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Characterisation of the Average Worker Employed Under Flexible Forms of Employment – Report on the Study of Individual Differences in the Context of Sociodemographic Data Concerning Polish Workers

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Abstract

The paper presents the sociodemographic data obtained as a result of an empirical study carried out on a group of $n=2118$ workers employed under what is referred to as flexible forms of employment, within a more extensive research project entitled “*Occupational problems of individuals working under flexible forms of employment – the psychological perspective*”. The inspiration to focus on this particular part of the research was provided by a trend observed in the international literature, analysing the profile of an average flexible worker in highly developed countries. An analysis of the study sample of flexible workers shows that the group included rather young people, with a similar share of women and men, living in big cities, and with a rather short length of service; they were well-educated, married people with children, with a small number of previous employers, and mostly working in the private sector. The Polish study sample matches the descriptions of the *average flexible European worker*.

Keywords: workers employed under flexible forms of employment, sociodemographic data, worker profile, individual differences.

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to present the sociodemographic data obtained as a result of an empirical study carried out on a group of $n=2118$ workers employed under what is referred to as flexible forms of employment, within a more extensive research project by the first author, entitled “*Occupational problems of individuals working under flexible forms of employment – the psychological perspective*”. The inspiration to focus on this particular part of the research was provided by a trend observed in the international literature, analysing the profile of an average flexible worker in highly developed countries due to a fixed percentage of the employer market being filled with flexible solutions.

The research was conducted among people living in southern Poland. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Out of the 2,500 questionnaire sets given to the study subjects, 2,118 completely filled out research tools were selected, and this is how the final sample size was determined. 136 questionnaires were rejected as having been

filled out incorrectly, and 246 subjects refused to participate in the research, even though they had been informed about it earlier, or interrupted the research in the process of filling out the questionnaires.

2,118 respondents participated in the survey, of whom 44% were women and 56% were men. One can very well assume that, due to the size of the sample, no disproportion was revealed between the flexible contracts concluded among women and men.

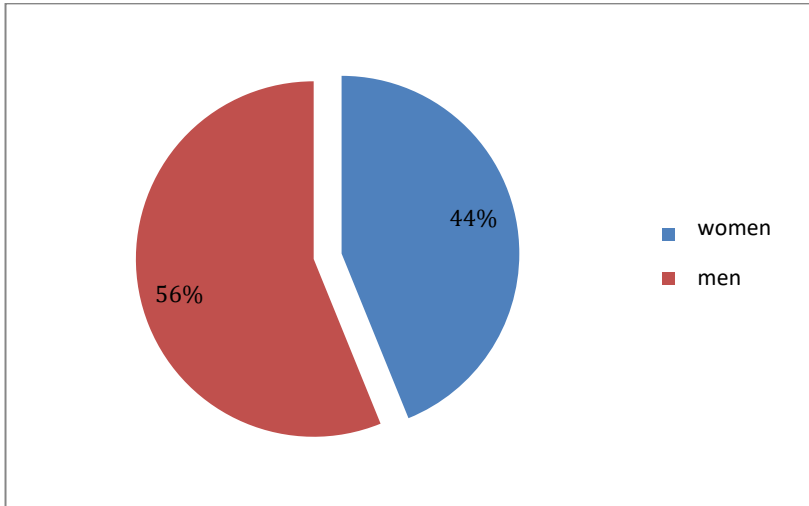


Figure 1. Sample distribution by gender (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The study subjects were adults of various ages (but all of working age), 18–60 in the case of the women, and 18–65 in the case of the men. 7% of the study subjects were aged 18 to 24. The most numerous group (42%) consisted of subjects aged 25–34. 34% of the respondents were 35 to 44 years old. Another 12% of the respondents were subjects aged 45 to 54, while 5% were aged 55–65. The mean age in the studied sample was 36, and the media age was 35. The youngest study subject was 18, and the oldest one 65.

