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Gig Economy – Flexible Cooperation or a Form of Precarisation

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse the gig economy in terms of the risk of precarisation. The considerations are based on literature review and own research (online survey of a group of 198 freelancers and 182 employees). The author of the article tries to get to know their perspective on financial stability and attitudes towards the risk of precarisation. The final conclusions allow us to assess the extent to which the respondents – freelancers – feel the stability and prospects of their work. For comparison, the same study was also conducted among full-time employees – enabling a comparison of the attitudes and feelings of both groups. The final conclusions provide guidance for managers and employees/gigs. Empirical research was preceded by theoretical considerations.

The limitations of the study result from the inherent weaknesses of survey research (respondents may provide subjective or inaccurate statements).

Keywords: giger, gig economy, freelancer, freelance workers, precarisation

JEL Classification Codes: D11, D23, M13, O31

Introduction

The modern work environment is undergoing a significant transformation, with the rise of the gig economy as a one of defining factors. This system, characterised by temporary and often unstable work arrangements, is gaining traction globally, altering the traditional employment structures (Skrzek-Lubasińska, 2019). This analysis explores the gig economy through the lens of freelancers, with a particular focus on the risk of precarisation.

Freelancers, as self-employed individuals, form the backbone of the gig economy (Ostoj, 2020). This article delves into their experiences, the challenges they face, and the inherent risks associated with gig work. The aim of author is to shed light on the evolving nature of freelance work, the uncertainties and difficulties encountered and the broader implications of the gig economy's dominance on their professional well-being, with a particular emphasis on the threat of precarisation.

Considering the relationship between precarity and the gig economy is crucial in order to understanding the potential hardships and challenges faced by gig workers (Roy and Shrivastava, 2020). This analysis will explore problems stemming from the dynamic environment of the gig economy.

According to the author of this article, the relationship between precarisation and freelancing is a relatively poorly researched issue, at least in Poland. While, individual researchers, including Polkowska (Polkowska 2019), attempt to address this question, further analysis in this area is necessary.

Some research conducted in recent years (Piowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024) confirms the increase in entrepreneurs' expenditure on the development of B2B freelancers' competences. Companies are increasingly willing to invest in training and certification for external collaborators, recognising the benefits of improving their qualifications. This trend reflects the growing demand for specialized skills and the flexibility that comes from working with independent experts. However, financing the development of freelancers alone still does not guarantee them employment stability. Entrepreneurs still treat them as temporary support for specific projects or tasks, rather than permanent team members. These relationships remain short-term and based on civil law contracts, which do not provide freelancers with a long-term professional perspective within a specific organisation. Therefore, while precarisation understood as low earnings does not necessarily affect every freelancer, the instability resulting from freelancing does.

This article formulates the following research problems:

1. Are the gig economy and the precariat related phenomena?
2. What actions do gig workers take to protect themselves against the threats resulting from precariousness?

3. What is the attitude of gig workers and traditional workers towards the threats resulting from precariat/job instability?

The above issues are not chosen randomly. For example, as Grimov notes, freelancing, despite the undoubted advantages of this work model from the freelancers' point of view, is a solution that poses a risk of precarisation. In particular, during an economic recession, entrepreneurs may be willing to limit cooperation with freelancers as part of cost optimisation – this is especially easy to do in the case of freelancers who work on the basis of short-term forms of cooperation (Grimov, 2016).

Precarisation is recognised as a problem affecting both the general labour market and individual professions. Labor market flexibility, the decline in full-time workers, and the increasing number of long-term contracts coexist with other trends such as self-employment and the increasing number of atypical positions. Precarity, appearing not only in the professional sphere, but also in all aspects of an individual's life, is a widely discussed topic that is gradually shaping the global reality and the national system. Uncertainty, as an element of capitalist development associated with neoliberalism, has a profound impact on the structure of the economy and social relations. For example, the problem of precarisation is examined in relation to freelancers operating in the journalistic industry (Çiğdem and Erdoğan, 2019). Of course, the research conducted by Çiğdem and Erdoğan is only an example of analyses conducted in this area.

Vandevenne and Vanroelen also investigated the problem of employment precarity among food suppliers. The effects of their research on this issue can be summarized in one sentence: precarity expressed by employment instability, is an inherent element of the employment of suppliers performing casual work (Vandevenne and Vanroelen, 2023).

Even at the level of EU institutions, including the bodies of the European Parliament, it is recognised that the dynamic development of modern digital technologies, which we have been witnessing in recent years, gives freelancers a huge potential to look for orders. At the same time, this development leads to an increase in the importance of the gig market economy, which does not provide stability for freelancers (European Parliament, 2016).

Gig economy: Basic information

Gig economy is a concept that describes the flexible market where people work on temporary projects as freelancers, offering their services online or offline (Ostoj, 2013). This includes various industries such as deliveries, passenger transport, and creating online content. The growth of the gig economy is associated with the development of technology and the evolution of work organisation (Roy and Shrivastava, 2020).

Initially seen as a way to combat unemployment during the 2008–2009 financial crisis (Ostoj, 2013), the gig economy has proven to be a stable trend. It has gained popularity thanks to its flexibility (Skrzek-Lubasińska, 2019). Digital technologies have had a significant impact on its development, transforming the gig economy from a niche model into an important element of the labour market (Instrate and Harris, 2017).

