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## The Needs of the Precariat and How They Might Be Satisfied: The Polish Experience and Challenges Faced in This Area

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Michał Czuba<sup>1</sup>, Rafał Muster<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The cognitive purpose of this article is to define the specificity of the Polish precariat and their needs, as well as the degree to which they are realised in the context of the current policy that supports employment as well as the social policy of the Polish government. Its utilitarian purpose is to define a set of actions that may be undertaken by governments to meet the needs of the precariat and to reduce the size of this social group.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** In order to determine to what extent the current government in Poland meets the needs of the precariat, a questionnaire was devised and delivered via the Internet to a research panel of respondents. The study used a stratified-quota sample selection, corresponding to the proportions of people in Poland working on various fixed-term contracts or as self-employed. 1,000 respondents who work with flexible forms of employment participated in the study. The research was carried out at the end of March/ beginning of April 2021. The basis for determining the main types of needs felt by the Polish precariat was shaped by sociological research in this area conducted in Poland.

**Practical Implications:** Taking into account the opinions of the Polish precariat, one should consider the need for governments (including the Polish government) to create tools for effective communication with members of the precariat. One potential solution to this problem may be the creation of a government portal that provides an accessible means of discovering the available tools and programs that promote employment, including the conditions for their eligibility, and offer know-how on entrepreneurship. A practical solution presented in this study is also a new approach to subsidies granted by employment offices to start one's first business, a form of support that incorporates the possibility that members of the precariat might participate in businesses run within franchising networks.

**Originality/Value:** In terms of value, this study aims to enrich knowledge about the precariat, their needs and life aspirations. It also provides suggestions on action that can be taken by governments and their agendas to scale back this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Labour policy, social needs, precariat, employment, unemployment, Covid-19.

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<sup>1</sup>Institute of Political Science, University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland,  
[michal.czuba@us.edu.pl](mailto:michal.czuba@us.edu.pl)

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland,  
[rafal.muster@us.edu.pl](mailto:rafal.muster@us.edu.pl)

## **1. Introduction**

The shifts occurring in the modern world mean that the economy has adopted the characteristics of an “impermanent economy”. This applies to forms of business activity, technology, products and jobs. The origin 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 boosts the importance of flexible forms of employment, which enable employers to quickly adapt to changing market demands and reduce running costs. For employees, atypical forms of employment create opportunities to improve work-life balance. A disturbing phenomenon on the labour market is the use of the argument for more flexible forms of employment in order to transfer uncertainty and risk onto the employees. As a consequence, the phenomenon of precarious employment – identified as being uncertain, without security and without prospects, as well as being mainly temporary and often low-paid – is gaining traction (Niewiadomska, 2017).

The cognitive aim of this article is to define the specificity of the Polish precariat and their needs, as well as the degree to which they are satisfied in the context of the current employment support and social policy of the Polish government. Its utilitarian purpose is to define a set of actions that may be taken by governments to meet the needs of the precariat and to reduce the number of people belonging to this social group.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Precariat – the Essence of the Concept**

The term “precariat” comes from the English term “precarity” or the French “precarité”, meaning “a situation of instability”. However, the *Dictionary of the English Language* offers a dual understanding of precarious. Firstly, and literally: “Something that is precarious is in a dangerous state or position because it is not securely held in place and seems likely to fall down or collapse at any moment.” Secondly, “If your situation or position is precarious, you are not secure because you are not in complete control of events and might fail in what you are doing” (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1990). On the one hand, this can be applied to an object that might fall at any moment or – referring to people – this term can mean a lack of a sense of security, uncertainty, and lack of control over the course of certain events.

Guy Standing popularised the topic of the *precariat* and *precarious* work in the literature. According to him, the concept of precariousness cannot be identified merely with the pauperisation of professionally active people (Standing 2014; 2015). One of the fundamental factors that is assigned to the precariat is a low salary, which

can be measured on the basis of chosen statistical indicators. However, the conceptual scope of this term is much wider.

The precariat has three dimensions. Firstly, it has to do with a characteristic pattern of work. The precariat are accustomed to living with unstable, precarious jobs. They work on the basis of temporary hiring, on-call work, cloud work, etc. More importantly, they lack a professional identity or narrative that they could give to their life or any organisation.

They have to do a variety of different jobs that are not included in the official statistics. However, if they do not do this work, they may face costly retraining, networking, improving their CVs, filling in forms and waiting for work. They usually get jobs for which they are overqualified and where they have little chance of being promoted. These factors cause frustration, insecurity and stress.

