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MANAGEMENT APPROACHES TO SOCIAL PROTECTION OF NON-STANDARD WORKERS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Griselda Muhametaj GUMA
University of Tirana, Albania

THE RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY is determined by the increase in non-standard forms of employment in the European Union, which requires the improvement of approaches to ensuring social protection for this vulnerable category of workers.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY was to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies in the social protection of non-standard workers in EU countries and identify ways to improve them. The methodological basis of the research consisted of a comparative analysis of legislative norms, an evaluation of existing social security models, and a study of best practices for adapting social guarantees for non-standard workers in the EU. The results demonstrated that an integrated social protection model, which combines updated elements of traditional guarantees with the introduction of adaptive support mechanisms, is the most effective in ensuring social justice for workers with non-standard forms of employment. The analysis covered practices in Germany, Spain, and Sweden, demonstrating different approaches to regulating flexible employment, including

legislative initiatives, voluntary insurance programs, and measures to expand access to social services. It was established that, with proper legal support, temporary contracts and alternative forms of employment can provide a basic level of stability, legal protection, and social welfare. A particular role in this is played by regulatory flexibility, as well as digital tools that optimise the management of social guarantees. Based on the results, recommendations were proposed for improving social protection for workers with non-standard forms of employment, including creating unified social programs, flexible funding mechanisms, and introducing educational programs for upskilling. The obtained results emphasised the importance of adapting modern approaches and models to form effective socio-economic policies that will improve social protection systems in EU countries and other states seeking to respond to changes in the labour market.

Keywords: legislative provision; digital solutions; financial incentives; professional mobility; support mechanisms.

NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
57	4	2

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ПІДХОДИ ДО УПРАВЛІННЯ СОЦІАЛЬНИМ ЗАХИСТОМ НЕСТАНДАРТНИХ ПРАЦІВНИКІВ У ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОМУ СОЮЗІ

Грізельда Мухаметадж ГУМА
Університет Тирані, Албанія

АКТУАЛЬНІСТЬ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ визначається зростанням нестандартних форм зайнятості в Європейському Союзі, що вимагає вдосконалення підходів до забезпечення соціального захисту цієї вразливої категорії працівників.

МЕТОЮ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ було оцінити ефективність чинної політики у сфері соціального захисту нестандартних працівників у країнах ЄС та визначити шляхи її вдосконалення.

МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНУ ОСНОВУ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ склали порівняльний аналіз законодавчих норм, оцінка існуючих моделей соціального забезпечення та дослідження передового досвіду адаптації соціальних гарантій для нестандартних працівників у ЄС.

РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ продемонстрували, що інтегрована модель соціального захисту, яка поєднує оновлені елементи традиційних гарантій із впровадженням адаптивних механізмів підтримки, є найефективнішою у забезпеченні соціальної справедливості для працівників з нестандартними формами зайнятості. Аналіз охопив практику Німеччини, Іспанії та Швеції, демонструючи різні підходи до регулювання гнучкої зайнятості, включаючи законодавчі ініціативи,

програми добровільного страхування та заходи щодо розширення доступу до соціальних послуг. Було встановлено, що за належного правового забезпечення тимчасові контракти та альтернативні форми зайнятості можуть забезпечити базовий рівень стабільності, правового захисту та соціального благополуччя. Особливу роль у цьому відіграє регуляторна гнучкість, а також цифрові інструменти, що оптимізують управління соціальними гарантіями. На основі результатів було запропоновано рекомендації щодо покращення соціального захисту працівників з нестандартними формами зайнятості, включаючи створення єдиних соціальних програм, гнучких механізмів фінансування та впровадження освітніх програм підвищення кваліфікації. Отримані результати підкреслили важливість адаптації сучасних підходів та моделей для формування ефективної соціально-економічної політики, яка покращить системи соціального захисту в країнах ЄС та інших державах, що прагнуть реагувати на зміни на ринку праці.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: законодавче забезпечення; цифрові рішення; фінансові стимули; професійна мобільність; механізми підтримки.

Introduction. The modern labour market in 2025 is changing due to the development of digital technologies, globalisation, and economic transformations, which contribute to the spread of non-standard forms of employment, such as freelancing and gig economy work. Despite providing flexibility, these forms of employment complicate access to social protection due to the absence of a stable employment contract, limited social insurance, and irregular contributions to the social security system, which traditional mechanisms rely on. In the European Union (EU), this problem is becoming increasingly relevant, requiring the adaptation of social security policies to reduce economic risks and increase social stability. The research problem was to identify effective approaches to social protection for non-standard workers, ensuring their economic and social stability. Specifically, there is a need to modernise existing social security mechanisms that do not account for the characteristics of non-standard employment, which increases social risks for such workers.

In the scientific work of M.V. Xhumari (2022), an analysis was conducted of socio-economic changes in Albania and their impact on unstable categories of workers. The study examined mechanisms for adapting these workers to labour market changes and evaluated management approaches to their social protection, which is relevant in ensuring the rights of non-standard workers in the EU. J. Barjaba & K. Barjaba (2023) explored issues related to reforming education and employment systems in Albania, focusing on the main obstacles to creating an effective link between educational institutions and the labour market. They analysed these challenges at macro and micro levels and emphasised the need to improve management approaches to strengthen the interaction between education and professional training, which is important for the social protection and integration of non-standard workers in the EU. A. Bertolini (2020) investigated the impact of institutional mechanisms on inequality among non-standard workers, highlighting the significance of a comprehensive analysis of social and legal aspects for developing effective management decisions in the field of social protection. In the study by S. Girardi *et al.* (2024), it was found that the effectiveness of social protection for non-standard workers is determined by a comprehensive approach to regulating labour relations, particularly the flexibility of contracts, which is important for forming effective management strategies in the social protection of non-standard workers in the EU. E. De Becker (2024) analysed EU initiatives to strengthen social protection for non-standard workers, particularly through the European Pillar of Social Rights and financial support during the pandemic. He found an increasing impact of the EU on social policy but identified ongoing issues regarding the effectiveness of these measures and the need for improvements in management strategies.

