostat, 2021b)

According to Eurofound (2020b), Greece is one of the countries with the highest percentage of people who lost their jobs (either temporarily or permanently) during the pandemic (14%). The total job losses in paid employment in March 2020 amounted to 41,903 positions (compared to the immediately previous months). These constituted 52.31% of the lost jobs while 73.77% were related to part-time (50.71%) and rotating (23.06%) employment (Kotsios, 2020).

Eurofound (2020b), in a large-scale online survey conducted in two phases (April and July 2020) examined the impact of the first “wave” of the pandemic on well-being, work, and economic situation of people living across the European Union. The following are some of the published data concerning Greece:

4.7% of the survey respondents (aged 18-50 plus) lost its job or contract permanently and 41.8% temporarily. As for the 18-34 age group, 4.1% lost its job or contract permanently and 43.7% temporarily.

14.7% of the participants considered the possibility of losing its job within the next 3 months very likely and 8.9% quite likely.

53.5% of the respondents stated that its working hours had been greatly decreased and 12.8% that it had been slightly decreased.

22.9% started working from home as a result of the pandemic, while the percentage of people aged 18-34 was much higher, standing at 36.1%.

*Regarding the individuals' financial situation and their living standards during the pandemic:*

Comparing the current financial situation of their household (during the pandemic) to the one existed three months ago (before the crisis), 47.4% of the respondents considered that it had worsened and 48.2% that it had remained the same. Regarding the percentages for the 18-34 age group, 47.4% of them reported its financial situation as worse than before the pandemic.

Taking into account the total monthly income of its household, 22.2% of the participants expressed that it could meet its financial obligations with great difficulty and 23.2% with difficulty. As regards the 18-34 age group, 17.6% of them reported that its household could make ends meet with great difficulty and 21.9% with difficulty.

According to statistical data gathered by ELSTAT (2020a, 2020b and 2020c), the repercussions of the pandemic on the labour market were multidimensional and affected all sectors of the economy. For both the first and the second quarter of 2020 (ELSTAT, 2020a, 2020b), as regards absences from work and reduced working hours, the sectors most affected were those related to the provision of services (trade, hotels, restaurants, transport, communications etc.), while agriculture, forestry and fisheries were affected to a lesser extent. The percentages of people working from home were higher in the financial and business sectors. However, according to ELSTAT (2020c), during the third quarter of 2020 the impact of the pandemic on the labour market slightly declined. Both the rate of absences from work and the rate of inactive population decreased (in comparison to the second quarter of 2020), while the working hours increased. However, the following "second wave" of the pandemic has severely worsened the situation.

GSEE (2020) in a survey conducted in September 2020 to examine the insecurity and the growing concern of private sector employees due to the changes that occurred during the pandemic recorded that more than 7 in 10 workers (73%) believe that the pandemic crisis could endanger core workers' rights. According to this survey, the level of the employees' optimism decreased, as 52% of respondents expressed pessimism about the current situation in Greece. Similarly, the level of employment security had also followed a



downward trend, with 54% of the employees (in September 2020) stating it was optimistic about maintaining its position in the labour market (2% less than in June). Moreover, the private sector employees expressed strong reservations about teleworking, in terms of their professional development, working hours, salaries, employment rights, and personal life.

## 5. Results and Key Findings of the Qualitative Research

Based on the findings of the primary qualitative research of the Project, young people (18-29 years old) seem to be employed, mostly in precarious forms of employment, either by concluding fixed-term or indefinite contracts (full-time or mainly part-time) or by undeclared work, either in businesses or as self-employed (including undeclared tele-working).

However, there are also cases of shift work and to a lesser extent declared self-employment. It is worth noting that precarious work among young people is not only traced in sectors of the economy such as tourism and catering, but it is observed (based on the research findings) in several occupations, e.g. pharmaceutical industry, telecommunications, e-commerce, etc.

The main characteristics of precarious forms of employment, especially when they are part of the contracting process, quite often seem to take a combined form. There is a gradually increasing combination of a mismatch between the contract and the actual employment (in hours, days, earnings and stamps):

*"I:<sup>1</sup> [...] We had a contract based on which I worked two days a week and I instead worked full time ten hours every day. I was getting about 400 euros a month [...]"*

(B.II.1, Marianna).