Secondly, the precariat has a distinctive social income. Its members have to rely almost entirely on their own earnings. They do not receive the non-wage benefits that the proletariat received, such as paid holidays, access to paid sick leave and the prospect of a significant retirement pension. The precariat even loses the privileges it once had. This means that the increase in inequality relative to the precariat exceeds what the income statistics suggest.

In real terms, precariat wages have stagnated or decreased and have become more volatile, which means more uncertainty for those involved, whose entitlement to social security is additionally limited. This leads to so-called “living on the edge”, on the brink of a debt that cannot be paid, knowing that a single illness, accident or mistake could plunge them into a financial abyss (Standing, 2018).

For the precariat, the uncertainty faced by individuals in relation to their career prospects is relevant, but this also concerns life prospects, in terms of starting a family, or the above-average risk of falling into a spiral of debts that are difficult to pay (Góra, 2016). According to Standing’s concept, seven types of work-related security may be mentioned (Standing, 2014):

1. Security on the labour market – a policy of full employment implemented by the legislator at the macro level;
2. Employment security – protection against arbitrary dismissal of employees, relevant regulations concerning hiring and firing employees;
3. Workplace security – the possibility of social advancement in terms of status and income;
4. Work safety – protection against accidents at work by applying appropriate health and safety regulations, limiting work in harmful conditions;
5. Security of skill reproduction – the possibility to acquire appropriate skills through vocational education, training, and the possibility to use these skills at work;

6. Income security – ensuring adequate remuneration, protected by minimum wage mechanisms, indexed to inflation;
7. Security of representation – employee participation, the possibility to join trade unions, the right to strike.

Referring to Standing's concept, insufficient protection of an individual at work undoubtedly exacerbates employee precarisation. This is associated with a number of drawbacks for professionally active people and their families.

In line with the concept of a dual labour market that divides the market into two parts – the core and the periphery – it can be assumed that the precariat, due to inferior working and wage conditions, function in the peripheral labour market (Piore, 1969). According to Standing, one can justify identifying precarious employment with an employee who works in peripheral labour market.

Knapińska points out that the concept of the precariat combines several co-occurring features: “young age, low income, temporary or no employment, lack of life prospects and financial plans for the future, lack of housing, often lack of a family and reluctance to start one due to the lack of life stability” (Knapińska, 2014).

Young people transitioning from the education system to the labour market are particularly exposed to the problem of having to work within the framework of “peripheral” – i.e., worse – employment. Long-term employment in the periphery of the labour market carries a number of undesirable implications that should be considered not only in terms of those directly related to a professionally active individual, but also in a broader, social and economic context. The precariat have decidedly less favourable career development opportunities – especially in terms of promotion to specialist and managerial positions within organisations. The unfavourable situation of the precariat on the labour market (including the lack of a sense of security and opportunities for professional development, as well as low wages) compared to the “core” employees, exacerbates their sense of deprivation, which results in a feeling of frustration. On the other hand, the lack of job stability, manifested by temporary work, for example, “may affect other aspects of life, such as decisions about starting a family and having children.” (Kamińska, Lewandowski, and Pogorzelski, 2014). This, in turn, translates into low fertility rates, which in turn feeds into the problem of depopulation.

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 (Czuba and Muster, 2021; Morozowicki, 2017).

In Poland and the European Union, there are similar trends in terms of employing people on temporary contracts. However, Poland differs in this respect from average EU employment in each age group by up to ten percent.

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% (Czuba and Muster, 2021).

## **2.2 The Needs of the Generations in the Context of the Precariat Phenomenon in the Polish Reality**

As Tomaszewski notes, “People and entire communities have their own needs that condition their behaviour and are the driving factor behind their individual and collective activities” (Tomaszewski, 2018). Needs are an inalienable feature of a human being, and at the same time – as emphasised in the literature – needs are dynamic social constructs that are subject to change over time, including under the influence of social transformations (Wiszejko-Wierzbicka *et al.*, 2018). The rapid development of modern societies causes shifts in the social needs articulated by their members (Wiszejko-Wierzbicka *et al.*, 2018; Honneth 2012). One clearly observable trend is increased consumerism. “In the twenty-first century, the cult of ownership is not assigned exclusively to the richest class, as the middle and poorest classes also strive to increase their ownership status” (Kurzak, 2016).

Thus, the problems of precarisation, which mainly affect employees working on the basis of flexible, less well paid, forms stir a deepening state of frustration related to the limited possibilities available to those involved to satisfy some of their needs – to a large extent created by the changing society and current trends, the fashion for owning specific products and the use of certain services. Young people have problems when it comes to purchasing more expensive apartments, and their uncertain situation on the labour market significantly reduces the possibility of obtaining a loan for the purchase of real estate.

