

Who Speaks for Whom? Interest Representation for Non-Standard Employees¹

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Abstract

The paper concentrates on the issues of interest representation for non-standard employees. The empirical findings from the European Union (EU) level are used as a frame of reference for analysis of the situation in Poland. Nonstandard employment is an ambiguous notion, so is, naturally, the concept of non-standard workers. In Poland nonstandard employment has been growing, mostly in a form of 'junk jobs'. Trade unions, and other institutional forms of collective interest representation, struggle to endorse problems faced by non-standard employees, with a moderate degree of success.

Key words: interest representation, non-standard employees, non-standard workers, trade unions

Introduction

Non-standard employment (NSE) – regardless of how one defines it – is a phenomenon, whose presence is currently an undisputed fact in European labour markets. Equally undeniable is the progress made – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – by NSE

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¹ The paper has been prepared as a part of the research project PREWORK („Young precarious workers in Poland and Germany: a comparative sociological study on working and living conditions, social consciousness and civic engagement”), financed by the National Science Centre, grant no.: UMO-2014/15/G/HS4/04476.

since the turn of the century. It would be trivial, albeit not irrelevant, to add that the process has only been amplified by the outbreak of the initial global economic crisis in 2008 and the series of subsequent crises of varied nature. Non-standard workers certainly have their interests in their specific employment relationships, yet the crucial questions, which arises is if and to what extent those interests overlap? If the answer to the former question is positive, than non-standard workers become a target group for trade unions and other collective forms of interest representation within the context of the labour market. The answer to the latter question is more difficult, as it is subject to measurement, which is supposed to allow for approximation on the return on investment by juxtaposing the input (resources of various types to be engaged on the part of trade unions and/or other organisations) and output (recruiting and retaining the members representing the NS workers).

The paper aims at investigating the problems of interest aggregation, articulation and representation with regard to non-standard employees in Poland. It is argued that non-standard employment is a vehicle for precarisation.

The paper is organized as follows: section 1 delivers a review of various conceptual approaches to non-standard employment, contains an account of various forms of NSE across Europe and a record of development and a statistical outlook on NSE in Poland and its impact of the rise of country-specific model of precarisation, section 2 focuses on conceptual and factual interrelations between NSE and precarity, section 3 summarizes efforts by European trade unions to address the challenge of organizing non-standard employees, section 4 offers an analysis of the relationship between nonstandard workers and trade unions legal environment of Polish industrial relations.

What is Non-Standard Employment?

There is no uniform and universally accepted definition of ‘non-standard employment’ (NSE). The very term is etymologically an antinomy to ‘standard employment’, which denotes ‘work that falls outside the scope of a standard employment relationship, which itself is understood as being work that is full-time, indefinite employment in a subordinate employment relationship’ (ILO 2015: 1). Vosko (2010: 51), defines ‘standard employment relationship’ as ‘a regulatory architecture built upon employment status (i.e., the bilateral employment relationship), standardized working time (normal daily,

weekly, and annual hours), and continuous employment (permanency)'. Obviously, the boundaries are stretched, so constructing an enumerative definition seems to be not only a reasonable but also a safe approach, and as such has been adopted by a number of legitimate sources. Such a strategy allows relative freedom in demarcating the field. In an attempt to define the domain of 'non-standard employment' for the purpose of the paper, outcomes of internal debates within the leading supranational institutions dealing with the issues of work and employment is summarized first, and in the next step the intersection is identified.

According to ILO (2015), the following forms of employment are treated as non-standard: (1) temporary employment; (2) temporary agency work and other contractual arrangements involving multiple parties; (3) ambiguous employment relationships; and (4) part-time employment. In particular, the item 3) catches attention, as it appears to be a convenient bin in which any leftovers which would not fit into the remaining three categories can be placed. Eurofound (2010a, 2010b, 2015, 2016) goes a step further, describing a 'very atypical forms of employment', which include: short fixed-term contracts of less than six months; employment without formal written contracts (unregistered); very atypical forms of working time such as very short part-time contracts (less than 10 hours a week); 'zero hours' contracts or on-call work, where workers can be called on at short notice to go into work; and any other forms of employment that are considered as being 'very atypical' in a given country.