With the growing prominence of the gig economy, it is becoming clear that it brings a set of challenges (Roy and Shrivastava, 2020). One of the most critical issues is the lack of sufficient social security and protections for those in non-permanent or informal work arrangements (Godlewska-Bujok, 2014).

Yet, the gig economy’s expansion undeniably transforms the way business and labour operate on a global scale (Lepanjuuri et al., 2018).

Diverging from the conventional employment model, which typically involves stable contracts and permanent duties, the gig economy presents a different approach. Here, work is centred around completing tasks for a variety of clients. Even when working with just one client, the assignments can be quite diverse and not necessarily related by theme. Every assignment stands alone, without a thematic link to the others (Roy and Shrivastava, 2020; Chen et al., 2020).

Table 1 shows selected definitions describing the essence of the gig economy.

Table 1. Gig economy – Definitions review

Definition	Author/Authors
A form of cooperation where digital platforms play a dominant role in the market	Instrate and Harris (2017)
A form of incidental cooperation, with dispersion on the part of the principals and lack of typical connections between tasks	Chen et al., (2020)
An alternative to traditional employment	Dokko et al. (2015); Manyika et al. (2016)
A new form of work alongside employee sharing, interim management and collaborative employment	Ćwiek et al. (2021)
A cooperation model where freelancers undertake short-term tasks	Miller (2016)
A cooperation model that provides flexibility for participating parties	Polkowska (2019)
A cooperation model that combines features typical of cooperation between independent entrepreneurs	Broughton et al. (2018)
A flexible form of cooperation, adapted to the requirements of a modern economy	Gasz (2020)

Definition	Author/Authors
A new social order based on modern technologies and sustainable development	Woodcock (2019)
A flexible cooperation model enabling effective use of economic resources	Botsman (2013)
A model of cooperation that requires the independence of giggers, also regarding organisation of work	Aloisi (2018)
A flexible model of cooperation between contractors and clients, where digital platforms can play the role of an intermediary	Kalleberg and Dunn (2016)
Short-term engagement of independent contractors on a global scale	Zakrzewska (2022)
A form of employment where work is adapted to current needs, instead of using a traditional employment model based on a constant flow of work	Roy and Shrivastava (2020); Lobel (2017)
A model of cooperation characterised by irregular earnings related to the demand for the services of independent contractors	Ostoj (2020)
Independent contractors (gigs, freelancers) characterized by high flexibility	Lepanjuuri et al., (2018)
One of the phenomena shaping the modern economy	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2018)
An alternative form of cooperation between clients and contractors	Broughton et al. (2018)
Cooperation based on modern technologies and globalisation processes, enabling flexibility in work organisation	Skrzek-Lubasińska (2019)
A form of cooperation where digital platforms play a dominant role, although some activities may be performed offline	Bogenhold et al., (2017)
A strategy to avoid legal restrictions on employment	Ostoj (2013)
A labour-for-wage exchange system in which independent contractors and contractors participate	Lepanjuuri et al., (2018)

Source: own study (authors: see Bibliography).

Basing on the aforementioned definitions, certain features of the gig economy can be identified.

The gig economy is a market sector dominated by the on-demand work model (Roy and Shrivastava, 2020). This term refers to the idea that service providers and ordering customers connect with each other, often through digital platforms (although it is not a necessary), where the services are provided at the direct request of the customer (Kalleberg and Dunn, 2016; Minter, 2017; Gandini, 2019).

Contractors, also known as “gigers” or “freelancers”, sign contracts to provide services. Ordering entitles (purchasing clients) undertake to remunerate contractors based on the effectiveness of the tasks performed, rather than the time spent on their implementation (Broughton et al., 2018).

Cooperation in this model is characterised by short-term, occasional employment, usually for the needs of a specific project, and sometimes even for a one-time activity (Zakrzewska, 2022). Communication between the contracting parties may take place via digital technology platforms, although this is not a mandatory requirement. Thus, the gig economy is a dynamic market area, based on flexible outcome contracts, enabling short-term and variable cooperation between service providers and their clients (Gasz, 2020; Polkowska, 2019; Botsman, 2013).

Precariat: General description

The term “precariat” emerged in academic discourse in the 1980 s. It is a neologism formed from the combination of two words: (a) “uncertain” (French: *précaire*), (b) “proletariat” (French: *proletariat*). The combination of these two words accurately captures the essence of the precariat – a group of characterised by uncertainty and instability are characteristic (Kolek, 2014). Uncertainty about future emergence is an inherent effect of precarity (Stachura-Kryształowicz and Barańska, 2022).

One of the reasons of the growing problem of the precariat is the spread of the gig economy, which, as described earlier in this article, is characterised by flexibility, but also by a lack of stability regarding the professional position of independent contractors (Broughton et al., 2018). It is important to note that precarious employment can affect not only to older or weaker workers, but also groups that might not seem directly at risk of precarity: freelancers such as trainers, physiotherapists, or designers can also be part of the precariat (Stachura-Kryształowicz and Barańska, 2022).

As shown in Table 2, the issue of the precariat can be analysed from different perspectives.

