

Kristin Jesnes

Approaches to atypical and precarious work



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Preface

In Norway, atypical and precarious work has been part of the political discussions in recent years. In 2015, the government changed the Working Environment Act and made it possible for companies to hire workers on ‘general’ fixed-term contracts without a specific reason (e.g. sick leave, parental leave). In addition, there is talk of a rise in on-call work and ‘no pay between assignments’ contracts. Still, changes are difficult to trace in the statistics, and this calls for a debate on the methodological challenges of measuring precarious and atypical work. Fafo has discussed such issues under the research programme ‘Tilknytningsformer’ [Forms of affiliation in the labour market], in recent years. This paper is the product of a review of recent literature on the topic and a workshop organized in Oslo in December 2017 with researchers who work on defining and measuring different forms of precarious atypical work. The participants in the workshop included: Anna Pärnänen (Statistics Finland), Anna Ilsøe and Trine P. Larsen (Faos, Denmark), Andrea Broughton (Institute for Employment Studies, England), Lorraine Ryan, Michelle O’Sullivan, Juliet McMahon, Caroline Murphy (University of Limerick, Ireland), Kristine Nergaard, Sissel Trygstad, Kristin Alsos, Jørgen Svalund, Beate Sletvold Øistad, Mona Bråten and Kristin Jesnes (Fafo, Norway), and three representatives from the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The aim of the paper is not to establish the share of precarious atypical work in any country, but to discuss different approaches to the issue.

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October 2018,
Kristin Jesnes

Introduction

Since the financial crisis, precarious and atypical work has been a topic of debate in Europe. There is no common definition of ‘precarious work’. The concept is often used to describe insecure jobs with poor wages and working conditions, such as zero-hour contracts, temporary agency work, or employees who are masqueraded as self-employed. Precarious work is often associated with atypical work, or non-standard forms of work, which are employment relationships that depart from standard work arrangements (full-time, indefinite, and conducted at a workplace) (Kalleberg 2000: 341, 2009:3). Atypical work has often been used as the main indicator of precariousness, but not all atypical work is precarious. For instance, solo self-employment might be considered atypical, but if you work as an independent consultant with a stable, high income, few would regard this as precarious work. Still, the use of atypical work as the main indicator of precariousness has led to the assumption that an increase in atypical work in parts of the labour market, as observed in several European countries, has led to a rise in precariousness (Broughton et al. 2016). The lack of definitions and methodological challenges of measuring the amount of precarious atypical work make this topic a highly political one and of interest to researchers.

In this context, we aim to give an overview of selected new literature on precarious atypical work. The aim was not to cover all literature on the topic, but to give insight into some approaches to measuring precarious atypical work, particularly in the Nordic countries and the UK. The aim has not been to establish any level or share of precarious work, but to investigate approaches and methods. In addition to a review of selected literature, the paper builds on a workshop organized in Oslo in December 2017 on how to define and measure precarious and atypical work, with researchers from the Nordic countries and the UK. At the workshop we attempted to cover different ways of operationalizing some specific forms of non-standard employment. The paper starts with a review of the selected literature followed by a summary of the workshop and the work presented by the researchers at the workshop.

Precarious atypical work in literature

Precarious work has been on the agenda since the 1970s (Kalleberg 2009), but has taken on new interest in Europe since the EU enlargement in 2004 and the financial crisis in 2008. Globalization, as well as technological- and social changes have made it an increasingly global phenomenon (see for instance Nielsen et al. 2017). Even the Nordic models are experiencing an increase in non-standard forms of work associated with higher risks of precarious work in parts of the labour market (Ilsøe et al. 2017). However, the debate is characterized by the lack of a shared definition of precarious work.

Precarious work is often used to describe insecure jobs with poor wages and working conditions, but many different terms are used interchangeably among politicians as well as researchers, which creates confusion around what we are actually talking about. Absence of a shared understanding also results in a lack of comparable data. Attempts to measure the share of precarious work in labour markets have often used non-standard employment contracts as the main indicator of precariousness (Broughton et al. 2016). Non-standard forms of work, or atypical work¹ as it is often called, are employment relationships that depart from standard work arrangements (full-time, indefinite, and conducted at a workplace) (Kalleberg 2000: 341, 2009:3).