The precariat meet their needs related to financial security only to a limited extent. They suffer from a lack of security – expressed by unemployment, especially of young people – and an uncertainty about what tomorrow may bring, an inability to plan often more than one week or a month into the future, a limbo between prosperity and poverty, and the constant threat of social decline and pauperisation. Therefore, anger, alienation, anomy and anxiety occur, as well as a lack of faith in their own abilities, which in turn all lead to further harm not only in socially, but also economically (Giełda, 2014). The needs expressed by members of the precariat are generation-specific. A generation can be defined as a grouping who matured in a similar socio-cultural situation (Świda-Ziemia, 1995). Thus – as emphasised in the literature – “belonging to a generation is determined not only by the year of birth, but also by the community of experiences shaped by a specific society” (Giddens, 2012).

Due to the specificity of the socio-economic processes that took place in Poland after 1989, the following can be distinguished: the “Solidarity” generation, the “transformation generation” and the “EU generation” (Andrejczuk, 2017). In Polish circumstances, the “transformation generation” consists of people born in the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, whose entry into adulthood coincided with the period of the political transformation in Poland. They are direct witnesses of the events related to the so-called Round Table, participants in the first free elections, as well as younger people who were just starting their education in the period of the Third Polish Republic.

In turn, the “EU Generation” – otherwise known as the “reform generation” or “Erasmus generation” – came of age along with Poland’s accession to the European Union. They were the beneficiaries of open borders (Erasmus program participants, the first large wave of economic migrants), as well as those affected by the reform in the education system, with subsequent age groups studying in lower secondary schools [Pol: *gymnazium*]. It can be stated that the group defined here as the “Solidarity generation” were more oriented towards success, while the next generation shared this need but also attached more importance to the value of personal and family happiness.

Both generations, however, agree that the market economy and the freedom of democracy provide the optimal conditions for success (Szafraniec, 2011). In turn, the gap that has opened up between these generations results primarily from the fatigue of the “Solidarity generation” as well as the high expectations held by the “transformation generation” regarding the possibility of social advancement. Furthermore, the attitudes of the youngest generation differ from the first two. This generation is close to “Gen Y”, or the “millennials” and, according to Września, includes those born in the years 1984-1997, although this group is often extended to the period of birth covering 1980-2000. It corresponds to the “EU/ reform/ Erasmus generation” analysed earlier, while international typology refers to it as “Gen Y”.

The needs that this generation wants to satisfy are, a successful family life, personal happiness, friendships. They also treat their professional work as an instrumental value, as well as a source of personal satisfaction, high income and a guarantee of an adequate standard of living, while at the same time it is possible to notice that the youngsters treat education aspirationally and instrumentally as something that should yield certain benefits in the future.

Generation Y is the most precariat group in the realities of Poland and other EU countries. The fate of the young precariat arises from various circumstances, origin, education, personality traits, “misfortune”, life difficulties; however, they do share a common socio-economic situation that results in fewer opportunities to find a “permanent job”. Often the mythical “permanent job” is simply a synonym of work that offers adequate remuneration and job stability, and thus a manifestation of “success” or “good luck in life”. One might think that having a steady job is just as important to Generation Y as having good workplace relationships as a hallmark of “a decent job”. It would seem that the “Gen Y” described in the literature, especially in the media as “forward-looking, dynamic, mobile, modern, with potential”, is predestined for development and a fast career.

However, this group may tend more towards unemployment, NEETs and finally the precariat. Therefore, the processes taking place in the economies, which are highlighted by, *inter alia*, G. Standing, gain importance from the perspective of young people’s situation on the labour market. To sum up, “Gen Y” experiences precariousness, because the social structure and economic processes create conditions on the labour market specifically for this and nothing else. At the same time, precariousness, understood in terms of change and flexibility, is in the DNA of “Gen Y”, distinguished by their ability to adapt to various circumstances (Andrejczuk, 2017 ). Despite this flexibility in adapting to the conditions on the labour market, some of Gen Y and people from the other generations mentioned above feel frustrated with their inability to meet their needs regarding security, as G. Standing pointed out, or improve their material status as well as starting a family. In this context, it is worth considering the expectations held by the precariat towards governments regarding their programs and staple policies, such as social and employment support policies, that have an impact on their living standards.