Thus, very atypical forms of employment can be defined rather by exclusion: they are contractual arrangements that are not subject to the patterns of standard employment (open-ended, full-time, at the employer's premises) and even to those of traditional atypical contracts (part-time, fixed-term, agency work, etc.).

In order to identify them, a starting point may be the (Eurofound 2015: 13), which includes an analysis of nine broad types of new employment forms:

Employee sharing – an individual worker is jointly hired by a group of employers (who are not clients of a traditional temporary work agency).

Job sharing – a single employer hires two or more workers to jointly fill a specific job.

Interim management – is a new work pattern among employees and describes situations in which a worker – usually a highly skilled expert – is hired for a temporary period of time by an employer, often to conduct a specific project or solve a specific problem. In contrast to traditional fixed-term work arrangements, interim management has some elements of consultancy, but the expert has employee status rather than that of external advisor.

Casual work – the employer is not obliged to regularly provide the worker with work, but has the flexibility to call on them when needed.

ICT-based mobile work – refers to work patterns characterized by the worker (whether employee or self-employed) operating from various possible locations outside the premises of their employer (for example, at home, at a client's premises or 'on the road'), supported by modern technologies such as laptop and tablet computers. This is different from traditional teleworking in the sense of being even less 'place-bound'.

Voucher-based work – employment relationship and related payment is based on a voucher rather than an employment contract. In most cases, the workers then have a status somewhere between employees and self-employed

Portfolio work – portfolio work done by the self-employed refers to situations in which they work for a large number of clients, providing just small amounts of work for each of them.

Crowd employment – crowd employment is a new option; this is also characterised by not being place-bound. Virtual platforms match a large number of buyers and sellers of services or products, often with larger tasks being broken down into small jobs.

In the Polish context, non-standard employment has become a subject of academic, socio-economic-oriented debate (leaving at this point the discussions within the field of labour law aside) since roughly mid-2000s, as the notion of junk job was harnessed to analysis of the domestic labour market by sociology of work (Kozek, Kubisa, Ostrowski 2005). The term was subsequently transposed into junk contracts (*umowy śmieciowe*), a quite provocative label, mostly because of its ambiguous character. There is no consensus as to what particular types of employment relationships could be referred to as 'junk', and which had been better excluded from that category. Should we try to introduce some order into the debate, it would be reasonable to distinguish junk jobs in the narrow (hence sparking relatively little controversy) sense (only civil law contracts), wider sense (besides civil law contracts, also self-employment and temporary agency work), and finally the widest sense (all employment relationships other than full-time, open-ended contracts).

The available data is scattered, often collected incidentally (hence scarcity of long-term data series) and, most importantly, a product of research based on divergent methodologies. Nevertheless, the tentative conclusion from the comparative analysis of the existing data (shown in the Table 1) provided by various public agencies is as follows: approximately one to seven million people (the former figure represents the number of people working on civil law contracts, while the latter – the total number

of persons performing work on a basis other than non-fixed term employment contract) are involved in non-standard employment. Furthermore, civil law contracts are the only regular source of income for 4% to 6% of the total working population in Poland. The share of those who have apparently been forced to perform work under civil law contracts is high, as GUS (2016: 4) reports that for ‘an overwhelming part of the people whose main job is based on a civil law contract (80.2%), it is not a form of employment of their own choice’. To complement the picture, data on temporary agency work (TAW) needs to be added. That specific form of non-standard employment has been spreading rapidly in recent years: it is estimated that between 2006 and 2015 the number of temporary workers increased from 228,000 to 700,000 (Polskie Forum HR 2015, 2016).