Scholars have in recent years attempted to move beyond understanding precarious work as being equal to non-standard forms of work. It is increasingly common to view precariousness not only as a result of the employment relationship, but also as dependent on the quality of work and the socio-economic situation of the individual (see for instance Olsthoorn 2014). In the report *Precarious Employment in Europe Part 1: Patterns, Trends and Policy Strategy*, Broughton et al. (2016) define precarious work as ‘vulnerable employees who have an insecure job and few entitlements to income support’ (20). Further, the report describes three approaches to studying precarious work used by researchers: the ‘individual contract approach’, the ‘individual choice approach’, and the ‘quality of work approach’. These approaches, further outlined below, are useful in categorizing different approaches to precarious and atypical work.

In the following, we will review selected literature with these three approaches to precarious work in mind. First, we examine and discuss the three methodological approaches. Second, we review research using the individual contract approach, a combination of the individual contract approach and the quality of work approach, and a combination of the individual contract approach and the individual choice approach. Lastly, we summarize some key lessons.

Three approaches to precarious work

Under the individual contract approach, the contract defines the precariousness. The approach entails counting how many different types of employment contracts there

¹ I will use the two terms – atypical and non-standard forms of employment – interchangeably in this paper.

are in the labour market, and especially the share of non-standard forms of employment. The share of certain types of employment relationships – typically non-standard – is then considered to be precarious.

Figure 1. Non-standard forms of employment. ILO (2016).

Form of employment	Characteristics
Temporary employment	Not open-ended, but fixed-term, including project- or task-based contracts, seasonal work, casual work.
Part-time and on-call	Not full-time. Normal working hours, but fewer than full-time equivalents, marginal part-time employment, on-call work, zero-hour contracts
Multi-party employment relationship	No direct subordinate relationship with the end user. Also known as 'dispatch', 'brokerage', and 'labour hire'. Temporary agency work, subcontracted labour, platform work.
Disguised employment/dependent self-employment	Not part of an employment relationship. Disguised employment, dependent self-employment, sham/false or misclassified self-employment.

The individual contract approach has its limitations. A pitfall that we have already addressed is mixing non-standard forms of work and precarious work. This makes it challenging to distinguish precarious from non-precarious atypical work. One example could be a consultant working on projects, but able to pick and choose between projects to work on. Most people would not consider this precarious work. Also, it is challenging to distinguish between self-employed and so-called *false* self-employed, i.e. self-employed that are defined as such by the companies they work for, but that in reality, according to the law, might be employees. The distinction between a self-employed person and an employee is important because it determines access to social security, training and coverage by legislation on working conditions. However, sometimes it may be hard to distinguish, and a legal assessment may be needed to determine this. Because of the limits of the individual contract approach to defining precarious work, there is a need for other indicators, according to Broughton et al. (2016).

The second approach, the individual choice approach, explores the motivations and the voluntary nature of the work contract. The method entails asking workers about their motivations and their reasons for working under this form of employment relationship, usually atypical. Kalleberg (2009) seems to have this approach to precarious work, which he defines as 'employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the *point of view of the worker*' [my emphasis] (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 2). The method is criticized for being too subjective, and may quickly end up as a reflection on how satisfied the employee is with his or her job situation, which is not necessarily an indication of precariousness. Another point of weakness is that employees are not always aware of what rights they are entitled to. If a company does not offer an employment contract, but says that you are self-employed and have to register as such, a worker might be convinced that it is so.

The quality of work approach is the third one. The approach considers elements such as lack of control over job content, lack of autonomy, lack of employee voice, little variation in tasks, low income, or a lack of control over working hours as indications of precariousness. These elements may be viewed as proxy indicators for precarious work. Broughton et al. (2016) recommend a combination of the individual

contract approach – studying the form of employment – and the quality of work approach – exploring proxy indicators – to explore precariousness. In the following, we review literature based on the three approaches, or a combination of them.

The individual contract approach

The individual contract approach – counting the share of atypical contracts in the labour market – is still widely used in research. Most researchers rely on data from the Labour Force Surveys. The individual contract approach is valuable because of the possibility to compare development over time. Yet, experiences from both the Norway and the UK show that when using the individual contract approach to measure precarious work, it might be necessary to explore and combine various data sources.