Table 2. Perspectives on the precariat

Scope	Description
Labor market	The need to constantly search for orders/employment; even in case of long-term cooperation there is a risk of immediate termination
Employment	Lack of legal regulations protecting the gigers against dismissal; no provisions specifying the notice period for the contract
Workplace	Few opportunities for promotion and raises in the platform economy; the "project to project" principle limits the prospects for permanent employment

Scope	Description
Way of working	Insufficient protection against accidents and occupational diseases; work in the platform economy is performed outside the company's headquarters, without conditions consistent with health and safety standards
Improve qualifications	Inability to improve skills; the contracting authority rarely invests in development, focusing only on the effects of work
Income	Minimum wage regulations are often not applied in the gig economy, resulting in low earnings of precariat workers
Representation	Workers are unable to associate in employee organisations, which weakens their negotiating position

Source: own study based on: Czakon, 2017.

Uncertainty manifests itself as a complex problem that requires a multidimensional approach. There is a visible lack of certainty regarding the prospects for professional development, the level of incomes and the challenges associated with looking for and maintaining a job. Uncertainty covers all stages of the gigers activities, from establishing cooperation, through the fulfilment of professional duties (with the lack of paid leave as a frequent element of precarious work) up to the searching for a new place of employment (Stachura-Kryształowicz and Barańska, 2022).

Precarisation should be considered as a broader problem than just issues relating to the professional situation of individual gigers. It affects the reality of the post-industrial economy and is not only limited to specific employees or professions, but also can affect every participant of the labour market. In the long term, potential negative impact the gig economy on the development of precarity are observed. This is an interesting phenomenon because meaning that the current perception of precarisation as a threat mainly to people with short professional experience, advanced age, low qualifications or specific needs to be reevaluated (Piwowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024).

The long-term impact of the gig economy on the labour market indicates an evolution of the gig economy. Recent years have shown the development of this concept among creative professions, benefiting both contractors and those ordering work via digital platforms. However, the development of the freelance economy carries the risk of “normalising precarity”, which may lead to an increasing number of people from various industries working as gig economy workers (Stachura-Kryształowicz and Barańska, 2022).

Despite attractive salaries, freelancers face a lack of stability, constantly living “from project to project”. Even if they have unique skills, they do not have access to benefits such as paid leave or an open-ended contract. Although negotiations between the contractor and the ordering party may lead to favourable arrangements

regarding privileges and benefits, these are not institutionalised solutions but depend on the individual contractor's market position (Instrate and Harris, 2017). Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that “precariat” and “gigers” are concepts that interpenetrate each other (Piwowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024).

Due to the development of modern digital technologies (Skrzek-Lubasińska, 2019) and the growing importance of the platforms, it can be predicted that the gig economy will become a common phenomenon in an increasing number of professions in the coming years. As a result, even traditional industries characterised by stability will be exposed to the risk of precarisation. Regarding the economic scope of precarity in the gig economy, particular attention should be paid to the freelancers incomes and the stability of gig employment (Polkowska, 2019).

Additionally, income variability is also a problem, which can lead to financial uncertainty. The lack of a guaranteed minimum wage is a significant challenge for freelancers in the gig economy. This can lead result in insufficient earnings, especially during periods of lower demand for services (for example, during non-working days). All this further complicates the freelancers situation (Piwowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024).

As for precarity of freelance work, the social dimension is also an important issue. Unfortunately, a characteristic feature of this form of earning money is the lack of access to social benefits, which is not typical of traditional employment. This situation requires a thorough profitability analysis before deciding to work in the platform economy. Even if the hourly wage rate nominally exceeds the earnings offered under an employment contract, once paid time off or sick pay is taken into account, these calculations may lose their optimistic perspective (Polkowska, 2019).

The third dimension of work precarity focuses on the organisational scope relating to the way freelancers perform their duties. The conventional employment model assumes working eight hours a day, five days a week. This way of working is often criticised as outdated and inappropriate for the modern realities of the 21st century. Nevertheless, apart from formal and legal issues, it should be emphasized that this model provides some stability, both in terms of finances and predictability of the work performed (Polkowska, 2019).

The situation of freelancers is completely different – they value the flexibility of this model, but at the same time, they have to content with irregular orders that often appear even late in the evening or at night. In the long run, this can lead to work overload. Thus, choosing between stability and flexibility at work is one of the key dilemmas that employees must face in today's work environment (Ostoj, 2020).

Research methodology and results

The research conducted from November 31, 2023 to January 6, 2024 focused on freelancers and employees in Poland. These participants earned income in various areas, including: programming (creating code used in the IT sector), computer graphics (involved in graphic design or visual content creation), copywriting (crafting written content for various purposes), translating (providing translation services), transcribing (transcribing audio or video content), SEO optimisation (enhancing online visibility through search engine optimisation), social media, and other forms of online marketing (engaging in digital marketing activities).

The above division regarding freelancers is not accidental; a similar categorisation was used in a study periodically conducted by Useme which is (a digital platform facilitating contact between clients and gig workers) (Useme, 2024).

