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Exploring Employment Relations of Pseudo-Contracted Workers in the Greek Banking Sector: A Qualitative Analysis

Eleni Rompoti and Alexis Ioannides *

Abstract. This article presents findings from qualitative research on the Greek banking sector, focusing on pseudo-contracted workers employed through Business Service Providers (contractors) and performing their work on bank premises. Drawing on interviews with workers and trade union representatives, the analysis examines employment relations, job precariousness, and forms of collective organization among this under-represented workforce. Although the international literature on labor leasing and outsourcing has expanded substantially, pseudo-contracting as a concealed form of labor leasing remains largely unexplored at both theoretical and empirical levels. The findings demonstrate that banks and contracting firms enter into fictitious project-based agreements, while in practice workers perform fixed and ongoing operational tasks without enjoying the rights and protections afforded to permanent employees. The study contributes to debates on labor market segmentation, precarious employment, the deregulation of industrial relations, and the erosion of collective representation, underscoring the need for clearer regulatory frameworks governing in-house outsourcing arrangements that conceal the use of leased workers.

Keywords: *Trade Unions, Pseudo-Contracted Workers, Leased Workers, Business Service Providers, Employment Relations.*

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1. Introduction

Flexible, informal, and innovative forms of employment emerged in the 1980s and noted rapid expansion during the Great Recession of 2007; this also happened during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Employers and businesses have increasingly adopted these models to reduce labor costs, boost productivity, and boost competitiveness. At the same time, flexible employment arrangements have also been used as a strategy to preserve jobs and mitigate rising unemployment during the financial crisis that began in 2007 in the USA and Europe and continued in Greece until 2018.¹

Various novel employment forms—including temporary work, workers leased through temporary work agencies (TWAs) to user undertakings, part-time employment, seasonal work, project-based contracts, and outsourcing—have become a dominant global trend and now correspond to approximately one-third of the total workforce.² For instance, part-time employment has steadily increased across many EU countries over

¹ C. Forde & G. Slater, “Agency working in Britain: Character, consequences and regulation,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 43 (2005): 249–271.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2005.00354.x>

D. Pavlopoulos, *Temporary employment in Greece and in the EU: An approach using longitudinal data*. Athens: INE/GSEE, 2015.

E. Rompoti, A. Ioannides & T. Koutroukis, “Employment flexibility and industrial relations reforms in Greece of memoranda,” *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labor Studies* 11 (2022): 40–63.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” *Greek Review of Social Research* 151 (2019): 99–135.

E. Rompoti and A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Research* 6 (2023a): 1–13.

E. Rompoti and A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” *Administrative Sciences* 13, no. 11 (2023b): 235.

² International Labor Organization (ILO), *What is temporary employment?* (n.d.), retrieved February 16, 2022, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/WCMS_534826/lang--en/index.htm.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

B. Thomson & L. Hünefeld, “Temporary agency work and well-being: The mediating role of job insecurity,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (2021): 11154.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18211154>.

the past two decades³ and worker leasing remains one of the fastest-growing forms of employment both globally and within Europe.⁴ Within the EU-27, temporary employment for individuals aged 15–64 accounted for 11.6% of total employment; 17.8% was part-time employment, and 2.4% of workers in that demographic were leased through TWAs as of 2023.⁵

Despite the increased interest in flexible forms of employment, the labor status for in-house outsourced or pseudo-contracted workers remains largely unexplored in many EU countries, including Greece. There is a common confusion in literature between this form of employment and the leasing of workers through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs), since the two practices share several common characteristics (e.g. workplaces at a user undertaking or the existence of two employers). Several studies suggest that the actual number of workers leased through TWAs in Greece may be higher than reported, as many are employed under fictitious contracts or through “pseudo-contracting” under Business Service Providers.⁶ Evidence from the Greek banking sector further

³ S. Gialis & K. Gourzis, “Discussing the ‘Covert Unemployment’: Variations in the underemployment rates in the Greek regions during the financial crisis”. In *Society, Unemployment, and Social Reproduction*. Athens: Gutenberg, 2017, 272–297.

J. Horemans, I. Marx, & B. Nolan, “Hanging in, but only just: Part-time employment and in-work poverty through the crisis,” *IZA Journal of European Labor Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–19.

C. Jenkins & C. Charleswell, “Debt, underemployment, and capitalism: The rise of twenty-first-century serfdom,” *New Politics* 15, no. 4 (2016): 33–39.

⁴ W. Eichhorst & V. Tobsch, Has atypical work become typical in Germany? Country case study on labor market segmentation. *Employment Working Paper No. 145*. Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2013.

K. Hakansson & T. Isidorsson, “Work organizational outcomes of the use of temporary agency workers,” *Organization Studies* 33, no. 4 (2012): 487–505.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612443456>.

International Labor Organization, *Private employment agencies, temporary agency workers and their contribution to the labor market*. Geneva: ILO, 2009.

J. Arrowsmith, *Temporary agency work and collective bargaining in the EU*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008.

⁵ Eurostat, “Temporary agency workers (annual average),” accessed September 13, 2024, <https://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

Eurostat, “Part time employment (annual average),” accessed November 13, 2024, <https://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

Eurostat, “Temporary employment (annual average),” accessed November 13, 2024, <https://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

⁶ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

shows that in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers often exhibit characteristics similar to those of leased workers, thereby blurring the lines between these two forms of employment even more.⁷ Among the various types of flexible employment, outsourcing has gained attention as a cost-reduction strategy in both public and private sector organizations. Outsourcing, a business strategy where companies assign services or projects to external providers, comes in two forms: when contracted workers perform their work at the premises of the user company, they are called “in-house outsourced workers”; when they execute their tasks at the premises of the contracting company, they are “out-house outsourced workers.”

Although research is increasingly engaged in issues related to Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) and general outsourcing practices,⁸ the legal and institutional aspects that should distinguish genuine contracting from unlawful leasing of personnel remain largely under-investigated in the Greek context.⁹ This paper wishes to close this gap by presenting an in-depth case study related to the Greek banking sector, where the pseudo-

E. Rompoti and A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti and A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*. Athens: Nomiki Vivliothiki, 2017.

G. Leventis, “Project contract that conceals leasing of employees,” *Deltio Ergatikis Nomothesias* 73 (2017): 185.

⁷ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*, op.cit.

G. Leventis, “Project contract that conceals leasing of employees,” op.cit.

⁸ J. Arrowsmith, *Temporary agency work and collective bargaining in the EU*. op. cit.. International Labor Organization, *Private employment agencies, temporary agency workers and their contribution to the labor market*. op. cit.

W. Eichhorst & V. Tobsch, Has atypical work become typical in Germany? Country case study on labor market segmentation. op. cit.

⁹ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*. Athens: Nomiki Vivliothiki, 2017.

G. Leventis, “Project contract that conceals leasing of employees,” op.cit.

contracting form of employment has become the norm given the otherwise vague or non-existent legal regulation.

The primary objective of this article is to investigate a specific form of flexible employment—contracted workers employed through Business Service Providers—with a particular focus on in-house outsourced workers, also referred to as pseudo-contracted workers, within the Greek banking sector. These workers in Greece typically receive low wages, experience limited labor rights, and—despite the formal outsourcing arrangements—perform duties very similar to those of workers leased through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs). This article includes a comprehensive literature review on both TWAs and Business Service Providers, offering a conceptual clarification of the differences and overlaps between the two models which are often mistakenly treated as equivalent. The key research questions addressed by this study are as follows:

1. Definition and Legal Protection: How is the leasing of workers through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) defined according to the EU literature, and what protections does European Directive 2008/104/EC offer to these workers? What are the main features of this form of employment, and how is it different to “in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers” employed by Business Service Providers? (See the theoretical framework in Part 2.)
2. Industrial Relations and Broader Impacts: What were the industrial relations like for in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers in the Greek banking sector during the financial crisis? Additionally, what are the broader effects of flexible employment practices on working conditions and labor rights? (See the theoretical framework and empirical findings in Parts 2 and 4.)
3. Characteristics and Motivations: Do in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers in the Greek banking sector exhibit characteristics similar to workers leased through TWAs? If so, what are the underlying motivations for employers to engage in “pseudo-contracting” practices in Greece? (See the theoretical framework and empirical results in Parts 2 and 4.)
4. Unionization and Advocacy for Workers' Rights: Have in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers in the Greek banking sector formed unions or other collective organizations to claim their rights? If so, how do they define their industrial relations, and what wins have they achieved or what obstacles have they encountered? (See the empirical findings in Part 4.)

