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The feminisation of precarity Poland compared to other countries*

Abstract

Precarity applies to people who, in order to survive, need to work in a low-quality job, which is uncertain, temporary, low-paid, with no prospect of promotion, no security and no contract. In this sense, the precariat is a category related mostly to the secondary segments of the labour market according to the concept of the dual labour market. It is also the universal feature of Post-Fordism and the modern working conditions in which women, more often than men are located in the “worst” segment of the labour market.

In this context, it is worth noting that since the beginning of the era of globalisation, women have mostly worked in the sectors more uncertain and unstable e.g., in the service industries and trade. It has been feminisation in a double sense of the word: there have been more and more working women, on the one hand, and on the other hand, women have usually taken the flexible jobs. Most of these jobs are precarious work. Precarity combined with job insecurity and low wages leaves the workforce in this group unable to plan for their future or afford a decent life.

This article attempts to prove that the threat of precarity is more probable for women than men. This claim is supported by the OECD and Eurostat data on precarity for Poland and other European countries.

Keywords: precarity, feminisation, dual-market theory, Post-Fordism

JEL Classification: E24, J83

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1. Introduction

Precarity applies to people who, in order to survive, need to work in a low-quality job, which is uncertain, temporary, low-paid, without any prospect of promotion, security, or contracts. People in such jobs live with uncertainty for the future, an inability to do any long-term planning or afford a decent life. A member of the precariat is a person suspended between prosperity and poverty, deprived of material security and constantly faced with social failure.

The phenomenon of precarity has been of interest to sociologists, economists and political scientists for over a dozen years. Until now, however, it has been mainly associated with the Euro May Day parades and the anarchist community or grassroots, small-scale protests. The situation, however, is changing dynamically, and recent years have brought mass protests from the members of the precariat in Spain and Greece, which translates into the huge popularity of the Podemos party in Spain and Syriza in Greece. Among contemporary researchers studying the phenomenon of precarity, Judith Butler, Guy Standing, Leah Vosko, Arne Kalleberga, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, and Isabell Lorey deserve a special mention. Precarious work is most often analysed at the national level, e.g., analyses concerning Japan (Amamiya, 2009; Vij, 2013), Canada (Vosko, 2005) or the European Union countries (Mrozowicki, Roosalu & Bajuk-Sencar, 2013; Potter & Hamilton, 2014), however, international comparisons are undertaken less frequently (Duell, 2004).

Robert Castel (2000, 2002) holds that precariat is one of the most important social issues of our time, and the “precariat zone” distinguished by him is still growing. Contemporary approaches to precarity emphasise creativity, freedom and autonomy for the non-permanent workforce as well as the ability to make decisions about their employment, including self-employment (especially in the creative professions). At the other extreme, there is precariat work treated as inferior, temporary, incomplete, affecting, in particular, the worst performing social groups, such as migrants and workers (Amamiya & Beck, 2010). Precarity also applies to women who have to cope with the increasingly difficult labour market burdens and taking care of the home and children.

The problem of feminisation of the precariat is best framed in the context of feminisation of poverty (Blicharz, 2014, pp. 39–46; Charkiewicz, 2010; Tarkowska, 2009). As women are more at risk of falling into poverty, they are more prone to join the ranks of the precariat. However, analyses regarding the feminisation of poverty is not included here.

This article puts forward the hypothesis that the phenomenon of precarity largely affects women—which is a consequence of women’s difficult situation in the labour market. Based on the analysis of Eurostat, OECD and European Commission data, this paper describes the women’s position in the labour market in Poland as compared to some selected European countries.

2. Dual labour market

Many theoretical approaches are useful in investigating precarity. Karl Marx, in his classic works addresses the issue; Max Weber also refers to the issue. Contemporary researcher, Guy Standing (2011), points to the social structure as the basis of analysis. However, research into the social structure in Poland is based on the classification and scale of professions (Domański & Karpiński, 2012) mostly omitting the issues related to the concept of the precariat and treating various aspects of job security and uncertainty as non-key issues (Szarfenberg, 2015). The most popular in contemporary analyses of this topic is the socio-economic approach, in particular referring to the theories of the labour market.