The research method employed was an online survey, which gathered information from 198 giggers and 182 employees (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Giggers and precariat – Own research

Description	Replies – giggers		Replies – employees	
	L	%	L	%
Sex				
Man	112	56.6	74	40.7
Woman	86	43.4	108	59.3
Age				
18–25	58	29.3	59	32.4
26–30	54	27.3	44	24.2
31–35	63	31.8	42	23.1
>35	23	11.6	37	20.3
Are gig economy earnings/traditional employment salary only, main or additional source of income?				
Only	90	45.5	39	21.4
Main	52	26.3	125	68.7
Additional	56	28.3	18	9.9
Monthly earnings (in PLN)				
< 2500	34	17.2	3	1.6
2501–5000	76	38.4	77	42.3
5001–7500	73	36.9	85	46.7
> 7501	15	7.6	17	9.3

cont. Table 3

Description	Replies – gigers		Replies – employees	
	L	%	L	%
Branch				
Programming	22	11.1	18	9.9
Computer graphic	12	6.1	21	11.5
Copywriting	89	44.9	17	9.3
Translating	11	5.6	20	11
Transcribing	3	1.5	11	6
SEO optimisation	49	24.7	16	8.8
Social media	12	6.1	41	22.5
Online marketing	22	11.1	38	20.9

Source: own study.

Job Stability Questionnaire is a tool created by the author for the purposes of this article. This questionnaire consists of:

- 4 questions regarding employment stability: These questions address feelings about employment stability and whether respondents try to diversify their income in order to secure and stabilise their earnings.
- 4 questions about employment prospects: This section includes questions about feelings changes in the labour market over the next 12 months and difficulties in obtaining new orders/new employment).

The above 8 questions used a Likert scale with 5 response levels, where a rating of “1” means the worst assessment from the respondent’s point of view, and “5” represents the most favourable assessment.

In addition, respondents were asked to answer 2 general questions. Freelancers were asked about factors influencing their sense of professional stability and the actions they take to strengthen their position on the labour market and protect against precarisation. For these 2 questions, respondents could indicate more than one answer. A Likert scale was not used for these questions.

Both groups – full-time employees and freelancers – received the same set of questions.

Table 4 shows the questions and the distribution of answers regarding Job Stability Questionnaire (the questionnaire was prepared by the researcher for the purposes of this article).

Table 4. Own research – Questions and results

Stability/ Perspective	Question No	Question	Rate	Reply	% of replies (gigers)	% of replies (employees)
Stability	1	How often do you worry about financial stability as a freelancer/employee?	1	Very often	38.9	1
			2	Often	35.4	1
			3	Sometimes	19.2	9.1
			4	Rarely	6.1	39.9
			5	Never	0.5	49
Stability	2	Do you think the lack of traditional employment/permanent employment affects your sense of security?	1	Very strongly	28.8	1
			2	Quite strongly	45.5	1
			3	Neutral	19.2	8.6
			4	A little	5.6	29.8
			5	Not at all	1	59.6
Stability	3	Do you look for sources of income as a freelancer/employer in order to minimise risk?	1	Not at all	1	17.9
			2	Rarely	7.6	19.7
			3	Sometimes	16.7	13.2
			4	Often	16.7	36.2
			5	Regularly often	58.1	13
Stability	4	Are you satisfied with the flexibility that freelancing/traditional employment provides?	1	Very dissatisfied	0.5	22.8
			2	Somewhat dissatisfied	5.6	24.7
			3	Neutral	21.7	28.8
			4	Somewhat satisfied	19.7	21.5
			5	Very satisfied	52.5	2.5
Perspective	5	How do you assess your professional prospects as a freelancer/employer in the future?	1	Very pessimistically	2	20.7
			2	Somewhat pessimistically	4.5	8.7
			3	Neutral	20.7	16.3
			4	Somewhat optimistically	29.8	36.7
			5	Very optimistically	42.9	17.7

cont. Table 4

Stability/ Perspective	Question No	Question	Rate	Reply	% of replies (gigers)	% of replies (employees)
Perspective	6	Do you expect demand for your services/employee skills to decline over the next 12 months?	1	Very strongly	4.5	5.6
			2	Quite strongly	6.6	8.7
			3	Neutral	10.1	15.2
			4	A little	37.9	41.8
			5	Not at all	40.9	28.7
Perspective	7	If you end your cooperation with your current clients/ employer, do you expect any difficulties in obtaining orders from new entitles/ new job?	1	Very strongly	5.1	11.6
			2	Quite strongly	6.1	12.8
			3	Neutral	5.1	16.2
			4	A little	47	36.7
			5	Not at all	36.9	22.7
Perspective	8	Do you believe that precariousness is an inevitable aspect of freelancing/ traditional employment?	1	Very strongly	51	2.6
			2	Quite strongly	25.3	6.7
			3	Neutral	17.7	11.6
			4	A little	5.1	46.9
			5	Not at all	1	32.3
-	9	What factors most influence your sense of security as a freelancer/ employer?*		Financial stability	56.1	19.7
				Contract length	38.1	18.7
				Collaboration with reputable entitles	27.8	27.8
				Social support	12	40.4
				Other	6.1	27.3
-	10	What actions do you take in order to protect yourself from precariousness?*		None	20.2	16.7
				Financial savings	53.5	51
				Client diversification	62.1	1.5
				Skill development	44.4	50
				Other (please specify)	0	0

* Respondents could mark in the question: 9 and 10 more than 1 answer

Source: own study.

Question 1:

The answers to the Question 1 shed light on scepticism among freelancers. The vast majority – 74.3% of respondents – admitted that they *often* (35.4%) or *very often* (38.9%) were concerned about their financial situation. This indicates a common and significant problem among giggers.