The main research assumptions are as follows:

First, in-house outsourced workers in the Greek banking sector are, in essence, pseudo-contracted workers, and contracting companies operate unlawfully as Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) by leasing personnel. It is believed that these contracting companies are pseudo-contracting companies and enter into fictitious project agreements with banks.

Second, these pseudo-contracted workers experience worse working conditions compared to permanent employees in banks. It is further assumed that their employment relations worsened significantly during the financial crisis.

This paper lays out a comprehensive and empirically supported description of an understated and legally vague form of employment: pseudo-contracting through business service providers. Based on theories of labor market segmentation,¹⁰ the concept of the precariat,¹¹ and the deregulation of labor relations and collective representation,¹² this paper explains how pseudo-contracting undermines labor rights and enhances job precariousness. Qualitative research in the banking sector shows that in-house outsourced workers operate as leased workers, but with limited rights. This study contributes both theoretically and empirically by clarifying crucial concepts and underlining the institutional deregulation of labor markets in Europe.

The structure of this article is as follows: The second part provides a literature review on both the “leasing” of workers through TWAs and on in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers through Business Service Providers by outlining the main features and distinctions between “leasing” and “pseudo-contracting.” The third part details the research methodology employed. The fourth part presents the empirical findings related to labor relations and union activities among in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted employees in the Greek banking sector. The fifth part contains the Discussions, the limitations, and suggestions for future research. The sixth part summarizes the principal conclusions from the study.

¹⁰ P. Doeringer & M. Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Health, 1971.

¹¹ G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

¹² W. Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*. London: Verso Books, 2016.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Flexible Forms of Employment: Employment Relations of Leased and Pseudo-contracted Workers in Greece and Europe

This section describes a new social class of workers who live and work under conditions of perpetual labor precarity. The analysis is based on existing literature regarding the concept of the precariat, as analyzed by Standing,¹³ as well as the theory of labor market segmentation.¹⁴ More specifically, our research highlights this new social class and focuses on the precarious situation of the pseudo-contracted workers (in-house outsourced workers) in the banking sector, who are leased workers in disguise.

The precariat, deriving from the Latin *precarius*, is a term that first appeared in the 80's. It refers to people that work – either mentally or manually – under flexible terms and those who are unemployed or retired individuals receiving a low pension as well. According to Standing,¹⁵ the main characteristics of the precariat are, on the one hand, instability and insecurity in work (e.g. fixed term contracts, part-time employment, leasing or contracting employment, outsourcing etc.). On the other hand, they are characterized by low wages and a lack of social protection. Access to state benefits is limited and collective representation (i.e. weakened unionism) is either minimum or absent. Mental insecurity, constant anxiety regarding the work future, and lack of labor rights and career perspectives are all prominent characteristics of the precariat.

Both leased workers from Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) and in-house outsourced workers/pseudo contracted workers employed through Business Service Providers (contracting companies) fit into the precariat definition, thus confirming the theory of labor market segmentation. These two forms of employment are often confused, yet they are not identical.

The method of leasing workers, or “temporary employment through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs),” emerged in the United States as early as the 1940s. In Western Europe, this employment model was introduced in the 1960s and was later adopted by other European

¹³ G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. op. cit.

¹⁴ P. Doeringer & M. Piore, Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis. op. cit.

M. Reich, M. Gordon, & R. Edwards, “Dual Labor Markets: A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation,” *American Economic Review* 63, no. 2 (1973): 359–365.

¹⁵ G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. op. cit.

countries in the 1990s. In Greece, this practice was first implemented in the early 2000s.¹⁶ Within the European Union (EU), “leasing” personnel through TWAs refers to the temporary placement of an employee at a secondary undertaking. More specifically, the employee signs a work contract with the TWA (direct employer)—either for a fixed or indefinite period and either for full-time or part-time employment—and is then leased or temporarily placed at another business or user undertaking (indirect employer). The indirect employer retains supervisory and managerial rights over the employee, determining the time, place, and mode of service provision.¹⁷ Consequently, the primary characteristic of worker “leasing” is the “duality of employers.” According to the European Directive 2008/104/EC, Temporary Employment through TWAs is safeguarded within the EU by ensuring equal pay and fundamental employment rights for leased workers, provided they possess the same qualifications as permanent employees in the user undertaking for the entire duration of their employment. In Greece, this Directive was transposed into national legislation through Laws 4052/2012, 4093/2012,

¹⁶ K. Papadimitriou, *Temporary Employment: “Leasing” by Profession*. Athens: Sakkoulas, 2007.

E. Rompoti, A. Ioannides & T. Koutroukis, “Employment flexibility and industrial relations reforms in Greece of memoranda,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Voss, K. Vitols, N. Farvaque, A. Broughton, F. Behling, F. Dota, S. Leonardi, & F. Naedenoen, *The Role of Temporary Agency Work and Labor Market Transitions in Europe: Institutional Frameworks, Empirical Evidence, Good Practice and the Impact of Social Dialogue*. Brussels: Eurocett, 2013.

¹⁷ European Parliament and Council, Directive 2008/104/EC on temporary agency work, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 327/9 (2008): 280–285.

Law 2956/2001, Restructuring of the Hellenic Manpower Organization and Other Provisions, *Greek Government Gazette* 258/A (2001).

Law 4052/2012, Law on the Competency of Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, and Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance for the Implementation of the Law: Approval of Draft Contracts of Funding Facilitations Between the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the Hellenic Republic and the Bank of Greece, and Other Emergency Provisions for the Reduction of the Public Debt and the Rescue of the National Economy: And Other Provisions, *Greek Government Gazette* 41/A (2012).

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*, op. cit.

and 4254/2014.¹⁸ The maximum permitted duration of “leasing” workers varies among EU member-states, as the decision remains at the discretion of each individual government. In many countries, the maximum duration has gradually increased.¹⁹

Outsourcing gained momentum in the 19th century. The term “outsourcing” refers to the business practice of assigning core or secondary services or projects to external service providers.²⁰ This practice is primarily employed to reduce labor costs and to access specialized personnel with expertise and innovative ideas in their respective fields.²¹ When outsourcing occurs within subsidiaries of corporate groups, it is “internal outsourcing,” whereas when performed through external undertakings, it is classified as either “in-house outsourcing” or “outhouse outsourcing.” “In-house outsourcing” requires contracted employees to work at the premises of the user-business, whereas “outhouse outsourcing” entails the completion of projects off-site. Notably, leasing workers via TWAs is inherently temporary, whereas outsourcing typically has a more “permanent” nature, as businesses often assign the same

¹⁸ Law 4052/2012, *op. cit.*

Law 4093/2012, Approving the Medium-Term Fiscal Strategy 2013–2016, *Greek Government Gazette* 222/A (2012).

Law 4254/2014, On Measures for the Support and Development of the Greek Economy and Other Provisions, *Greek Government Gazette* 85/A (2014).

¹⁹ The shortest duration is 6 months in Spain and Finland, while the maximum, 42 months, applies in the Netherlands. The threshold is 12 months in Luxembourg and Portugal, 18 in Poland and 24 months in France, Germany, and Belgium. In the latter three countries, the initial maximum duration for this form of employment was 18, 12 and 6 months respectively; thus, the periods have been elongated by 6, 12 and 18 months respectively. In Greece and Romania, the maximum permitted period is 36 months, although the initial terms were 16 and 24 months; meaning they increased by 20 and 12 months, respectively. It is, therefore, noted a significant increase in the maximum duration in many countries. For a detailed presentation of the practice of leasing personnel and a comparison of data among the EU countries, see E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” *op. cit.* and E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” *op. cit.*

²⁰ E. Galanaki, Factors that Impact the Outsourcing of Human Resources Management Services. PhD diss., National Records of PhD Theses, 2005.

²¹ C. Costa, “Information Technology Outsourcing in Australia: A Literature Review,” *Information Management & Computer Security* 9 (2001): 213–224.

E. Doval, “Is Outsourcing a Strategic Tool to Enhance the Competitive Advantage?” *Review of General Management* 23, no. 1 (2016): 78–87.

E. Galanaki, Factors that Impact the Outsourcing of Human Resources Management Services, *op. cit.*

services or projects on an ongoing basis to external contractors (Business Service Providers).

While outsourcing and in-house outsourced workers share some common characteristics with leased workers through TWAs, such as the fact that they both work for a second user-undertaking, they remain as two distinct concepts. The fundamental difference lies in the nature of the employment arrangement. Leased workers are temporarily assigned to a user undertaking, whereas contracted workers through Business Service Providers are engaged to complete specific projects, either on-site as in-house outsourced workers or remotely as outhouse outsourced staff.