Considering the situation of people in the precariat from the perspective of the labour market theories, the assumption is that the labour market is internally heterogeneous (Kryńska & Kwiatkowski, 2013, p. 205). The concept of segmentation is used in the theories of the labour market for the description of the process caused by this heterogeneity. In the theories of labour market segmentation, it is recognised that the market is divided into partial markets, which justifies the diversification of the functioning of these parts (segments).

One of the main theories, particularly important from the point of view of the issues being addressed, is the concept of the dual labour market. The basic hypothesis of the concept of the dual labour market assumes that the labour market is divided into two parts in which employees and employers operate on completely different rules of conduct that are characterised by identifiable characteristics (Kryńska, 1996, p. 95). The labour market is perceived not as a unified area but as a multiplicity of markets with different structures and features. In sociological explanations, this division of the labour market is, to a decisive extent, a result of employees having specific traits (race, gender, age) that affect their work and living environments (Kryńska & Kwiatkowski, 2013). According to this concept, the labour market is divided into two segments—the primary one and the secondary one. Because of this division, the core sector is classified as the primary segment, while the peripheral sector is assigned the term secondary segment. This concept introduces the distinction between “good jobs”—generally assigned to the primary segment—and “bad jobs”—associated with the secondary segment (Kryńska, 1996).

The primary segment offers jobs in large profitable enterprises that are largely covered by the supervision and influence of trade unions. Employees in this sector are protected against the lawlessness of employers, have a guarantee of job security, promotion prospects, opportunities to expand professional knowledge and stable working conditions. These jobs offer better wages and the employees prefer these jobs (Kryńska & Kwiatkowski, 2013, p. 213). Free access to jobs in the primary market is limited by strictly defined criteria for hiring employees at the precisely defined levels of professional advancement, etc. The selection at the

entrance to the primary job market is to avoid employing people that are unable to perform their tasks properly in the manner imposed by the nature of a given segment.

At the other extreme, there are jobs in the secondary market. They are unattractive: relatively low wages, modest working conditions, poor career advancement opportunities, no ability to raise qualifications and no guarantee of permanent employment. The described jobs are characterised by high rotation of employees and ease of transferring from one job to another. In employee group-oriented analyses, the secondary segment is identified with a group of “wronged” people that have worse employment conditions. The essence of the problem is, however, not the existence of the dual labour market as such, but the low permeability for employees. Starting with a job in the inferior segment can largely determine the career of an individual (Bednarski, 2012).

As regards the work of women, they are often a part of the secondary segment due to various factors. First, women more often than men find jobs in the services sector, which is temporary, uncertain and prone to cyclical changes. Secondly, women have breaks in employment due to child bearing and childcare, thus pushing the women into the secondary segment. And thirdly, women have greater difficulties than men in reconciling work and family life making them are less “attractive” employees for the employers.

3. Precarity indicators in the literature

In the ongoing debate on the precariat in Poland, there are voices that dispute the point of distinguishing such a category, while at the other extreme, there are activists calling the precariat to unite and fight for better working conditions. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the features that are, and are not, indicative of being a member of the precariat. It is also worth recognising the precariat as a certain community as pointed out by Guy Standing. (Since several approaches to defining the category of the precariat have been presented in the literature, e.g., in analyses of Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (2011), these authors will not include it here).

The first approach, often used by Polish researchers, assumes that the precariat/precarius workers are all temporary contract employees (Knapińska, 2014). Taking into account the scale of the phenomenon in Poland (27%), hence every fourth employee is a member of the precariat. It is all the more problematic because many employees take up employment based on temporary contracts and are very happy that they are not permanently attached to a given employer (it is the opinion of, e.g. Leah Vosko).

The other approach, adopted, among others, by Guy Standing (2011, p. 49), assumes the indication of some features (quite difficult to measure) testifying to being a member of the precariat. He described them as seven safeguards the lack of which defines the individual as a precariat representative. He included the fol-

lowing: labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security. Members of the precariat are those who live in the uncertainty of tomorrow. This uncertainty prevents them from planning anything (for example, due to forms of employment—temporary, “junk” contracts). In most cases, these features are quite difficult to measure, and relate largely to the subjective assessment of being a member of the precariat.