The result distribution on the Polish sample matches the *European characterisation of flexible workers*, describing them as rather young people with an average length of service with the organisation, of up to five years (Nollen, 1996).

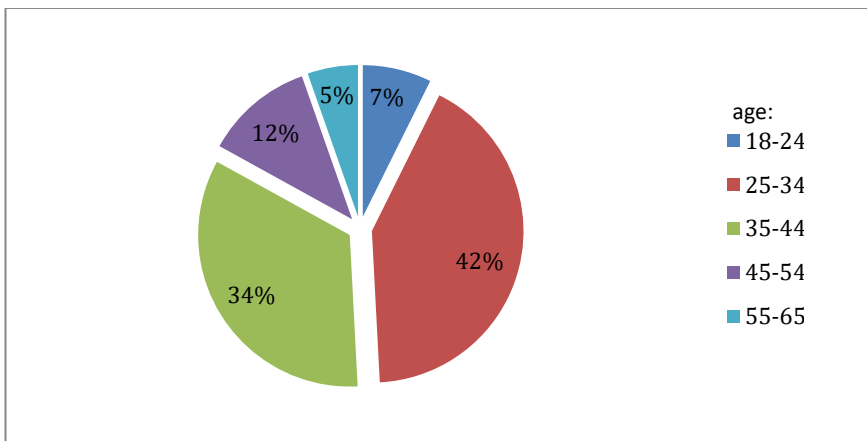


Figure 2. Sample distribution by age (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The flexible workers who participated in the study were well-educated. Over half of the study subjects (56%) had completed higher education. A substantial group of the subjects (34%) had completed upper secondary education. 6% of the respondents had completed vocational education, while only 4% were people with elementary or lower secondary school education. People without any education accounted for only 0.3% of the sample. The result is interesting in that the social perception of flexible employment is related to the stereotypical and pejorative image of employment under the relevant forms, described as “junk jobs”, or jobs for people with low qualifications. It turns out, however, that the vast majority of the individuals entering such forms of employment are educated people.

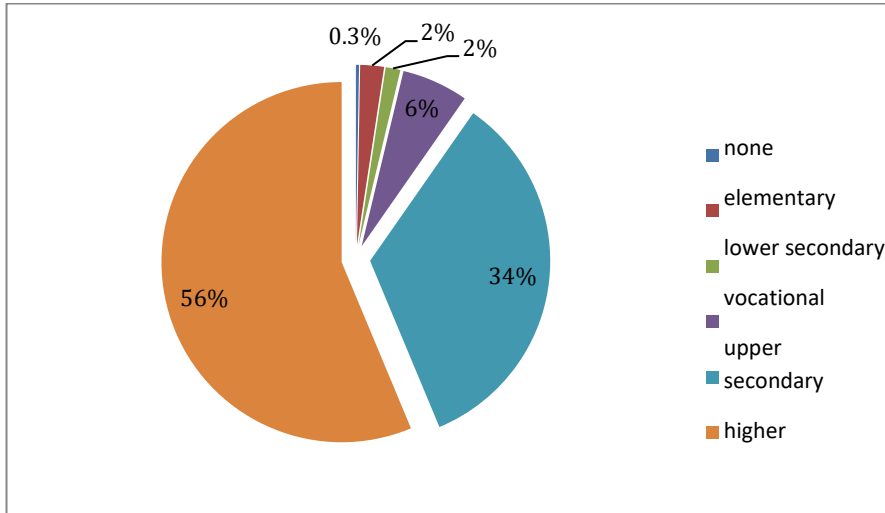


Figure 3. Sample distribution by education (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

Most of the study subjects were urban dwellers, with 50% living in towns, and 29% in cities. Respondents living in rural areas accounted for 21% of the sample. The distribution obtained may result from the difficult access to job agencies and organisations applying flexible staffing solutions in rural areas.