H.X.J. Tamayo & A. Tumino (2020) studied the impact of tax benefits on the social protection of non-standard workers in cases of unemployment, focusing on insurance coverage, financial stability of households, and poverty risks among this category. They emphasised that limited access for the self-employed to unemployment benefits creates additional financial risks, requiring improvements in management approaches to the social protection of non-standard workers in the EU. C. Gatz (2020) analysed the transformation of social protection systems in the context of the rise of non-standard employment, focusing on how welfare states are adapting to labour market changes, the impact of social guarantees on economic stability, and the development of the service sector, which is key to forming effective management approaches to social protection for non-standard workers in the EU. L. Ratti *et al.* (2024) examined gaps in the EU legal framework regarding social protection for non-standard workers, focusing on limitations in the principle of equal treatment as the main regulatory approach, noting that existing directives do not fully ensure social guarantees for this category of workers. H. Immervoll *et al.* (2022) found that access to social protection for non-standard workers varies by country. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, gaps between standard and non-standard workers were significant in some countries, demonstrating the possibility of closing these gaps through effective policy mechanisms to improve social protection in the EU.

A comprehensive approach to social protection for non-standard workers in the EU has been insufficiently researched, which complicates the development of effective strategies, as most studies focus on individual aspects, leaving their interconnection and impact on the labour market largely unexplored. This limits the possibilities for adapting social systems. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of management approaches to social protection for non-standard workers in EU countries in the context of labour market transformations.

Materials and Methods. The research followed a structured plan to examine the role of government regulation and corporate initiatives in expanding social guarantees for non-standard workers. The study began by analysing EU legal documents (European Commission, 2024; n.d.a; n.d.b) related to the rights of workers in non-standard forms of employment. Corporate strategies were then explored, including voluntary insurance and pension programs for workers in flexible employment or self-employed individuals. Notable companies such as Amazon, Zalando, SAP, Telefónica, Siemens, and IKEA were highlighted for their commitment to strengthening corporate social responsibility in the labour sector.

The study also examined the risks associated with insufficient social protection for non-standard workers, including factors leading to legal

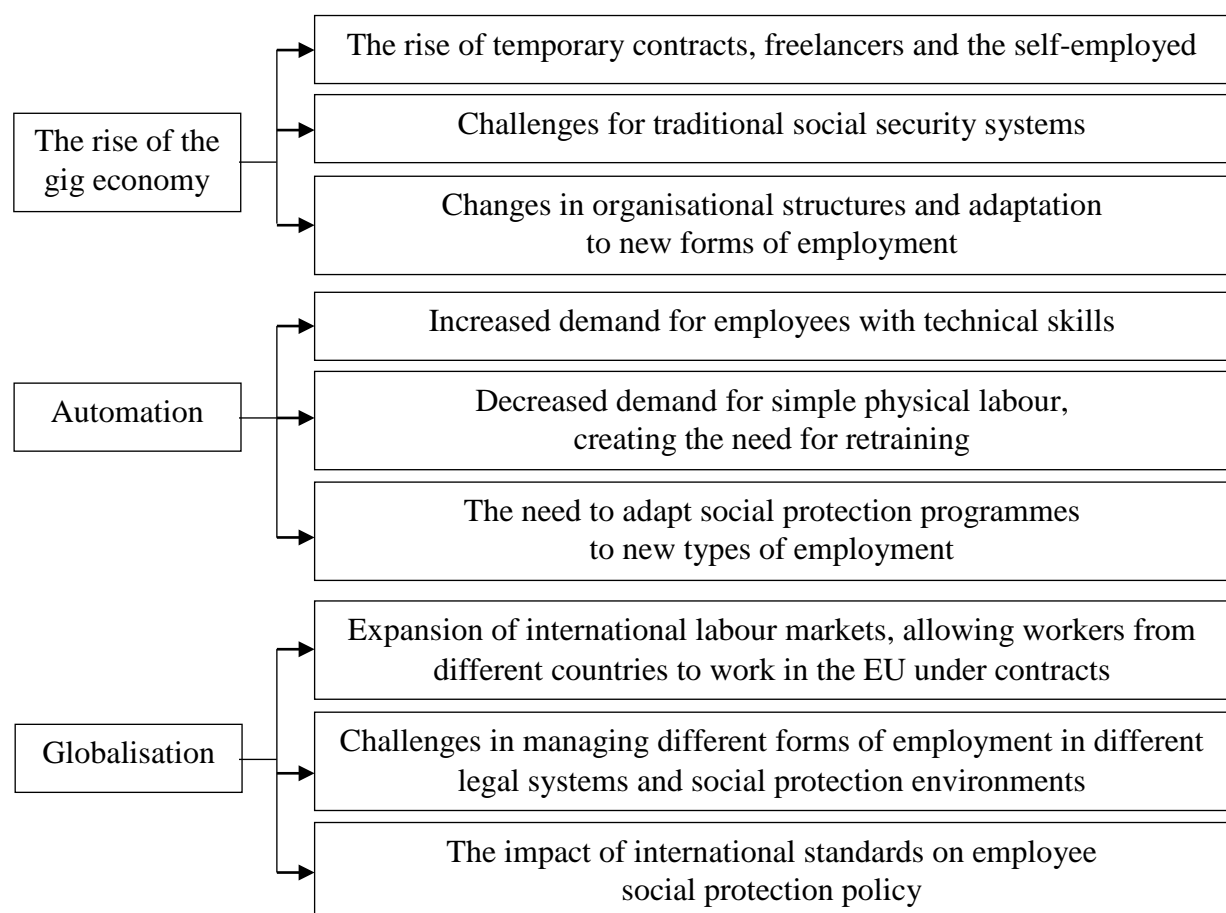
vulnerability, income instability, and limited social mobility. A comparative analysis was conducted on the social protection mechanisms for non-standard workers in EU countries (Spain, Germany, Sweden), assessing the effectiveness of various models of social security, including legislative initiatives, social insurance programs, and financial tools supporting non-standard employees. Eurostat (2025a; 2025b) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018; 2024; n.d.) (OECD) data were used to evaluate factors affecting social stability and the link between social guarantees, economic security, and workforce mobility.