### **3. Research Methods and Outcomes**

#### **3.1 Methods**

In order to determine to what extent the current government in Poland meets the needs of the precariat, a survey was conducted via the Internet and a research panel of respondents. The research applied a stratified-quota sample selection, corresponding to the proportions of people working on various fixed-term contracts and self-employed in Poland. 1,000 respondents participated in the study that was conducted at the turn of March and April 2021.

The conducted research examined the political preferences of the Polish precariat and how they have been impacted by actions taken by the Polish government to limit the precariat phenomenon. The subject of the research was how the Polish precariat evaluates the above-mentioned government actions, and their expectations in terms of state aid to improve their current life situation. Taking into account the subject of this article, the issues of the current political preferences of the Polish precariat will be discussed in general terms, considering their utility for the topic of this study. In further considerations, answers will be presented relating to the degree and scope of activities that the Polish government is undertaking so that the Polish precariat may have conditions that better meet their needs in the context of the aforementioned generation affiliation, with particular emphasis on Gen Y, which is an important part of the modern labour market.

### **3.2 Research outcomes**

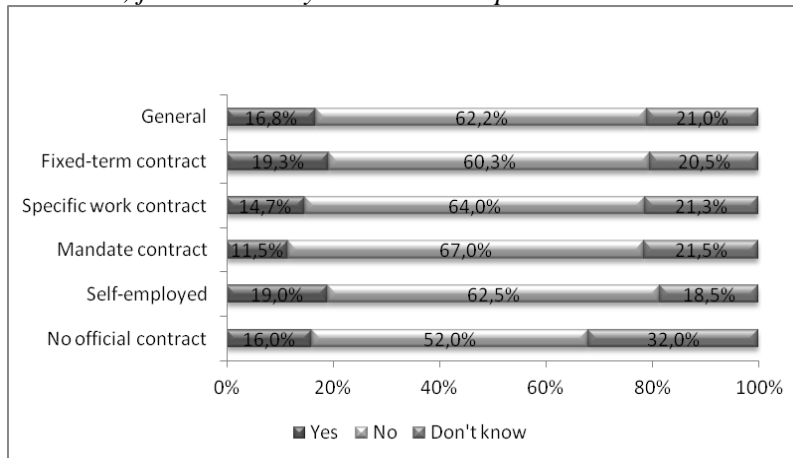
Within the scope of the research, the respondents were asked whether the current Polish government is taking sufficient measures to limit the phenomenon of the precariat. The answers provided indicate that the majority of respondents (62.2%) believe that the government is taking insufficient measures to limit this phenomenon. A contrary, positive opinion on this subject was expressed by only 16.8% of the respondents. Every fifth respondent (21%) declined to comment on this issue.

Further questions that the respondents were asked concerned the adequacy of activities carried out by the current Polish government aimed at limiting the scale of the precariat phenomenon. Both the respondents taken as a whole and individual groups within them referred to this issue in a similar manner. Generalising the answers given, the respondents negatively assessed the current activities carried out by the Polish government in this area. Over 60% of the respondents as a whole and in individual groups gave this answer. The exception in this regard were people working without a formal contract of employment. Compared to other groups, 52% of the respondents from this precariat group expressed a negative opinion about the actions taken by the Polish government aimed at limiting the phenomenon of the precariat.

A decisive minority of the respondents as a whole, and when broken down into specific groups, expressed a positive opinion on this subject – 16.8% of the respondents. Taking into account the detailed groups participating in the research, this element of the Polish government's policy was given the most positive evaluation by people working on fixed-term contracts and self-employed. The smallest number of people who expressed a positive opinion about such endeavours of the Polish government were expressed by respondents working on specific work contracts and mandate contracts (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Evaluation of the adequacy of actions taken by the Law and Justice government aimed at limiting the precariat phenomenon connected with work under civil law contracts, job uncertainty and worker impoverishment