Paweł Poławski (2012) presents a similar approach, as he refers precarious forms of employment to, among others, long-term employment security, the degree of control over working conditions, the degree of protection of the workplace and working conditions by the relevant regulations, and the possibility of claiming their rights and determining the earnings by employees. Other researchers, e.g.: Rogers and Rogers (1898), add a number of additional features into the characteristics and methods of precarity measurement: non-pay employee benefits, autonomy in performing tasks at work, compliance of employment with qualifications, physical safety and health conditions, or the possibility of reconciling work and family life.

Another group of researchers analyses the phenomenon of the precariat in terms of social movement and associates it with activities of trade unions (Mrozowicki, Roosalu & Bajuk-Sencar, 2013; Urbański, 2014; Woolfson, Fudge & Thörnqvist, 2014). In the works of this research community, a member of the precariat is understood very specifically—as an employee who opposes the “exploitation” carried out by the entrepreneur or employer. This is an employee fighting for a better tomorrow for all those working on the so-called junk contracts (in Poland).

To sum up, there is no single way of analysing and defining the phenomenon of precarity, and there are several other ways to describe precarious work in addition to the above-mentioned ones (Gerry Rodgers, Arne Kalleberg, Leah Vosko, to name just the most-quoted researchers). Secondly, some authors focus on the precariat as a certain population, and others on features of precarious work (or even precarious employment). And thirdly, we should bear in mind that regardless of whether we talk about the precariat or precarious work, it is always a situation of uncertainty, insecurity and increased risk in relation to work.

Although it is relatively easy to create a catalogue of indicators pointing (or not) to the existence of a separate segment of the precariat in the social structure (it can be supplemented with field research) at the level of a given country, it is difficult to indicate the same in comparisons between countries. In the case of international comparisons, it is therefore appropriate to use such databases that collect information from individual countries in a similar way. Using Eurostat and OECD databases, we obtain relatively complete comparable data. Unfortunately, their disadvantages include the lack of all the information that is of interest to the researcher, which I took into account while starting the analysis.

4. Feminisation of labour

In the face of increasing globalisation and due to the necessity of functioning under the conditions of the Post-Fordist order, the emerging phenomenon of feminisation of labour is largely a consequence of the massive entry of women into the labour market. The feminisation of labour is coupled with the phenomenon described in the literature as occupational segregation, which can be considered in its horizontal or vertical variant.

Horizontal segregation means the domination of women and men in specific occupations and industries (e.g., women in health care, men in construction). Professions dominated by women are less well paid and less appreciated than those in which most employees are men (Borowska & Branka, 2010). A similar tendency to group women in specific industries (lower paid, less prestigious), e.g., healthcare, social welfare, and education, occurs in most European countries.

Vertical segregation means low participation of women in decision-making processes, disproportions in the representation of women and men in managerial positions in business, administration, education, health care, politics, etc., as well as difficulties for women in access to promotion and occupying managerial and decision-making positions. Vertical segregation is associated with such concepts as glass ceilings, glass escalators, glass walls, or sticky floors (Titkow, 2003).

A feminisation of labour has occurred due to two reasons: starting with the 19th and early 20th century, large numbers of women have entered the labour market, and since the 1970s, women have accepted flexible work. The increase of flexible forms of employment is linked with the global development of services that, unlike agriculture or industry, often require non-standard employment. In many of the services sectors, due to their cyclical nature, the employers prefer worker that are willing to accept non-permanent work and accept that the employment will end with the season/cycle. To reduce the costs further, many employers prefer non-employment contracts (civil law contracts). According to Guy Standing (2011, p. 71):

The jobs that were spreading led to a rising demand for women [...]. If flexible labour means more short-term jobs, then there is little premium placed on employment of men, perceived correctly or not—to offer long term commitment. Fears that women might involve employers in high non-wage costs, because they might become pregnant or withdraw to look after children, are less relevant if jobs are set only to last a few months, if the arrangement is non-binding or contingent on fluctuating demand, or if there is no cost to intermittent labour.