A grey area exists between workers leased through TWAs and in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers, as some businesses exploit outsourcing arrangements to mask illegally leased personnel when these workers operate on the premises of a user undertaking.²²

In many EU countries there is a lack of sufficient legislative regulation related to the illegal leasing of workers. Therefore, the EU case law has set a series of criteria and characteristics (11 in total) to make a distinction between the lawful leasing of workers through TWAs and the “fictitious” contracting or pseudo-contracting, which in reality conceals the leasing of workers.

For the EU countries, the most important criterion for the distinction between the two forms is the managerial right, as defined in the European Directive 2008/104/EC which is incorporated into national legislation. More specifically, in the case of leasing through TWAs, when a worker is placed on the premises of a user undertaking, the managerial right (meaning the right to set the conditions and to supervise the worker) is exercised by the user undertaking (indirect employer).

On the contrary, in the case of contracted workers through Business Service Providers, and independent of whether a worker provides services on the premises of a contracting business (outhouse outsourcing) or at the premises of the user undertaking-client (in-house outsourcing), the managerial right lies exclusively with the contracting business. Additional distinguishing characteristics exist, such as the provision of work

²² E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*, op. cit.

G. Leventis, “Project contract that conceals leasing of employees,” op. cit.

equipment and the degree of integration/cooperation with permanent employees. A full and in-depth analysis of the eleven (11) criteria/characteristics that apply in EU countries for the distinction between workers' leasing through TWAs and pseudo-contracting is beyond the scope of this paper. For a more detailed presentation, see Rompoti & Ioannides.²³

In Greece, contracting companies frequently operate unlawfully as TWAs by basically turning in-house outsourced workers into pseudo-contracted employees. Managerial and supervisory rights are, in practice, exercised by the user undertaking rather than the contractor, allowing this to happen.²⁴ Therefore, contracting companies are usually pseudo-contracting undertakings. Strong evidence in Greece leads us to believe that businesses make use of in-house outsourcing/pseudo-contracting to avoid temporary employment/leasing through TWAs. Specifically, businesses aim to circumvent the European Directive 2008/104/EC and the Greek laws that provide for wage and employment equality between workers leased through TWAs and permanent employees from user undertakings. In Greece, workers leased through TWAs and contracted workers—whether in-house or out-house outsourced—are protected by the National General Collective Labor Agreement, which establishes minimum wage and working conditions as a safety net. However, contracted workers are not protected under the sector-, profession-, or business-level collective labor agreements that apply for the permanent employees of a user undertaking. As a result, in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers are not remunerated the same as permanent employees. On the contrary, workers leased through TWAs, as stipulated by the European Directive 2008/104/EC, receive equal pay as their co-workers that hold equivalent qualifications. This discrepancy contributes to pseudo-contracted workers' dissatisfaction, as they face

²³ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

²⁴ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece," op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Leased workers in the EU and in Greece," op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

D. Zerdelis, *The professional leasing of employees*, op. cit.

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increased job insecurity and are deprived of equal pay and career advancement opportunities.²⁵

In Greece, neither the legislators nor case law has dealt with the issue of pseudo-contracting in depth, contrary to some other countries like Germany. German law on temporary employment or the leasing of workers through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) was amended on April 1st, 2017, to incorporate provisions against unlawful leasing of workers (§ 611a BGB).²⁶ More specifically, the law obliges the TWAs and user undertakings to expressly identify their agreements as “temporary cession or leasing of workers agreements.” Otherwise, they are void and their leasing of workers is deemed unlawful.

Already in 2012, the Federal Labor Court of Berlin-Brandenburg (No. 15 Sa 1217/12) issued a significant ruling regarding pseudo-contracting cases in Germany. It was about collaborations between contracting businesses and user undertakings through project or service agreements. The Court ruled that relevant agreements shall expressly define who is the contractor and who is the user undertaking, what the scope of the project or service is, its term, and the rules on liability. In Germany, the agreement between businesses shall clearly state whether it relates to a leasing of workers or a project/service agreement.

In Italy, the Biagi reform (Law 276/2003) legalized several forms of work assignment, including work through contracting businesses (in-house and outhouse outsourcing) and temporary work/leasing of workers through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs). The law expressly allows for external collaborators to provide their services within businesses through the method of in-house outsourcing. Although the method is typically lawful, in practice it is often used to conceal how workers are actually being leased, leading to a decline of the unified labor relation between

²⁵ P. Ferreira & S. Gomes, “Temporary Work, Permanent Strain? Personal Resources as Inhibitors of Temporary Agency Workers’ Burnout,” *Administrative Sciences* 12 (2022): 87, <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12030087>.

B. Thomson and L. Hünefeld, “Temporary Agency Work and Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Insecurity,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (2021): 11154, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18211154>.

²⁶ German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch – BGB), Section 611a “Employment Contract (Arbeitsvertrag),” introduced by the Act to Amend the Temporary Agency Work Act and Other Acts (Gesetz zur Änderung des Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetzes und anderer Gesetze), in force since April 1, 2017, Federal Law Gazette I (2017), 258. Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz), *Temporary Agency Work Act (Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetz – AÜG)*, Reform Act of 21 February 2017, Federal Law Gazette I (2017), 258.

permanent and temporary workers. These workers are deprived of labor protection and collective representation.²⁷ The main reason why employers turn to pseudo-contracting is to circumvent the European Directive 2008/104/EC that provides salary equality between workers leased through TWAs and permanent employees from a user undertaking. Moreover, they are seeking to avoid restrictions and prohibitions set by their national laws regarding the workers leased through TWAs.

Article 43 of the Workers' Statute in Spain also allows for the leasing of workers through TWAs. In practice, however, there is extensive use of in-house outsourcing by user businesses, largely concealing the leasing of personnel.²⁸ By doing so, user undertakings avoid providing pay equality and benefits that their permanent personnel enjoy.

Therefore, both in Greece and in Italy and Spain, in-house outsourcing has become one of the main deregulating mechanisms of the labor market since pseudo-contracting incidents are noted. Flexible forms of employment – such as in-house and outhouse outsourcing and the leasing of workers – confirm the theory of labor market segmentation or bisection of the nucleus (“insiders”); namely, the bisection of employees under stable employment, high salaries and protection, and the periphery (“outsiders”) that contain the flexible, low paid and vulnerable workers.²⁹

While this method of pseudo contracting may also be employed in other European countries, there is no empirical quantitative research confirming this assumption. To the best of our knowledge, the only empirical quantitative study on in-house outsourced/pseudo-contracted workers to date was conducted in Greece, specifically in the banking sector, revealing that these workers operate under pseudo-contracting arrangements with substandard employment relations.³⁰ In addition, there is a significant data gap regarding in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers in the EU, as Eurostat does not provide relevant statistics. Consequently, the actual magnitude of this employment category remains unclear. This form

²⁷ M. Tiraboschi, “The Italian Labor Market after the Biagi Reform,” *International Journal of Comparative Labor Law and Industrial Relations* 21, no. 2 (2005): 149–192, <https://doi.org/10.54648/ijcl2005009>.

²⁸ Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (JILPT), Labor Law and Atomization of Work: Spain, JILPT Report no. 15 (2016), https://www.jil.go.jp/english/reports/documents/jilpt-reports/no.15_spain.pdf.

²⁹ P. Doeringer & M. Piore, Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis, op.cit, M. Reich, M. Gordon, & R. Edwards, “Dual Labor Markets: A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation,” op.cit.

³⁰ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

of employment blossomed during the economic crisis primarily to circumvent legal protections and restrictions associated with temporary employment/leasing through TWAs (see Part 3: Methodology and Part 4: Results of the empirical research).

Strong evidence from past research suggests that all flexible forms of employment (e.g. involuntary part-time or temporary employment, leasing through TWAs, pseudo-contracted workers,) are used to cover “low quality” positions with low remunerations and benefits. These workers are deprived of the opportunity to move from temporary to permanent employment and to invest in their careers. More specifically, flexible forms of employment operate more like traps rather than steps towards professional advancement – they are a no stepping-stone job.³¹ In particular, studies have shown that workers under fixed-term contracts are paid lower than their colleagues under permanent contracts.³² Leased workers through TWAs are mostly driven to unemployment and social exclusion once their contracts expire. They may also get trapped in flexible forms of employment through a constant renewal of their contracts by covering fixed and ongoing needs in their user undertaking. Thus, they are left without the possibility of permanent

³¹ D. Autor & S. Houseman, “Do Temporary-Help Jobs Improve Labor Market Outcomes for Low-Skilled Workers? Evidence from ‘Work First’,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2, no. 3 (2010): 96–128.