Table 1. Non-standard employment and self-employment in Poland since 2010

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Civil law contracts (GUS) (thous.)	547(a)	1,013(a)	1,350(a)	1,320(a)	1,260 (a)/ 1,087 (b)	1,288 (a)
Civil law contracts (MF) (thous.)	796	894	916	974	1,040	ND
Civil law contracts (NBP) (% of all people in employment)	ND	ND	ND	ND	4%	ND
Labour contracts of limited duration (% of all labour contracts) (GUS, BAEL)	27,3%	26,9%	26,6%	27,2%	29,0%	27,8%
Self-employed (with no employees, in thous. and as % of all people in employment) (GUS, BAEL)	2,346 (14,7%)	2,376 (14,7%)	2,292 (14,7%)	2,220 (14,1%)	2,282 (14,2%)	2,308 (14,3%)
Number of temporary agency workers (thous.)	433	499	509	559	699	708

Source: *Badanie Ankiety Rynku Pracy*, NBP (2015); *Pracujący w gospodarce narodowej*, GUS (a) (2011-2016), *Pracujący w nietypowych formach zatrudnienia* GUS (b) (2016), *Badanie Aktywności Ekonomicznej Ludności*, GUS (2011-2015); data on personal income tax (PIT) on income incurred only from performance of civil law contracts, Ministry of Finance, MF (2010-2014); data on TAW by Polskie Forum HR (2015, 2016).

Non-standard Employment and Precarity

Is there a causal relationship between non-standard employment and precarity? Or in other words, is precarity a consequence of non-standard employment, and even, if it is the case, is it an unavoidable consequence? No straightforward answer can be given for at least two reasons: first, the notion of precarity and precarious employment are

blurred, and, second, not each and every case of non-standard employment can be categorized as precarious.

Providing a terminological order for the purpose of the paper requires a recapitulation of the key concepts circulating within the global discourse on precariat. Standing (2008/2014) claims precariat is a 'class in the making' in a Marxian sense but his view is contested, for instance by Doerre (2014) who argues that precariat is more of a condition related to labour market situation of an individual rather than a social status, so provided certain conditions (instability of employment) are met, anyone can find themselves being a part of the precariat regardless of social stratum they nominally belong to. Savage and his collaborators have undertaken a large-scale research (using the BBC Great British Society Survey) attempting to empirically verify the assumption of precariat being a social class, yet with a different view on class on their agenda, namely as one of 'popular classes' in Bourdieu perspective (Savage et al. 2015). Precariat is often described as a phenomenon at least as old as industrial capitalism (e.g. Hardy 2015, Doerre 2015) and its outward manifestation and product would be 'loose people', a large aggregate cutting across all strata, comprising also people seeking employment (Assorodobraj 1966) or 'expendable people' (Czarnowski 1956), who at the one hand were freed from societal constraints being part of the population that is 'elusive, unattached to any place, living of casual work earnings, wandering from one place of service to another' (Assorodobraj 1966: 41) but on the other hand they suffered rejection and unfair treatment (very little protection from their employers, Assorodobraj: 72–99) by society as unwanted or at least unneeded permanently or temporarily (in this case the association to the 'reserve army of labour' is very much relevant, Assorodobraj: 128). Butler looks at precariat as 'a group of people who are not only exploited workers, but those whose labor is now regarded as dispensable. It is one thing to demand a decent wage and good work conditions, and it is quite another to see that there is no job security, and that temporary forms of labor are becoming the norm. So it is that shift in labor conditions that demands that we begin to think the precariat apart from the proletariat' (Kania 2013: 34). It is a plausible claim, therefore, to say that precariat is – as a social fact – closely tied to such other phenomena as precariousness, precarity and precarsiation. A quick look at the literature allows to establish the following meanings for the key concepts in the debate:

Precariat – social 'class in the making' (Standing 2008/2014); social class defined in the tradition of Bourdieu (Savage et al. 2015); a social category whose common denominator is collective marginalization, not only due to their

economically-determined dispensability as a workforce but also to their victimization as a result of war or living in areas decimated by development.