In the UK, zero-hour contracts have been the subject of political debate since the 1990s, and how to count the share of this form of work in the labour market has become quite important for this debate. In the 1990s, the contracts were used to ‘clock off’ workers in quiet periods, while keeping the workers on site. In late 1990, regulation brought an end to such practice, and clarified that employees should be paid while on site (Pennycock et al. 2013). The ‘zero-hour contract’ acquired a new meaning, and it is now used to describe contracts that *lack a guaranteed minimum number of hours*. There is still no legal definition of such contracts. However, since 2000 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in the UK has measured the share of zero-hour contracts through the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS samples around 40,000 households per quarter and collects information about people’s employment status. One of the questions in the LFS, asked of people in employment, relates to special working arrangements that vary daily or weekly. Respondents can choose up to three different arrangements from a list of eight options, one of which is ‘zero-hour contracts’ defined as follows:

‘an open-ended contract *without a guarantee for a fixed number of hours*, workers are called into work and report to work at a short notice only when needed. [Although the employer has *no obligation to provide work, a minimum number of hours may be agreed* in some cases between the employer and the worker.] On-call workers can be scheduled to work for several days or weeks in a row but they do not have a regular schedule.’²

In other words, this means that the workers are called into work when needed, the company is not obliged to call them, and the workers do not have to work when asked. Also, the company cannot hinder those on zero-hour contracts from seeking work elsewhere. The individual will have the status of a ‘worker’ or an ‘employee’, and the company is still responsible for the health and safety³ of these workers and for paying at least the national minimum wage. The UK labour law makes a distinction between ‘workers’ and ‘employees’. Workers are entitled to the national minimum wage, as well as health and safety rights, working time, data protection rights and time off for family emergencies. Employees have, in addition, rights to statutory sick pay, parental leave and pay, minimum notice periods, protection against unfair dismissal and the right to a permanent contract (Garben, 2017: 36).

² E-mail exchange with Mark Chandler in the ONS, on October 23, 2017.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/contract-types-and-employer-responsibilities/zero-hour-contracts>

In 2013, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) published a survey of 1000 employers – *The 2013 Labour Market Outlook* – where they estimated a much higher number of zero-hour contracts than in the LFS.⁴ As the LFS is based on respondents' views about their working arrangements, and counts people rather than contracts, it is likely that any estimate of zero-hour contracts from the LFS will be less than an estimate obtained from businesses,⁵ as companies have a more exact overview of the number of zero-hour contracts they use. This illustrated the methodological challenges of measuring such work through the Labour Force Survey. After the CIPD survey was published, the ONS received considerable criticism for having underreported the number of zero-hour contracts. This has led to the ONS using both methodologies, asking both employers and employees when reporting the extent of zero-hour contracts.

Nergaard (2015, 2016) has studied different forms of both typical and atypical of employment over a long period, through the Norwegian Labour Force Survey. In addition, the LFS has been combined with other data sources when giving estimates of the share of specific forms of employment (see for instance Nergaard et al. 2015, Nergaard 2016). In order to estimate the scope of on-call work for instance, defined as not having a set number of working hours per week, Nergaard et al. (2015) used a range of data sources including data from an ad hoc module to the Norwegian Labour Force Survey from 2013 and surveys of the retail, hotel and restaurant, and cleaning industries. In the ad hoc module to the LFS, three per cent of the workers stated that they 'did not have set working hours' which was used as a definition of on-call work and which might indicate the amount of on-call contracts in Norway (Nergaard et al. 2015:40).

Individual choice and individual contract approach

Other researchers combine the individual contract approach and the individual choice approach. In Finland, the rise in solo self-employed has been an issue of debate in recent years. At Statistics Finland, a separate survey of self-employed without employees was carried out in 2013. In the report *Self-employed without employees in Finland 2013*, the assumption that many self-employed work as entrepreneurs because they cannot find other forms of paid work is tested (Pärnänen & Sutela 2014). The report is based on a survey, partly conducted online and partly by telephone, of working life experiences and motivations of 'self-employed without employees'⁶, and finds that 'forced entrepreneurship' is the case for about 20 per cent of the self-employed without employees. Forced entrepreneurship is defined as posts where the self-employed person does not have control over the work process, time or place. The respondents answered statements about issues such as opportunities for inclusion at work, stress at work and income regularity, which gave an indication of whether they had control over their own work process, time or place. The research combines the individual contract approach and the individual choice approach.