J. Hveem, “Are Temporary Work Agencies Stepping Stones into Regular Employment?” *IZA Journal of Migration* 2, no. 21 (2013): 1–27.

International Labor Organization (ILO), *Non-Standard Forms of Employment*. Geneva: ILO, 2015.

E. J. Jahn & M. Roshholm, Looking Beyond the Bridge: The Effect of Temporary Agency Employment on Labor Market Outcomes, *European Economic Review* 65 (2014): 108–125.

M. Kauhanen & J. Nätti, Involuntary Temporary and Part-Time Work, Job Quality and Well-Being at Work, *Social Indicators Research* 120, no. 3 (2015): 783–799.

D. Pavlopoulos, Temporary Employment in Greece and in the EU: An Approach Using Longitudinal Data, op.cit

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

³² A. Booth, M. Francesconi & J. Frank, “Temporary Jobs: Stepping Stones or Dead Ends?” *Economic Journal* 112, no. 480 (2002): 189–213.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Leased workers in the EU and in Greece,” op. cit.

D. Pavlopoulos, Temporary Employment in Greece and in the EU: An Approach Using Longitudinal Data, op.cit

employment/open-ended contracts at their undertaking.³³ Moreover, the low-paid jobs that characterize flexible forms of employment often do not provide an opportunity for further education and training, causing high job insecurity with negative effects on workers' physical and mental health.³⁴

The role of trade unions has been pivotal in safeguarding stable employment and advancing labor rights. In Europe, unions emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In Greece their establishment occurred during the final quarter of the 19th century (1875 onwards) due to delayed industrial development. Despite initial setbacks, Greek unions progressively incorporated workers in flexible or informal employment and advocated for collective labor contracts as well as equal labor and insurance rights.³⁵

The reforms and deregulations introduced during the economic crisis profoundly affected unionism, employment conditions, and industrial relations. In the private sector across Europe, wages were sharply reduced, favorable employee regulations dismantled, and sectoral collective agreements were decentralized, while company-level agreements—often under less favorable terms—were reinforced. In Greece, these measures included the suspension of seniority-based pay raises in the private sector and the abolition of the 13th and 14th salaries in the public sector. At the

³³ International Labor Organization (ILO), *Non-Standard Forms of Employment*, op.cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece, op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Leased workers in the EU and in Greece," op. cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

³⁴ P. Ferreira & S. Gomes, "Temporary Work, Permanent Strain? Personal Resources as Inhibitors of Temporary Agency Workers' Burnout," *Administrative Sciences* 12 (2022): 87, <https://doi.org/10.3390/admisci12030087>.

L. W. Mitlacher, "Job Quality and Temporary Agency Work: Challenges for Human Resource Management in Triangular Employment Relations in Germany," *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 19 (2008): 446–460.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

B. Thomson and L. Hünefeld, "Temporary Agency Work and Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Insecurity," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (2021): 11154, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18211154>.

³⁵ R. Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society*. London: SAGE Publications, 2001.

T. Koutroukis, *Contemporary Labor Relations*. Athens: Kritiki, 2022.

D. Stratoulis, *Labor Relations in the Throes of the Neoliberal Whirl*. Athens: Greek Letters, 2005.

same time, permanent contracts declined while flexible forms of employment expanded, including project-based and subcontracting arrangements, self-employment, independent services, and outsourcing. Working time was reorganized by a reduction of full-time employment, a replacement with part-time or rotational work, an introduction of a six-day work week, and by a rise of teleworking. The institutional framework for employee protection was relaxed, collective dismissals increased, and fundamental pillars of industrial relations—collective bargaining, social dialogue, and trade union power—were significantly eroded. These changes were accompanied by a broader questioning of the role of the state and of the social contract between employer and employee.³⁶ From a theoretical standpoint, Wolfgang Streeck interprets labor market deregulation as a structural element of the transition from post-war Fordist capitalism to neoliberal capitalism.³⁷ Under the post-war regime (1945–1970), industrial relations were characterized by collective bargaining, strong state regulation, and employment stability. From the 1980s onwards, however, this framework gradually disintegrated due to policies of flexibility, austerity, and the institutional weakening of trade unions.³⁸ According to Streeck, the new labor status prioritizes employer flexibility at the expense of worker security, marginalizing collective

³⁶ A. Koukiadaki & C. Kokkinou, “The Greek System of Collective Bargaining in the Crisis,” in *Joint Regulation and Labor Market Policy in Europe during the Crisis*, ed. I. Tavora and M. Martinez Lucio. Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, 2016, 120–140.

M. Lucio, A. Koukiadaki, & I. Tavora, “The Legacy of Thatcherism in European Labor Relations: The Impact of the Politics of Neo-Liberalism and Austerity on Collective Bargaining in a Fragmenting Europe,” *Industrial and Employment Rights Journal* 2, no. 1 (2019): 28–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/instemplrightj.2.1.0028>.

P. Marginson & C. Welz, “European Wage-Setting Mechanisms under Pressure: Negotiated and Unilateral Changes and the EU’s Economic Governance Regime,” *Transfer* 21, no. 4 (2015): 429–450.

E. Rompoti, A. Ioannides & T. Koutroukis, Employment flexibility and industrial relations reforms in Greece of memoranda, op.cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Feronas, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Labor Market of Countries under the Economic Adjustment Regime: A Comparative Analysis,” *Social Policy* 5 (2017): 38–63.

I. Zisimopoulos & G. Oikonomakis, “Labor Relations in Greece: The Impact of Public Sector Restructuring,” *Theseis*, no. 122 (January–March 2013).

I. Zisimopoulos & G. Oikonomakis, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Greek Collective Bargaining System,” *Theseis*, no. 144 (2018).

³⁷ W. Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*. London: Verso Books, 2014.

³⁸ W. Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, op.cit. W. Streeck, How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System, op.cit.

representation. Workers in the 21st century thus appear “socially isolated and politically powerless,” with the rhetoric of competitiveness functioning as an ideological mechanism that legitimizes deregulation, wage suppression, layoffs, and the dismantling of labor and social rights. Consequently, labor relations have become subordinated to market logic, stripped of institutional counterbalances, social protection, and democratic accountability, signaling a profound shift in the social contract. The Greek case exemplifies these dynamics vividly. Labor market deregulation during the crisis reinforced the already precarious situation of pseudo-contracted workers and exposed the diminished ability of unions to restore labor rights and collective bargaining. The personalization of employment relations further accelerated the weakening of collective representation, curtailed social dialogue, and eroded union power. Employment in the secondary sector—traditionally a stronghold of unionism—declined, while tertiary sectors, where unions are either absent or comparatively weak in protecting workers’ rights, have expanded.³⁹ Notably, there are no unions for “leased” employees through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs) in Greece and unionization among contracted workers via Business Service Providers remains extremely limited.⁴⁰ Greek unions today are considerably weaker than fifty years ago, a decline shaped by globalization, technological change, and declining interest in unionism, particularly among younger generations.⁴¹ Additional contributing factors include poverty, unemployment, inflation, systemic violations of labor rights, and unions’ inability to secure tangible gains for

³⁹ M. Lucio, A. Koukiadaki, & I. Tavora, *The Legacy of Thatcherism in European Labor Relations: The Impact of the Politics of Neo-Liberalism and Austerity on Collective Bargaining in a Fragmenting Europe*, op.cit.

T. Koutroukis, *Contemporary Labor Relations*, op.cit.

E. Rompoti, A. Ioannides & T. Koutroukis, “Employment flexibility and industrial relations reforms in Greece of memoranda, op.cit.

⁴⁰ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, *Temporary agency workers and the economic crisis in EU and Greece*, op. cit.

⁴¹ D. Katsoridas, *New Technologies and Employment: Changes in the Productive and Work Process*. Athens: Alternative Editions, 1998.

D. Katsoridas, *The Labor Question: The Composition of the Working Class in Greece and Its Trade Union Representation*. Athens: INE/GSEE, 2021.

I. Zisimopoulos, “Trade Unions and Union Density in Greece: A Brief Historical Overview, Theoretical Review of Determining Factors, and Recent Empirical Research,” *Krisi 12* (2023): 9–71, available on ResearchGate.

I. Zisimopoulos & G. Oikonomakis, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Greek Collective Bargaining System,” op.cit.

T. Koutroukis, *Contemporary Labor Relations*, op.cit.

workers.⁴² In the banking sector, pseudo-contracting has further undermined collective bargaining and entrenched individualized employment agreements, operating as a mechanism to bypass unionism, wage equality, and the implementation of fundamental labor rights (see Section 4, Results of the empirical research).