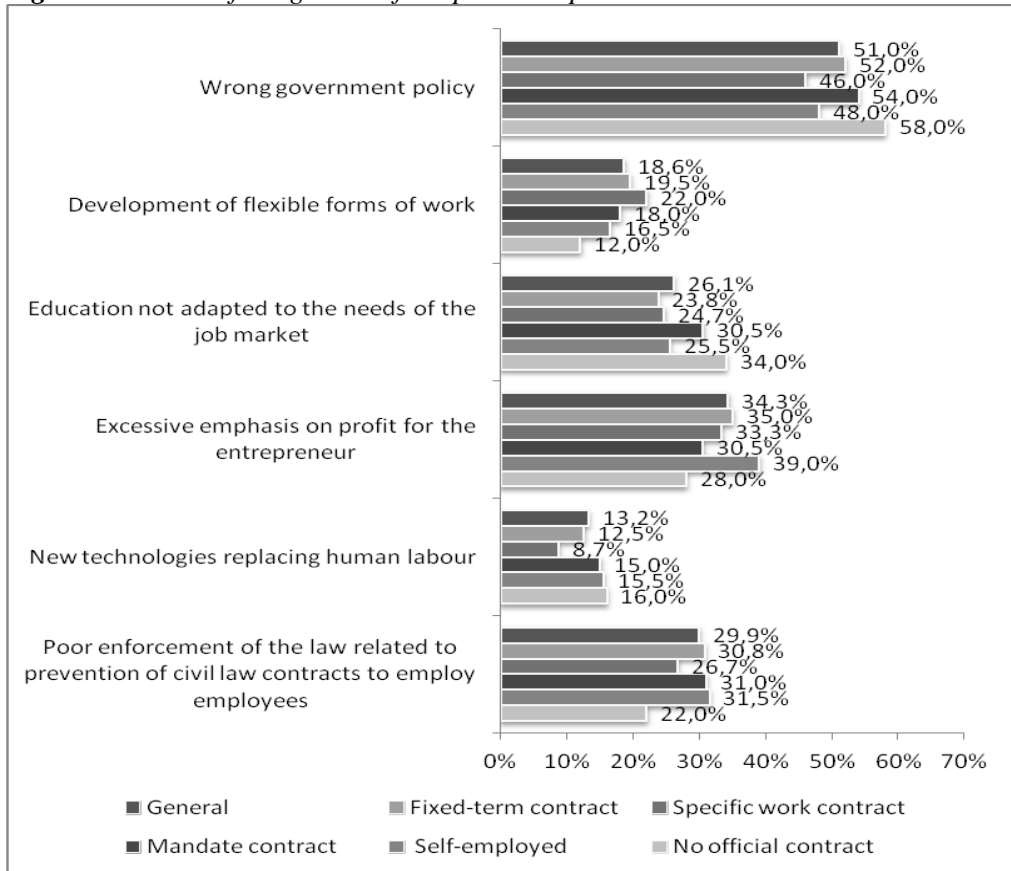
Source: Own study.

Participants in the research were asked about the reasons for the occurrence of the precariat phenomenon in Poland. Taking the respondents as a whole, the most important cause of this phenomenon is wrong government policy, the entrepreneur striving to generate profit at all costs, poor enforcement of the law related to prevention of civil law contracts to employ employees, education not adapted to the requirements of the labour market in Poland, the development of flexible forms of work and new technologies replacing human work (Figure 2).

The research also examined the issue of whether the current Polish government is fostering conditions for entrepreneurs to create more vacancies for permanent work contracts. When analysing the answers to this issue, it can be concluded that the respondents taken as a whole, and broken down into groups, assess this issue similarly. In answer to this question, the respondents could choose between “definitely yes”, “rather yes”, “hard to say”, “rather not”, “no”. Positive answers – i.e., “yes” and “rather yes” – were given by 18% of the total number of respondents. The negative variants were given by 25.4 and 28.7% of respondents respectively. Individual groups of respondents had similar opinions on this subject.

In the next question, the respondents were asked about their approval of actions undertaken by Polish government related to offering favourable conditions to entrepreneurs who employ workers for on permanent contracts. With regard to this issue, the respondents, as a whole and in individual groups, positively responded to such a solution. On average, over 60% of respondents expressed a positive opinion about this action undertaken by the Polish government.

