

DRAFT – DO NOT QUOTE

Flexibility and its measures: the Italian case.

Authors: P. Di Nicola¹, I. Mingo²

Abstract

Flexibility of work is an important element in present-day economical and political debates, but a clear and univocal definition of the concept does not exist. The objective of this paper is to identify its various theoretical and operative possibilities, focusing especially on the forms of flexible work connected to the risk of job insecurity. In the first part of the paper we underline the complexity and the polysemy of the concept; in the second part, we focus on research methodology and we try to understand how and to what extent this concept overlaps, fades into or gets mixed up with other similar ones (casual, atypical, non-standard, parasubordinate, temporary work). For this reason we will review some of the most important and recent studies on the phenomenon – based on surveys made by ISTAT, INPS, ISFOL, IRES-CGIL, pointing out similarities and differences as to the methodology used and the results obtained.

1 *The essence of flexibility*

Flexibility is an important element in present-day economical and political debates, being an integral part of work organization and policies and an indispensable and necessary solution to maintain an acceptable and competitive position in the World. It is essential therefore to give it a clear and shareable definition.

At present, flexibility is not only about the internal organization of a company; it is not just a private fact, for it regards work positions in the ambit of both Italian and European/International labour market policies. The problem seems to have two main aspects: an economical and a social one³, the first connected to the system of productivity gain and the accumulation of capital, the second to the macro and micro social dynamics of the workers involved.

These two aspects, the economical and the social, are inseparable, so that the changes on one side produce effects on the other, and vice versa. In the debate on the concept of flexibility, the terms flexibility and job insecurity have often been semantically placed together and have consequently become ambiguous, being used even as synonyms. In reality, though interconnected, they are two different dimensions.

Flexibility refers to a way of organizing one's work, and it is about freedom of place and time as well as the slimming down of procedures. Job insecurity refers instead to the difficulties of life determined by employment conditions.

While job insecurity concerns first of all social issues, flexibility can be analyzed in organizational and economical terms. From the organizational point of view, work can be divided into two big markets, which to a certain extent have developed in a similar way from the 1980s onwards. The so called "standard" labour market, characterized by three dimensions (subordinate work, full time working hours, open-end contracts), continued to grow. But conditions, different from standard work even under only one aspect, also appeared. This aspect was the possibility to work in a para subordinate position or to work part-time. The

¹PATRIZIO DI NICOLA is professor of Organizational Sociology in the Faculty of Communication Sciences, University of Rome "La Sapienza".

²ISABELLA MINGO is professor of Statistical Sources and Socio-Cultural Indicators in the Faculty of Communication Sciences and professor of Social Research Methodologies and Techniques in the ambit of the graduate course in Social Services at the same University. The Authors wish to thank Zaira Bassetti and Flavia Bagni for the assistance in preparing the paper.

³ L. Gallino, *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Laterza, Roma – Bari, 2003.

words "non standard", "short-term", "temporary", "atypical" started to be used with reference to this parallel market to underline the refusal of certain dimensions and to describe the differences separating it from an assumed typical employment condition.

To non standard employment conditions we can give the name flexibility, referring this way to a wide range of contractual possibilities, each with specific characteristics and distinctive aspects. As to its definition, flexibility can therefore be described through three dimensions: the absence of a subordinate form of work; working hours different from full time; an expiration date already included in the contract.

The word "flexible" implies a whole range of meanings, all of which refer to different dimensions.

2 Methodological issues: from concepts to variables

The empirical translation of a relatively complex and general concept requires a logical and operative process to identify, gather and quantify specific dimensions – or indicators – to which the concept can be brought back. These dimensions will then be further reduced to variables, used to refer to the concept from which they were originated. In the passage from abstract to concrete, from general to specific, a reduction of complexity, a simplification is inevitable: only some of the most significant aspects will be chosen, while others, intentionally or unintentionally, will be neglected. Therefore, a concept, especially if particularly complex and articulated, can be quantified using first indicators and then variables in the ambit of different researches and contexts⁴.

Among the same dimensions, also the construction of variables can follow different steps, and be the result of two kinds of surveys, the *administrative* and the *cognitive*⁵. Administrative data, though gathered systematically, cannot register all the events and the facts which, for their very nature, are forgotten in the typical formal grids of administrative acts: for example, *informal factual* aspects and *non factual* ones, related to the opinions, the motives, the expectations and the fears of people. This kind of information can be gathered through *ad hoc* surveys on specific topics; they are usually censal or sample inquiries addressed to those directly interested and are based on their declarations. These two ways of gathering information imply *different data construction processes* and therefore often allow *different readings of the same phenomenon*. To ignore these differences brings to the discovery of discrepancies in the statistics: in reality these discrepancies are only apparent and should be put down to the different operative definitions of a concept – or even of different but similar concepts – to which by mistake and by convention the same label is given. The discrepancy is not in the data, but in the wrong interpretation given of it, attributing the same meaning to differently built variables which measure different aspects of the same phenomenon or even quantify different phenomena.