The strongest pessimism was observed among copywriting freelancers (all copywriters chose the answer *often* or *very often*) and creating graphics (almost 90% of respondents), likely related to the progress of generative artificial intelligence. Freelancers fear that evolving algorithms could threaten their profession by automating content and graphics creation processes. This phenomenon may affect the competitiveness of the labour market for freelancers, forcing adaptation to new technological trends.

In contrast, the majority do not experience these fears *rarely* (39.9%) or *never* (49.0%). However, a smaller group experiences fear *sometimes* (9.1%) or *often* (1.0%). This indicates significant differences in the level of financial security between employees.

Question 2:

Data received from freelancers indicate that most of them experience a negative impact of non-standard forms of employment on their security. As many as 45,5% of respondents admit that the lack of permanent employment affects them *quite strongly*; another 28,8% feel that this situation has a very significant impact on their professional life. This indicates widespread concern among freelancers about the stability of their position in the labour market and highlights the importance of further research into the elements that influence their professional situation.

In turn, a smaller part of the employees, amounting to a total of 6.6%, does not feel the impact of non-standard employment at all (5.6%) or it is negligible (1%) for them. Nevertheless, the dominant group of respondents described the impact as *quite strong* and *very strong*, drawing attention to the need for actions that could increase the professional stability of freelancers in the face of the evolving labour market, which may be a sign of increasing precarisation.

The lack of permanent employment has a minimal impact on the majority of employees (59.6%), who do not feel any major difficulties as a result. Only a small proportion of respondents experience slight negative effects (1%), with 1% not feeling them at all, and 8.6% of surveyed employees are neutral.

Question 3:

The majority of surveyed freelancers, i.e. 58.1%, admitted that they *regularly* derive income from various clients. Such a trend may indicate the common practice of diversifying sources of income among freelancers, which may be a strategy to minimise the risk associated with the instability of self-employment.

In turn, a much smaller group of freelancers declare that they *sometimes* or *often* look for multiple sources of income (16.7%). A small group of respondents (7.6%) stated that they *rarely* use diversification and only 1% indicated that they do not use it at all.

As for minimising financial risk, a significant part of employees *often* (36.2%) or *very often* (13%) looks for additional sources of income, which emphasises the importance of this strategy for maintaining financial stability. However, there are also some respondents (17.9%) who do not take action to protect themselves against risk at all, 19.7% do it *rarely*, and 13.2% *sometimes*.

Question 4:

A survey of satisfaction related to the flexibility of freelance work reveals mainly positive opinions among freelancers. The vast majority are satisfied (72.2%) with 19.7% feeling *somewhat satisfied* and 52.5% *very satisfied*. Such a high satisfaction rate emphasises that the flexibility of self-employment is perceived as a very positive element of their professional activity.

It is also worth noting that only a small part of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Only 0.5% of respondents described themselves as *very dissatisfied* and 5.6% as *somewhat dissatisfied*.

Regarding satisfaction with flexibility, the results suggest that approximately half of employees expressing dissatisfaction with the level of flexibility. Almost every third employee maintains a neutral stance, and every fifth is satisfied with the current situation. Only 2.5% chose the *very satisfied* option.

Question 5:

Interestingly, the study shows that freelancers generally have positive feelings about their future career prospects. The majority of respondents, 72.7%, shared moderate (29.8%) or strong (42.9%) optimism. This attitude indicates a belief in the growth potential of the freelancing sector and the opportunities that freelancers have to succeed in an ever-changing work environment. However, this optimism relates more to the level of income and acquiring new projects than to the stability of employment in the gig economy model.

As for assessing future career prospects among employees, this study shows that only 17.7% of employees are *very optimistic*, while 20.7% are *very pessimistic*, and 16.3% of respondents express a neutral approach.

Question 6:

The data presented indicates that a significant part of respondents – gigers – expressed confidence in the sustained demand for their services over the next 12 months. Some participants either feel *neutral* (10.1%) or anticipate only a slight decline (37.9%) in demand. Notably, a substantial 40.9% assert that they do not expect any decline in demand at all. On the contrary, those expressing stronger concerns are comparatively fewer, with 4.5% *very strongly* and 6.6% *quite strongly* expecting a decline in demand. Overall, the prevailing sentiment appears to lean towards a more optimistic outlook regarding the anticipated demand for the specified services in the coming year.

The vast majority of employers expect only a slight (41.8%) or no (28.7%) decline in demand over the next 12 months, suggesting relatively stable employment prospects. The most pessimistic attitude is expressed by only 5.6% of respondents. So, the results for freelancers and employees are quite similar.

Question 7:

The study showed that almost half (47%) of respondents expect only minor difficulties in obtaining orders from new customers after terminating cooperation with existing ones. In turn, 36.9% of respondents do not expect any problems in this area at all. Only a small part of respondents (11.2% in total) are afraid of serious difficulties – 6.1% expect rather large and 5.1% expect large problems with acquiring new clients. Additionally, 5.1% of responses could be classified as neutral, indicating a moderate level of uncertainty among respondents about potential difficulties.

As for difficulties in obtaining new orders or work after terminating cooperation with current employers, the majority of employees expect only minor (36.7%) or even no (22.7%) difficulties, while the rest expect some (12.8%) or serious (11.6%) problems.