Women in the labour market became competition for men. Many good, prestigious and “secure” jobs had been already “occupied” by men, hence, as a matter of necessity, women took the most precarious jobs receiving short-term contracts or a civil-law contract, which resulted, among others, in differences in earnings between women and men or inequalities at a later time in regard to the retirement benefits.

5. The feminisation of the precariat

The key question is: what evidence is there that women are more prone to join the ranks of the precariat than the men? To verify this hypothesis, indicators are used that show an increased risk of facing uncertainty in the labour market and being in a worse situation as compared to men. Other indicators such as, part-time employment, temporary employment, remuneration, the share of women and men among the management staff (vertical segregation), the participation of women and men in individual sectors of the economy and occupational groups (horizontal segregation) contribute to the problem. This set of indicators allows one to make international comparisons. The selection of these indicators results from the characteristics of precarity phenomenon mentioned by the researchers. To have a more complete picture of the phenomenon of precarity, it would be necessary to conduct in-depth analyses at various levels in all the examined countries (including field studies).

Six countries were selected for the analysis: the UK, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Germany and Poland. Such selection of countries results, on the one hand, from the fact that they represent different models of social policy (welfare regimes), and on the other hand, raises the issue of equality in the labour market (Korpi, 2000). Differences in institutional support for the family in each of these systems indicate to what extent women are encouraged to be professionally active and to what extent these systems allow them to combine motherhood with paid work. This translates into how much the state supports women in undertaking a professional activity and to what extent they are on their own in this respect. It also affects their situation in the labour market and the sustainability of their employment.

Considering these dependencies, three main systems and countries representing them were identified: (1) general family support model—Belgium and Germany; (2) dual-earner support model—Finland and Sweden, and (3) market-oriented model—the UK. And, Poland as an example of a post-socialist state.

The analyses should start with the presentation of basic data on the situation of women and men in the labour market in the EU countries using the economic activity rate, employment rate and unemployment rate.

The first table presents data on the economic activity rate, employment rate and unemployment rate in selected EU countries broken down by gender. In all the countries, the value of the economic activity rate for women is lower than for men. The biggest differences are recorded in Poland (13.7 pp) and the UK (10.4 pp), slightly smaller in Germany (8.6 pp) and Belgium (9.4 pp). At the opposite extreme, one can find Finland (3.8 pp) and Sweden (3.7 pp). At the same time, it is worth noting that the female participation rate is the lowest in Poland and Belgium, and the highest in Sweden. The data also show how many women (especially in Poland and Belgium) are economically inactive—38.0% and 37.1%, respectively.

As for the employment rate, similarly to the previous case, its values in all the countries are lower for women than for men, with the highest value in Sweden and the lowest in Poland and Belgium. As far as the differences between men and women are concerned, the greatest difference is again observed in Poland (12.9 pp.) and the smallest in Sweden (2.7 pp).

Table 1. Economic activity rate, employment rate and unemployment rate in selected EU countries (%), 2016

Country	Economic activity rate		Employment rate		Unemployment rate	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Belgium	72.3	62.9	66.5	58.1	8.1	7.6
Finland	77.9	74.1	70.8	67.6	9.2	8.7
Germany	82.2	73.6	78.5	70.8	4.5	3.8
Poland	75.7	62.0	71.0	58.1	6.2	6.3
Sweden	83.9	80.2	77.5	74.8	7.5	6.7
UK	83.4	73.0	79.1	69.5	5.1	4.8

Note. Adapted from OECD Employment database.

The unemployment rate is also a measure of the situation in the labour market. In all the analysed countries, this ratio was lower for women than for men. The only exception is Poland, where the unemployment rate for women exceeded the male unemployment rate by 0.1 p.p. Women in the labour market in Germany (3.8%) and the United Kingdom (4.8%) are in the best situation in this respect. Further analysis will answer the question about the reasons for this state of affairs.

As noted earlier, precarious work is determined by various characteristics of the position of women and men in the labour market. The catalogue of selected indicators is not finite, but in my opinion, the features selected for the analysis will allow us to determine whether in selected European countries the phenomenon of feminisation of the precariat occurs.