Precariousness – a natural human condition determined by impediments of people’s physicality and risks entailed by those restraints (sickness, disability and ultimately death). ‘Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed’ (Butler 2009: 25).

Precarity – unlike ‘precariousness’ ‘precarity’ appears to be an ambiguous concept: adopting the perspective proposed by Butler (2006, 2009), universal risks encoded in precariousness of human life can be and are manifested at individual and collective level in various forms, how it actually happens can be named precarity (see: Szarfenberg 2016: 1–2). On the other hand, the term is applied in a more specific way: social situation determined not only by stability of employment (or lack thereof) but also related to housing, debt, access to social welfare and time welfare for building effective personal relations (Arnold i Bongiovi 2013: 298–299).

Precarious work – ‘employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker’ (Kalleberg 2009: 2), so there is an explicit link between precarious work and employment.

Precarious employment can be described as a combination ‘shaped by the relationship between employment status (i.e. self- or paid employment), form of employment (e.g. temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time), and dimensions of labor market insecurity, as well as social context (e.g. occupation, industry, and geography) and social location (or the interaction between social relations, such as gender, and legal and political categories, such as citizenship)’ (Vosko 2010: 2).

Non-standard Employment and Trade Unions

Non-standard employees pose a challenge for traditional actors of industrial relations. This is mostly due to the difficulties in defining, aggregating, articulating (voicing) and representing interests of a heterogeneous workforce. Trade unions – and other institutional forms of collective interest representation (e.g. works councils) – are often accused of neglecting the non-standard workers and concentrate on of ‘insiders’ rather than ‘outsiders’ in the labour market. While such a strategy of exclusion is widespread and could be seen as understandable, considering the problems in recruiting and retaining the NSE into unions, as well as the risk of free-riding on

the part of such members, it is not always followed. On the other hand, worker organisations cannot afford to ignore a growing segment of the labour force with an ongoing process of de-unionization observable across the developed world.

Based on the screening of union initiative towards young non-standard employees in seven European countries, Kuene (2013) identifies the following strategies and instruments targeting young precarious workers: collective bargaining, influencing national policies and legislation through social dialogue or campaigning, litigation in court, organizing precarious workers and providing them with services, mobilization and campaigns to influence public opinion. The wide spectrum of institutional arrangements and forms of action confirms the popular wisdom that strategy and tactics of reaching out to workers in non-standard employment depend on the specifics of national environment of industrial relations. The strategies employed by trade unions in countries with corporatist traditions contrast with those preferred by unions in countries with pluralist (liberal) industrial relations systems, and post-socialist countries with empty or state-centred industrial relations systems (Bechter, Brandl, Meardi 2011) constitute a space where yet different approaches are required. To illustrate the cross-national variations, the example of the Netherlands as a corporatist country can be given. Dutch unions' focus is on advancing the problems related to non-standard employment in the collective bargaining agenda (Boonstra, Keune, Verhulp 2011). In the UK, which is an epitome of a pluralist country, unions seem to channel their efforts into legal action as well as organizing NSE (Simms 2011). For the NMS with post-socialist background Slovakia can be discussed as a meaningful case. Apparently, tripartite social dialogue bodies have been chosen as a platform on which the NSE issues are put on display (Kahancová, Martiková 2011). Aiming at expanding the picture, a more detailed account on union initiatives across Europe can be delivered. In Sweden, the economic recession of late 1990s led to a serious blow in union membership, especially among young workers in unstable employment conditions who often thought they could not afford paying their membership dues. Furthermore, during that time unions began losing control over the unemployment insurance system, very developed in that country following establishment of an independent insurance fund called *Alfa-kassan*. In the 21st century unions responded i.a. with the campaign 'Let's change the unions now' (*Facket Förändras nu*) engineered by the Swedish Confederation of Professionals (*Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation*, TCO) targeting young employees (aged up to 35). In Denmark, the Metalworkers Union (*Dansk Metal*) has been putting an effort to recruit new member among trainees and apprentices from vocational schools. In Norway, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (*Landsorganisasjonen*