The comparison of social security models allowed for assessing the effectiveness of social protection approaches in EU countries and their impact on non-standard employees. The research also included an analysis of key EU directives such as Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council “Concerning Certain Aspects of the Organisation of Working Time” (2003), Council Directive 97/81/EC “Framework Agreement on Part-Time Work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC – Annex: Framework Agreement on Part-Time Work” (1997) and Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council “On Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions in the European Union” (2019), which set the legal framework for social protection of workers in flexible employment forms. Supplementing the legal analysis were reports from international organisations, such as the OECD on the future of social security for non-standard workers, International Organisation of Employers (2023; 2024) on challenges for sustainable social systems, and the European Commission (2024; n.d.a; n.d.b) on labour market inclusion. Company practices from Amazon, Zalando, SAP, Telefónica, Siemens, and IKEA were also considered, showcasing voluntary pension and health insurance programs and professional development support for workers in flexible employment forms.

Results. Changes in the EU labour market, particularly the growth of the gig economy, automation, and globalisation, have significantly impacted the management of non-standard workers. Research by I. Mandl (2021) highlighted the transformation of labour relations under the influence of digital and socio-economic factors. Increasing the number of temporary workers and freelancers requires revising social programs and adapting policies to new employment forms. Considering these challenges, it is crucial to examine how labour market changes affect management strategies for non-standard workers and what measures need to be implemented to ensure their effective social protection (Figure 1).

The active development of the gig economy in the EU contributes to the spread of non-standard forms of employment, which is manifested in the increasing number of freelancers, self-employed individuals, and other workers

engaged under flexible labour conditions. This trend leads to the fact that traditional employment models, which previously ensured standard social guarantees, no longer meet the needs of this new category of workers. Gig economy workers in the European Union often face limited access to social protection. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2023), only 40% of these workers have health insurance, and only 15% have pension coverage. Self-employed individuals working through digital platforms are especially vulnerable, as they often fall outside the scope of traditional social security systems designed for standard labour relations. This creates significant gaps in social protection coverage, particularly regarding pension provision, health insurance, and paid leave. These challenges underscore the need for reforms in social protection policies to adapt to new forms of employment.



Source: developed by the author based on (International Social Security Association, 2024; European Parliament, 2024; Eurostat, 2025a, 2025b).

**Figure 1. Impact of EU labour market trends
on the management of atypical workers**

Automation in the European Union significantly transforms the labour market by reducing the demand for physical labour while simultaneously

creating demand for new specialised professions requiring technical skills. According to a study by E. Hazan *et al.* (2024), by 2030, up to 30% of current work hours in Europe could be automated, leading to the need for retraining approximately 12 million workers. These changes drive demand for specialists in education and healthcare and workers with developed social and emotional skills. Specifically, demand for technological skills is expected to increase by 25%, while demand for social and emotional skills will grow by 11% by 2030.

At the same time, research by the European Commission (n.d.a; n.d.b) shows that introducing industrial robots has a limited impact on overall employment levels but may lead to increased work intensity and changes in the quality of jobs. Thus, automation in the EU reduces the need for physical labour and stimulates the development of new professions requiring both technical and social skills, highlighting the need for education systems and professional training to adapt to new labour market demands.

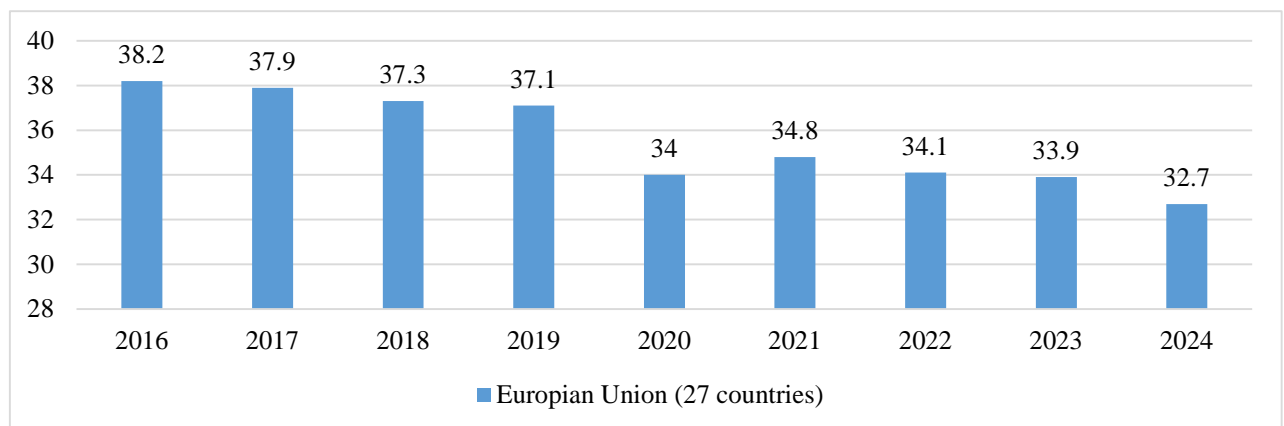
The globalisation of the labour market is expanding opportunities for workers from different countries to work in the EU. The opening of international labour markets creates new opportunities and raises the demand for integrating different legal systems and social standards. Workers from Eastern and Southern Europe working in the EU require harmonised working conditions and social protection, which involves the unifying standards across various legal systems. This includes the need to develop joint social protection mechanisms to ensure equal conditions for workers from different countries, particularly regarding wages, social benefits, and legal guarantees.