First, data on part-time and temporary employment will be analysed. Table 2 presents data on part-time employment (less than 30 hours per week) in selected EU countries broken down by gender.¹

Table 2. Part-time employment, 2016

Country	Men	Women
Belgium	6.9	30.0
Finland	10.6	17.7
Germany	9.1	36.9
Poland	3.4	9.0
Sweden	10.1	17.8
UK	11.6	37.5

Note. Adapted from OECD Statistics.

The data show, first, that in all the analysed countries, the share of women working part-time is larger or much larger than the share of men. The highest percentage of part-time women workers is in the UK (37.5%), Germany (36.9%) and Belgium (30.0%), while the lowest in Poland. It can be noted that in Poland, both women and men rarely work part-time compared to other countries. Indicators for part-time employment for men in the analysed countries (except Poland)

¹ The data refer to the frequency of part-time employment expressed as a percentage of total employment, taking into account a common definition of such employment for all the analysed countries.

are at a similar level and range from 6.9% in Belgium to 11.6% in the United Kingdom. The smallest differences between part-time employment of women and men are found in Poland (5.6 pp), Finland (7.1 pp) and Sweden (7.7 pp). In the remaining countries, these differences amount to over 20 percentage points (in Germany even 27.8 p.p.).

However, the data on part-time work can be misleading in view of the worse situation of women in the labour market and the greater odds of women joining the ranks of the precariat. This is because the majority of those women voluntarily accept under-employed. Therefore, the data on part-time employees who accepted such employment because they could not find permanent jobs is interesting in this context. The information presented applies only to those who are involuntary part-time employees (the share of involuntary part-timers as a percentage of part-time employment).

Table 3. Share of involuntary part-timers as a percentage of part-time employment, 2016 (%)

Country	Men	Women
Belgium	14.1	7.6
Finland	33.3	34.7
Germany	18.3	10.3
Poland	26.5	25.5
Sweden	36.6	25.2
UK	27.4	11.7

Note. Adapted from OECD Statistics.

Table 3 presents data on the percentage of people dissatisfied with part-time employment among all part-time employees (the involuntary part-time employment indicator). The data leads to interesting conclusions. In all the countries except Finland, men are more dissatisfied than women with their part-time employment. In the UK, it is every fourth person working in this form of employment (while for women it is only 11.7%). The Belgians are the most satisfied with this form of employment—both women and men, and the most dissatisfied are the Swedes and Finns (both women and men). There are quite many dissatisfied people also in Poland, taking into consideration how few Polish men and women work part-time. Among those who decided on this form of employment, every third did it involuntarily, most often due to a lack of full-time work.

Another important indicator, often referred to while discussing the issue of the precariat, is temporary employment. Detailed data are presented in Table 4.

Based on the above-presented data, it can be concluded that temporary employment rates are higher for women than for men in most of the analysed countries. The exception is Germany, where the share of women and men is the same. The case of Poland is particularly important in this context. In comparison with the other analysed countries, the share of temporary contracts is much higher. In the case of men, it is almost twice as high as in Sweden and almost five times higher than in the UK. The lowest rates are recorded in the UK and Belgium. It is difficult to estimate

the number of members of the precariat in individual countries based on this indicator. Nevertheless, Poland compares unfavourably with the other analysed countries, but this disadvantageous comparison applies to both women and men.

Table 4. Share of persons employed temporarily among all employed persons, 2016 (%)

Country	Men	Women
Belgium	8.4	10.0
Finland	13.2	18.4
Germany	13.1	13.1
Poland	27.3	27.7
Sweden	15.1	18.4
UK	5.5	6.6

Note. Adapted from OECD Employment database.

When analysing the situation of women in the labour market, in particular, their positions related to the precariat, it is important to refer to the issue of occupational segregation. It has two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. The existence of inequalities, both horizontal and vertical, indicate a worse situation for women in the labour market in relation to men. **Horizontal segregation of the labour market** means the dominance of women in sectors with lower earnings and lower prestige, along with the low participation of women in sectors strategic for the development of the country, and at the same time low participation of men in “caring” professions. Consequently, this means that the sectors of the economy and professions are divided into “masculine” and “feminine”.

Table 5 presents the share of women and men in particular sectors of the economy (services, industry, agriculture), and additionally in Table 6 the self-employed in the analysed EU countries is shown.