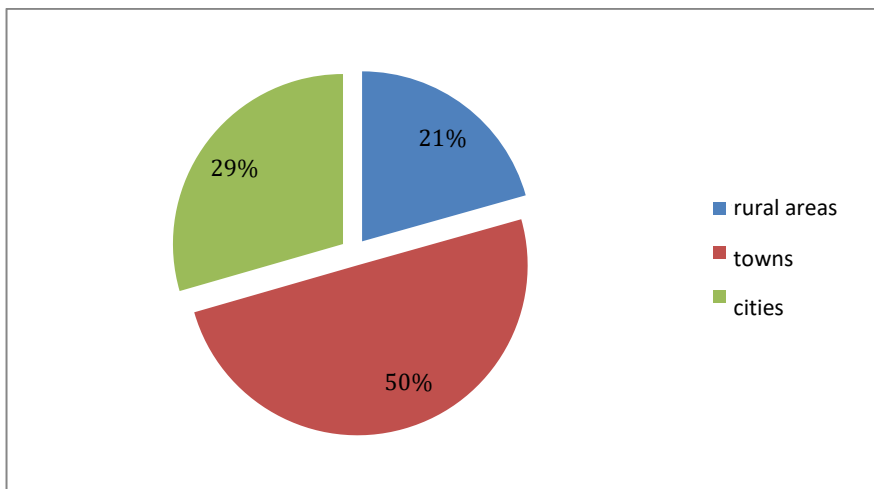


Figure 4. Sample distribution by place of residence (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

28% of the study subjects were single. 64% were married. 7% were divorced, and 1% were widows or widowers. Juxtaposing these results against the distribution of the results in terms of the age of the study subjects, one may assume that the majority are people for whom a characteristic stage of life is represented by forming a family or by having a typical

family life, which makes them no different from the descriptions of workers employed under traditional forms. The results presented below supplement this interpretation.

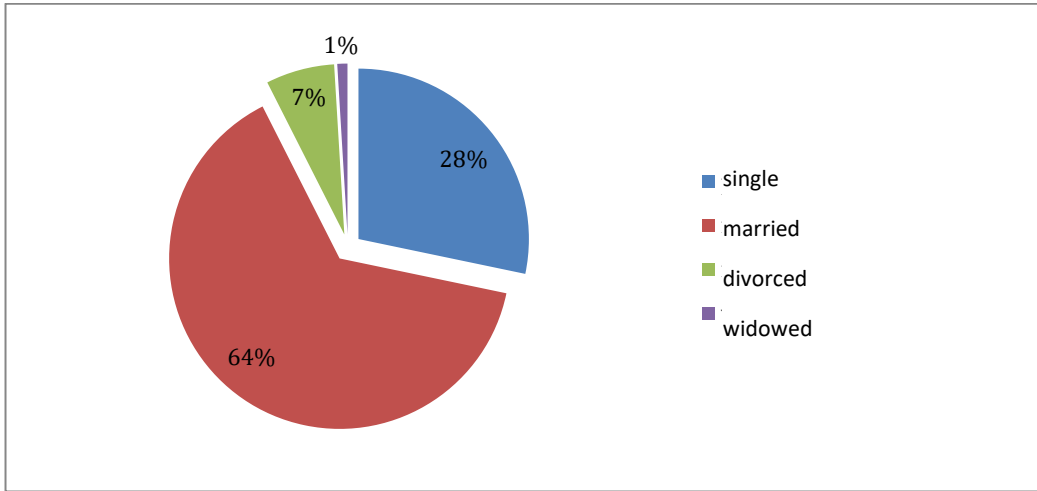


Figure 5. Sample distribution by marital status (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The study subjects were mostly people with children (65%), including: 32% with 1 child, 26% with 2 children, and 7% with 3 or more children. Childless individuals accounted for 35% of the sample.