All these trends have created new challenges for social systems and labour policies, compelling EU governments to adapt their regulatory frameworks to the new labour market conditions, including introducing new approaches to social protection and worker qualification requirements. Transformations in the European Union labour market significantly impact the nature of employment and require re-evaluating approaches to managing non-standard workers. One of these trends is the spread of flexible forms of employment, which emphasises the need to analyse their impact on the social protection system (Figure 2).

The overall trend of decreasing the share of workers with non-standard working hours indicates a gradual transformation of the EU labour market towards more stable forms of employment. This may be the result of political and regulatory changes aimed at strengthening social protection, as well as the outcome of digitalisation, which reduces the need for flexible labour. At the same time, the growing focus on the quality of labour relations and the well-being of workers encourages employers to adapt their approaches to personnel management, decreasing reliance on non-standard forms of employment.

Reducing non-standard employment may also signal changes in the structure of labour market demand, where preference is given to long-term

hiring with predictable conditions. In this context, the role of the state and social partners in maintaining a balance between flexibility and job security remains essential. The changing dynamics of non-standard employment forms are a key signal for developing new labour relations and social policy management strategies.



Source: developed by the author based on (Eurostat, 2025a; 2025b).

Figure 2. Share of employees with atypical working hours in the EU in 2016–2024, %

Key EU regulatory frameworks that define social protection conditions for non-standard workers aim to adapt social policies to the new labour market conditions, where the number of flexible and temporary forms of employment is increasing. Table 1 presented the main regulatory initiatives that are significant for the social protection of such workers.

Table 1

Key EU regulatory initiatives on social protection of atypical workers and their practical implications

Regulatory initiative	Description	Practical significance
Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council "Concerning Certain Aspects of the Organisation of Working Time" (2003)	Establishes rules regarding maximum working hours, minimum rest periods, and annual leave. Applies to all workers, including temporary and flexible employees.	Ensures that all workers, including temporary ones, have equal rights to rest and limitations on working hours, which is essential for their well-being.
Council Directive 97/81/EC "Framework Agreement on Part-Time Work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC – Annex: Framework Agreement on Part-Time Work" (1997)	Regulates the working conditions of part-time employees, guaranteeing equal rights and access to social benefits, including leave, health insurance, and pensions.	Provides equal treatment for part-time workers by ensuring access to social benefits, even for those working reduced hours.

End Table 1

Regulatory initiative	Description	Practical significance
Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions in the European Union" (2019)	Introduces new rights for flexible workers, including access to training, employment stability, and fair working conditions. Ensures equal treatment for atypical workers.	Enhances the stability of workers on temporary or flexible contracts by mandating access to training and requiring transparency in employment conditions.
Fair Minimum Wages Package	Developed to guarantee minimum wages across EU Member States, including non-standard workers such as freelancers and temporary employees, thus ensuring a decent standard of living.	Strengthens social protection and financial stability for non-standard workers whose employment conditions often lack income security.
Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC	Establishes regulations for digital platforms (e.g., in the gig economy) regarding algorithmic transparency, fair remuneration, and social protection for platform workers.	Increases transparency in the gig economy, guarantees fair pay, and secures basic social protection for platform-based workers, including freelancers.

Source: developed by the author based on (Council Directive 97/81/EC, 1997; Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2003; Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2019; Digital Services Act, 2022; European Parliament, 2025).

As listed in the table, EU regulatory initiatives are mandatory for implementation within the national legal systems of member states; however, their practical implementation may vary depending on the socio-economic context of individual countries. For example, the Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (2003) has been successfully implemented in Germany and the Netherlands through collective bargaining systems that regulate working hours even in temporary employment sectors. The Council Directive 97/81/EC (1997) is effectively applied in France, where part-time employment is accompanied by proportional social guarantees. Thus, directives not only create a common framework for the protection of non-standard workers but also allow adaptation to the specific conditions of each country.

These initiatives are essential as they aim to adapt the social protection system to changes in the labour market, particularly to the growth of the gig economy and the spread of non-standard forms of employment. They create opportunities for providing social protection to workers with flexible contracts or self-employed individuals, who previously did not have access to traditional social benefits (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065..., 2022; Directorate-General for

Employment ..., 2024). Thanks to such initiatives, EU member states have created fairer labour policies that meet the modern requirements of the economy and ensure equal conditions for all workers.

In modern companies such as Amazon, Zalando, and SAP, personnel management is a key aspect of ensuring effective operations and competitiveness in the labour market. However, with the development of the economy and changes in employment structures, an important aspect has become the inclusion of non-standard workers, such as those with flexible contracts, temporary employees, self-employed individuals, and other forms of work. For such workers, organisations apply various personnel management models that allow them to adapt to new conditions and business needs while ensuring high efficiency and employee engagement.

Flexible contracts, rotation schemes, and integration into the corporate culture are the main approaches to managing non-standard workers. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages, which affect the effectiveness of its implementation in organisations. Table 2 presents the details of these management models that allow organisations to integrate non-standard workers effectively.