Table 5. Share of women and men in the economic sectors of individual EU countries, 2014

Country	Services		Industry		Agriculture	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Belgium	69.9	92.2	28.4	6.9	1.7	0.9
Germany	62.2	86.8	35.9	12.2	2.0	1.1
Poland	46.0	73.5	41.5	16.3	12.5	10.2
Finland	58.2	88.5	35.2	8.9	6.7	2.6
Sweden	65.4	90.9	31.4	8.0	3.2	1.0
UK	73.6	92.7	24.4	6.5	2.0	0.8

Note. Adapted from Eurostat Database.

Data from Table 5 show that women are more often than men employed in the services sector in all the analysed countries. At the same time, the men are employed more frequently than women in the industrial and agricultural sectors. The largest share in the services sector among women is found in the UK (92.7%) and Belgium (92.2%), while the lowest in Poland (73.5%). Women in Poland, much more often than women in the other analysed countries, work in the industry

(16.3%) and agriculture (10.2%). The share of women in the latter sector is particularly significant—sometimes exceeding the share in the other analysed countries by a factor of ten.

Data on self-employment also renders interesting insights. See Table 6.

Table 6. Self-employment, 2016 (%)

Country	Self-employment	
	Men	Women
Belgium	18.44	10.63
Germany	12.84	7.65
Poland	23.87	16.83
Finland	18.37	9.37
Sweden	13.54	6.11
UK	19.44	10.85

Note. Adapted from OECD Statistics.

Data in Table 6 show that self-employment is the most popular in Poland, and the least in Sweden and Germany. In all the analysed countries, women run their own business less frequently than men. It is worth noting that Poles prevail significantly in the number of single-person companies among the analysed countries, especially large differences can be seen among women (Polish women—16.83%, Swedish women—6.11%.) In the context of the precariat, the question of voluntary self-employment remains open (especially in Poland).

Apart from employment broken down into individual sectors of the economy, it is equally important in the perspective of occupational segregation to compare the share of women and men in the main groups of occupations. Tables 7a and 7b show data (in thousands) on the number of women and men in the nine main occupational groups. Since the data on some occupations such as the Armed Forces is incomplete, these occupations are not included in the present analysis.

Table 7a. Participation of women and men in the main groups of occupations, 2017, part 1 (in thousands)

	Belgium		Germany		Poland	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Legislators, senior officials and managers	234.0	121.6	1,320.7	542.2	609.6	410.7
Professionals	553.4	633.5	3,929.6	3,335.6	1,212.1	1,942.8
Technicians and associate professionals	356.5	304.5	3,761.9	5,200.0	1,035.1	1,109.4
Clerks	213.8	342.4	1,921.1	3,467.9	372.6	586.0
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	196.3	400.8	2,093.0	3,634.9	725.7	1,420.7
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	44.1	8.0	390.5	82.8	792.7	546.5
Craft and related trades workers	447.7	28.7	4,468.9	568.9	2,167.0	277.3
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	260.5	45.0	2,133.9	357.1	1,424.2	253.3
Elementary occupations	177.2	277.0	1,284.6	1,837.5	385.9	608.7

Note. Adapted from Eurostat.

Table 7b. Participation of women and men in the main groups of occupations, 2014, part 1 (in thousands)

	Finland		Sweden		UK	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Legislators, senior officials and managers	57.6	26.5	184.9	114.3	2,191.9	1,226.8
Professionals	310.3	298.4	574.5	788.1	3,876.5	3,814.8
Technicians and associate professionals	197.6	268.4	507.3	384.4	1,880.4	2,026.4
Clerks	35.3	108.8	122.4	187.0	1,007.9	2,058.4
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	128.1	327.2	301.8	630.9	1,806.3	3,943.3
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	41.4	24.2	45.8	18.3	288.9	46.1
Craft and related trades workers	242.8	16.8	413.1	34.7	2,373.5	164.0
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	153.1	24.2	241.2	40.0	1,327.0	185.5
Elementary occupations	65.4	74.7	112.0	112.9	1,450.8	1,161.0

Note. Adapted from Eurostat.