Figure 2. Causes of the growth of the precariat phenomenon in Poland



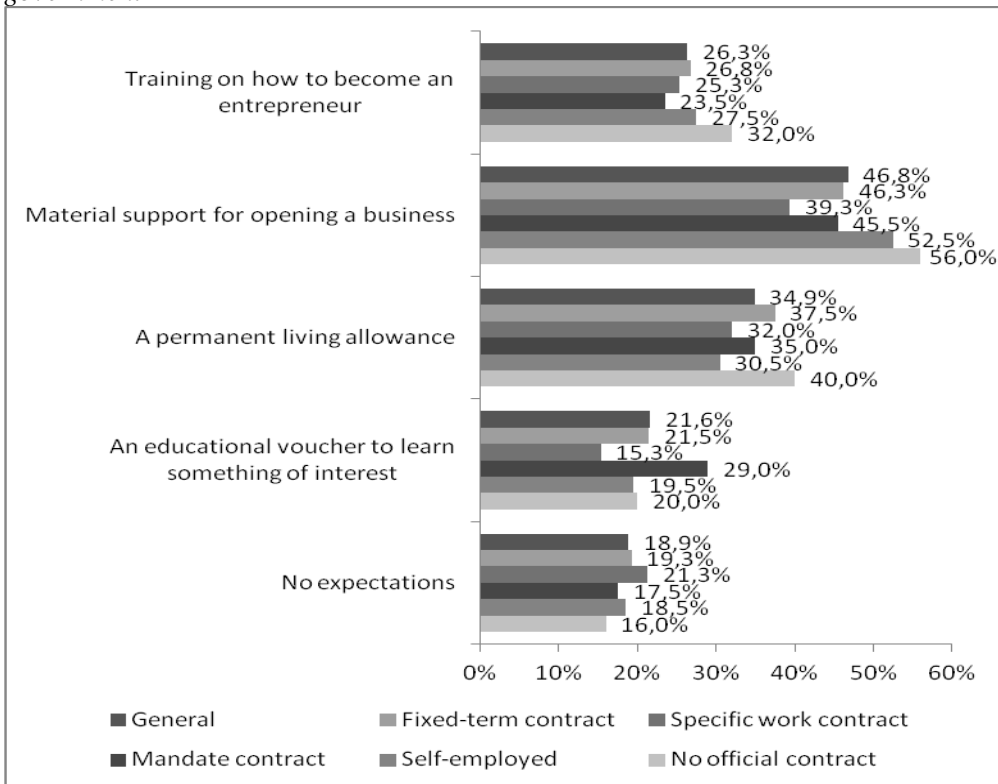
Source: Own study.

Another issue for the respondents was the scope of potential help they would expect from the Polish government and its agencies. In this field, the respondents expected material help for opening their company. This answer was given by 46.8% of the total number of respondents. The largest group that expressed such expectations were those working without a formal written contract. The second answer given in relation to this question concerned willingness to receive an allowance for living purposes. 34.9% of all respondents expect this form of state aid. Other forms of assistance that the respondents would expect from the state include appropriate training for starting a business, an educational voucher for gaining qualifications in accordance with interests.

Such answers were given by 26.3% and 21.6% of the respondents, respectively. 18.9% of the respondents declared that they did not expect any help from the state in order to change their professional situation. Analysing these issues more closely, the answers given by individual groups of respondents have similar values to the respondents taken as a whole, with the exception of those working without formal

written contracts. Respondents from this group had greater expectations than people from other groups regarding support from the Polish government in terms of training to run their own business and financial support related to opening such a business, as well as a permanent allowance for living purposes (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Potential areas of support that the Polish precariat might expect from the government



Source: Own study.

A significant number of respondents with regard to potential government assistance stated that they did not expect any. 18.9% of respondents overall held such an opinion, and this was similar for individual groups of respondents. Slightly more self-employed respondents answered in this way – 21.3%. The smallest number of people with this belief were those without a formal written contract. This opinion was expressed by 16% of this group of respondents.

#### 4. Discussion

The answers provided within the research conducted show the discrepancy between the needs of the Polish precariat and the degree to which they are satisfied, as well as the actions taken by the Polish government. This also translates into the potential political preferences of the respondents. Unless their life and professional situation

changes, it may translate into their election decisions. In their voting preferences, the Polish precariat give the newly formed Poland 2050 a chance and also support left-wing groups, which may change the Polish political scene in the next elections. This tendency confirms G. Standing's belief that the precariat are looking for political forces that express their unmet needs and aspirations. In the Polish reality, these choices are quite rational in terms of the political scene, although this does not confirm the assumption of the above-mentioned author that the precariat supports populist groups. The tendencies indicated may contribute to changes in the political scene in Poland after the next elections.

Despite the actions taken by the Polish government aimed at limiting the precariat phenomenon, they are assessed as insufficient and inadequate for the present situation.

The respondents positively evaluate the activities carried out by the Polish government related to supporting and rewarding entrepreneurs who create jobs on the basis of which they employ people for an indefinite period. This shows the dream of a significant section of the respondents for permanent work contracts. Such initiatives meet this need and are positively received by the respondents.

The respondents, referring to the factors contributing to the phenomenon of the precariat in Poland, define them by dividing them into those that are dependent on the government and those that occur regardless of its influence. The former include the government's inadequate employment and social policy in relation to the needs of the precariat, and poor enforcement of the law related to the abuse of temporary work contracts. When it comes to factors beyond the influence of the Polish government, the respondents mention entrepreneurs striving for profit, technologies replacing human work and the failure to adapt university education programs to the current requirements of the labour market in Poland.