The empirical translation of the concept of flexibility, whose complexity and polysemy emerged in the first part of the paper, does not escape this logic.

What and how many are the ways of expressing flexibility in research practice? How much and in what way does this concept overlap, fade into and get mixed up with others? What do the different surveys on this topic *measure*?

We will review in the following paragraphs some of the most important and recent inquiries on this phenomenon – based on both cognitive and administrative surveys – and we shall see how from time to time the concept of flexibility becomes operative and is flanked or *overlapped* by other similar concepts such as job insecurity or atypical, non standard, parasubordinate, temporary employment. Referring to the definition of these concepts, we will see, from the semantic point of view, the analogies and the differences which emerge in the surveys. We will then analyze from an empirical point of view the results obtained.

We will consider:

⁴ This is a problem of indication ratio relativity as suggested by A. Marradi, *Concetti e metodo per la ricerca sociale*, La Giuntina, Firenze 1980.

⁵ The first kind of survey consists in the gathering of information regarding single subjects or legal entities, in the ambit of the normal activities of administration units, bodies and institutes, first of all for management, control and program reasons. This information is then properly processed and, when aggregated, used for statistical purposes, that is to quantify the phenomena it refers to.

- ISTAT's "Survey on the causes and the extent of insecurity in the labour market",
- Isfol's "PLUS Participation, Labour, Unemployment Survey" (Survey)
- Ires's "Risk of insecurity for parasubordinate work in Italy" (Survey)
- INPS's "Parasubordinate employment from 1996 to 2004" (Based on administrative sources)

Though having in common the objective of identifying, describing and typifying workers coming from weak realities, these surveys differ when it comes to the population considered, the type of inquiry, the approach and the goal, but also when we consider the conceptual dimensions used and the modalities of data construction.

3 Contract flexibility and job insecurity: ISTAT's point of view

The "Indagine conoscitiva sulle cause e le dimensioni del precariato nel mondo del lavoro" ("The cognitive inquiry on the causes and the extent of insecurity in the labour market"),⁶ focuses specifically on workforce data gathered in the second trimester 2006⁷, and aims at studying the causes, the dimensions and the forms of unstable employment, considered as a particular case of flexibility⁸.

The survey offers a longitudinal and transversal perspective, trying to quantify the characteristics and the social impact of the phenomenon not only at present but also in the long term: its development over the last five years and its future trends. In addition, the survey is not limited to the description of the domestic situation, for it takes on an international outlook, making comparisons with the rest of Europe.

A distinction is made between *working hours flexibility* and *contract flexibility*: while the first does not necessarily indicate discontinuous and insecure employment conditions, the second, which is based on *temporary* work relationships, contributes more to their creation. It is frequently used therefore the expression "temporary workers", while it is rarely used that of "flexible workers". The essential dimensions by which we define the concept of job insecurity are the discontinuous presence in the labour market and the consequent lack of an adequate and regular income in the medium and long terms. Other factors which strengthen situations of explicit employment and existential insecurity are not however omitted: the lack of adequate social security protection, the absence of social safety valves for the periods of inactivity, the temporary nature and the shortness of the contracts, the remaining in a situation of contractual uncertainty and the reduced possibility to pass on to secure contract typologies. In the survey, for the lack of adequate statistics capable of giving an empirical translation⁹, all these factors are not taken into account and the analysis is initially centered on the temporariness of the contract, that is the tenet dimension to which the concept of job insecurity is empirically anchored.

The groups of workers chosen as the reference population and on which the survey focuses, are the so-called "temporary workers": the employed with fixed-term contracts¹⁰, the collaborators and the occasional professional service consultants in the private sector and in

⁶ The results were presented at a Parliament hearing by the President of the Institute Luigi Buggeri the 7th of November 2006. (Istat 2006, Indagine conoscitiva sulle cause e le dimensioni del precariato nel mondo del lavoro, Audizione del Presidente dell'Istituto nazionale di statistica Luigi Buggeri, XI Commissione (Lavoro Pubblico e Privato) – Camera dei Deputati).

⁷ It is a sample investigation based on a study carried out with no interruptions during the year; the statistical population is made up of members (who are at least 15 years old) of families resident in Italy and the main objective is to identify three groups of people, exhaustive and mutually exclusive: the employed, the unemployed and the inactive.

⁸ "We must consider that a cognitive survey regards both the private sector and the public administration and it does not limit itself to identifying the kinds of flexible work, trying also to find out when, with reference to the various production sectors and the different geographic areas, flexibility degenerates into job insecurity". (Istat, op. cit. page. 2)

⁹ "The available statistical sources do not allow us to completely understand the complexity of these factors; therefore, at present, it is impossible to answer all the questions that we have asked ourselves or that have been put forward by the Commission.