Due to the data format contained in Tables 7a and 7b, precise international comparisons are not possible. However, when analysing the above-presented information, certain regularities are easily observable. In all the analysed countries, women outnumber men in the categories of clerks, personal service workers and salespersons. In Belgium, Poland and Sweden, women constitute the majority in the group of professionals. In Germany, Poland, Finland and the United Kingdom, they also dominate in the group of technicians and associate professionals. In all the analysed countries (except for the UK), women outnumber men also in relation to the group of “elementary occupations”. On the other hand, when it comes to groups such as legislators, senior officials and managers; skilled agricultural and fishery workers; craft and related trades workers; plant and machine operators and assemblers, in all the analysed countries, men largely outnumbered women.

Based on the present analyses, one can see that women are generally found in those groups of professions that are less paid and less prestigious, and hence this is one of the reasons for their worse situation in the labour market compared to men. In addition, the prevalence of women in occupational groups such as elementary occupations or service workers and shop and market sales workers promotes the precarisation of these professions. The high turnover of employees, short-term contracts (or employment based on civil-legal contracts), low wages, and a lack of opportunities for career advancement confirm the assumption regarding the feminisation of the precariat in this respect.

An important indicator of the position of women in the labour market is their participation in the top positions. This is connected with the phenomenon of vertical segregation, i.e. with access to the highest managerial and decision-making positions for women and limited promotion opportunities.

Data collected by the European Commission were used for the analysis. First, the information on the percentage of women and men in the highest positions in companies listed on the stock exchanges of the analysed countries is presented.

Three types of positions are analysed: presidents of companies (president), members of the board/supervisory boards (members) and managing directors (chief executive officer). Detailed data are provided in Table 9.

Table 9. Share of women and men in the highest positions in companies listed on the stock exchanges in individual countries (%), 2017

Country	President		Members		Chief executive officer	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Belgium	94.1	5.9	69.3	30.7	94.1	5.9
Finland	95.8	4.2	67.2	32.8	95.8	4.2
Germany	96.7	3.3	68.1	31.9	100.0	0.0
Poland	70.0	30.0	79.9	20.1	100.0	0.0
Sweden	92.6	7.4	64.1	35.9	92.6	7.4
UK	100.0	0.0	72.8	27.2	96.0	4.0

Note. Adapted from European Institute for Gender Equality.

The data contained in Table 9 show that women occupy the highest management positions much less often than men. When it comes to the positions of CEOs of the largest companies, the best situation is in Poland. Almost every third president of the companies listed on the Polish stock exchange is a woman (30%). The worst situation is in the UK, where there is no female president. The situation is slightly better in relation to the position of board members/supervisory board members of such companies. Women's share ranges from 20.1% in Poland to 35.9% in Sweden. No women in Germany and Poland hold the positions of CEO. In contrast, in the other analysed countries, the share varies from 4% to 7.4%.

The information in Table 9 is supplemented with data on the positions of the presidents of national banks. In 2014, men were the heads of the banks of six analysed countries (in the entire European Union only in Cyprus the president of the National Bank of Cyprus was a woman). Women are also not the presidents of any of the most important EU financial institutions (the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank or the European Investment Fund). As regards managerial positions in public administration at the highest EU level, on average 15% of women were in the positions of CEO or their deputies (data from the European Commission). It is evident that in all spheres of life where there is a hierarchy of positions men predominantly hold the highest positions.

All the data prove the existence of "glass ceilings"—invisible barriers to women's promotion to senior management positions in the company, independent of the level of education, experience, internship, etc. (Branka & Borowska, 2010, p. 35).

Another important feature pointing to the worse situation of women in the labour market, and at the same time confirming their greater membership in the precariat category, is the gender pay gap. This is an important indicator used in the framework of the European Employment Strategy (EES) to monitor inequalities in pay between women and men. The gender pay-gap is defined as the difference between the average gross earnings per hour of work by men and women expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly salary of men.

The reasons for, and the size of, the pay-gap can vary widely between countries. This is due to the different situation of women and men in the national labour markets, which in turn is a result of many factors (e.g.: institutional facilitation regarding the reconciliation of work and family life or flexible forms of employment).