⁴ <http://www.onrec.com/news/news-archive/zero-hours-contracts-more-widespread-than-thought-only-minority-of-zero-hours-work>

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworking-hours/articles/contractsthatdonotguaranteeaminimumnumberofhours/september2017>

⁶ The sample was drawn in connection with the Labor Force Survey among those who said they were contractors, own-account workers, freelancers or grant recipients and did not have any paid employees.

This combination of the individual contract approach and the individual choice approach is also explored in the report *Self-employed without personnel – between freedom and insecurity*. Conen et al. (2016) provide an overview of the position of solo self-employed in Germany and the Netherlands. The report builds on desk research, analyses of existing statistical data, survey research and interviews with self-employed workers without personnel. The report explores changes in the number of self-employed, the legal and institutional position of self-employed workers without personnel, and the motivations and work situation of the self-employed. Traditionally, self-employed workers have been treated as ‘insiders’ on the labour market, fitting the category of independent entrepreneurs who voluntarily seek to gain higher utility from income, autonomy, flexibility and other working conditions attributed to a job in self-employment. This is not necessarily the case, argue the researchers.

Eurostat conducted a similar study, an ad hoc module to the Labour Force Survey in 2017, on the heterogeneity of self-employment (Eurofound 2017). In line with the Finnish and the Dutch studies, questions on financial dependence, the main reasons for becoming self-employed, main reasons for self-service, the main reasons for not having employees, well-being, job autonomy, preferred academic status of the main task, the main reason for not becoming an independent entrepreneur in one’s main work, are included. Eurofound (2017) find that one in five Europeans report to have no alternatives for work, and that they became self-employed out of necessity. In addition, Eurofound (2017) find that one in four self-employed are in a situation characterized by economic dependence, low level of autonomy and financial vulnerability. This bears resemblance to precariousness.

The individual choice approach has been criticized for being too subjective. However, recent studies of self-employment, combining the individual contract approach and the individual choice approach, seem to be one way forward to explore the heterogeneity of self-employment and to estimate the share of false self-employment.

Quality of work and individual contract approach

Broughton and al. (2016) recommend a combination of studying the contracts and the quality of work, leaving aside the more subjective measures, when approaching precarious work. Some research articles explore a combination of the quality of work and the individual contract approach. In the article *Measuring Precarious Employment: A Proposal for Two Indicators of Precarious Employment Based on Set-Theory and Tested with Dutch Labour Market-Data*, Olsthoorn (2014) uses a combination of the quality of work and the individual contract approach to define precarious employment in order “to move beyond non-standard contracts as a single indicator for precarious employment” (2014: 425). Olsthoorn defines precarious employment as those who ‘earn low wages, have little job- and income security and occupy jobs that can generally be deemed low quality’(1). In the article, Olsthoorn proposes two indicators for measuring precarious employment. The first is income security, constructed by use of wage, supplementary income and unemployment benefits. The other indicator is job security, constructed by use of contract type and unemployment duration. The two indicators are integrated and then tested on Dutch labour market data. The results calls for caution when using non-standard contracts to indicate precariousness, as highly educated people have an equal risk of being employed on a non-standard contract.

Ilsøe et al. (2017) also explore a combination of the quality of work approach and the individual contract approach in their article *Living hours under pressure: flexibility loopholes in the Danish IR-model*. They study the effect of part-time work on absolute wages through analysis of collective agreements and registry data on wages and working hours of Danish employees in the cleaning, retail, and hotel and restaurant sectors from the period 2008 to 2014. The findings indicate that de facto hourly wages have increased in all three sectors since the global financial crisis. Yet, the majority of workers in these sectors work part-time, and particularly on marginal part-time contracts (15 hours or less per week). These workers have a low yearly income. Collective agreements in industrial cleaning include a minimum floor of 15 weekly working hours, meaning that the contracts have to include at least 15 hours per week. This is not the case in the retail, hotel and restaurant industries. This implies that employers in the latter two sectors can employ people on marginal part-time contracts of less than 15 hours, which would lead to a very low yearly income and often to those people having multiple jobs, according to the authors. As the living wage literature usually focuses on hourly wages, Ilsøe et al. (2017) introduce a new aspect by also focusing on the yearly income. They build on the concept of ‘living hours’ (Ilsøe 2016), and their analysis demonstrates that studies of low-wage work benefit from including the number of working hours as well as working time regulations, as especially this latter aspect can have a dramatic influence on absolute wages. Part-time work and especially marginal part-time work can be associated with very low yearly income levels – even in cases like Denmark – if regulations do not include minimum working time floors as in the cleaning sector. Setting a floor for minimum working time in collective agreements might be a possible tool only for a few countries.