Question 8:

The vast majority, i.e. as many as 76.3% of respondents, consider uncertainty to be a key element of freelancing, of which 51% admit to having a strong belief and 25.3% having a moderate belief.

Meanwhile, a smaller group of respondents, 5.1%, expressed moderate optimism; only 1% did not see uncertainty as part of freelancing. Additionally, 17.7% of respondents took a neutral stance; this seems astonishing, given that irregularity – and therefore uncertainty – is an inherent feature of the gig economy.

The vast majority of employees (four fifths) believe that precariousness is an inherent element of professional activity. Only one in ten is afraid of this problem and 11.6% of them are neutral.

Question 9:

Due to the systemically unstable nature of contracts concluded with gigers, financial issues turned out to be the dominant factor – 111 respondents (56.1%) described them as the main factor determining their safety as gigers.

Duration of the contract was considered by 77 respondents (38.1%) as a key factor influencing their sense of security. Either way, it should be mentioned that B2B and civil law contracts – even if briefly concluded for a long period of time – can be broken quite easily.

Interestingly, quite a large percentage of respondents indicated cooperation with reputable clients, where 55 respondents (27.8%) emphasised the importance of cooperation with trusted entities. This seems to be due to the specific nature of gig workers' work; even if contracts do not guarantee stable cooperation, the freelancer's portfolio, successful cooperation with a given client and the possibility of recommending to other entities seem to compensate for this.

Unfortunately, none of the respondents indicated other factors.

With regard to factors affecting the sense of security, employees point to a variety of factors, the greatest of which are: social security (40.4%; much more compared to gig workers) and cooperation with reputable entities (27.8%).

Question 10:

The study found that freelancers use different methods to deal with job uncertainty. Although 40 of them (20.2%) did not take any countermeasures, most opted for active strategies. 106 freelancers (53.5%) chose savings as their main strategy, demonstrating the importance of a financial safety cushion. 123 people (62.1%) focused on diversifying their clients, striving to reduce the risk of dependence on a single source of income. 88 respondents invested in the development of their skills, which is to increase their flexibility in the labour market (44,4%).

These results suggest that many freelancers are adopting risk-mitigation measures by focusing on financial stability, client diversity, and continuing education. This also

suggests the possibility of creating specialised educational or support programmes for those who have not yet adopted such strategies, which would contribute to strengthening and securing the working environment for freelancers.

Employees are also taking a variety of actions to protect themselves from uncertainty, with the most common strategies being financial savings (51%) and skills development (50%), highlighting the importance of both financial stability and personal development for employees.

Conclusion

Precarisation as a side effect of freelancing is a problem that is noticed not only in Poland. This is proven, for example, by Slovak and Hungarian researchers Kahancová, Meszmann and Mária Sedláková, who published an article with the telling title: “Precarisation via Digitalisation? Work Arrangements in the On-Demand Platform Economy in Hungary and Slovakia”. They highlighted that the digitisation of professional life, especially in freelancing, is characterised by, the increasing importance of digital intermediary platforms. The concept of precarity is increasingly used to analyse standard and non-standard (atypical) forms of employment, although platform-based work is rarely included among atypical forms of employment. This article draws attention to the importance of precarity in on-demand platform work and the relationship between job uncertainty in the case of work on on-demand platforms. Empirical studies were carried out in Hungary and Slovakia, finding that the increase in precarious employment went hand in hand with the increase of work via digital platforms. It was found that uncertainty in working on on-demand platforms is present in the dimensions of work autonomy and interest representation, and digitalisation increases precarity (Kahancová et al., 2020).

According to Standing, precariat is in some sense a separate phenomenon from traditional categories such as “working poor” or “precarious employment”, although they share certain elements. The essence of the precariat is also manifested in the lack of a lasting identity based on work, as the activities undertaken by the precariat rarely allow for professional development or the building of a lasting professional identification. Therefore, they lack a sense of community with other employees, leading to a sense of alienation and instrumental treatment of professional duties in the context of their own benefits. This results in adopting attitudes and taking actions resulting from a constant feeling of uncertainty and the risk of losing their job. Insecure people follow a winding career path, constantly balancing between unstable job positions. They may be employed temporarily under an employment contract, then sometimes immediately after this form of employment, take up

work under a civil law contract for specific work, and finally decide to run their own business (Kryńska, 2016).

The questions in the survey questionnaire were assigned to two main categories: Stability and Perspectiveness. Stability focuses on the current feelings of the freelance respondents, while Perspectiveness looks at their future expectations. This division was proposed by the author of this article.