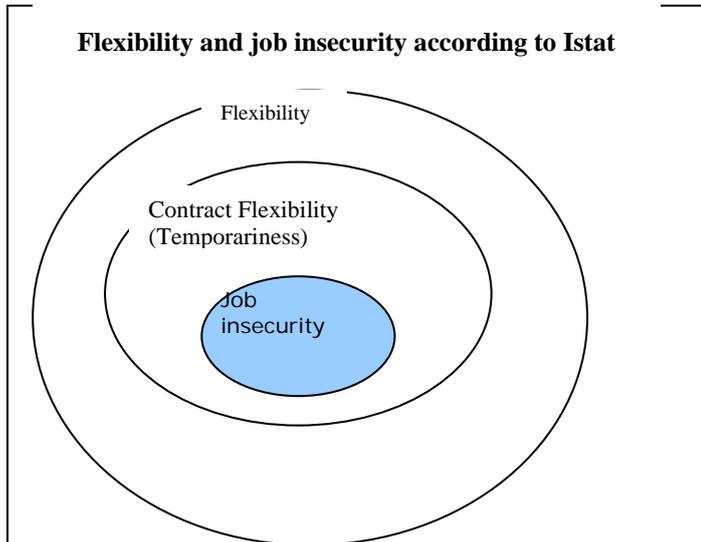
An eventual future analysis and the possibility to extend the existent statistical records might give preciser answers." (Istat, op. cit. page 4).

¹⁰ The referring to fixed-term contracts to identify real situations of job insecurity is due to the fact that abroad the trend and the characteristics of temporary contracts are connected to potential situations of job insecurity.

the public administration¹¹. In the second trimester 2006, this aggregate amounts to 2 million 735 thousand, that is to 11,8% of the total of people employed.

In the ambit of the aggregate some distinctions are then made, considering the socio-demographic characteristics of the workers and those of the jobs performed. These allow us to identify the sub-aggregates of the most disadvantaged workers.

Of the segmentation criteria, gender, age and level of education are the first to be used.



Among the temporary workers, women outnumber men by a few thousand: 1 million 408 thousand against 1 million 327 thousand. If this difference from the numerical point of view is marginal, being of only 81 thousand, an interesting result can be read in the percentage of temporary workers among the respective populations: female temporary workers represent 15,4% of the total of women employed, in comparison to the percentage of male temporary workers, which is six points less and represents 9,4% of the total of men employed. If then we consider only the collaborators and the occasional professional service consultants, the presence of women doubles that of men. Age is an important factor too: the workers most at risk are young people between 15 and 29, age

bracket in which temporary work amounts to 40,7% of the total. And we must not underestimate another alarming fact: over 60% of the workers with fixed-term contracts are over 30 years old. Nearly half (that is 800 thousand workers) are between 30 and 39 years old, while the remaining belong to the age bracket of 40 year olds. For these segments of population, the risk of permanent job temporariness is very high, showing that *contract flexibility* may not be the way to enter the market of stable and guaranteed employment.

Interesting is also the ratio between the level of education and the number of temporary workers: the percentage of workers with unstable contracts increases in the case of higher levels of education. Among those who have only done their compulsory schooling, temporary workers are 10%, but these rise to 15,3% in the case of graduates, and reach 18% in the case of post-graduates.

Looking at the territory, the analysis shows a more critical situation in Southern Italy with rates differing in gender: 20,8 per cent of women and 11,7 per cent of men.

The analysis of the employment sectors allows us to introduce further elements of differentiation. It is in the services sector that the presence of these workers is greater: 1 million 898 thousand, equal however to only 12,4% of those employed. In percentage terms, it is agriculture with its 24,2% of temporary workers (237 thousand workers) the sector where they represent nearly a quarter of the total. Even the public administration is not alien to temporary kinds of work; and indeed in recent years these have spread quickly. In the public sector, schools have the lion's share: the temporary workers are 215 thousand, equal to over 20% of the employed. However, it is in universities and research institutes that the increase has been the most marked: if in 2001 the condition of temporariness regarded 10,7% of the workers, at the end of 2004 the percentage had risen to 18,2%.