Further, a combination of declared and undeclared work is also observed. In most cases, these two combinations coexist and are applied in the context of the precarious work of young people.

Regarding the reasons for choosing precarious work and working conditions, based on the research findings, it emerged that young people choose to work in precarious jobs, mostly: i. For livelihood and survival reasons in order to get out of the unemployment status in which they are, ii. Due to the lack of viable alternatives, as to the impossibility of finding permanent or full-time employment or a job on the subject of their studies, iii. In order to continue and/or complete their studies, for financial reasons (payment of tuition and/ or livelihood reasons) or due to flexible working hours that facilitate their studies, and iv. (To a

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<sup>1</sup> **R.:** Researcher

**I.:** Interviewee

lesser extent) they approach their precarious work as a transitional stage between their studies and their professional development.

Nevertheless, many young people seem to accept precarious working conditions and consequently have accepted or even almost "normalized" inappropriate and/or irregular working conditions, behaviors and attitudes of both clients and, above all, employers and superiors. And, in many cases, this condition-state seems to be a forced informal norm and a "common secret" among employees, which, many times (out of necessity) employees conceal, due to the danger that lurks to be fired from their work:

*"I.: [...] the employee let's say in a small local community, like here, if he is not happy with the job or he receives a lot of "black" money or he is being exploited ... very simply if he speaks, ... he will be found out. So the next business, in which he will turn for a job, will not bother to hire him [...] So, you get blackened directly you become the scapegoat, so you do not speak. [...] Because of fear. [...]"*

(A.I.2, Georgia).

Regarding the effects of precarious work on the life course of young people, it seems that precarious work in all its forms affects young people's life course, either to a greater or lesser extent:

*"I.: There may be a month when I will not spend any money, that is, at such a level. There may be a month that I will need for personal reasons 200 euros or 100 euros, [...].But it can also be much lower, that is to say 50."*

(B.I.6, Stathis).

Precarious work functions either as a "solution of necessity" given the economic situation of Greece and, consequently, the difficulty of finding a job, or (less) as a temporary professional way out, to improve both professional prospects and the quality of standard of living.

It is worth noting that (based on the research finding) there is a high degree of correlation between the income resulting from the work of young people and their life course. Specifically, *"the Greek family with the special coherence and support that characterizes it"* (Papadakis, 2016: 40), seems to contribute decisively to the livelihood but also the survival of several young people (whose financial earnings from their precarious

work are not sufficient to meet their obligations), by supporting them financially and providing them housing:

*"I.: [...] It is unfortunate at the age of 25 to depend on your parents' contribution to, say, livelihood, but it is also a Greek reality, isn't it? [...]"*

(C.I.6, Konstantinos).

Family acts, in essence, on the one hand as a deterrent to the further widening of the precariousness of young people in their life course and on the other hand as a factor in reducing the risk of young people moving into trajectories of social vulnerability and impoverishment.

In addition, in several cases of young people, there seems to be a strong correlation between their precarious work and the burden of their psychology, showing high levels of generalized stress and insecurity in their daily lives due to the high risk of dismissal and because of their low financial earnings, which in some cases has led them to despair over their livelihood prospects.

Regarding the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employment status of young people, as the research findings show, both the pandemic and the measures that were inevitably imposed to address the health crisis, e.g. lockdown, had an impact on the majority of young people and particularly on the ones who are underemployed, affecting both their working terms and conditions and, consequently, lowering their standard of living: i. Either due to a reduction in their working remuneration {"I.: *My work was affected [...], initially with suspension and then when I returned to work with reduced earnings. [...] The working hours remained the same, yes*» (C.I.5, Giannis)}, ii. Or due to transition to unemployment, suspension of work or non-payment of wages by employers.

However, most of them do not seem to have had a negative or even significant impact on their balance and / or their relationship with their family. There are also cases of young people to whom a change in their employment status due to the pandemic has resulted in: i. Either the disruption of relations to some extent with their family, ii. Or to the intensification of their insecurity status, due to the transition to suspension from work, during the lockdown, which burdened them psychologically, resulting in social isolation and sometimes in the breakdown of their family relationships.

As for the biographical planning and survival strategies of young people, the majority of young people do not seem to be desperate and try to maintain their optimism and make life plans. However, for some young people, the general state of uncertainty, mainly due to the recession, causes them strong feelings of insecurity regarding the achievement of their

plans, both professionally and personally, working discouragingly on their psychology, but also on their biographical planning.