The survey reveals that gigers (freelancers) are generally optimistic about their career position, although their hopes focus more on future opportunities rather than the stability of the present. This is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Own research results – Stability and perspectiveness

Category	Rate	% of replies (gigers)	% of replies (employees)
Stability	1	17	11
Stability	2	24	12
Stability	3	19	15
Stability	4	12	32
Stability	5	28	31
Category	Rate	% of replies (gigers)	% of replies (employees)
Perspective	1	16	10
Perspective	2	11	9
Perspective	3	13	15
Perspective	4	30	40
Perspective	5	30	25

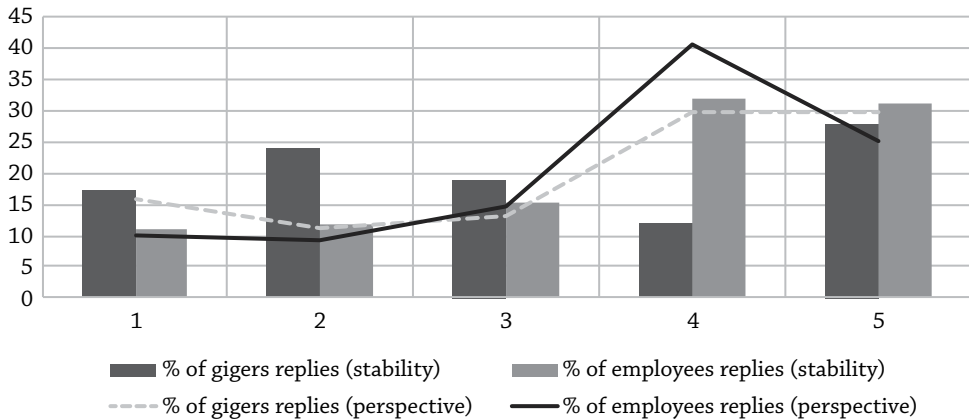
Source: own study.

Analysing the data, it can be noticed that employees seem to rate the stability of cooperation slightly higher compared to freelancers (gigers). The results show that the percentage of employee responses at rating level 4 in the stability category is undoubtedly higher (32%) than that of freelancers (12%). When it comes to perspective, the differences are less clear, but still favour employees. It is noticeable that as many as 40% of employees rated the perspective at level 4, while only 30% of freelancers responded this way. These results suggest that employees have slightly more positive feelings about the stability of their current roles and their future prospects compared to freelancers.

However it should be noted that for gigers this optimism does not translate directly into the perception of stability in the context of long-term contracts and social protection. Problems such as concerns about their financial situation still may have a negative impact not only on the living situation of gig workers, but also on their

mental health; providing support by the state or non-governmental organisations in this area may contribute to improving the overall well-being of freelancers. It is worth bearing in mind that a potential problem is not only the amount of income earned (these may be very high at a given time), but also: (a) variability of income (the amount of earnings is strictly dependent on the demand for services provided by freelancers), (b) lack of minimum wage.

Figure 1. Own research results – Stability and perspective



Source: own study.

There is a clear relationship between the gig economy and the precariat. The characteristic features of the gig economy, such as the lack of permanent employment, irregular working hours and the lack of traditional social benefits, may lead to an increase in the precarisation of employment. Therefore, it can be said that the gig economy is one of the factors contributing to the emergence and development of the precariat.

The research shows that gig workers take various actions to protect themselves against the threats related to precarisation. According to the study results: (a) 53.5% of employees decide to save money, (b) 62.1% choose customer diversification, (c) 44.4% focus on developing their professional skills.

Both gig workers and full-time employees have similar concerns about job instability. Although gig workers may be more susceptible to this type of risk due to the characteristics of their job, research suggests that the differences in levels of concern between them and traditional workers are not significant. Both types of employees therefore experience similar feelings of uncertainty and anxiety related to job security.

The key elements of precarisation include uncertainty regarding expected income, lack of stable employment, and limited access to social benefits (Polkowska, 2019). Empirical research has revealed ways in which individuals may encounter difficulties in the area of precarity. People affected by this phenomenon often struggle with constant financial instability, which negatively affects their overall quality of life and sense of stability. The results of this study have important practical implications, particularly for gigers (freelancers). They shed light on unique aspects of uncertainty in this occupational group and provide insights that may be valuable in developing strategies to address this pressing issue.

The research conducted for this article shows that a significant number of freelancers express concerns, in particular about the stability of earnings. To be able to at least partially reduce the risk in this respect, many gig workers regularly draw income from various sources, which may be a strategy to minimise the risk associated with the instability of self-employment. Interestingly, the surveyed freelancers are generally satisfied with the flexibility of their work and are optimistic about future career prospects, although more in terms of income and new projects than employment stability.

Most do not expect a decline in demand for their services in the next 12 months and do not anticipate any serious difficulties in acquiring new customers after terminating cooperation with current ones. It seems to be consistent with the results of the analysis carried out by Useme (Useme, 2024), according to which freelancers, although still aware of the instability of their employment, are generally satisfied with the earnings they achieve. As the president of Useme, P. Głośny, notes, even despite a noticeable decline in the number of orders among copywriters (a decline of approximately 10% year-on-year), this profession saw the largest positive change in remuneration in 2023, as the average rate for the work increased by almost 24%. At the same time, it should be added that the remaining industries also recorded positive changes in terms of remuneration received by freelancers (Useme, 2024).