Table 2

HRM models for effective inclusion of atypical workers in the EU

Management model	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	EU Example
Flexible contracts	Flexible contracts allow employees to work under variable conditions, choosing their working hours and location.	Provide flexibility for both employers and employees, reduce costs associated with long-term contracts, and enable rapid adaptation to shifts in labour demand.	If contracts frequently change, this may lead to instability in work processes; careful coordination is required to ensure continuity of operations.	Telefónica (Spain): Utilises flexible contracts to attract technology specialists, allowing quick team adjustments according to project needs.
Rotational schemes	Rotational schemes involve periodically relocating employees between departments or projects.	Enhance employee skill diversity, promote mobility and professional growth, and help maintain high levels of engagement and motivation.	May cause stress due to constant adaptation; maintaining organisational balance in large companies can be challenging.	Siemens (Germany): Offers graduate rotation programmes across countries and departments to increase qualifications and adaptability.

End Table 2

Management model	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	EU Example
Integration into Corporate Culture	Refers to initiatives aimed at including non-standard workers in the organisational culture. These workers are given access to training, development opportunities, and team activities, fostering a sense of belonging.	Promotes a cohesive team environment, increases employee satisfaction, reduces turnover, and improves overall organisational performance.	Non-standard workers may struggle to integrate fully, primarily if they work remotely or on irregular schedules, potentially creating communication barriers.	IKEA (Sweden) actively involves all workers in training, corporate events, and development programmes, regardless of contract type.

Source: developed by the author based on (European Commission, 2024).

The personnel management models used for effectively integrating non-standard workers in the EU differ in their essence and approaches. Still, all aim to improve productivity and adapt to the changing labour market conditions. One such model is flexible contracts, which are actively used by Telefónica in Spain. These contracts allow employees to define the terms of their work, including the choice of working hours and location. This allows the company to adapt to market demand fluctuations, reduce costs, and ensure flexibility in managing human resources. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Telefónica actively used these contracts to adapt to economic changes, enabling its employees to work remotely.

Another model that is effectively used in EU companies is rotation schemes. This model is applied, for example, in Siemens in Germany (Siemens, n.d.). It involves periodically moving employees between different departments or projects, allowing them to develop in various areas of activity. This approach provides employees with new development opportunities, stimulates their interest in work, and increases their level of engagement. However, rotation can be stressful for employees, who must constantly adapt to new working conditions. An essential part of this strategy is supporting employees, helping them cope with constant changes and maintain high productivity.

There is also the model of integration into the corporate culture, which is actively applied at IKEA in Sweden. Regardless of whether an employee is permanent or working on a contract, IKEA actively involves all of its employees in corporate events, training, and professional development opportunities. The company ensures equal access to training programs and creates an environment

where all employees can interact with each other. This enhances motivation, satisfaction, and employee loyalty, which, in turn, contributes to reducing turnover and improving overall efficiency.

Each model has its advantages and challenges, but they aim to engage non-standard workers in company processes effectively, increase their engagement, adaptability, and stability in changing labour market conditions. However, in light of the changes in the labour market and the need to adapt to economic fluctuations, flexible contracts have become a more appropriate approach. They provide the opportunity to quickly adjust the composition of work groups to changes in the labour market, reduce costs, and offer employees greater freedom in choosing work conditions. Rotation schemes and integration into corporate culture are also important for employee motivation, but flexibility in contracts is the main factor for companies operating in conditions of change and uncertainty.

In the context of growing economic instability, companies must find the optimal balance between employment flexibility and social guarantees to adapt to labour market changes while providing appropriate protection for workers. Innovative models that combine flexible contracts, rotation schemes, and adaptive social programs must be developed to maintain employee stability in challenging conditions. Therefore, Figure 3 outlines the main approaches to balancing employment flexibility.



Source: compiled by the author.

Figure 3. Key approaches to achieving a balance between employment flexibility and social protection

To achieve an effective balance between employment flexibility and social guarantees, it is essential to integrate several key approaches that help maintain employee stability while adapting to changing economic conditions. Flexible contracts with social protection are one such critical approach. Temporary work, freelancing, or part-time employment allow organisations to quickly adjust their workforce to demand and economic changes, while providing employees with necessary social protection, including health insurance, pension contributions, and paid leave.

Between 2020 and 2024, European Union countries (Llave *et al.*, 2022) applied comprehensive approaches to regulating the social protection of non-standard workers. The goal of these measures was to achieve a balance between employment flexibility and the provision of social guarantees. One key direction was improving the legal framework covering all forms of employment, including freelancing, temporary work, and gig employment. Governments developed provisions for safe remote work, the right to disconnect, and equal access to insurance for all categories of workers.