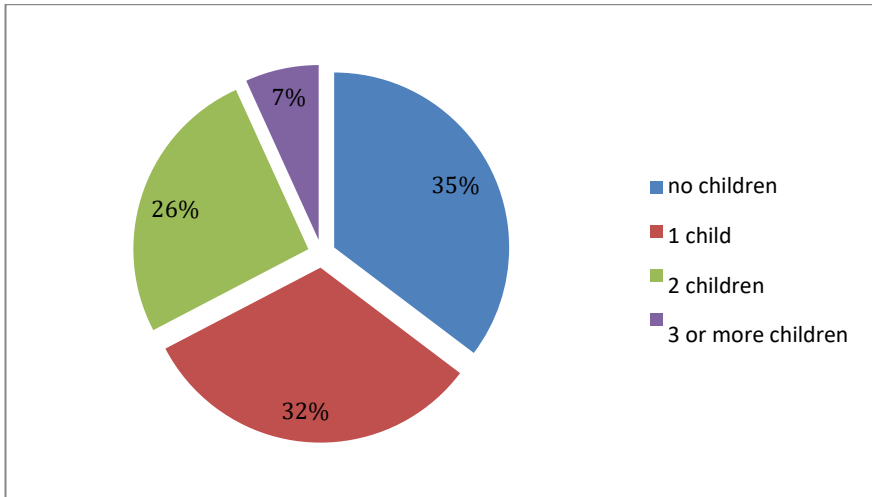


Figure 6. Sample distribution by number of children (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The study focused mainly on work-related aspects. The respondents, i.e. workers hired under flexible forms of employment, were divided into 9 job groups, each composed of over 200 people. The following groups were distinguished:

fixed-term workers;

part-time workers;

contract workers;

self-employed workers;

teleworkers;

workers hired under a replacement employment contract;

temporary workers;

seasonal workers;

social economy workers.

The distribution of the study subjects with regard to legal regulations is illustrated by the of flexible forms of employment provided below:

replacement employment in accordance with Article 25 § 1 of the Labour Code;

temporary employment as defined in the Act of 9 July 2003 on the employment of temporary workers (Polish Journal of Laws Dz.U.03.166.1608);

self-employment, running one's own business activity as defined by the Act of 2 July 2004 on freedom of economic activity;

telework in accordance with Article 675ff. of the Labour Code;

fixed-term employment in accordance with Article 25 § 1 of the Labour Code;

part-time employment in accordance with Article 292 § 1 of the Labour Code;

work under a civil-law contract on the basis of the freedom of contract principle, i.e. Article 3531 § 1 of the Labour Code;

seasonal work in accordance with Article 25 § 1 of the Labour Code;

employment in the social economy, including: social cooperatives, worker cooperatives, disabled and blind cooperatives, non-governmental organisations and entities indicated in Article 3, paragraph 3 of the Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism (Dz. U. of 29 May 2003, as amended).

The detailed sample distribution with respect to the groups that were distinguished in relation to the employment form is presented in the chart below.