The potential needs of the Polish precariat are demonstrated by the answers given by the respondents about the assistance they would expect from the Polish government and its agencies to improve their life situation. They indicate that the Polish precariat have unfulfilled needs for general and business education that would be useful for running their own enterprise. Therefore, they would expect the state to provide an educational voucher as well as relevant training to help open their own business. The respondents largely declare that they would expect financial support from the state to open their own company. This expectation corresponds to the aspirations and needs of Gen Y, for whom material success is an essential element of life and personal success. The answers provided also indicate that the respondents expect a permanent cash allowance from the state for living purposes. This type of expectation was indicated by 34.9% of the respondents. This indicates that a significant proportion of the respondents are not sufficiently satisfied that their needs are being met in this regard. This answer also corresponds with the idea of a

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universal basic income, postulated by G. Standing, intended to equalise the life opportunities of the contemporary precariat.

Referring to the typology of Polish generations presented above, the need expressed by the respondents for support from the Polish government in specific areas corresponds to the need to achieve success, which is important for the “Solidarity generation” and the “transformation generation”. The needs the Polish Gen Y wants to satisfy are: a successful family life, personal happiness, friendships, high income and an adequate standard of living, and this goes hand in hand with young people treating education instrumentally as a means of gaining certain benefits in the future. The expectations expressed by the respondents regarding educational vouchers or business training as well as assistance in starting their own business correspond to the presented needs of Generation Y.

The statements given by the respondents indicate their negative attitude to the actions taken by the current government to limit the precariat phenomenon, despite the fact that the government is conducting an active employment policy with the appropriate tools. This includes the possibility to receive a subsidy for starting a business, the funding of advisory and training services for people who have been granted the aforementioned grant for setting up their own company, financing the costs of training in order to take up employment or non-agricultural activity beyond the farm (the website of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, 2021).

One might try to justify this negative attitude espoused by the respondents as a result of the prolonged coronavirus pandemic that has affected the labour market, made even more flexible due to the uncertainty of entrepreneurs as to the further state of their operations, which does not contribute to their willingness to employ people permanently, but instead compels them to offer work on the basis of civil law contracts, or for a specified period. In the context of the prolonged coronavirus pandemic in Poland, the precariat as a peripheral group on the labour market, earning enough to get by day to day, but not enough to save and create a financial cushion for the crisis (for a year or two).

The dramatic situations suffered by people in this type of situation are available for all to read in the self-help forums that emerged after the outbreak of the epidemic. There users place desperate requests, and sometimes even pleas, for help in finding a job. With the means to survive for a month or two, they fear layoffs caused by an epidemic. They are frustrated by the inability to actively seek other income (Lewicki 2020). In the context of such life situations, the frustration associated with them translates into a negative assessment of the actions taken by the Polish government aimed at limiting employment on civil law contracts.

Poland ranks second in the European Union regarding share of temporary employment. This was mainly due to its rapid growth in 2001–2007. Since 2015, the share of this form of employment has been systematically decreasing.

Temporary contracts mainly affect young people. Eurostat data show that in the 15–24 age group, they account for nearly 60%. Many scientific studies have indicated the downsides of these forms of employment, such as wage discrimination, poorer remuneration standards or the suspension of family planning. People who have just entered the labour market are particularly vulnerable.

Only 42% of people who started their professional career in Poland with a civil law contract find work under a fixed-term employment contract after 3 years of employment (22%) or a permanent contract (20%). 28% still work under a civil law contract. A fixed-term employment contract is a much better starting point for a career, as more than 80% of those who began in this way continue working on a fixed-term contract 3 years after graduation (55%) or move to permanent employment (26%) (PIE 2020). Such phenomena are certainly a source of disappointment and reflect a failure to meet the needs of the respondents, who move further away from satisfying their expressed need for a permanent, well-paid job and the desire for some stability in their lives.

The third justification for the negative attitude towards the present government in the area of limiting the precariat phenomenon may be a weakness in its information policy regarding the tools and programs available for people on civil law contracts to change their form of employment. The potential lack of information on this topic, or access to it, may also cause a sense of disappointment with the government's actions in reducing the precariat phenomenon.

## **5. Conclusions**

The aim of this article was to present the needs of the Polish precariat and their degree of satisfaction with action undertaken by the Polish government aimed at limiting the excessive scope of employment under civil law contracts.