In the article *Precarious work and the commodification of the employer relationship: the case of zero hours in the UK and mini jobs in Germany*, Rubery & Grimshaw (2016) explore developments challenging the standard employment relationship. This represents yet another way of combining the individual contract approach and the quality of work approach. The first development they comment on is the increase in non-standard forms of work that do not provide the same extent of protection as standard employment contracts. The other development is an ‘erosion of decommodification within the full-time open-ended contract itself.’ Dimensions of decommodification are guaranteed wage income, stability of employment, income during non-work periods, skill upgrading and opportunities of voice. Rubery & Grimshaw (2016) outline these dimensions and explore how zero-hour contracts in the UK and mini-jobs in Germany can be associated with commodification of work. As already mentioned, there is no legal status of zero-hour contracts in the UK, yet there tends to be an agreement on understanding these as contracts with no guaranteed hours or times of work. Mini-jobs have long existed in Germany, but were reinvigorated as part of specific government labour market policy initiatives called the Hartz II reforms in 2003. Mini-jobs do not involve the constant state of on-call alert associated with zero-hour contracts and are instead more likely to offer a regular income. But while zero-hour contracts average more than 20 hours per week and usually represent the person’s main source of income, the evidence for mini-jobs suggests that they average a far lower level of hours (around 11 per week). While hours might be more regular for mini-jobs than for zero-hour contracts, the wage level is more problematic. Mini-jobs seem to equate to marginal part-time contracts (Rubery & Grimshaw 2016).

These articles show that combining indicators of quality of work with the type of contract might provide new insights on precariousness.

Summary

In this section we have reviewed some articles on precarious atypical work with the three approaches of Broughton et al. (2017) in mind. These newer studies illustrate some attempts to move beyond the use of non-standard forms of work as the main indicator of precariousness. The individual contract approach still seems to be central, especially because of its capacity to compare developments over time, but it is increasingly used in combination with the individual choice approach or the quality of work approach. These two latter approaches, in combination with the individual contract approach, can help us to distinguish precarious atypical work from atypical work that is performed out of opportunity. Broughton and al. (2016) particularly recommend a combination of studying the contracts and the quality of work, leaving aside the more subjective measures, when approaching precarious work.

Summary of workshop

In December 2017, Fafo organized a workshop in Oslo with researchers from the Nordic countries and the UK with the aim of discussing methodological approaches and challenges related to defining precarious work. We were particularly interested in ways to operationalize some forms of atypical work from the Nordic countries and the UK. The participants in the workshop included Anna Pärnänen (Statistics Finland), Anna Ilsøe and Trine P. Larsen (Faos, Denmark), Andrea Broughton (Institute for Employment Studies, England), Lorraine Ryan, Michelle O’Sullivan, Juliet McMahon, Caroline Murphy (University of Limerick, Ireland), Kristine Nergaard, Sissel Trygstad, Kristin Alsos, Jørgen Svalund, Beate Sletvold Øistad, Mona Bråten and Kristin Jesnes (Fafo, Norway), and three representatives from the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The term ‘precarious work’ has different associations in the five countries represented at the workshop. While the rise in marginal part-time contracts is high on the political agenda in Denmark, the rise in solo self-employment is the subject of debate in Finland. While ‘if and when’ contracts– where workers only get paid if they get called in – are high on the political agenda in Ireland, the UK is debating how to define and measure zero-hour contracts. In Norway, the increased use of ‘on-call contracts’ in retail, hotel and restaurant, and health care and ‘no pay between assignment contracts’ (no PBA-contracts) used by staffing agencies, especially in the construction sector, is high on the political agenda. In recent years, platform companies such as Uber and Upwork, intermediating labour to self-employed or freelancers, have spread in all the countries, and contracts used in the ‘platform economy’ are a topic of debate in all the countries, although the issue still seems to be marginal.