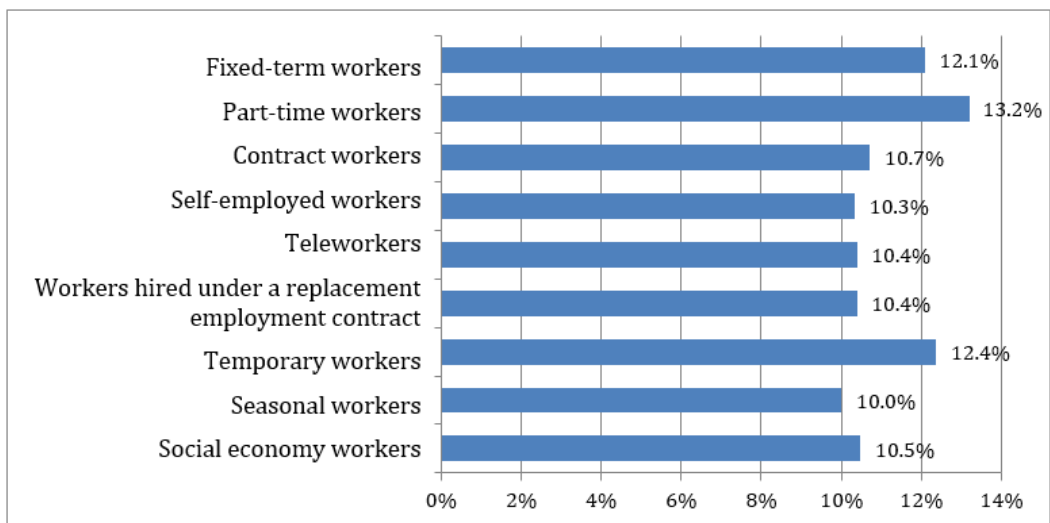


Figure 7. Sample distribution by employment form (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The selection to the individual 9 employment groups did not demonstrate a significant disproportion.

Flexible workers pursue various occupations. They were grouped into the following categories:

- company officers, directors and presidents;
- independent professionals;
- engineers/technicians;
- lower-level officials;
- business owners;
- retail and service employees;
- skilled workers;
- labourers doing simple jobs.

The chart below shows the distribution of the studied sample with respect to the current job position, acquired profession and actual occupation.

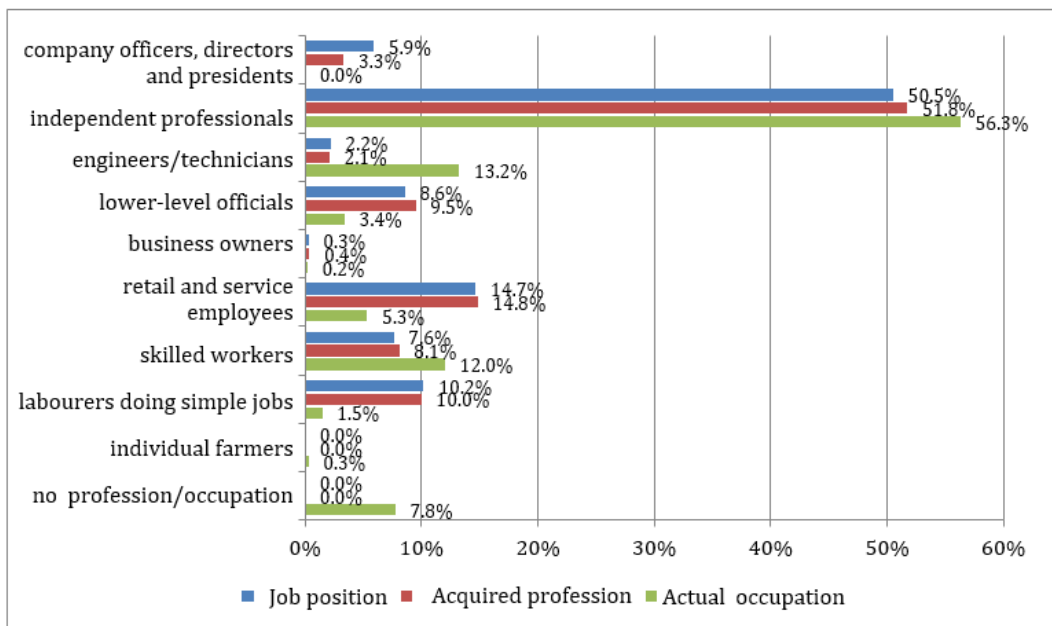


Figure 8. Sample distribution by job position (N=2098), acquired profession (N=2102) and actual occupation (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The length of service of the flexible workers participating in the study ranged from several months to several dozen years (41 years was the maximum), with the mean length of service being 8.5 years. Length of service of the largest group of study subjects (42.6%) was up to 5 years, while the smallest number of respondents had worked for a long time, which also corresponds to the already mentioned *European characterisation of the average flexible worker* (Nollen, 1996).