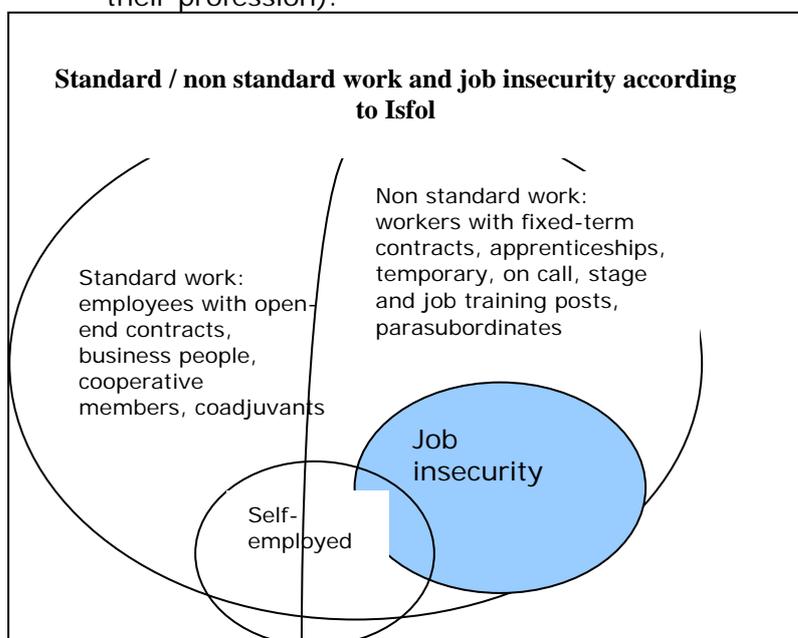
At last we must consider working hours and contract length, further elements which allow us to describe the phenomenon of job insecurity in greater detail. The contracts of collaborators and of professional service workers generally last 12,8 months, but 37% of temporary workers have a contract equal to or shorter than six months. Less than 20% have a contract longer than two years. Contract length and working hours change also when gender is considered: as an average, men's contracts last one month more than women's and while men work in average 36,4 hours a week, women work only 29,7 with inevitable consequences when we consider the sense of job insecurity and the availability of economic resources.

¹¹ The data on fixed-term contracts and collaborations in the ambit of the public administration refers to the Annual Report published by the Ragioneria Generale dello Stato. (Istat, op. cit., page 8)

All in all, in the ISTAT survey, the concepts of flexibility, temporariness and insecurity are considered at decreasing levels of generality: flexible workers form therefore a wider aggregate than temporary workers with contract flexibility, those on which the survey is centered. Among the temporary workers, we can find the sub-aggregate of those who are at risk of job insecurity, being discontinuously present in the labour market. They have not been empirically identified in a clear and univocal way. For example, no threshold value is indicated with reference to contract length, working hours or income earned, though this would permit us to identify the insecure workers. But the exogenous factors which affect the probability of such risk are instead described: gender, age, territory, employment sectors, contract length and working hours. For whoever is young, is a woman and lives in the South, the probability of being a temporary worker is higher; as higher is the risk of being insecure both economically and in the planning of one's future.

4. *Between standard and non standard work: Isfol's point of view*

The *PLUS, Participation, Labour, Unemployment Survey*¹² carried out by Isfol¹³ gives us a picture of the labour market considering objective factors (employment status, contract forms and modalities, characteristics of work activities) and subjective ones (the perception of the different kinds of employment and the motivation of workers who are working their way up in their profession).



In the survey different classifications of employment are proposed: some of them are simple, some are articulated. A first distinction, aiming at identifying the standard and non standard components of the Italian labour market, is made on the basis of the contract form and the modalities by which the worker performs his/her job. In the *standard work* category we can place full-time workers with open-end contracts and the self-employed. Instead, in the *non standard work* category we can insert workers without one or more standard work factors, such as open-end contracts, full-time working hours, a precise position in a well defined work organization.

In the sub-aggregate of non-standard employment we can therefore place "workers with fixed-term contracts" (job training contracts, apprenticeships, placement and short-term contracts), "other kinds of atypical contracts", such as temporary, seasonal or on call jobs, work and training arrangements (only if paid), "other non standard contracts of services", such as co.co.co., occasional collaborations, project work contracts.

Workers with a VAT registration number use instead a mix between standard and non standard contracts, that is, an intersectioned sub-aggregate of them.

This first classification is followed by a more articulated one which takes into account six different dimensions: 1- the kind of work (dependent-subordinate, independent-self-employed, formally self-employed but heterodirected, parasubordinate); 2- the length (open-end, fixed-term); 3- the intensity (full time, part time), 4- contributions (complete and compulsory, compulsory but limited, non-compulsory and partial); 5- the acceptance of one's working

¹² Cfr. Isfol, *PLUS Participation, Labour, Unemployment Survey*, 2005.

Isfol's inquiry PLUS, carried out with one survey on 40.386 workers in the first trimester 2005 considering members of Italian families between 15 and 64 years old, aims at analyzing five non-mutually exclusive specific targets – young people between 15 and 29, women between 20 and 49, people over 50, people unemployed and in search of work, people employed. Isfol, *Indagine Plus*, page 461.

¹³ ISFOL, Istituto per la Formazione dei Lavoratori (Institute for the Training of Workers), is part of Sistan.

conditions (voluntary, non-voluntary); modalities of performance (standard performances, non standard performances, telework).

The multiplicity of dimensions introduced allows us to consider different aspects when we classify employment and when we try to identify the different forms of flexibility: we can obtain 13 different kinds of workers, not mutually exclusive and only to some extent connected to the well known and consolidated dichotomy which divides the Italian labour market into standard and non standard.