Overall, flexible forms of employment are increasingly promoted as “regular” employment, with employers primarily motivated by cost reduction and the dismantling of permanent positions. The operation of external contracting companies—many of which function unlawfully as TWAs in Greece—requires critical reassessment. Despite their diminished power, it remains imperative to reinforce unions to safeguard labor rights and demands.⁴³

3. Methodology

3.1 The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method Design

In our research on in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector, we employed a mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative research) conducted in person. Specifically, we used the explanatory sequential mixed-method design for the workers (quantitative followed by qualitative research). In the explanatory sequential mixed-method design quantitative research is conducted first, followed by qualitative research to supplement and deepen the findings of the quantitative study. The main tool for data collection in our quantitative research was a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Three semi-structured open-ended questions were included at the end of

⁴² D. Katsoridas, “Causes and Consequences of Unemployment and the Need for the Creation of an Unemployed Movement, in Unemployment: *Myths and Reality*. Athens: Alternative Editions, 1998, 1–25.

T. Koutroukis, *Contemporary Labor Relations*, op.cit.

O. Papadopoulos & G. Ioannou, “Working in Hospitality and Catering in Greece and the UK: Do Trade Union Membership and Collective Bargaining Still Matter?” *European Journal of Industrial Relations* (2023): 105–122.

⁴³ D. Katsoridas, Unions: The Urgent Need for Their Reconstruction, *Othoni (Quarterly Publication of EETE-OTE)*, no. 104 (2016): 1–10.

T. Koutroukis, *Contemporary Labor Relations*, op.cit.

M. Lucio, A. Koukiadaki, & I. Tavora, The Legacy of Thatcherism in European Labor Relations: The Impact of the Politics of Neo-Liberalism and Austerity on Collective Bargaining in a Fragmenting Europe, op.cit.

E. Rompoti, A. Ioannides & T. Koutroukis, “Employment flexibility and industrial relations reforms in Greece of memoranda, op.cit.

the questionnaire to allow for the collection of qualitative data. Therefore, this research used the mixed approach—the explanatory sequential mixed methods design—which combines quantitative and qualitative research.⁴⁴ To specify, in the explanatory sequential mixed-method design, qualitative research (open-ended questions) follows the quantitative research (closed-ended questions). The results of this qualitative research improve, extends, complements or interprets the initial results of the quantitative research.⁴⁵ Moreover, qualitative research showcases the personal experiences and opinions of the workers, thus contributing to the identification of new topics and trends that may have been initially overlooked. In addition, the qualitative research allows for the disclosure of unexpected research dimensions, which may influence the direction of future research.

Moreover, the results of our qualitative research with the workers confirm, supplement or explain the results that derived from the interviews with unions' chairpersons. In-depth qualitative research using semi-structured questions was conducted with the chairpersons of the unions representing the pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector (fourteen questions).

The explanatory sequential mixed-method design was implemented with employees from January to December 2019 (12 months) in Greece. The research was conducted in person and the same sample of workers were used in both the quantitative and qualitative research. More specifically, the sample consisted of 365 pseudo-contracted workers: 86.7% (317) worked in Athens, 7.8% (31) worked in Thessaloniki, and 5.5% (31) in Patras. The sample included 272 women (74.5%) and 93 men (25.5%). The employees' ages ranged from 23 to 59, with an average age of 38 years. Regarding their educational background, 66.4% were university graduates (see Appendices A, B, C). The duration of the interviews with the employees were 60 minutes. The time allocated for the completion of

⁴⁴ J. W. Creswell & V. L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

⁴⁵ See Braun & V. Clarke, Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

J. W. Creswell, *Research in Education: Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, 2nd Greek ed., scientific editing C. Tsarmpatzoudis. Athens: Pedio, 2016.

C. Teddlie and A. Tashakkori, *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009.

A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie, eds., *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010.

the questionnaire with the employees, closed-ended questions (quantitative research) were 30-35 minutes and the questionnaire with open-ended questions (qualitative research) lasted approximately 25-30 minutes. We tried to keep the duration as initially set to avoid exhausting the respondents and to develop a friendly mood for cooperation.

3.2 Qualitative Research with the Unions

Separate in-depth qualitative research was conducted with the representatives of pseudo-contracted workers, specifically with two chairpersons representing the unions of pseudo-contracted workers. The qualitative research on which this article focuses on highlights issues related to unionism and industrial relations of pseudo-contracted workers employed as in-house outsourced workers in Banking. All surveys were conducted in person.

Specifically, interviews were conducted with the chairman of a sector-level Union of Leased Personnel in the Banking Sector (SYDAPIT) and with a chairman of a business-level union representing employees in a large, well-known pseudo-contracting company (alias "X").⁴⁶ The interviews with the chairpersons were conducted from 2019-2020. The interviews took place in person at the Prefecture of Attica. A "purposeful sampling" technique was employed with these union representatives (Chairpersons). In this process, the researchers intentionally selected individuals and locations to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic.⁴⁷ Each interview with the union representatives in the qualitative research lasted approximately 40 minutes.

In this qualitative research, interviews with the union chairpersons were held in person and guided by semi-structured open-ended questions that aimed to avoid limiting the opinions/views/perceptions of the respondents. To clarify, semi-structured or partially structured questions were specified in advance, but the order and structure could be changed and amendments were possible depending on the course of the conversation.⁴⁸ Semi-structured questions in interviews are a flexible

⁴⁶ To be mentioned that in order to avoid reference to the name of the pseudo contracting company, it is referred to by an alias.

⁴⁷ J. W. Creswell, Research in Education: *Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, op.cit.

⁴⁸ J. W. Creswell, Research in Education: *Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, op.cit.

strategy of disclosure, as they offer flexibility both to the interviewer and the respondent and facilitate the flow of interaction between them.⁴⁹ Moreover, semi-structured questions allow respondents to reference numerous experiences.⁵⁰

3.3 Quantitative Research

There are no available data from Eurostat for the in-house outsourced/pseudo-contracted workers performing their tasks at the premises of the user undertaking, which makes it difficult to know the real size of this category. Thus, we conducted our own primary research. The sample of the quantitative research contained 365 workers from Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras. The same sample was also used for the qualitative research.

Our quantitative research, which was part of explanatory sequential mixed methods design, was based on a novel methodology. Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), which is helpful in cases of hidden or hard-to-reach populations and when random sampling is either difficult or impossible, was used. It is a method employed when no official lists or records exist regarding the population researched, thus rendering standard sampling impossible.⁵¹ From 2011 and on, the RDS methodology has been applied

N. Kyriazi, *Sociological Research: Critical Review of Methods and Techniques*, 2nd ed. Athens: Pedio, 2011.

A. Lydaki, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. Athens: Kastaniotis, 2012.

S. MacDonald & H. Headlam, *Research Methods Handbook: Introductory Guide to Research Methods for Social Research*. Manchester: Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2009.

J. Mason, *Conducting a Qualitative Research*, trans. N. Kyriazi. Athens: Pedio, 2011.

G. Tsiolis, *Methods and Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Social Research*. Athens: Kritiki, 2014.

⁴⁹ N. Kyriazi, *Sociological Research: Critical Review of Methods and Techniques*, op.cit.

G. Tsiolis, *Methods and Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Social Research*, op.cit.

⁵⁰ Th. Iosifidis & M. Spyridakis, *Qualitative Social Research: Methodological Approaches and Data Analyses*. Athens: Kritiki, 2006.

N. Kyriazi, *Sociological Research: Critical Review of Methods and Techniques*, op.cit.

G. Tsiolis, *Methods and Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Social Research*, op.cit.

⁵¹ D. D. Heckathorn, Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations, *Social Problems* 44 (1997): 174–199.

D. D. Heckathorn, R. S. Broadhead, & B. Sergeyev, A Methodology for Reducing Respondent Duplication and Impersonation in Samples of Hidden Populations, *Journal of Drug Issues* 31 (2001): 543–564.

Lucie Leon, Don Des Jarlais, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, & Yann Le Strat, Update on Respondent-Driven Sampling: Theory and Practical Considerations for Studies of Persons Who Inject Drugs, *Methodological Innovations* 9 (2016): 1–9.

in over 600 studies, mainly in fields like health, culture, and arts.⁵² Heckathorn was the first to use the method in a study related to injecting drug users in the USA in 1997. Since then, it has been employed in studies with hard-to-reach populations, such as with immigrants, the homeless, sex workers, and patients suffering from chronic diseases.