Thus, most young people intend to remain in their precarious employment status: i. Either, mainly, for livelihood and survival reasons, ii. Or in order to earn a living, enabling them to continue or complete their studies, aiming in the distant future to find a more permanent job.

Regarding the creation of their own business, although several young people have thought about it, it seems that the lack of capital, the unstable regulatory framework, the bureaucracy, the unstable business climate in Greece, the current economic recession, the burden of obligations and responsibilities that an employer-entrepreneur bears but also the risk-competition involved in a business venture in Greece, are the main impediments for young people to start their own business, either in the short or the long term.

However, despite their precarious employment status, many of them do not immediately plan to emigrate abroad to find better work and better living conditions, as they seem to consider immigration as their "last reserve". There are, however, some young people who are seriously considering the prospect of immigrating abroad: i. Either to find a better and higher paid job, ii. Or to gain work experience in conjunction with continuing their studies: "I.: *It is an issue that has concerned me many times and still concerns me. [...] Unfortunately, as long as the situation in Greece remains desperate, it is a thought that I cannot avoid. [...]*" (C.I.5, Giannis).

Also, based on the research findings, almost all young people consider as decisive factors in finding a job in Greece (given the current unfavorable situation in the labour market and labour relations): the "degree of despair" (i.e. the complete absence of alternatives and need for survival, which leads them to accept any version of precarious work with virtually no choice), networks and social capital, previous work experience, geographical area and personality. The educational level and skills are not placed as a primal factor, outlining, essentially, a new transformed framework of criteria and qualifications, in terms of the chances of finding a job or improving a person's professional prospects in Greece: "I.: *[...] Degree of despair, [...] When you are unemployed for years or have a long time to find a job, [...] You do everything [...]*" (A.I.2., Georgia).

Regarding the views and attitudes of young people pertaining to education, the educational system and its connection to the labour market, according to the research findings, young people seem to recognize the contribution of the education system and

education in general in acquiring knowledge. However, the existing centralized structure and knowledge-based operation of the Educational Institutions, as well as the mismatch between supply and demand in qualifications and skills and the deficient connection of the educational system with the labour market, render the transition of young people from the educational system to permanent employment extremely difficult, even impossible.

Regarding the training programs and their association with the labour market in Greece, there is a tendency of distrust and denial on the part of most young people regarding the effectiveness of the existing vocational training programs in Greece and their connection with the employment and the labour market, which seems to have evolved over the years, both on the basis of their previous and existing work experience and, above all, on the basis of the general state of affairs in employment and economy, during the years of the Economic Recession to the present day in Greece.

With regard to the existing labour legislation and regulatory framework for the protection of workers employed in precarious forms of work, the research findings show the severe implementation gaps, regarding the actual implementation of the labour law, in combination with the shortcomings observed in relation to the frequency of inspections, by the competent bodies for compliance with labour legislation: *"I: [...]In the companies I have been working for two and a half years, that nothing is right, inspection does not come. [...]"*(A.II.2, Roxanne). Further, the growing tendency of flexibility of labour relations in the private sector, seems to result in either the unilateral abuse by the employers, or the forced "informal" agreement-consensus between employers and employees<sup>2</sup>: *"I: [...]That is, I do not think that someone who would have a different choice would go into some form of precarious work. We are all forced to do so because we either have no choice or it is a matter of survival or in any case of a dignified life, so? [...]"* (C.I.5, Giannis). The abovementioned are framed by established, chronic, pathogens of the Greek labour market, that were expanded during the economic recession of the previous decade (European Commission, 2017) and the current financial crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (INSETE/Ikkos & Koutsos, 2018; Kanelleas et al., 2020), and have led to an evolutionary disengagement of labour relations, especially in the private sector, from the existing regulatory framework.

The following are also found:

i. The intense dissatisfaction, frustration and distrust they feel for the political system and the political staff of Greece but also for the institutions (even for the institution of justice):

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<sup>2</sup> Where the latter seem to be forced to consent for livelihood or even survival reasons.

".: [...] It is not my best opinion. [...] Wrong policies, policies that inflate problems. [...] Some serve specific interest groups and not society as a whole. [...] My confidence in the institutions is a bit shaky [...]. Justice. I see things I do not like. [...]."