In particular, we can identify three different non standard measures (*strictu sensu*, *latu sensu* and overall); of these the first two, which refer to “negative” conditions, represent respectively 12,4% and 15% of the employed. With reference to the overall non standard conditions – which include non standard and permanent part-time workers (20,2% of the employed) - ISFOL recommends a “neutral” reading because if part-time employment is the consequence of free choice, it can be seen by workers as an opportunity¹⁴.

Tab.1 - Employment classification according to ISFOL

Groupings	Employment %	Notes
Employees	70,8	
Self-employed	27,2	
Voluntary part-time	5,3	With permanent contracts
Involuntary part-time	2,5	With permanent contracts
Overall part-time	9,0	With any subordinate employment contract
Standard	77,7	With no permanent part-timers
Standard enlarged	85,5	With permanent part-timers
Non-standard employees	6,6	As to contract and working hours
Non-standard self-employed	5,8	Parasubordinate workers¹⁵
Non-standard <i>strictu sensu</i>	12,4	Non-standard employees plus parasubordinates
Non-standard <i>latu sensu</i>	15,0	Non-standard <i>strictu sensu</i> plus involuntary part-timers.
Overall non-standard workers	20,2	Non standard, with permanent part-timers
Non-classified	2,1	Informal agreements/working practices
Total	22.060.491	

Source : Isfol Plus 2005 – Our adaptation

Among the listed categories we cannot obviously find that of *insecure work* which is transversal to some of them and is defined by Isfol as “the sum of non standard workers with little professionalism, with fixed-term contracts and, in the expression’s widest meaning, employed in companies living such a market or sector crisis that doubts arise on the permanence of their jobs”. The concept of job insecurity can therefore be associated with the non standard one, but other elements and other variables (low professionalism, a company in crisis, the perception of instability) are required to identify its frontiers.

According to ISFOL the correspondence non standard employment=job insecurity is not always true: the negative or positive connotation the non standard concept can assume, depends also on whether or not the choice of a non standard kind of employment is voluntary and on whether there are expectations as to job permanence.¹⁶

If we consider the results obtained, the PLUS survey shows similar empirical evidence to the ISTAT one: non standard jobs are frequent especially among women and characterize in particular young people between 15 and 29, although the consistent presence of non standard workers in the age bracket 30-39, proves that it is not a momentary phenomenon, but can characterize all or most of a person’s employment career.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.87

¹⁵ With regards to the identification of “parasubordinate” employment, ISFOL follows different criteria: the uniqueness or not of the employing party, the regular presence or not in the working place (the employer’s premises/or elsewhere), the following of agreed upon working hours, the use in carrying out one’s activity of working tools, materials and equipment belonging to the company, the renewal of one’s contract with the same employer, the free choice of one’s contract.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pages 82-83.

The results offer an alarming picture of the consistency of the so-called "job insecurity trap", that is the phenomenon which sees workers remaining in a non standard contract condition for a considerable length of time. Half of those who had non standard contracts, have kept on working in unstable employment conditions, while those who had open-end contracts have kept their *status* of permanent workers. Only in the long-term (five years) there is a higher possibility of passing from non standard situations to stable employment conditions.

The results contain also a paradox: experts in cultural and scientific subjects have in common with unqualified clerical workers a higher incidence of non standard working conditions than among the other professional typologies considered. Non standard are 22% of the workers who perform unskilled jobs and 19,9% of those who perform intellectual work or are employed in the field of science.

From a strictly economic point of view, non standard workers earn much less than standard ones. If workers with fixed-term contracts can earn up to 1000 euro per month, for the so-called collaborators this sum is a dream: they barely earn 850 euro per month. In practice, the smaller expenses companies have thanks to the use of non standard contracts, are not transformed into effective wage and salary rises. These workers are penalized towards those with standard contracts, not only in their monthly wages and salaries, but also in their lack of guaranteed rights.

The average contract length and the issue of work discontinuity, typical of non standard contract conditions, complete the scenario: for non standard workers the contract length is one year, with the exception of on call workers and trainees (20%), whose contracts last about six months. This produces immediate effects on wages and salaries, on the economic and consumption possibilities of the workers, but also on their social security contributions, the present structure of the Italian pension system being inadequate to face the transformations which have lately taken place in the labour market.

To sum up, in the PLUS inquiry, importance is given to the multidimensional aspects of the concept of flexibility and different standard and non standard typologies are identified. The concept of job insecurity is inserted in this ambit, where it is anchored not only to objective conditions, but also to the subjective evaluations of the workers. The analysis of the socio-demographic and economic profiles which distinguish standard and non standard workers, confirms what already said in the previous paragraph about those in disadvantaged employment conditions.

5. Flexibility and job insecurity: Ires's point of view

Different in its methodological structure, in its sample size and in its measuring tools is the research carried out by Ires, which can be placed halfway between a quantitative and a qualitative approach.