i Norge) keeps on reviving the initiative of Summer Patrol each year. The union's representatives inform young workers taking up a seasonal employment during school holidays of their rights, oversee their working conditions and build links with their potential members on the verge of the labour market. In Belgium, two main union confederations (ACV/CSC and ABVV/FGTB) decided to introduce a special student membership, which is free of charge and offers a palette of consultancy services suiting major needs of young entrants to the labour market such as labour contracts, pay and unemployment benefits.

Flexible workforce demands flexible interest representation. The willingness of unions' to address the special needs of NSE can be exemplified by such initiatives as the Outreach Plan, launched by the Irish Trade Union Congress (ICTU) in 2007. In the Netherlands certain unions realized the importance of internet-based platforms already 10 years ago, when *De Unie* began to offer a special membership for an annual fee of only 10 EUR providing the holder with a package of advisory services delivered via Web but not traditional union entitlements. Dutch union *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging*, FNV was among pioneers of organizing the self-employed: in 1999 they would embrace that part of the workforce, which was indeed a pragmatic response to changing labour market in the construction sector plagued by bogus self-employment. That initiative set a trend, and a decade later another Dutch union, *Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond* CNV stepped forward with a project to retain a hold on their members despite them losing the employee status and becoming self-employed, very often not out of their own choice. In Germany, *IG Metall* federation reacted to the increase in the volume of temporary agency workers by launching a campaign called 'Equal pay for equal work' (*Gleiche Arbeit – Gleiches Geld*) with a view of renegotiating collective agreements for workplaces where TAWs made up at least 10% of staff.

In Austria, the Association of Salaried, Printing Workers and Journalists (GPA-DJP) has been monitoring the working conditions of non-standard workers (NSW), with a special focus on self-employed (an important issue in the sector with traditionally high share of freelancers) and most recently, on internships and apprenticeships, which is another significant feature of the labour market in the country well known for its dual education system. In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, the union launched the Internships and Apprenticeships Observatory in 2014. Observatory relies on the web platform, which allows for provision of information on the legal and social rights of trainees and apprentices, and collecting the reports on irregularities and abuse.

In the UK trade unions have shifted in 2000s from workplace-oriented organizing campaigns to sector-related (focusing not only on branches but also on specific groups and categories of workers) approach. As a result, several large-scale campaigns were conducted, including the arguably most prominent one, 'Justice for Cleaners' completed by the Unite union. Another well-known case was a campaign aiming at organizing migrant workers in the meat-processing industry.

Majority of union efforts regarding NSW are either neutral or involve some kind of cooperation with public authorities (unless it is the public authorities who promote NSE in their own workplaces), while usually being confrontational towards the business side using NSE as a means of cost-cutting and increasing flexibility in managing human resources. However, there are attempts to address the issue in a consensual way and engage in a 'non-zero sum games' both in a bipartite (collective bargaining) or tripartite negotiations. The case of Danish major trade union confederation LO and Uber is worth mentioning in that context also for being the illustration of transformation of industrial relations under pressure of sharing economy. In 2014 LO put forward an idea of Uber joining an employer organization, which move would allow to cover Uber drivers by the collective agreement, thus improve their working conditions, especially with regard to pay. While Uber's (and business community's in general) response was positive, trade unions of transport workers (associating also taxi drivers) contested the idea, claiming that inviting Uber to the negotiation table would mean legitimizing the business which is highly controversial both on legal and ethical ground.