The workshop commenced with a general discussion on what forms of atypical work are debated in light of precariousness in each country, and what definitions are in use, before the researchers presented their work on the topic. First we will give an overview of the forms of precarious work most debated in each country, before giving a brief summary of the researchers presentations at the workshop.

Forms of precarious work on the agenda

Table 1 below illustrates the forms of employment that are high on the agenda in the five countries represented at the workshop.

Table 1. Non-standard forms of employment on the agenda in five European countries

Country	High on the agenda	Definitions in use
Denmark	Marginal part-time contracts	Contracts guaranteeing less than 15 hours a week.
The UK	Zero-hour contracts	Contracts lacking a guaranteed minimum number of hours. No legal definition.
Finland	Solo self-employment	Self-employed without own employees. The concept 'self-employed without employees' covers four sub-groups, herein sole entrepreneurs (excluding self-employed in agriculture), own-account workers, freelancers, and grant recipients.
Ireland	If and when contracts	Employee does not have guaranteed hours of work and is not required to be available for work.
Norway	No-PBA contracts	The employee is permanently employed by the staffing agency, but is only paid when available jobs are assigned to that employee.

If and When Contracts in Ireland

Lorraine Ryan, Michelle O'Sullivan, Juliet McMahon and Caroline Murphy from the University of Limerick in Ireland explained how the debate in Ireland is concentrated around on-call work and zero-hour contracts, and more recently around the modified version of such contracts – the 'if and when' contracts.

Ireland introduced regulation on zero-hour contracts inspired by the UK in 1997, meaning that the workers on such contracts had to be available in certain periods, but no work was guaranteed. This form of zero-hour contract was in use for a while, but when these workers were eventually paid for the periods they had to be available, a new type of contract emerged – the 'if and when' contract – where workers only get paid if they get called in. It is difficult to get data on the number of 'if and when' contracts. Many people that are working on such contracts do not realize that they are. There is also a proliferation of marginal part-time contracts. The types of contracts – zero hour contracts, on-call work and 'if and when' contracts – are used interchangeably, and it is difficult to measure the number of people on such contracts. At the workshop, Ryan, O'Sullivan, McMahon and Murphy presented their work on *Trends of Low Hours Working in the Irish Retail Sector: Analysis and Implications*. This was an analysis built on the report titled *A Study on the Prevalence of Zero Hours Contracts among Irish Employers and their Impact on Employees* by O'Sullivan et al. (2015). In order to show trends in low hours and variable working hours in the retail sector, data from the quarterly national households survey (QNS) (26 000 households) were used in combination with interviews and data on state support to supplement income. As the QNS does not use any measures or questions on employment contracts, including zero-hour or 'if and when' contracts, it uses irregular hours that change from week to week as a proxy indicator for such work. The findings indicate that zero-hour work has affected the lives of retail workers in terms of earnings, work stability and predictability. The approach illustrates the challenges in operationalizing this form of employment. It also illustrates that proxy indicators and questions – such as

on variations in hours per week – might be the best way to indicate some of the more precarious forms of employment.

How to define and measure zero-hour contracts in Finland? How to measure necessity-based self-employment?

Anna Pärnanen from Statistics Finland gave an overview of different forms of employment used in Finland before talking more specifically about zero-hour contracts and necessity-based self-employment. Solo self-employment has been high on the agenda in Finland in recent years, as mentioned in the previous chapter, which also outlines the study conducted by Pärnanen & Sutela (2014).

In addition, Statistics Finland included questions about zero-hour contracts in the LFS in 2014. The number of people who worked on zero-hour contracts was investigated in connection with the Labour Force Survey in 2014 using the question: ‘Is your employment contract a so-called zero-hour contract where the number of hours worked is at least zero hours (e.g. 0 to 29 hours per week)?’ The results were surprisingly high. Four per cent or about 83,000 respondents reported that they had zero-hour contracts.