The RDS methodology was chosen because pseudo-contracted workers in Greece constitute a hidden or hard-to-reach population. Their details are not officially recorded and random sampling is impossible. Unfortunately, the fact that these pseudo-contracted workers have not yet been empirically studied narrows the possibility for discussion and comparison to results of previous studies. Our research on pseudo-contracted workers in the Greek banking sector is the first to apply the Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) methodology internationally for the study of pseudo-contracted/in house outsourced workers.⁵³ This novelty introduces a new methodology approach in the field of labor analysis and offers a reliable tool for the study of pseudo-contracted workers, even in other EU countries that lack of officially recorded data and where random sampling is not feasible. Moreover, this methodology can be used on a wider basis in analyzing the labor market to study hard-to-reach populations.

According to existing literature, the main element for correctly implementing the RDS methodology is that the researcher follows three steps. These steps in our research were based on the pseudo-contracted workers of the Banking sector.⁵⁴

R. Magnani, K. Sabin, T. Saidel, & D. Heckathorn, Review of Sampling Hard-to-Reach and Hidden Populations for HIV Surveillance, *AIDS* 19 (2005): S67–S72.

M. Spreen, Rare Populations, Hidden Populations, and Link-Tracing Designs: What and Why? *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 36 (1992): 34–58.

⁵² Lucie Leon, Don Des Jarlais, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, & Yann Le Strat, Update on Respondent-Driven Sampling: Theory and Practical Considerations for Studies of Persons Who Inject Drugs, op.cit.

⁵³ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

⁵⁴ Lucie Leon, Don Des Jarlais, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, & Yann Le Strat, Update on Respondent-Driven Sampling: Theory and Practical Considerations for Studies of Persons Who Inject Drugs, op.cit.

Lisa G. Johnston, Avi J. Hakim, Samantha Dittrich, Janet Burnett, Evelyn Kim, & Richard G. White, A Systematic Review of Published Respondent-Driven Sampling Surveys Collecting Behavioral and Biologic Data, *AIDS and Behavior* 20 (2016): 1754–1776.

Guri Tyldum & Lisa Johnston, Applying Respondent Driven Sampling to Migrant Populations. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

The first step is seeds selection. Studies using the RDS methodology start with a small number of seeds (3-15 persons). Seeds are made of different individuals who are well-networked in the field being research. It is not compulsory that seeds are selected randomly. In our research with contracted workers, the initial seeds were thirteen (13).

The second step includes interviews and further recruitment of individuals. To clarify, the seeds first complete their interviews and are then given a set number of coupons in order to recruit more people.

These people belong in the same category as the initial seeds (e.g. same professions) and are possibly interested in participating in the research (wave 1). Thus, the RDS methodology is applied in populations that are linked (social network - colleagues). Then, the newly recruited persons of wave 1 complete their interviews and recruit other interested persons (wave 2). In their turn, those recruited in wave 2 complete their interviews and recruit others (wave 3), and so on until the desired sample is reached. Our research contained 19 waves.

From the onset of the research, the researcher should thoroughly check the individuals regarding whom has recommended who. The main idea of the RDS methodology is that seeds yield random “sprouts” (meaning new members of the sample). The sample should be large enough and should also maintain long referral chains (new sprouts) without repeating the sample participants.

In the third step, the researcher asks the participants how many people they know and come in daily contact with (e.g. workers of the same profession). The researcher aims to identify the number of their social contacts by asking this question (social network).

The collection of primary data was completed with a sample of 365 vulnerable bank workers (pseudo-contracted workers) from Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras. In a population that, according to estimations of the unions, amount to around 4,000 individuals, simple random sampling requires a sample of approximately 180 individuals for a confidence level of 95%. However, as Salganik⁵⁵ notes, for the RDS researchers to be not only unbiased but also statistically efficient, a larger sample is required due to the design effect, which often is around 2. For that reason, a sample of 365 individuals were selected to represent the target population, thus limiting bias and enhancing the reliability of assessments.

⁵⁵ M. Salganik, Variance Estimation, Design Effects, and Sample Size Calculations for Respondent-Driven Sampling. *Journal of Urban Health* 83 (2006): 98–112.

The RDS (Respondent-Driven Sampling) methodology uses specialized statistical estimators aimed at reducing bias during data collection. Estimators aim at compensating two main bias sources.

The first source is related to different sizes of the participants' social networks. More specifically, individuals with a limited social network (i.e. who know less people) are allocated lower weight in calculating the estimators of the RDS Analyst compared to people with wider social networks.

The second source concerns deviations in the recruitment process, especially due to homophily – meaning the inclination of participants to recruit people that look like them and are within the same main social or demographic characteristics, such as race or educational level. In such cases, the data are weighted accordingly to reduce the chances of systematic bias from the recruitment of very similar individuals.

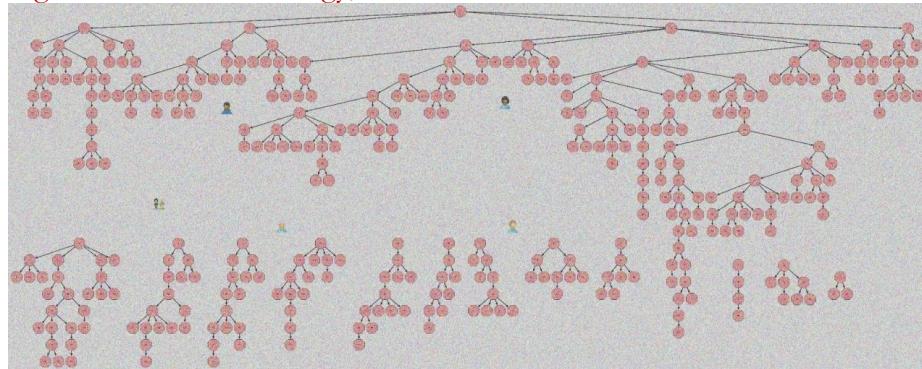
In this study on pseudo-contracted workers, the homophily effect was assessed for several characteristics. The homophily value was equal to 1, thus the impact was considered to be negligible. When a characteristic is examined and the homophily value is over 1, that means there is a higher homophily impact.

Calculations were conducted by using three estimators: RDS I, RDS II and RDS-SS, which were implemented with the RDS Analyst statistical software in this study.

The detailed description of the quantitative research and data processing exceeds the objectives of this article, which focuses on the presentation of the qualitative research results. For a more detailed analysis of the methodology and the results of the quantitative research, see articles by Rompoti & Ioannides.⁵⁶ For more details regarding our methodology, see Figure 1.

⁵⁶ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," *op. cit.*

Figure 1. The Methodology, RDS.



3.4 Questions and Data Processing in Qualitative Research

The parts of the qualitative research, both on the pseudo-contracted workers and the chairpersons, included questions on unionism and industrial relations of the in-house outsourced workers /pseudo-contracted employees. The findings from the interviews are presented by topic to maintain consistency and the sequence of results. Contact with the chairperson of the workers' union from the large pseudo-contracting company (alias "X") aimed at collecting some useful insight on the union as well as on the method of "pseudo-contracting." It also aimed to understand how these flexible forms of employment have affected the working conditions of pseudo-contracted workers and those of the permanent workers in the Banking Sector.

As far as the technical method employed, a tape recorder was used from the beginning as the main tool to accurately record the discussions with the workers and the unions' chairpersons, only after acquiring the consent of those who had agreed to participate. Our notes from the recording of the interviews proved to be an important tool for those who did not consent to the recording of their interview. The transcription stage was a time-consuming process, as it required a lot more time than was spent to complete each interview.

Primary data of the qualitative research with the workers and chairpersons of the unions were processed in consecutive stages following the logic and structure of Thematic Analysis as described by Braun and Clarke.⁵⁷ First,

⁵⁷ V. Braun & V. Clarke, Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. V. Braun & V. Clarke, Thematic Analysis, in APA

the primary data for analysis was prepared and organized. Second, the data was investigated and codified. Third, the codified data was used to create thematic sections. Fourth, representation, reporting, and interpretation of qualitative findings happened, aimed at highlighting the employment relations and the main problems that workers are facing. Fifth, the accuracy of the findings was validified.⁵⁸ It is worth noting that the results contain word-for-word quotes from the interviews. This was considered of the utmost importance for the conceptualization and interpretation of the primary qualitative data. The use of exact quotes makes the narration more vivid and descriptive.