Nevertheless, the Eurostat data shows that in 2016, women's earnings (measured as average gross hourly earnings) were 16.2% lower than the earnings for men. Among all the EU countries, the largest differences in earnings were in Estonia (25.3%), the smallest, in Romania (5.2%) and in Italy (5.3%). In 2016, among the countries included in the study, the largest differences in remuneration between women and men were in Germany—21.5%, the UK stood at 21%, Finland at 17.4%, and Sweden at 13.3%. The lowest differences were in Belgium (6.1%) and Poland (7.2%).

The feminisation of the precariat is also often manifested by the nature of women's employment. They have more breaks in work (related to, for example, having and bringing up children), which makes them more vulnerable to the discontinuity of employment. Moreover, the necessity to perform household duties by women (unpaid work of women) often prevents them from taking any permanent employment. Women are expected to do most of the work related to taking care of the home and children and looking after older relatives combined with simultaneous activity in the labour market. All this makes more stable employment increasingly less available for women, which further pushes them towards the precariat.

This information is supplemented with data on unpaid women's work. By definition, it is the production by household members of such goods and services that are not sold on the market. There is a significant difference in time spent on unpaid work by women and men. Table 10 presents the detailed data on activities other than work.

Table 10. Time allocated for various activities outside of work during the day in minutes, 2003–2010

Country	Unpaid work ^a		Personal hygiene ^b		Rest ^c	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
Belgium	151	245	671	695	350	307
Finland	159	232	631	651	386	336
Germany	164	269	636	656	351	326
Poland	157	296	642	658	323	273
Sweden	154	207	573	617	314	272
UK	141	258	574	598	382	339

Note. Adapted from OECD Indicators of Gender Equality in Employment.

^aRoutine household chores, shopping, taking care of children and the elderly, volunteering, travel related to housework and more;

^bSleep, food, drink, doctor visits and related travel;

^cSports, participation in parties and events, visiting friends, watching TV at home.

The data show that, first, in all the analysed countries, women spend more time than men on unpaid domestic work. Women from Poland and men from Germany spend the most amount of time on unpaid work. Regarding sleeping, eating or visiting a doctor, there are no significant differences between men and women. As for rest, a slight (though occurring in all the analysed countries) regularity can be seen: women rest less during the day than do men. Women in Sweden get the shortest rest breaks, while women in the UK get the longest rest breaks.

6. Conclusions

Employment insecurity affects largely those who have a relatively worse position in the labour market. The precarious segment of the labour market is a segment of the excluded, functioning on its periphery and not rooted in industrial labour relations.

A universal feature of Post-Fordist order and the modern labour market is employment uncertainty and insecurity. Employment security has given way to a lack of security, temporary contracts and growing self-employment. Formal wage differences have deepened and the unemployed are forced to rely on insufficient benefits, disability pensions and informal gainful activities at the borderline of legality.

Considering the literature on precarity and the analyses presented, one may conclude that this is a multidimensional phenomenon. Factors determining the emergence of precarious employment differ in individual countries and depend on the characteristics of a given labour market and its institutional context.

While it is undeniable that the situation of women in the labour market is worse, it is difficult to state clearly whether this fact is decisive when it comes to greater vulnerability of women in terms of joining the ranks of the precariat. If one were to compare the situation of Poland with the other countries, one would see a higher rate of inactivity and a higher percentage of people employed on temporary contracts. Women in Poland are more likely to join the precariat. When variables such as the pay-gap, part-time employment, and involuntary employment are considered, it turns out that the position of Polish women in the labour market is stronger than the women in the other analysed countries. There are also data that can be interpreted in various ways, such as the high share of women in the agricultural sector and the relatively low share in services. On the one hand, it shows a worse situation for these women in the labour market, and on the other hand, it can also be interpreted as beneficial, due to the fact that the precariat is to the greatest extent "embedded" in services.

The present analyses do not indicate unequivocally that in the analysed countries there are that women will have more precarious jobs than men. The women's worse situation in the labour market in comparison with men is not a sufficient reason for including women in the precariat. The thesis on feminisation of the precariat adopted at the beginning of the article is therefore not confirmed.

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