How to find the precarious workers? Norway

Kristine Nergaard from Fafo in Norway gave an overview of the various forms of contracts used in Norway. The share of atypical work is fairly stable in the LFS. Fixed-term contracts have been discussed in Norway in recent years due to the aforementioned changes to the Working Environment Act in 2015, allowing for the use of such contracts without a specific reason. In addition, no-PBA contracts have received much attention in recent times. Such contracts entail that the employee is a permanent employee of the staffing agency, but is only paid when available jobs are assigned to that employee. Employees with such contracts are not required to undertake the assignments offered. The scope of no-PBA contracts has proved difficult to measure (Nergaard 2016), but there is available data on the number of temporary agency workers. Based on numbers from Statistics Norway (SSB) and from the employer organization NHO Service, which organizes the temporary agencies, an estimation by Fafo suggests that temporary agency work represents between 1.5 and 2 per cent of all full-time jobs. The exact proportion of these that have no-PBA contracts is unknown, but qualitative data indicates that this is the most prevalent contract among temporary agencies hiring out to the construction sector (Nergaard 2016). This is an example of how combining different data sources can be useful in approaching this type of work.

Presentation of the report *The experiences of individuals in the gig economy*

Andrea Broughton from the Institute for Employment Studies in the UK started with a presentation of the report on *Precarious Employment in Europe* (Broughton et al. 2017). This was discussed in the previous section, but a point that was stressed by Broughton was that precariousness is a highly political issue, which means different things for different people and depending on the situation of the individual. The premise for the study on precarious work in Europe was that all types of work are at risk of precariousness. Through a literature review and statistical analysis of Labour Force Surveys, Broughton et al. (2017) looked at trends and found that full-time permanent employment is decreasing, and the risk of precariousness is increasing.

Broughton further presented preliminary results from the report *The experiences of individuals in the gig economy* (Broughton et al. 2018). Based on interviews with 150 people who work through digital platforms, the report finds a great diversity among individuals doing gig work. Workers receiving most of their income through such work are vulnerable to fluctuations in working time, pay levels, and lack of employment rights. The report has been published and the results indicate that for most participants, platform work serves as an occasional source of income. Platform workers enjoy flexibility and autonomy, but also experience stress due to long working hours and finding new tasks (Broughton et al. 2018).

Marginal part-time and income – ‘Living hours’

Marginal part-time contracts have been high on the agenda in Denmark, and Ilsøe, Larsen and Felbo-Kolding (2017) explore this in their article *Living hours under pressure: flexibility loopholes in the Danish IR-model*, summarized in the previous section. Anna Ilsøe and Trine P. Larsen from the Employment Relations Research Centre (FAOS) also discussed how employees are increasingly combining different forms of employment such as solo self-employment with zero-hour contracts. There are many names for the same form of employment, and these are used interchangeably and often in combination. Ilsøe and Larsen refer to the people combining multiple jobs as ‘multi-jobbers’, and to how some of these, working less than eight hours a week, suffer from protective gaps (pension, employment protection etc.). The multi-jobbers represents a new group in the labour market that should be paid attention to when discussing precarious work.

Summary

The workshop highlighted some of the same elements as the literature review; in order to identify precarious atypical work it might be necessary to move beyond the individual contract approach, and combine it with the individual choice approach or the quality of work approach. If using the individual contract approach, it might be beneficial to combine various data sources. Broughton et al. (2016) recommend the individual contract approach in combination with the quality of work approach. It seems reasonable to combine the form of employment with quality of work and leaving aside the more subjective measures. But for some forms of employment, such as dependent self-employment, the subjective measure might also be useful. In future research, clear definitions and emphasis on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach taken would benefit the literature on precarious and atypical work.

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Approaches to atypical and precarious work

This paper outlines different methodological approaches to atypical and precarious work. Fafo has discussed such issues under the research programme 'Tilknytningsformer' [Forms of affiliation in the labour market], in recent years. The paper is the product of a review of selected articles on the topic and a workshop organized in Oslo in December 2017 with researchers from the Nordic countries and the UK. At the workshop, we attempted to cover different ways of operationalizing some specific forms of atypical and precarious work. The aim of the paper is not to establish the share of precarious atypical work in any country, but to discuss different definitions and approaches to the issue.



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