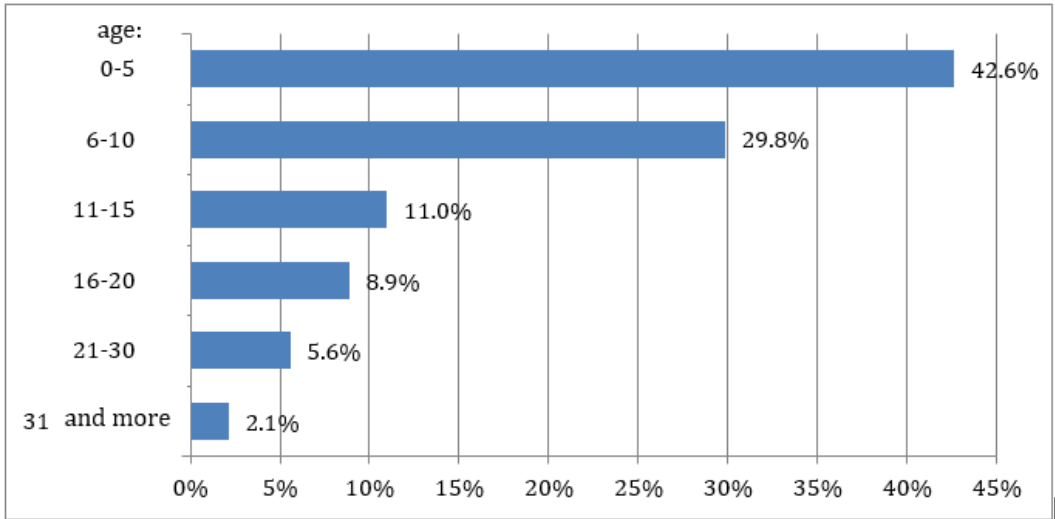


Figure 9. Sample distribution by length of service (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The flexible workers who participated in the study had mostly had 2–3 employers (47%). 13% of them had had only one employer. The remaining respondents had changed their job slightly more often. 28% had worked with 4–5 employers, while 12% had had over 5 employers. The results obtained demonstrate relatively low migration between employers, which one might have expected in relation to flexible employment.

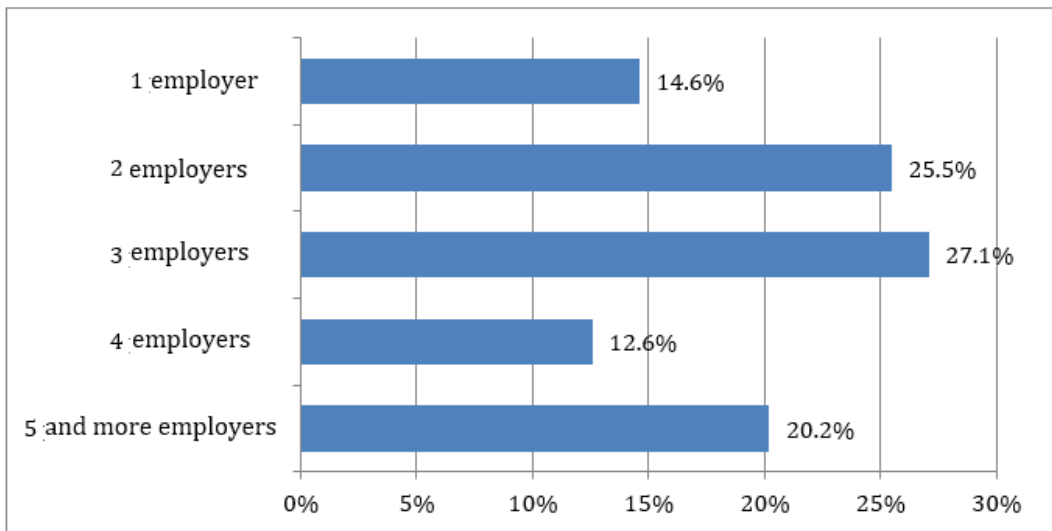


Figure 10. Sample distribution by the number of employers so far (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The flexible workers who participated in the research had been working for 5.5 years on average under their contract in force at the time of the study. The detailed distribution of the answers in a breakdown by time category is shown in the chart below. Paradoxically, the group with the highest percentage figure comprised individuals working not only under short-term contracts, under the same contract up to one year (19.3%) and up to two years (19.0%), but also ones with long-term employment relationships, of more than 10 years.