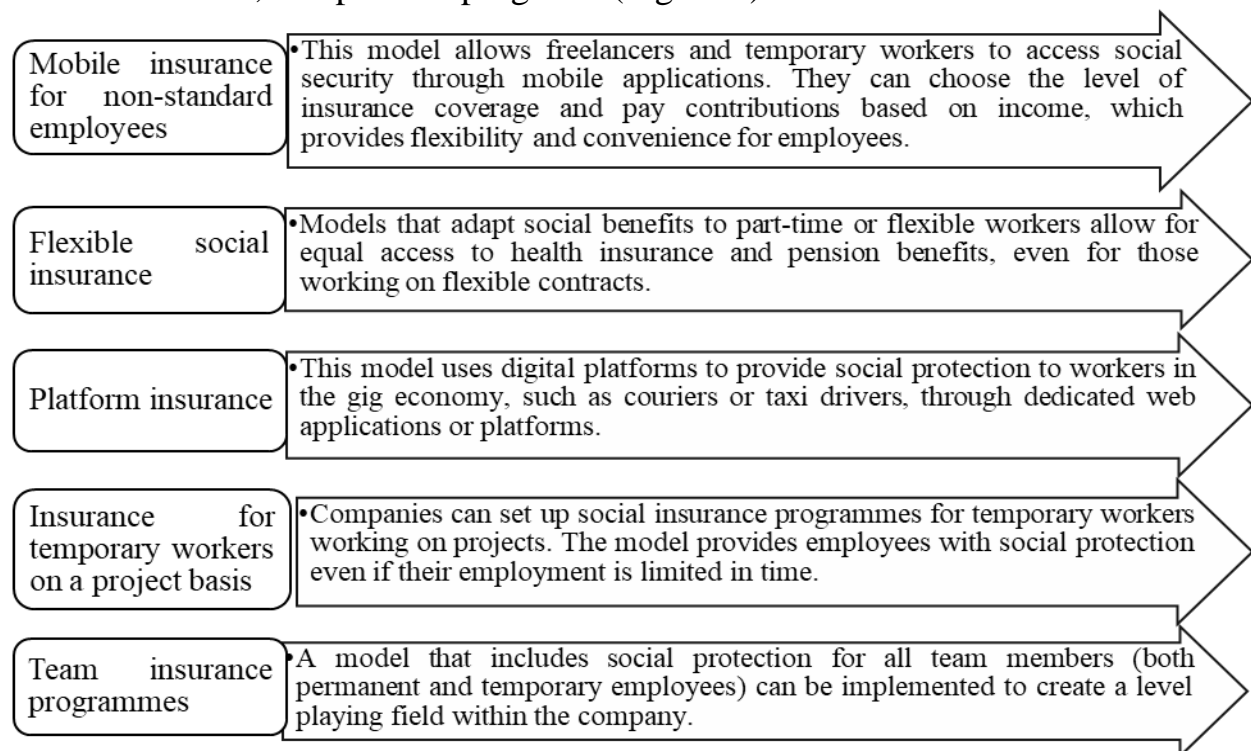
At the same time, countries introduced adaptive social programs that ensured workers had access to fundamental social guarantees – specifically health insurance, paid leave, and pension contributions. These programs were significant for self-employed workers and platform workers, who previously often did not have access to traditional forms of social protection – according to a report by the International Labour Organisation (2023), expanding coverage of social guarantees positively impacted income stability and reduced the risk of poverty among non-standard workers.

Another approach practised in EU countries was integrating flexible workers into corporate culture. Companies provided access to internal training, involved workers in team events, and expanded feedback opportunities. This contributed to increased loyalty and reduced turnover. The report by O.V. Llave *et al.* (2022) noted that employee engagement and employer support were crucial for motivating non-standard workers and ensuring long-term participation in company activities. A study by N. Pavlenchyk & V. Tsizdyn (2025) showed that a balanced combination of material and non-material motivational factors significantly enhanced personnel management effectiveness across diverse enterprises.

Moreover, companies implemented digital tools to manage social guarantees and flexible working schedules. Such solutions allowed for greater transparency, automated payment calculations, and better adaptation of working conditions to employee needs. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018; 2024; n.d.), companies that applied innovative human resource (HR) technologies demonstrated higher productivity and lower turnover rates among temporary and remote workers.

Non-compliance with social standards and insufficient protection of workers' rights can lead to legal risks for companies. Workers who feel their labour rights are violated may turn to the courts or trade unions, often resulting in significant financial and reputational consequences for the company. For example, Chipotle in the USA was required to pay USD 8 million for unlawful termination, which sparked criticism and damaged the company's employer brand (Butler, 2021). Following the Supreme Court ruling on Uber in the UK, the company was forced to change the status of thousands of workers, costing millions and casting doubt on its business model (O'Brien, 2021). Such cases complicate recruiting new qualified workers and reduce trust in the company on the labour market.

Therefore, insufficient social protection for employees lowers their motivation and loyalty and creates significant risks for the company. Incorporating social guarantees into the company's policy is necessary to ensure its operations' stability and effectiveness. Innovative social insurance models for flexible and temporary workers consider the peculiarities of new forms of employment and changes in the labour market. Traditional social protection mechanisms often fail to meet the needs of workers with irregular schedules, so flexible systems have been considered, providing access to social benefits, health insurance, and pension programs (Figure 4).



Source: developed by the author based on (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024; International Organisation of Employers, 2023, 2024).

**Figure 4. Innovative social insurance models
for flexible and temporary workers**

Among the various models, the most effective is the flexible social insurance model, which adapts to the changing work schedules of employees, particularly freelancers and temporary workers. This model of social protection has proven effective in practice, notably in Spain, which in 2021 adopted the so-called "Rider Law" (Waeyaert *et al.*, 2022). This legislation required digital platforms such as Glovo and Uber Eats to recognise couriers as employees, granting them access to social insurance, paid leave, and a stable income. The law also mandates transparency of algorithms affecting working conditions, marking a crucial step in protecting workers' rights in the digital era. Furthermore, a study by I. Sharif & C. Zhenwei Qiang (2023) highlighted that ensuring access to the full spectrum of social protection for gig economy workers is essential for effective integration into the labour market and reducing the risk of poverty. Thus, adapting the social protection system to the needs of non-standard workers makes it possible to achieve flexibility and stability in the modern economy.

The rapid growth of the gig economy has been driven by the convergence of digitalisation, economic instability, and shifting priorities among workers and employers. The proliferation of online platforms has made flexible, remote work more accessible, particularly for young people and those seeking additional income. According to the T. Bowen *et al.* (2020), online gig work grew by over 40% between 2016 and the first quarter of 2023. Companies, for their part, increasingly utilise gig models to reduce costs and quickly adapt to market changes (Euro News, 2023). Below are recommendations to improve social protection policies for workers in non-standard forms of employment and proposed implementation strategies at the national and organisational levels.