In qualitative research with both union chairpersons and employees, data were processed by the researchers themselves and not using any software. The aim was to maintain direct contact with primary data and record the complexity of the experiences that workers and unions faced. As Morison & Moir (1998) point out, researchers retain the full right to carry out research and study without the use of any computer software. Quality control criteria were used in the qualitative study both with the unions' chairpersons and the pseudo-contracted workers to ensure reliability and the validity of data. Researchers complied with the quality control criteria for qualitative research as set by Lincoln & Guba⁵⁹ and Mertens.⁶⁰ To be specific: First, the researchers' engagement in the research field was prolonged, meaningful and persistent. Second, they were debriefed by peers and specialists in the field of contracted workers (e.g. information from Labor Institute of the General Confederation of Greek Workers INE/GSEE). Third, they were validated by members of the researched

Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, ed. H. Cooper. Washington, DC: *American Psychological Association*, 2012, 51–77.

V. Braun & V. Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* London: SAGE, 2013.

⁵⁸ V. Braun and V. Clarke, Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, op.cit.

V. Braun & V. Clarke, Thematic Analysis, in APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, op.cit.

V. Braun & V. Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*, op.cit.

E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

J. W. Creswell, *Research in Education: Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, op.cit.

J. W. Creswell & V. L. Plano Clark, Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research, op.cit.

⁵⁹ Y. S. Lincoln & E. Guba. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: SAGE Publications, 1985.

⁶⁰ D. Mertens, *Transformative Research and Evaluation*. New York: Guilford Press, 2009.

group (e.g. member check, informant feedback, respondent validation). Fourth, they applied triangulation. They conducted qualitative and quantitative research with chairpersons from the unions and workers to check the findings and draw more documented conclusions. Fifth, they applied investigator triangulation; in the study with pseudo-contracted workers, more than one researcher participated in the interpretation of the data to reduce subjectivity. Sixth, the reliability of the thematic patterns was verified through information saturation, since the continuous reappearance of specific issues-topics on the part of the respondents indicated that no new issues arose, thus confirming stability, reliability and validity of the findings.

3.5 Ethics and Conduct

The collection of primary data in our research, both quantitative and qualitative, followed the code of ethics and conduct.⁶¹ The use of code numbers instead of names on the questionnaires ensured the anonymity of the respondents and established our respect towards the pseudo-contracted workers. Out of respect, we asked the respondents to choose the date, time, and place for the interviews, which were mainly near their workplaces. Before asking any questions, the objective and duration of the interviews were mentioned to ensure transparency and tackle any reservations the respondents had. Workers were free to leave at any time during the process and faced no pressure.⁶² Finally, we committed to share research results to the respondents in our effort to offer useful data both to workers and to employment policymakers. The entire procedure was based on respect, morality, and confidentiality. Quality control criteria were applied both in the quantitative and qualitative research to enhance transparency, objectivity, reliability, and validity of the research.

⁶¹ J. W. Creswell, Research in Education: *Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, op.cit.

C. Robson, *Real World Research*, trans. K. Michalopoulou. Athens: Gutenberg, 2010.

⁶² J. W. Creswell, Research in Education: *Design, Implementation, and Assessment of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, op.cit.

S. S. Manning & C. E. Gaul, The Ethics of Informed Consent: A Critical Variable in the Self-Determination of Health and Mental Health Clients. *Social Work in Health Care* 25, no. 3 (1997): 103–117, https://doi.org/10.1300/J010v25n03_09. C. Robson, *Real World Research*, op.cit. G. Tsolitis, *Methods and Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Social Research*, op.cit.

4. Results of the Primary Qualitative Study

Introduction: Trade Unionism and Pseudo-Contracted Workers in the Banking Sector

This section presents the results of the qualitative research conducted with the union chairpersons and the pseudo-contracted employees in the banking sector. Questions regarding unionism and industrial relations were addressed (see Appendices A, B, C). These employees work on the premises of banks (in-house outsourced workers), and it has already been established that they are pseudo-contracted employees.⁶³ To clarify, contracting companies are usually pseudo-contracting firms and their employees are pseudo-contracted, as they exhibit characteristics of leased workers employed through Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs).

4.1. Results by thematic section based on the interviews with the chairpersons of the unions representing the pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector

1. The Evolution of In-House Outsourcing in the Banking Sector

The Chairman of SYDAPTT and the chairman of the sole business-level union in a large pseudo-contracting company (alias 'X') report that the method of in-house outsourcing appeared around 2000 and began to skyrocket during the economic crisis (2008), maintaining an upward trend (2020). Approximately 4,000 in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted workers are employed in banks across Greece.

2. Unionization, Members and Collective Fights of Pseudo-Contracted Employees

The union chairpersons report that they managed to organize collectively during the economic crisis and are able to freely advocate for their rights through the establishment of two unions, despite the severe impact of the crisis on the workforce (e.g., layoffs, wage cuts, individualization of industrial relations, and threats from employers discouraging union membership) and the shrinking power of unions in general. According to the chairperson of SYDAPTT, the sector-level union of pseudo-

⁶³ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, "Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece," op. cit.

contracted workers was founded in January 2013 and has 500 members; all of which work as office employees in the banking sector. According to the chairman of the sole business-level union of a major pseudo-contracting company (alias 'X'), the union was founded in January 2015 and consists of 150 office employees in the banking sector (data up to 2020).

3. The Role and Membership of SYDAPTT and Business-Level Unions

The chairperson of SYDAPTT stated that theirs is a first-level union and all employees under indirect employment are entitled to join, i.e., those working for businesses that lease personnel to the banking sector. More specifically, they can either be employees leased through TWAs or employees working for Businesses Service Providers (in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted). Employees working through 'genuine leasing' (subsidiaries belonging to a group of banking businesses) are also included.

Moreover, SYDAPTT representatives are entitled to participate in elections and vote, alongside other first-level unions, to elect their representatives at the district level for second- and third-level labor unions such as GSEE.

The chairpersons of the two unions highlight the collective struggle of in-house outsourced workers, particularly pseudo-contracted and permanent employees. As the president of the major pseudo-contracting company known as 'X' characteristically states:

"Permanent employees must fight alongside pseudo-contracted employees, advocating for equal rights. As long as contracting businesses exist, the salaries and rights of both permanent and pseudo-contracted employees will continue to shrink. Therefore, the issue of pseudo-contracted workers should not solely be their problem, but it should also concern permanent bank employees, who have witnessed a 50% reduction in job positions".

(Extract from an interview with the chairman of a major pseudo-contracting company, alias 'X'.).

4. Employment Conditions, Requests, Complaints, and Inequalities Between Permanent and Pseudo-Contracted Workers

The two chairpersons stated that the day when “pseudo-contracted” employees will fully replace permanent ones is not far off. As the chairperson of SYDAPTT union pointed out:

“Many departments and services are staffed exclusively by 'pseudo-contracted' employees, with one manager supervising them” (SYDAPTT chairperson, interview extract).

Consequently, according to the testimonials of the unions’ representatives (i.e. the chairpersons), it is obvious that the “pseudo-contracted” employees, who have been providing services for several years in banks cover fixed and permanent needs and substitute permanent employees as part of the user undertaking.

As the SYDAPTT chairperson states, “pseudo-contracted” workers employed as office employees work in several services and undertake various tasks. These include call centers, accounting departments, legal services, customer support services, consumer and housing loans, and loans in default. The SYDAPIT chairperson stated:

“Job positions in call centers are filled at ninety percent by 'pseudo-contracted' employees. However, there are many others serving in other job positions across various departments in the banks. There are also such employees at the bank stores, working as cashiers...” (SYDAPTT chairperson, interview extract).

As for the employment terms of pseudo-contracted employees, the chairpersons of the unions inform us that these are set according to the national general collective agreements (EGSEE). These agreements apply to employees throughout the country. On the contrary, the employment terms for permanent bank employees or permanent employees of bank subsidiaries are set according to the sector or business-level collective agreement. As the SYDAPTT chairperson stated:

“You usually see three to four cashiers in a bank store. Two are most likely 'pseudo-contracted,' and the other two are permanent bank employees. They do exactly the same job, but their employment terms as well as their salaries are different. The two 'pseudo-contracted' persons are paid based on the national general collective agreement, while the permanent bank employees are covered by the sector-level collective agreement.”

As becomes apparent, the pay inequalities are vast, with salary differences being as much as double or more. These are “two-tier” employees, who have the same skills and do exactly the same job, in the same job position” (SYDAPTT chairperson, interview extract).

The large salary inequalities between the pseudo-contracted and permanent employees of the Banking Sector are also confirmed by the results of the quantitative research, which is part of the explanatory sequential mixed method with 365 employees.⁶⁴

According to the SYDAPTT chairperson, their request to join the Federation of Bank Employee Unions (OTOE) as bank employees was rejected. OTOE does not recognize them as employees of the bank, and therefore, the employees contracted through Business Service Providers are only members of the Federation of Private Employees of Greece, [“OIYE” in Greek].