It is a survey on 560 female/male parasubordinate workers aiming at sampling non factual aspects, such as the subjects' opinions, motives, expectations and fears. The instrument used to gather information is the structured interview¹⁷, by which the data collector tries to understand especially the subjective dimension of the individual with regards to flexibility (freedom or not in the choice of one's contract, expectations and dreams for the future, personal opinions).

In this survey the concepts of parasubordination, atypical contract forms and job insecurity are considered as synonyms. There isn't an explicit definition or a semantic differentiation of the various concepts, but in the survey we can find the description of the contract elements and of the employment conditions which cause a greater exposure to situations of risk. Job insecurity is combined with multiple factors, but first of all with the length and the continuity of the employment relationship: many short contracts of uncertain renewal, the existence of only one employer and the low income earned increase the sense of existential insecurity.

The survey considers the coordinated and continuative collaborators one can still find in the public administration, the various single work project consultants, the occasional collaborators and the possessors of VAT registration numbers. It includes also trainees, bursars and

¹⁷ The questionnaire used for the survey can be downloaded from the web site www.ires.it

doctorate degree candidates, who carry out different jobs and have different qualifications, but are united by the fact of not having a proper employment contract.

With the intention of considering the largest and most variegated professional reality as possible, various employment typologies have been taken into account: highly qualified jobs as well as clerical and little qualified ones. For this reason interviews were made with people who perform intellectual work (from the social sciences, training and research sectors) and with people who carry out technical or clerical work (for example, call center operators)

In our opinion, the empirical research stresses:

- A condition of "almost dependency": most of the collaborators interviewed work inside their employers' premises (for 80% of them there is only one employer from whom they depend economically), they must guarantee a daily presence (77%) with fixed-time working hours (71%). Over half of the project workers and the so-called co.co.co, with the exception of VAT registration number workers and occasional collaborators, declare to "not be able to perform their job freely, but to possess only certain margins of operative independence"¹⁸.

In addition, about half of the collaborators interviewed work in average 38 hours per week, with striking cases where 45 hours are reached (for example, among trainees in the private sector). It results that the majority of the interviewees, especially if women and in the public sector, consider themselves more as "irregular subordinate workers" (that is workers who actually perform subordinate work)¹⁹ than as self-employed.

- The perception of an inadequate economic condition: with all the working hours performed, 31% of the interviewees earns net less than 800 euro per month, while 26% receives a monthly salary between 800 and a 1000 euro.
- The lack of certainties for the future: the survey confirms the condition of prolonged employment insecurity. Most of the interviewees are thirty year olds who have been working for at least three years and have with their employers a relatively stable employment relationship. Contract length and renewal concurs of course to the sense of job insecurity: more than half of the interviewees has a one year contract, while 33% has a less than six months one. Even though the majority of the collaborators have been working for the same employer over a long enough period of time, they do not seem hopeful as to the continuity and the possible stabilization of their employment contracts. It is not difficult therefore to imagine their condition of existential insecurity and the impossibility of planning a future for themselves.

The IRES survey can be considered an interesting *focus* on a specific segment of parasubordinate workers, in which the three concepts of flexibility, atypical employment and job insecurity empirically converge. The universe of parasubordinates is however more extensive and heterogeneous, as we can see from the picture given by INPS.

6. The universe of parasubordinates: the picture drawn by INPS

Parasubordinate workers are the reference population of another survey: "Il Lavoro parasubordinato dal 1996 al 2004" ("Parasubordinate employment from 1996 to 2004")²⁰. This is an INPS survey, based on the administrative archives of the special fund for self-employed workers²¹, inside which we can find the variously called *parasubordinate*, "averagely independent" or *non standard* workers. The analysis focuses on social security contribution payers²² which were over 1.750.000 in 2004.

The concept of flexibility is not explicitly mentioned in the survey, but it is used in practice thanks to three different principles which allow us to identify various types of workers:

¹⁸ Nidil – CGIL (a cura di) *1° Osservatorio permanente sul lavoro atipico in Italia – 2006*.

¹⁹ Op. cit. pp.50-53

²⁰ INPS, *Il lavoro parasubordinato. Dal 1996 al 2004*.

²¹ That is "the management of social security measures for workers who are, though not exclusively, self-employed".

²² This created great difficulties during the survey because to obtain information on the social security contribution payers it was "necessary to wait for the declaration made by the employing party, which occurred only after the effective payment of the contributions". From 2005 onwards the situation should be simpler for what concerns information timeliness, because from this date the employing parties have to send telematically every month the income data of their collaborators and the type of contract existent between employer and collaborator.