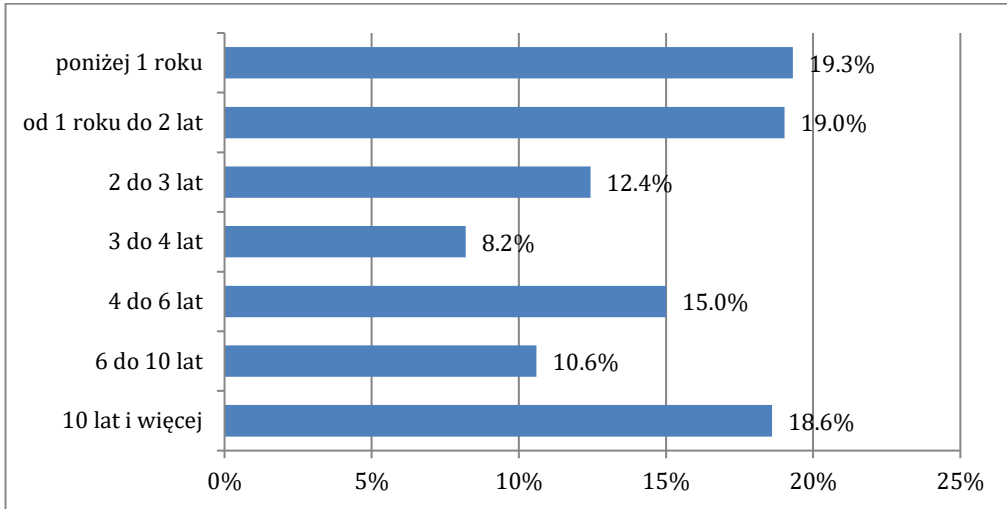


Figure 11. Sample distribution by employment time under the current contract (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

As far as their place within the employee structure was concerned, the largest share of the respondents were subordinates (62%). Flexible workers also included specialists (29%), but less often managers (7%) or company officers/directors (2%).

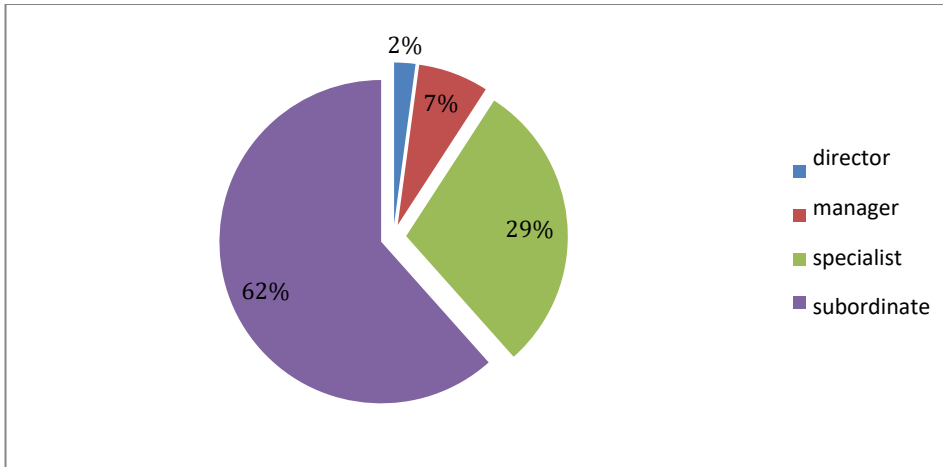


Figure 12. Sample distribution by position in organisational structure (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

Over half (54%) of all the flexible workers who participated in the study were working in the private sector. 34% were people employed in the public sector, and the remaining 12% were working in the social sector. The private sector used flexible staffing solutions to a much larger extent than the public sector.

