

## **2. Today's youth at the European work market**

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### **Towards precarious work and NEET generation?**

#### **“Precarious work” as a consequence of the development of a flexible world of work**

One of the most striking trends of the modern world of work is its *increasing flexibility*, and thus dispersion of work in time and space, which has been developing since the 1980s. *Flexible forms of employment and work organization*, which are different from the traditional model of wage labour, are becoming ever more important. Their main feature is - as the name suggests - "flexibility" of time and place of work, employment relationship, relation of an employee with an employer, salary and the scope of work. On the one hand, many researchers praise "the flexibility of the new work" taking the view that it is an expression of civilization progress. However, there is no doubt that it also adversely affects the lives of people.

One of the most important consequences resulting from the development of flexible employment model seems to be the emergence of the so-called *precarious work*, meaning work which is uncertain, lacking security and prospects, mainly temporary, often poorly paid. *Precarious workers* are people performing precarious work, who have to make a living from it. They are deprived of fundamental rights guaranteed by the labour market and take up unsecured forms of work, which do not give any chance to have a sense of professional identity or build a career.

The concept of "*precarariat*" was coined by an American professor Guy Standing, who understands by it a new, threatening social class, emerging and dangerous to the social and political order, as it consists of people with a minimum level of trust in the state. In the author's view the flexibility and insecurity of work is more severe than the lack of work itself. People are anxious and stressed out and at the same time "under-" or "over-" qualified. They live in constant anxiety and fear that they may lose their jobs overnight, which has an impact on their behaviour in personal and

family life as well as their physical and mental health. In the case of mental health there occurs a syndrome of four feelings: anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation. Such people become "precarious" that is they are subject to pressure and experiences leading to an unsecure existence, living in the present, without identity providing a sense of security, as well as with no chance of development achieved by work.

Most temporary or part-time workers are close to being in precariat<sup>1</sup>, because such employees have very poor relationship with the relations of production, have a low income in comparison with people doing similar work on a permanent basis and limited career opportunities. Of course, having a temporary job does not always have to be a sign of work without prospects and is preferable if it gives satisfaction and the possibility of pursuing a career. The above mentioned author himself admits that there are no good indicators of precarious work but also says that nowadays at least a quarter of adults in the world are in precariat (or at risk) (Standing 2011).

### **The education system as a trap of precariousness**

There is no doubt that Europe's future lies in the hands of 94 million Europeans in age from 15 to 29 years. The labour market, however, afflicts young people the most. In 2011 only 34% of them were employed, which was the lowest percentage ever recorded by Eurostat. Since the beginning of the economic crisis of 2008 the labour market has become less and less friendly for young people - youth unemployment has increased by 1.5 million, reaching in 2011 the level of 5.5 million or 21% in the EU (Mascherini, Salvatore, A. Meierkord et al., 2012).

Although so many young people nowadays have educational opportunities created, on the labour market – throughout their working lives – they will be accompanied by uncertainty. Precarious workers include educated people; graduates with bachelor's, engineer or master's degree; people who continue their education and link it to

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<sup>1</sup> According to the report *Key Data on Education in Europe 2012* it can be estimated that an average of 10-15% of workers in the European Union aged 25-64 have signed temporary contracts. These overall figures conceal the differences between countries - the smallest percentage of such contracts is recorded among others in Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania, and the highest - in Spain, Poland and Portugal. In these latter countries, about one quarter of the workforce is employed on a temporary basis.

professional training or simply young people who have completed their education and entered or try to enter the labour market.

Precarious workers realise in a painful way that the ideals inculcated in childhood and youth, indicating that work is an obligation and a duty of man, and the way to work is systematic education, collide with the different realities of the flexible world of work. This leads to doubting the high value of work and education as well as the sense of participation in social life in all its dimensions. One can risk saying that education sets a trap of precarity for young people, since the commercialization of education at all levels is now a global phenomenon. Currently, there is a tendency to transform the education system into a regular part of the market society. Thus, the role of education is moved towards the formation of "human capital" and preparation for work. In the words of G. Standing it is one of the most disgusting aspects of globalization. The education system presents itself as an industry, as a source of income also generating earnings from export, as an area of competition between countries, universities and schools classified according to performance indicators.

The overall objective of this global project is the production of goods called "certificates" and "graduates". Commodification of education is, according to the author, a social disease that has a high price. Striving of the educational system to multiply the "human capital" has not created better job prospects. Education sold as capital goods, which does not bring economic return, is therefore for most buyers simply a fraud. If education is sold as capital goods, if the supply of certificates is endless, and if they do not bring the promised profit, that is to say access to good jobs and a high income, it will lead to bitterness, disappointment and anger in the world (Standing, 2011).

It even seems that this process has already begun and its expression can be seen in the more and more increasingly emerging the so-called NEET generation that refers to "young people without work, education and training." This generation is slowly becoming an index of withdrawal from the labour market and from the society in general. The number of people aged 15-29 without any job regularly increases. In the European Union, it increased from 13% in 2008 to 15.9% in 2013 and in Poland from

12.7% to 16.2% over the same period. It is worth noting that in 2008 the proportion of 'NEETs' in any country did not exceed 20%. In 2013 there were already five such countries (Greece - 28.9%, Italy - 26%, Bulgaria - 25.7%, Spain - 22.5% and Croatia - 20.9%) (Mascherini, Salvatore, A. Meierkord et al., 2012; They do not work, they do not learn, 2014).

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If you take the position of Guy Standing, anyone of us can become a precarious worker, because there are probably no individuals today that under the conditions of the dynamics of modern civilization and flexible world of work would have a sense of long-term safety. Thus, there is a concern, whether education in which we have participated and are going to participate for further part of our lives, will protect us from this danger.

To sum up the presented reflection and not to undermine the sense of intensive educational efforts, young people are right - brought up from childhood in the spirit of education; persuaded by parents and teachers to learn well and "to invest in themselves" – when, entering the labour market, they are forced to take "precarious work" and cannot understand why it happened.

### **Bibliography**

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