- According to their social security contributions, parasubordinates are divided into *professional workers* (12%) and *collaborators* (88%)²³.
- Considering the collaborations which are relevant for the determination of an income, workers are divided into those who carry out their job exclusively for one employer (that is workers whose parasubordinate employment contracts represent the only income) and those who work for different employers, using other pension funds and performing additional activities. As an indicator, this distinction can display the risk of job insecurity. It is plausible in fact to think that workers, whose only income derives from parasubordinate employment, are those living situations of instability and insecurity. In 2004 they represented 70% of all the parasubordinates.
- According to the type of work performed – and referring to the TUIR, art. 50, paragraph 1, letter c-bis – a distinction can be made between “*typical*” workers (company directors, auditors, members of boards and committees, collaborators of newspapers and magazines) and “*atypical*” ones (all the other categories including door-to-door salesmen, cooperative members and profit-sharing associates). We must notice therefore that the concept of what is typical or atypical depends on the form of work performed by the worker and the necessity of this distinction exists even among parasubordinate workers, who cannot be considered atypical tout court.²⁴ In 2004, according to INPS, 65% of parasubordinate social security contribution payers were atypical workers, the remaining 35% being considered typical.

Parasubordinates are therefore a variegated and composite aggregate, while the categories of workers identified by the INPS survey following the three principles previously indicated, are not mutually exclusive: from their combination we can obtain more specific categories – to which the INPS report does not pay much attention – which enable us to identify different forms of flexibility among the non standard workers. The differences in gender, age, geographical distribution, income, pension contributions and social security protection introduce further dimensions and segment the universe of parasubordinate workers into various levels of social vulnerability.

Tab.2 Classification of parasubordinate workers on the basis of INPS criteria

	Exclusive employment relationship		Various employment relationships	
	Typical	Atypical	Typical	Atypical
Professional workers	Typical professional workers with no other income	Atypical professional workers with no other income	Typical professional workers with other earnings	Atypical professional workers with other earnings
Collaborators	Typical collaborators with no other income	Atypical collaborators with no other income	Typical collaborators with other earnings	Atypical collaborators with other earnings

For its heterogeneous composition, the universe of parasubordinate workers can therefore be considered an aggregate of non standard workers particularly significant for those who wish to study the different forms of flexibility.

7. Concluding remarks

The analysis presented in this paper has underlined the complexity of the concept of flexibility both in the existent printed material and in the research procedures. The surveys reviewed have proved that an univocal operative definition of the concept does not exist. Often classified referring to different reference populations and analysis dimensions, this concept sometimes

²³ In particular, if the pension contributions are paid by the employer, we are in presence of a collaborator; if instead they are paid directly by the worker, we are dealing with a professional self-employed person. (*Ibidem*, page 26).

²⁴ ISFOL considers parasubordinate workers atypical, but it does not identify them only with administrative criteria, using in fact six subaltern indicators too (See footnote n. 35).

overlaps other similar ones. Also for some of these concepts, by now of common use – such as atypical employment and job insecurity – univocal and agreed upon definitions do not seem to exist.

We think that the study of such an important phenomenon when monitoring social exclusion, cannot and should not be based on conceptual and operative ambiguity which risks to make the debate, even in academic environments, more an ideological battle than a scientific exchange of opinions. The elaboration of agreed upon theoretical frameworks and empirical tools is therefore pressing if we want precise data collection and quantification.

This is only the first step towards the creation of a scientific framework capable of helping us to read the terms flexibility, atypical employment and job insecurity in a better way, starting from the structural conditions of the social subjects.

Stopping to look at the concept of job insecurity, we notice that it is more specific than the concept of flexibility and greatly differs from it. From a quick review of the surveys on this topic, together with the different definitions, the fundamental dimensions which characterize the concept emerge: the discontinuous presence in the labour market, the lack of a suitable and regular income, the inadequate pension coverage, the absence of social safety valves during the periods of inactivity, the permanent situation of contract uncertainty, the impossibility of choosing one's employment conditions. All these factors, together with the characteristics of the workers and the employment contexts in which they work, would be quantifiable thanks to *ad hoc* cognitive surveys capable of integrating the information coming from the administrative archives.

The available statistical sources, as pointed out by the President of ISTAT, do not at present allow us to understand the complexity of these factors and their interrelations: we do hope therefore that the National Statistical System will *in primis* integrate the existent data collections and analyses in order to give the community more quantitative information and more accurate answers.

Reassuring indications in this sense come from the integrations to the "Rilevazione Continua sulle Forze di Lavoro" (the continuous survey of workforce data) which since 2004 contains questions gathering data on coordinated and continuative collaborations, on casual and temporary employment and on other contract forms introduced by the law 30 passed in 2003. It would naturally be desirable for these questions to be further integrated by others which aim at surveying in depth the conditions of employment and existential instability *perceived* by the workers. This is necessary because if we know enough about the conditions of these new workers, we can contribute, now more than ever, to the development of suitable policies against social suffering.