(C.I.7, Vangelis).

ii. Young peoples' frustration with the Welfare State, the structures and policies implemented (see Papadakis et al 2016):

"I.: No. [...]. I believe that at the moment, it is possible for peoples' living standards to fall so much that they reach indecent conditions. And then they probably give some help, [...] but the world has just become very poor. [...]"

(C.I.8, Eleni).

All of the above reflect an expanded devaluation of political institutions and consequently a serious major crisis of confidence in conjunction with the ongoing de-escalation of public trust among young people.

In conclusion, it turns out that a new labour market dualization is formed, a new norm, which concerns young people who are precarious workers: *insiders* can be considered precarious workers who are employed in a more structured and less flexible working regime, with more "normal" terms of employment. *Outsiders* are young people, who are precarious workers and are employed with "flexible" working conditions, and with an increased risk of experiencing the "phenomenon (of) terror" (according to Lodovici & Semenza, 2012: 7).

Moreover, it emerged that both livelihood and survival reasons as well a lack of alternatives seem to be the key determinants for young peoples' "choice" to work in precarious forms of employment. In whom the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market and the consequent economic crisis have transformed their employment status and have intensified the precariousness both in their work and, consequently, in their life course.

It also seems that the tectonic transformations in the labour market of the last decade, combined with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labour market, have trapped young people in a necessarily precarious irregular work "normality", which tends to transform in a social construction in the direction of forming a new (dislocated) "labour *habitus*". Its main characteristics are the persistent work precarity and the consequent vulnerability of young workers, towards the formation of a new "precariat", consisting of the "insiders" and "outsiders" precariously working young people (see above).

Another division is traced between “normal” patterns and increasingly legitimized “pathological ones” (see also Canguilhem, 1978). The latter are feed-backed by the gradual disjoining of the labour market.

The above mentioned emerged work “normality”, in the context of which young people are (often) forced to consent for livelihood reasons, in parallel with a frequent violation of their labour rights, seem to have formed a newly “work ethics” and a newly labour discourse, framed by irregular labour relations and an enforced “law of silence” among employers and employees, to which the latter quite often consent either for survival reasons or due to a lack of employment alternatives.

## 6. Conclusions – Discussion

Undoubtedly, the prolonged (ten-year) economic recession in Greece brought about a series of dramatic changes in the fields of economy and employment and a tremendous impact on the society. The above are related to the (borne out) rapid expansion of the phenomenon of precarious work and the (qualitative and quantitative) increase of precarious forms of work in Greece, to which the new generation necessarily turns quite often, in the absence of alternatives. In short, a new condition has been created in the labour market, whereby forms of work characterized by precariousness and “flexibility” such as part-time work, shift work, seasonal work, undeclared work, etc, are intensified (especially for youth).

Some of the key findings of the secondary quantitative analysis, conducted as part of our survey, are the following (see Eurostat 2020a - Eurostat 2020j, Eurostat 2021a-b, ELSTAT 2020a; Papadakis et al., 2020): Part-time rates over the last decade for young people aged 15-29 in Greece, have increased significantly, while in 2019, the percentage of part-time young people aged 15-24 was 30%. During the years 2010-2019 (according to Eurostat and ELSTAT): i. The main reason for “opting for” part-time or temporary employment (mainly for young people) was the inability to find a full-time job (involuntary and “unintentional” precarious employment). ii. From a series of findings, there is a strong correlation between educational level and part-time employment. iii. There is a strong gender dimension in precarious employment. iv. The trend of evolutionary over-representation of precarious forms of employment in the private sector is becoming conspicuous. v. Part-time workers at risk of poverty in Greece were more than double the number of full-time workers, while temporary workers were almost three times more likely to become poor, so, there is a strong correlation between precarious employment, social vulnerability and risk of poverty.