NSW are not a 'natural clientele' for trade unions. Heterogeneous workforce, who has only lack of stability (or socio-economic security in the language of Standing) in common requires different institutional arrangements to facilitate their interests: not stable structures but flexible networks. Those can be formed around NGOs, not necessarily in opposition to trade unions. On the contrary, there are cases of union-NGOs cooperation or even trade unions' patronage over civil society associations. A notable example is the Italian 'Bread and Roses' association of freelancers from the ICT sector created in 2001 in Milan subsequently merged with CISL confederation (Galletto 2010). Even more important are the new trade union organizations that originated from independent organisations addressing new forms of such as NIdiL CGIL (New Work Identity). It has been active since 1998 and is associated with the CGIL trade union confederation. NIdiL's explicitly named target group are 'atypical workers'.

Given ambiguous position of NSW in the labour market, it is debatable whether their representation should be restricted to trade unions or associations that

self-identify as organisations of employees or workers. In particular, self-employed make up a group that could either choose to join/establish the abovementioned organizational forms or seek to build links with employer or business associations. Alternatively, they can form organizations of their own, that neither stick to trade union or similar formula nor aspire to the status of employer or business association. Eminent such organizations operate in Spain, for example ATA (Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Autónomos) representing about 0.5 million self-employed, and UPTA (Unión de Profesionales y Trabajadores Autónomos), which is a federation bringing together branch and local organizations comprising workers, self-employed and entrepreneurs.

Non-standard Workers in Poland: who Can Speak on their Behalf, and why Hardly no One?

Legal environment in Poland does not make the complex tasks of aggregating, voicing and representing interests of NSW easily achievable. Quite the contrary, the binding regulations set serious obstacles to organize anybody else but people in narrowly defined standard employment into trade unions. Unions still remain the best equipped – in terms of resources they hold – institution to take the challenge, while other organizations (NGOs) or institutions (e.g. works councils) seem incapable of offering any significant support to NSW. The main reasons are arguably as follows:

Unlawfully restricted right to association – the Trade Unions Act of 1991 limits the right to join trade unions to employees (with a contract of employment) only. NSW are thus denied any legal possibility to gain union protection. Even though this particular regulation was found unconstitutional already in 2012, the regulations are yet to be amended, as social partners have been struggling with reaching a consensus over the shape of new provisions regarding the right to association since 2015 (after a two-year long deadlock in social dialogue, 2013–2015).

Workplace-centred unionism – the Trade Unions Act requires that a basic unit of trade unions (workplace-level union) comprises at least 10 eligible employees, and there are no farther conditions to fulfil, only formal registration of a new organisation with the court of law. In effect the volume of registered unions has inflated: in the late 1990s there were 24 thousand such, and in 2015 – 19.5 thousand registered unions, of which 12.9 thousand active (GUS 2015).

Conflict-driven industrial relations model and competitive pluralism – Polish trade unionism has been haunted for decades by political cleavage between post-Solidarity (*Solidarność*) and post-communist (OPZZ) camps, which seemed to be gradually healing (with the model passing through different stages: from competitive pluralism through consultative etatism to cooperative pluralism) until the government shift in 2015, which provoked concerns about potential return of competitive pluralism.

Structure of employment – roughly 96% of all economic entities in Poland employ less than 10 persons (microenterprises), and their total share in employment amounts to 40%, so that field is practically impenetrable to trade unions (due to legal conditions outlined above), although formally they do have tools to organize workers on non-workplace basis;

Deterioration of collective bargaining and moderate regard for NSW by social dialogue bodies – collective bargaining plays marginal role, with modest volume of collective agreements, low number of employees covered, and little impact collective bargaining has on employment relations. At the same time, tripartite social dialogue, which is seen as a form of institutional compensation for underdevelopment of collective bargaining in Poland (and other post-socialist Central European Countries too), has been rather inattentive to the issues related to NSE, and the crucial cases discussed by the central level tripartite bodies over past several years were initiated by the government (e.g. minimum hourly wage for those working on the basis of civil law contracts).