One key recommendation is establishing upskilling and reskilling programmes to support non-standard workers. This is particularly relevant for freelancers, temporary workers, and the self-employed, who often have limited access to traditional training opportunities. These programmes should focus on developing new skills that enable such workers to adapt to changing conditions and remain competitive. Given the constant transformation of the labour market, these programmes must be accessible and flexible, responding to the needs of those working under flexible arrangements. To implement this initiative, governments can collaborate with educational institutions and trade unions to offer targeted benefits or free courses for non-standard workers. This approach also enables companies to integrate training into their development strategies, providing workers access to learning opportunities within the corporate structure.

Introduce flexible mechanisms for financing social guarantees to ensure adequate social protection for workers with flexible employment arrangements (e.g., part-time, temporary, or variable working hours). This includes creating

temporary support schemes that adjust to workers' employment status changes. Such programmes allow for the timely adjustment of social benefits in response to shifts in employment, ensuring continuous access to social protection for those in non-standard jobs. To implement this recommendation, it is essential to establish financial instruments that allow social benefit funding to be tailored to specific working conditions. This may include developing support mechanisms for individuals working under part-time contracts or on short-term projects, with the capacity to adjust payments quickly based on changes in workload or schedule. With this approach, authorities and businesses can provide stability and protection for workers, even amid fluctuations in labour market conditions.

To support the gig economy, organisations should develop corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes focusing on supporting workers with flexible contracts. These programmes should ensure access to stable social protection, training and development opportunities, and the integration of gig workers into the corporate culture. Companies must adopt policies that support employees working under flexible arrangements, fostering their loyalty and engagement with the organisation. To achieve this, companies can create clear internal policies that include regular training and professional development programmes available to gig workers on equal terms with permanent employees. Additionally, companies can establish dedicated platforms for communication and involvement in corporate initiatives and events, helping to integrate gig workers into the organisational environment. Governments can also support this initiative by offering incentives and grants to companies that include gig workers in social protection schemes and ensure equal conditions for all categories of workers. The proposed initiatives will improve working conditions for individuals in non-standard employment, enhance their economic stability, and ensure social protection through the adaptation of existing programmes to new realities. They include the development of flexible mechanisms that consider the specific circumstances of such workers, enabling an effective response to their needs and the evolving challenges of the modern labour market.

Discussion. The study of management approaches to the social protection of non-standard workers in the EU is crucial for understanding the impact of various policies on this group's support. Scholars working in this field focus on examining current legislative initiatives, social security programmes, and corporate strategies that influence non-standard workers' access to social benefits. Particular attention is paid to evaluating the effectiveness of these policies, which enables the forecasting of changes in social protection governance in the context of a dynamic labour market.

The research by M. Petmesidou *et al.* (2023), L. Jerg *et al.* (2021), and A. Seemann *et al.* (2021), which centres on post-COVID-19 social protection,

explored the transformative potential of the EU's Next Generation initiatives in the social sphere, especially regarding the economic recovery of Southern European countries. The analysis of political strategies in these countries revealed a common concern for social issues and significant differences in integrating social policy approaches. Research on the social security of workers engaged in multiple jobs simultaneously highlighted challenges in adapting welfare systems to emerging forms of employment, particularly in the context of the platform economy. The findings partially align with the results of the present study, which identified that new forms of employment, notably in the gig economy and through flexible contracts, necessitate adaptations in social systems. However, despite the broad scope of support policies implemented during the pandemic, they did not result in significant systemic changes for non-standard workers, indicating a pressing need for further reforms.

The findings of L. Westhoff (2022) and M. Bhebhe (2021) focused on wage disparities between non-standard and standard workers, particularly across different forms of atypical employment. Using data from seven European countries, the authors established that temporary employment is associated with significant wage reductions, especially at higher income levels. In contrast, for workers with multiple jobs these differences are less pronounced. An analysis of employment instability in the private security sector in Zimbabwe identified significant challenges in managing contractual employment, particularly due to labour market fragmentation and insufficient regulation. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of the present study regarding the need to improve social protection for non-standard workers and to integrate diverse approaches into social policy to ensure more effective support for this group.

Scholars such as M.D. Vasilescu *et al.* (2020), and M. Tanweer (2022) have emphasised the wage differentials between standard and non-standard workers, particularly in the context of part-time and temporary employment. They noted that when assessing wage levels, it is essential to account for the type of employment, as income-determining mechanisms may vary depending on the type of employment contract. Concerning the challenges of unstable employment in Zimbabwe's private security sector, their research revealed severe difficulties contract workers face, including labour market fragmentation, lack of adequate regulation, and weak representation. These conclusions resonate with the present study, which focuses on enhancing social protection policies for non-standard workers, particularly by adapting national welfare systems to the specific characteristics of temporary work, part-time employment, and platform-based jobs.

However, differences in research findings were observed in the works of A. Aloisi (2022), E. Mattarelli *et al.* (2022), and A. Murgia *et al.* (2020), as their approaches to analysing the effectiveness of social protection policies for non-

standard workers varied significantly depending on national contexts and legal frameworks across different countries. For instance, in France and Spain, the effectiveness of policies aimed at integrating platform workers into social protection systems varied due to differences in worker classification and mechanisms of access to social benefits. Meanwhile, more universal strategies for protecting temporary and part-time workers in Germany and Italy have led to notable progress in ensuring social guarantees for this group. However, even these systems do not always adequately respond to emerging forms of employment, such as platform work.