Finally, the repercussions of the pandemic on the labour market are already multidimensional and have affected all sectors of the economy, as well as the labour market,



increasing precarious employment. Among others (see Eurostat, 2021a-j, 2021b; Eurofound, 2020b; ELSTAT, 2020a-2020c; ELSTAT, 2021; N.I.L.H.R.-LMD 2020; Kotsios, 2020; Lalioti, 2020; GSEE, 2020): The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of income at EU level, were particularly tense for the most vulnerable subgroups of the working population. They particularly impacted the low-wage and precarious workers, despite the temporary policy measures introduced in all Member States. Across the EU27, more than a quarter of workers by the summer of 2020 had lost their jobs, either temporarily (23%) or permanently (5%), whereas the effects of the pandemic at a pan-European level, influence young people more. Countries that rely more on tourism (such as Greece) seem to have the largest declines in income. It is indicative that in Crete (where the local economy relies heavily on tourism) there has been a rapid increase in unemployment especially after the start of the second wave of the pandemic and, as a consequence, of the new restrictive measures. Unemployment increased from 12% in October 2019 to 19.3% in October 2020 (ELSTAT, 2021: 3). That is, in other words, a percentage change of 60.8% within a year. The sectors most affected, at a European level, are services and accommodation services with losses of almost 20%. The same trend is observed in Greece.

In addition, a significant category of precarious workers is particularly affected, ie seasonal workers. Especially young people who are precarious workers are those who have been particularly affected by the effects of the pandemic. Part-time employment decreased by 9.9% compared to the previous quarter (mainly due to the transition to unemployment), while temporary employment has increased by 8.4% compared to the previous quarter. In the period 2019-2020, the "labour market slack" (see Eurostat, 2021a) in Greece hit young people aged 15-24 more than people aged 25-54, further widening their precariousness. Finally, it is worth noting that Greece, in the second quarter of 2020, was one of the countries with the highest reduction in working hours, as well as with the highest percentages of people who lost their jobs during the pandemic (in addition to Spain). The second wave of the pandemic and the multi-month restrictive measures imposed (that are still ongoing) seem (from some initial estimates) to have changed the already particularly unfavorable situation in the labour market (which had temporarily improved somewhat in the third quarter of 2020, due to the lifting of the first lockdown and the temporary - as it turned out - partial restart of the economy), increasing, among other things, the precariousness in employment.

The main findings of the secondary quantitative analysis are confirmed by the conducted qualitative research as well.

As it turned out, young people (18-29 years old) seem to be employed in mostly precarious forms of work. The main characteristics of precarious forms of work, especially when they are a by-product of contracts, in most cases seem to take a combined form, ie there is a combination of a mismatch between the contract and the actual employment, and in several cases a combination of declared and undeclared work. There is a wider tendency to expand and "normalize" the forms of precarious work in relation to the new generation, especially the combination of declared and undeclared work but also exclusively undeclared work as well as an extensive elaboration of working conditions. It seems that a new labour market dualization has emerged, regarding young people who work in precarious forms of employment. Another finding is that young people "choose" to work in precarious jobs, mainly due to livelihood and survival reasons, to get out of their unemployment status, or due to a lack of alternatives (the "degree of despair" as one of the participants stated). It is also shown that both the pandemic and the restrictive measures taken have had a severe impact on the living standards and working conditions of the majority of young people (especially the ones who work in precarious forms and posts of employment). The transformations in the labour market, which have occurred due to the pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis-recession, seem to lead to the further deterioration of the employment status of several young people and consequently to their transition into a much more precarious employment regime, effectively causing a rupture in their already precarious life trajectory. Further, the abovementioned clearly affect key determinants of young peoples' political behavior. An increasing frustration and "delegitimation" of the political system and personnel, as well as the Welfare State, seem to result in the collapse of public trust among young people.

Summing up, the emerging, expanded and (often) forced, newly built work "normality" (with the frequent violation of the labour rights of precariously working young people and consequently the serious impact on labour relations) seems to lead to a reconstruction of "work ethics", with (irregular) labour norms prevailing. These are framed by an enforced "law of silence", both on the part of employers and employees, to which the latter (out of necessity) often consent for reasons of livelihood and survival and in the absence of alternatives. The abovementioned seem to have led to the creation of a new kind of "precarariat" (see Standing, 2014), having as its main components insecurity, uncertainty and social vulnerability, but also the gradual weakening of the "standard framework of biography" (Alheit & Bergamini, 1998: 122) of young people, essentially turning it into a precarious framework of biography. These implications may be decisive and far-reaching for

social cohesion, and the need for a paradigm shift in the labour market constitutes a persistent challenge for the whole public policy complex.

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