Legal incapacity of trade unions to efficiently represent NSW – trade unions do not explicitly exclude NSW from membership, and number of key nationwide organisations claim to actually associate such members. However, union representatives openly admit they have very little room to maneuver when there is an emergency situation and the rights of NSW vis-à-vis employers need to be defended, apart from legal consultancy unions can provide their affiliates.

On the other hand, in the past there were cases of efficient actions taken on behalf of NSW by the civic society organisations, also involving trade unions. One eminent example of a non-union initiative of bringing together collective interests of various entities to have emerged so far in Poland was the *Stowarzyszenie Poszkodowanych Przez Wielkie Sieci Handlowe – Biedronka* [the Association of People Harmed by Large Retail Chains – Biedronka]. Founded in 2002 as *Stowarzyszenie Kontrahentów Poszkodowanych Przez Jeronimo Martins Dystrybucja* [The Association of Trade Partners Who Suffered Damages as a Result of Jeronimo Martins Distribution], the Association initially focused on organizing suppliers to the chain who were

conducting legal battles against the chain. Following media exposure of systematic breach of employee rights in that chain's stores, the formula for association expanded to embrace also former and current employees of the 'Biedronka' outlets and to represent them in court against their employer. In so doing, the Association took on the character of a corporate structure representing the collective interests of both sides of labour relations (i.e., commercial companies and employees). Subsequently, the Association launched another initiative to of a nation-wide network of law firms operating under the 'Stop the exploitation' banner.

Yet another instance of non-conventional approach towards the changing realities of employment relations is the Central European regional cooperation between the Polish Association of Migrant Workers (*Polskie Stowarzyszenie Pracowników Migrujących*) and trade unions as well as NGOs from Lithuania, Ukraine and Germany. PSPM's general objective is to provide advice, assistance and aid to people leaving the country in search of work. Their target group is primarily migrant workforce per se (people leaving Poland for good on job-searching grounds) but also to seasonal and posted workers. PSPM built links with trade unions organisations in the countries belonging to a group of the most popular destinations of migrant workers. Another important fact regarding PSPM is their orientation towards not only outward movement of workers (from Poland) but also inward movement (to Poland).

Summary and Final Remarks

NSE has become a significant feature of modern labour markets. Its persistence provokes one to state a question whether the term is still correct, provided phenomenon once dubbed 'non-standard' has been turning into a steady (that is, 'standard') element of the economy. Explosion of NSE has triggered varied, largely inconsistent, and sometimes even contradictory interpretations: on the one hand, there is a post-Fordist narrative, which embraces the 'flexible specialisation' perspective. The key part of that analytical framework is the assumption that elasticity of demand by product and service markets requires structural adjustments by suppliers, hence their strive to escape firm strings binding employees with employers, typical for standard employment relationship. On the other hand, there is precarity-oriented perspective, inside which one may find number of sub-perspectives with the class-focused approach seeking a link between the impact of non-standard employment

on social structure and collective consciousness playing the first fiddle. Nevertheless, there is a look from another angle, according to which non-standard employment has been an ever-present feature of capitalist order.

Regardless of any theoretical view on non-standard employment as important socio-economic phenomenon, there is a more down-to-earth problem to be tackled: how to define, aggregate, voice and represent collective interests of NSW? It has been established that trade unions remain the most viable vehicle for carrying the NSW agenda but still they appear – in light of empirical evidence – to be a highly ineffective agent. If they wish to change it, there are at least two paths to follow. One is to enhance the unions' aptitude to deal with NSW by devising new ways to attract and retain members who are not in standard employment and expanding portfolios of union services designed specifically to suit NSW needs. The other is coalition-building with the civic society organisations. The end result would be improving NSW position vis-a-vis employers and boosting unions' veto power with their constituency enlarged. However banal it sounds, only mutually beneficial solutions can and do work.

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