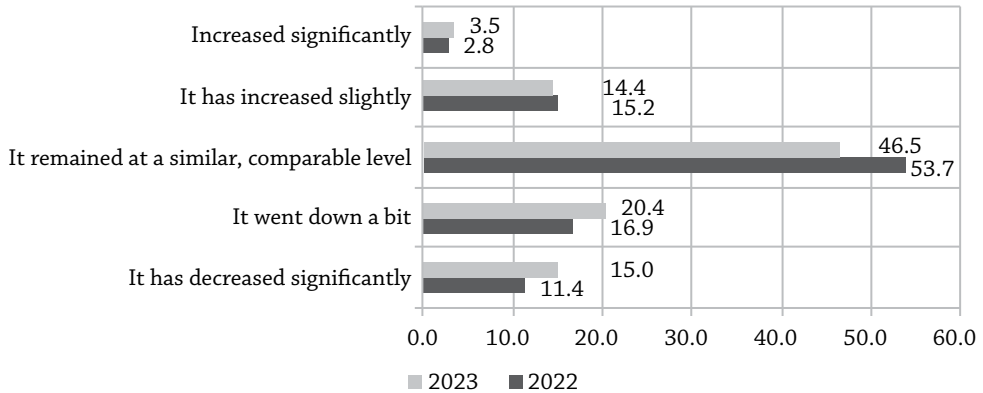
Uncertainty is perceived as a key element of freelancing, and the main factors influencing the sense of security are financial issues and the duration of contracts. This may be evidenced by the significant number of “1” and “2” ratings given by gig economy respondents – the number of low ratings in questions about employment stability was clearly higher compared to full-time employees, while the opposite was true in the case of higher ratings.

As the author’s study showed, freelancers cope with uncertainty by saving, diversifying clients and investing in skills development.

The fact that instability is an inherent feature of employment in the gig economy can be seen by analysing the data collected by Useme. It turns out that although in the period 2022–2023 the largest group of respondents were freelancers, for whom the

number of orders remained at a similar, comparable level, this percentage dropped from 53.7% in 2022 to 46.5% in 2023. Unfortunately, due to these changes, the percentage of freelancers whose number of orders decreased, not increased, rose (as shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2. Economic recession and the number of orders received by gig workers from 2022 to 2023



Source: own study based on: Useme, 2024

Precarisation, i.e. the phenomenon of uncertainty and instability of employment, seems more appropriate for flexible forms of work, such as mandate contracts, where employees perform relatively simple tasks. In such cases, employers often prefer short-term and easily terminated contracts, which allow them greater flexibility in managing human resources and adapting to changing business needs. Contract workers usually do not have access to social benefits or employment stability, which makes them more susceptible to precarisation. Interestingly, the literature on the subject sometimes notes that the archetype of a self-sufficient, risky, non-unionised, flexibly employed employee in creative industries can be considered a role model of contemporary capitalism. However, as noted by, De Peuter in 2014 (De Peuter, 2014), this model carries the threat of precarisation.

On the other hand, highly qualified IT specialists, often working as freelancers on a B2B basis, usually do not experience precarisation to the same extent. Their unique skills and knowledge are in high demand on the market, which gives them greater bargaining power and the ability to negotiate favourable terms of cooperation. However, even in their case, there is no full employment stability because they usually work on the basis of short-term contracts or projects. Despite this, their high specialisation and the ability to freely choose assignments provide them with

greater financial and professional independence than employees performing simple jobs (Piowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024).

According to the author, the research and considerations undertaken in this article can be deepened by taking into account, for example, the fact that – as Piowar and Bąk-Grabowska rightly note (Piowar-Sulej and Bąk-Grabowska, 2024) – the demand for the qualifications of individual freelancers may vary depending on profession, current market situation, and other factors.

Recommendations

The development of freelancing is an extremely dynamic and complex phenomenon. At first glance, it attracts attention with its flexibility and the ability to independently shape one’s own career path. However, apart from these positive aspects, there is also a dark side to this trend – precarisation. Freelancers often struggle with job insecurity, low earnings, lack of health or pension insurance, and financial instability (Polkowska, 2019).

As for study’s results, decision-makers, enterprises, and digital platforms should take these gig workers’ attitudes into account when shaping strategies and methods of operation that directly affect freelancers. Taking into account and addressing the issues raised by freelancers can lead to a more robust and supportive working environment for them. Possible solutions include creating a social security system, providing affordable healthcare, and developing procedures for resolving conflicts among freelancers. To sum up, the conclusions of this study should be treated as an appeal to all interested parties to cooperate and introduce solutions that increase the level of professional safety of freelancers in the constantly evolving world of work.

According to the author’s opinion, in order to reduce precarity among freelancers, governments could take the following actions:

Table 6. Solving precarisation problems referring to freelancing

Area	Description
Regulations on payments and deadlines	Introducing regulations that set payment deadlines for services provided by freelancers could reduce situations in which they are forced to wait for long periods of time for remuneration or encounter delays in payments
Social security	It is necessary to create a system that provides freelancers with access to social security, such as health and pension insurance. Special programmes or contributions tailored to the specific nature of freelance work could be introduced

Area	Description
Reducing the abuse of mandate contracts	Many cases of precarisation occur through the abuse of mandate contracts, which deprive freelancers of basic employment rights. Introducing stricter regulations on the use of these contracts could prevent abuse
Promotion of associations and organisations of freelancers	Supporting the creation and development of associations and organisations that represent the interests of freelancers can help in negotiations with employers and in providing legal and advisory assistance
Education and support for freelancers	Organising training, workshops and providing information on the rights and obligations of freelancers can help them better understand their rights and protect themselves more effectively against precarisation
Monitoring the labour market	Regular research and monitoring of the labour market situation for freelancers can provide important data needed to take effective legislative and political actions aimed at reducing precarity

Source: own study.

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