Bibliography

- AAVV, *La «legge Biagi» anatomia di una riforma*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2006.
- Accornero A., *Era il secolo del lavoro*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997/2000.
- Accornero A., G. Altieri, C. Oteri, *Lavoro flessibile*, Ediesse, Roma, 2001.
- Accornero, A. *Lavoro, mercato, regole: quando il difetto sta nel manico...*, in AAVV, *La «<< legge Biagi»>> anatomia di una riforma*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2006.
- Accornero A., *Il mondo della produzione*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- Accornero A., *San Precario lavora per noi*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006
- Barbier J., Nadel H. *La flessibilità del lavoro e dell'occupazione*, Donzelli, Roma, 2002.
- Barman Z., *La società dell'incertezza*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000.
- Beck U., *Il lavoro nell'epoca della fine del lavoro*, Einaudi, Torino, 2000.
- Bologna S., A. Fumagalli (a cura di), *Il lavoro autonomo di seconda generazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1997.
- Bonazzi G., *Come studiare le organizzazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- Butera F., *Dalle occupazioni industriali alle nuove professioni*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1997.
- Butera F., M. La Rosa, *Formazione, sviluppo organizzativo e gestione delle risorse umane*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1998.
- Casagrande M., Cepollaro G., *Il lavoro senza confini*, Guerini e Associati, Milano, 2003.
- Castells M. *La nascita della società in rete*, Egea, Milano, 2002.
- Catania D., C. M. Vaccaro, G. Zucca (a cura di), *Una vita tanti lavori*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2004.
- Catania D., *La flessibilità situazionale: aspetti teorici del post-fordismo*, in D. Catania, C. M. Vaccaro, G. Zucca (a cura di), *Una vita tanti lavori*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2004.
- Ceri P., *La società vulnerabile*, Laterza, Bari, 2003.
- Coriat B., *Ripensare l'organizzazione del lavoro*, Dedalo, Bari, 1993.
- Davidow, W H and Malone, M S (1992) *The Virtual Corporation: Structuring and Revitalizing the Corporation for the 21st Century* HarperBusiness, New York
- De Masi D. (1999), *Il futuro del lavoro*, Laterza, Milano
- Di Nicola P., *Da Taylor a Ford. Appunti per lo studio dello «Scientific Management» e della catena di montaggio*, Ediesse, Roma, 2005.
- Di Nicola P., *I lavoratori nella net-economy tra dipendenza e autonomia*, in R. Fontana, B. Mazza (a cura di), *E-job*, Guerini, e Associati, Milano, 2001.
- Fontana R., Mazza B. (a cura di), *E-job*, Guerini, e Associati, Milano, 2001.
- Freni M., *Biografie rapsodiche*, in M. Casagrande, G. Cepollaro, *Il lavoro senza confini*, Guerini e Associati, Milano, 2003.
- Gallino L., *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Laterza, Roma – Bari, 2003.
- Gallino L., *Lavori flessibili, società flessibile e integrazione sociale*, in G. Mari (a cura di), *Libertà, sviluppo, lavoro*, Mondadori, Milano, 2004.
- Harrison B., *Agile e snella*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1999.
- Iacci P. (a cura di), *La flessibilità nella gestione delle risorse umane*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2005.
- INPS, *Il lavoro parasubordinato. Dal 1996 al 2004.*
- Isof, *PLUS Participation, Labour, Unemployment Survey*, 2005
- ISTAT 2006, Indagine conoscitiva sulle cause e le dimensioni del precariato nel mondo del lavoro, Audizione del Presidente dell'Istituto nazionale di statistica Luigi Biggeri, XI Commissione (Lavoro Pubblico e Privato) – Camera dei Deputati).
- Laubacher, R.J. and Malone, T.W. (1997) 'Flexible Work Arrangements and 21st Century Worker's Guilds', Working Paper No. 04, MIT Sloan School of Management, 21st Century Initiative, Cambridge.
- Malone, T.W. and Laubacher, R.J. (1998) 'The Dawn of the E-Lance Economy', *Harvard Business Review*, 76(10): 145-152.
- Marazzi C., *Il posto dei calzini*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1999.
- Mari G. (a cura di), *Libertà, sviluppo, lavoro*, Mondadori, Milano, 2004.
- Marrani A., *Concetti e metodo per la ricerca sociale*, La Giuntina, Firenze 1980.
- Mingione E., E. Pugliese, *Il lavoro*, Carocci, Roma, 2003.
- Nonaka I., Takeuchi H. *The knowledge creating company*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.
- Ranci C., *Le nuove disuguaglianze in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- Reyneri E. *Sociologia del mercato del lavoro*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- Rifkin J., *La fine del lavoro*, Baldini & Castaldi, Milano, 1997.
- Sennett R., *L'uomo flessibile*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2003.
- Sennett R., *La cultura del nuovo capitalismo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2006.
- Sennett R., *Rispetto*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2004.
- Trigilia C., *Sociologia economica*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- Zucca, G. *Vite a (o per il) lavoro: tipologie dell'atipicità e vulnerabilità sociale*, in D. Catania, C. M. Vaccaro, G. Zucca (a cura di), *Una vita tanti lavori*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2004.