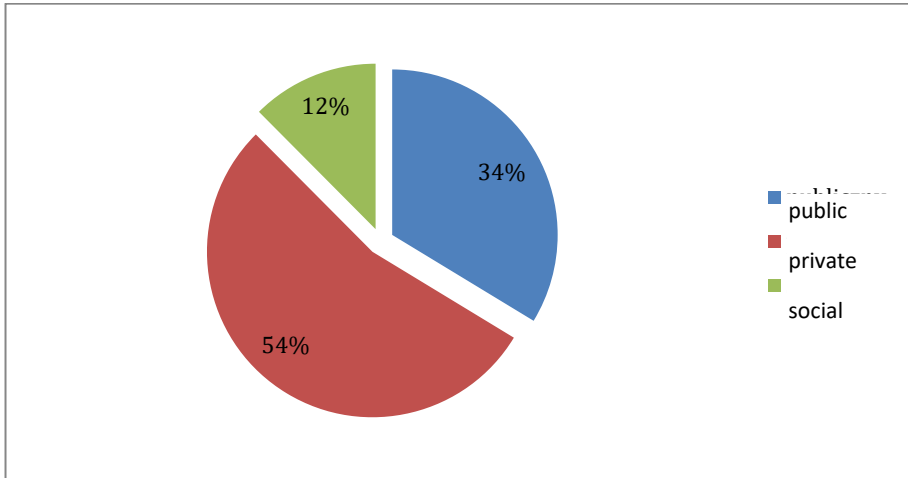


Figure 13. Sample distribution by employment sector (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

The largest number of the study subjects worked in the public administration sector (31.8%) and in the service sector (28.5%), the least of them in health care and education. The detailed distribution is presented in the chart below.

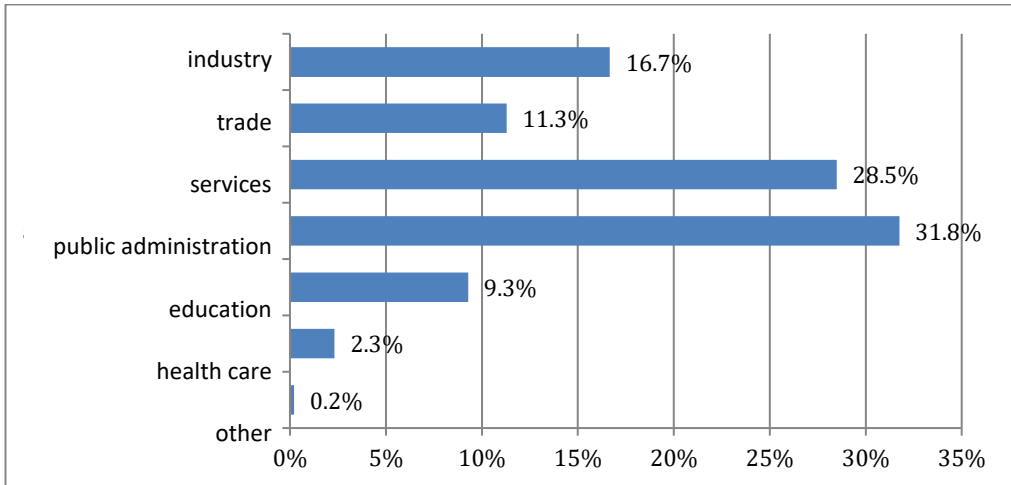


Figure 14. Sample distribution by employment sector (N=2118). Source: own compilation.

Conclusion

An analysis of the study sample of flexible workers shows that the group included rather young people, with a similar share of women and men, living in big cities, and with a rather short length of service; they were well-educated, married people with children, with a small number of previous employers, and mostly working in the private sector. Therefore, the study sample matches the already mentioned description by Nollen (1996) of the *average flexible European worker*. In the individual 9 employment forms, study groups were distinguished of over 200 subjects, and the whole sample consisted of 2,118 subjects on the basis of whom the analyses presented above were performed.

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