The phenomenon of the precariat in the Polish reality affects mainly young people entering the labour market. Referring to the attitudes and opinions on this subject expressed by young people, some of them accept this state of affairs and believe that a full and present life is more important to them than professional issues. Opinions were also raised among this group that the precariat and working under civil law contracts significantly hinder life stability and starting a family.

Taking into account these trends, the Polish government and other state governments should consider taking measures to limit this phenomenon. The Polish government as well as others should consider taking action to limit this phenomenon.

The results of direct research on the Polish precariat presented in this article reveal the considerable dissatisfaction and frustration experienced by this group of working people that certainly stems from the prolonged coronavirus pandemic damaging their personal lives and increasing the risk of losing their jobs. The pessimism that

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accompanies this situation translates into the Polish precariat's assessment of the action undertaken to date by the Polish government, aimed at reducing the scale of employment under civil law contracts. It may also affect the image of the Polish political scene after the next elections. In the face of these phenomena, the Polish government and its related agents operating in the labour market and social environment should improve how they conduct their information policy in terms of boosting access to information on programs and activities aimed at helping the precariat change their professional and life situation. The Polish labour market is characterised, *inter alia*, by deep segmentation, as well as by a low scale of professional activity, similar to other EU countries, a high level of youth unemployment, and difficulties in adapting educational programs to the needs of the labour market, which hinders the effective transition of young people from the education system into the sphere of work.

The significant segmentation of the labour market is also a characteristic Polish feature, which in practice prevents free transfer between the sections of people working on permanent contracts and those with atypical forms of employment. The latter – both those officially and unofficially employed – are exposed to a much greater risk of losing their job than typical employees and do not enjoy the same social rights as them. It is also difficult for them to access training, and thus the possibility of improving their qualifications and chances for promotion.

Taking into account the opinions of the Polish precariat, it is advisable to consider the need for governments (including the Polish government) to create tools for efficient communication with members of the precariat in order to provide them with information about available state programs for retraining, business training or possible financial support to start a business. In Poland, within the framework of the employment support policy, educational programs exist that introduce the principles of running a company and obtaining loans to set up one's own business. The responses of the respondents indicate a lack of knowledge about the existence of such programs or difficulties in obtaining such information. Therefore, it would be advisable to consider the creation of a government portal that would promote this type of knowledge among the precariat.

One of the tools available to support unemployed people in Poland and other EU countries who want to start their own business are state subsidies for this purpose. In the current situation, it seems that they should possibly also be granted for businesses based on franchising, and not only for companies operating on the basis of self-employment. This would allow the size of such subsidies to be limited in terms of amount, and would give an unemployed person access to proven business models and help them gain the necessary experience and business knowledge based on training conducted by their franchise networks. This idea refers to the possibility of using the concept of public-private partnerships ensuring the participation of governments and private business in transforming the unemployed precariat into entrepreneurs, educated by the franchise networks within which they would operate.

This solution could potentially be cheaper in Poland than giving subsidies for someone first business and could be a new tool within an employment support policy.

In order to reduce the precariat phenomenon, governments should adopt legislation specifying minimum wages, including for work performed on the basis of civil law contracts. Such legislation should eliminate the possibility of setting wages for people working less than 1 year at 80% of the applicable minimum wage. In Poland, this rule is respected in practice.

The solutions outlined above are beneficial for the precariat, but from the employers' point of view, they would increase labour costs. Therefore, there is a risk that some jobs, especially those with low productivity, not requiring high qualifications, will move to the shadow economy. In order to prevent this, measures are necessary to develop entrepreneurship. The idea is to reduce administrative and formal barriers, which often represent a significant cost for small businesses.

Another category of action to be performed at the governmental level should be programs promoting entrepreneurship that departs from the "philosophy" of precarious work. Ministries dealing with issues of social policy should take action aimed at discouraging employers from an excessive, sometimes unlawful, use of temporary contracts by reducing the disproportion in employment costs that exist between statutory employment contracts and civil law contracts. In Poland, the following solutions are heading in this direction:

1. In order to reduce the scale of abuse of civil law contracts on the labour market, an obligation has been introduced for all mandate contracts to pay social security contributions, up to an amount corresponding to at least the minimum wage. These regulations have been in force since the beginning of 2016.
2. On 1 September 2016, an Act amending the Labour Code entered into force, which obliges the employer to confirm in writing the terms of the employment contract concluded with the employee before the employee is admitted to start work (and not – as before – by the end of the first day of work at the latest, which was conducive to abuse by dishonest employers).

The above-mentioned actions aim to limit the precariat phenomenon in Poland and may serve as inspiration for actions in other countries who are attempting to reduce the scale of this phenomenon.

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