Research on the impact of non-standard employment on innovation processes and the effectiveness of social protection for such workers highlights the importance of enhancing social protection policies across the EU. This issue is examined in detail in the works of J. Reljic *et al.* (2021), D. Bąk-Grabowska & K. Piwowar-Sulej (2021), and P. Elia & S. Bekker (2023), which investigated the effects of non-standard employment on innovation in five European countries. Their findings revealed a negative impact of a high proportion of workers in such jobs on innovation, particularly in technical sectors, reinforcing the need to ensure social security for these workers. Additionally, research on vocational training for workers in project teams and under non-standard forms of employment addressed the development of skills for this category of workers, aligning with the conclusions of the present study. Concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social protection of non-standard workers and the temporary support mechanisms implemented in response, the research highlighted systemic gaps, especially for freelancers and self-employed individuals. Many countries adapted their policies by expanding access to unemployment benefits and introducing temporary support schemes. However, the effectiveness of these measures varied across countries, pointing to the need to improve policies to ensure social security for non-standard workers in the future. These findings diverge from those of the present study, which, unlike earlier research, emphasises the need to adjust existing social protection policies to mitigate the adverse effects of non-standard employment and ensure equal access to social benefits for all workers, regardless of their contractual arrangements.

In the studies conducted by S. Spasova *et al.* (2021), A. Ludera-Ruszel (2020), and E. De Becker (2025), an analysis was carried out to assess the impact of measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic on EU labour markets, particularly for non-standard workers and the self-employed. These findings confirmed the importance of social programmes such as unemployment benefits, sickness allowances, and parental special provisions. The research also highlighted the relevance of the gender dimension in access to these programmes. An analysis of the differences in treatment between standard and

non-standard employees revealed that the latter often face discrimination and limited access to high-quality employment. The growth in non-standard jobs across the EU, including self-employment, part-time work, and temporary contracts, has shown that around 40% of the workforce is engaged in atypical forms of employment. These findings align with the conclusions of the studies mentioned earlier, underscoring the need to adapt social protection policies to ensure equal conditions for all workers, especially those in non-standard employment, and to address discriminatory practices against these groups.

These results diverge from the studies by A.I. Uwadinma (2024), A. Aranguiz (2024), and T. Bowen *et al.* (2020), which focused on the impact of globalisation on working conditions and labour standards, particularly for non-standard workers. Their approach significantly differs from those grounded in economic analysis. Their research focused on improving or deteriorating working conditions across sectors due to globalisation, but paid insufficient attention to the implications for workers' social protection. Regarding the issue of equal treatment, the studies addressed critical aspects of discrimination against non-standard workers, especially regarding access to social security. Moreover, they explored the role of adaptive social protection in supporting households during major disruptions such as economic crises, stressing the importance of stability for vulnerable groups, including those in non-standard employment.

An analysis of managerial approaches to the social protection of atypical workers in the EU indicates that the effective integration of social protection policies for non-standard forms of employment is key to ensuring equal rights and working conditions. It was found that existing social protection mechanisms must be adapted to the specific needs of the self-employed, temporary and part-time employees. In contrast to traditional approaches, which often focus on protecting standard employment, recent research has emphasised the necessity of integrating different forms of employment into a unified social protection strategy. This would enable more effective bridging of the gaps and safeguarding the rights of these categories of workers.

Conclusions. The research established that transformative changes in the European Union labour market – particularly the rise of the gig economy, automation of production and management processes, digitalisation of labour relations, and growing globalisation – have significantly expanded the scope of atypical employment. In countries such as Germany, Sweden, and Spain, regulatory, programmatic, and technological mechanisms have been actively implemented to enhance the social protection of workers engaged in flexible contractual arrangements.

The analysis of legal frameworks – especially Council Directive 97/81/EC, Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, and

Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council – demonstrated their crucial role in regulating the social rights of atypical workers. These directives form the foundation of European labour law, aiming to harmonise employment standards across EU member states. This is particularly important given the expansion of digital platforms and flexible employment models. Their implementation contributes to the unification of approaches to providing workers with access to basic labour and social guarantees, regardless of the type of employment relationship. Spain's experience is especially illustrative: following the adoption of the so-called "Riders Law", digital platforms were required to recognise workers as officially employed, granting them a social protection package.

The cases of companies such as Telefónica (Spain), Siemens (Germany), and IKEA (Sweden) illustrate that innovative HR management approaches – including the implementation of flexible contracts, rotation schemes, and active integration policies for atypical workers – help enhance motivation, reduce staff turnover, and improve adaptability to change. Telefónica employs flexible agreements to attract IT specialists with remote working options and variable schedules. Siemens operates international rotation programmes for young professionals, increasing their adaptability and professional mobility. At IKEA, all employees, regardless of contract type, have equal access to training and corporate events, fostering an inclusive and development-oriented work environment.

Given the rapid development of the gig economy and changes in the labour market, the study proposed key recommendations for enhancing social protection for non-standard workers. These include the establishment of universal social security schemes that provide equal access to pension insurance, healthcare, unemployment benefits, and leave entitlements for freelancers, temporary employees, and the self-employed. The necessity for reskilling programmes to support the competitiveness of such workers was emphasised, alongside the creation of flexible funding mechanisms for social guarantees, including adaptive temporary support schemes. Furthermore, integrating non-standard workers into corporate culture through joint projects and training initiatives was highlighted as a means to boost motivation, reduce staff turnover, and stabilise the internal environment of companies.

Future research in social protection for non-standard workers in the EU should concentrate on the effects of digital platforms and HR technologies on the efficiency of social security provision, as well as adapting social protection policies to changes in the labour market. It is also crucial to investigate the potential for expanding training and reskilling programmes to enhance these workers' competitiveness and to further harmonise social standards across the EU.

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AUTHOR (S) BIOSKETCHES



Griselda Muhametaj GUMA, PhD in Law, Assistant, University of Tirana, Albania

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2088-7668>

E-mail: griseldamuhametajguma@gmail.com

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