According to the chairpersons of the unions, namely the sector-level SYDAPTT and the business-level union of a major contracting undertaking (with pseudonym “X”), they have lodged several complaints with the Ministry of labor & Social Affairs and the Hellenic labor Inspectorate (SEPE), mainly on the grounds of unfair dismissals, abusive relocations, prohibition of participation in unions, and obstruction in defending their labor rights.

However, the chairpersons of the “pseudo-contracted” employees, both of the sector and business-level unions, informed us that up until 2020, they have not sought recourse from the Mediation and Arbitration Organization (OMED).

5. Legal Issues: Fictitious Contracts and the Circumvention of Labor Laws

The representatives of the unions, including the chairperson of SYDAPTT and the representative of a business-level union of a major pseudo-contracting undertaking (alias “X”), describe these agreements as “fictitious” contracts since the supervision of the project is always carried out by the banks and not by the contractors. All union representatives mentioned that the right to manage and supervise (e.g., giving instructions, issuing orders, checking the project) is exercised by the user-company (Banks) rather than the pseudo-contracting undertaking. They

⁶⁴ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

also stated that when any issue arises concerning the project or the services provided by these employees, banks are accountable for the latter, not the pseudo-contractors (Business Service Providers).

Moreover, they emphasized in their interviews that the workers using the equipment and hardware of the user businesses is concrete evidence of the “fictitious” nature of these contracts. The union chairpersons underlined that in many departments, “pseudo-contracted” employees work alongside and in teams with the permanent staff from user undertakings. Additionally, they pointed out that pseudo-contracted employees do not change job positions; instead, they remain in the same roles for years, covering ongoing and permanent needs of the user undertaking.

Given this, unions openly argue that these agreements constitute fictitious contracting between pseudo-contractors and user undertakings (bank), as the pseudo-contracting companies often operate “unlawfully” as temporary work agencies (TWAs). They report that the managerial and supervisory rights over pseudo-contracted workers are, in practice, exercised by user undertakings (bank) instead of pseudo-contracting companies, who should actually be legally responsible for them.

Consequently, contracted workers are effectively pseudo-contracted workers, as they share the same characteristics with “leased” workers employed through TWAs. The chairpersons of the unions claimed that employers, “under the guise/cloak” of project or service contracts, bypass the salary equality provisions that apply to workers leased through TWAs (Law 4052/2012). This means they have found a way to circumvent the Greek national Law 4052/2012, which incorporates the European Directive 2008/104/EC, ensuring wage equality between leased and permanent workers for as long as the leased workers are employed by the user undertaking.

The union chairpersons’ claims are further supported by the results of quantitative research conducted as part of an explanatory sequential mixed-method study involving 365 employees. A series of questions were asked regarding the distinguishing features between pseudo-contracted workers and those leased through TWAs. The findings confirmed that in-house outsourced workers/pseudo-contracted employees at Greek banks share the same characteristics with workers leased through TWAs, reinforcing their classification as pseudo-contracted workers.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” *op. cit.*

6. Impact of Legislative Changes on Pseudo-Contracted Employees

The representatives of the above unions stated in their interviews that a negative development in the labor sector is the government's decision to abolish two positive measures that had been enacted by the previous administration.

More specifically, the first measure concerns the law on contract termination and the requirement for justified dismissals (Article 48, Law 4611/2019).⁶⁶ The second measure pertains to the joint liability of a contractor (Business Service Provider) and a user undertaking (Article 9, Law 4554/2018).⁶⁷

According to the union representatives, all employees, and especially "pseudo-contracted" workers, will be negatively affected. As they argued, pseudo-contracting businesses will now be able to proceed with dismissals more easily, without solid justification, whenever and however they choose. Additionally, they emphasized that "pseudo-contracted" workers are in a precarious position when it comes to defending their rights and demands as they find themselves caught between their employer (the pseudo-contracting business) and the user undertaking. This vulnerability becomes particularly concerning in cases of wage and insurance abuses, such as salary deductions or unpaid dismissal compensation.

7. SYDAPTT Union Victories

With regard to the SYDAPTT union's achievements, its chairperson highlighted several significant victories, including the successful conversion of some fixed-term contracts into indefinite-term contracts, the reinstatement of dismissed pregnant employees, the prevention of salary reductions for cleaning personnel (e.g., in a major Greek bank), and the establishment of minimum wage and leave entitlements for "pseudo-contracted" employees and bank security guards.

More specifically, the intervention of the union ensured that security guards receive the statutory minimum wage along with statutory overtime pay. Furthermore, the practice of requiring security guards to work for 10 consecutive days without a day off was abolished, and since 2019, they have also benefited from an 11% minimum wage increase.

⁶⁶ Law 4611/2019, Article 48 (abolished), Fair Grounds for Dismissal. *Greek Government Gazette*, no. 4611/2019.

⁶⁷ Law 4554/2018, Article 9 (abolished), Liability of Awarding Body, Contractor, and Subcontractor vis-à-vis the Employees, *Greek Government Gazette*, no. 4554/2018.

The SYDAPTT chairperson also emphasized one of the union's most significant victories in favor of "pseudo-contracted" employees, marked by two landmark court rulings. They referred to a pivotal legal case that led to the first judicial recognition in Greece of "fictitious" contracting. Notably, 20 years after the introduction of the contracting system, Greek courts delivered two crucial judgments—one at the end of 2019 and the other in early 2020—confirming for the first time that contracting arrangements were "fictitious" and that the affected employees were actually "pseudo-contracted" or "leased workers".

The first ruling was issued in November 2019 by the Single-Member Court of First Instance of Athens, in favor of a woman employed at a call center in Athens. After her dismissal, she exposed both the inappropriate conduct of a major bank's management—where she had been providing her services—and the actions of the pseudo-contracting company that was her official employer. The court ruled that her dismissal had been motivated by resentment and vindictiveness by her employers, ordering the pseudo-contracting company to pay €13,682.72 in compensation—a significant victory for the union. Furthermore, the court determined that the contracting arrangement was "fictitious" since the bank, rather than the pseudo-contracting company, had been exercising managerial and supervisory control over the employee's work.

The second ruling was delivered in January 2020 by the Court of Appeals of Athens, which ruled in favor of an employee dismissed without cause from a subsidiary of a major Greek bank. The court formally recognized that the actual employer was the user undertaking to whom she had been providing her services, while the pseudo-contracting company—her nominal employer—was merely a façade for legal purposes. As a result, the court concluded that the employee was a pseudo-contracted worker and, in reality, a "leased worker".

According to the SYDAPTT chairperson, these legal victories validated the collective fights of the SYDAPTT union and set a crucial precedent in the fight for labor rights.

8. Conclusion: The Future of Pseudo-Contracted Workers in Banking

The phenomenon of pseudo-contracting is expected to increase rapidly in the future. According to union representatives, user undertakings will abdicate all responsibility, reiterating the same claim they have made for the past thirty years: "*They are not our employees, and legally, we are not entitled to intervene in third-party businesses*".

Table 1. Main findings per thematic section drawn from the interviews with the unions' chairpersons

Thematic Section	Key Findings
1. The Evolution of In-House Outsourcing in the Banking Sector	In house-outsourcing in Greece: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First appeared in 2000 • Rapidly expanded after the onset of the crisis in 2008 • Followed an upward course till 2020 • 4.000 workers are employed in banks.
2. Unionization, Members and Collective Fights of Pseudo-Contracted Employees	Despite the anti-unionism pressures, two unions of pseudo-contracted workers were established during the crisis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2013: Sector-level union SYDAPTT, (500 members) • 2015: Business-level union (alias X), (150 members)
3. The Role and Membership of SYDAPTT and Business-Level Unions	SYDAPTT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are workers that are indirectly employed (e.g. leased through TWAs, in-house outsourced/pseudo-contracted workers, "genuinely" leased workers) • Participated in union-level elections SYDAPTT & Business-level union: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They underline the need for solidarity and equality between permanent and pseudo-contracted workers in Banks
4. Employment Conditions, Requests, Complaints and Inequalities Between Permanent and Pseudo-Contracted workers	Pseudo-contracted workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They do the same job as the permanent employees but under more unfavorable conditions • They have high pay inequalities compared to the permanent employees of the user undertaking • They will fully replace the permanent employees in the user undertaking
5. Legal Issues: Fictitious Contracts and the Circumvention of Labor	Trade Unions report that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pseudo-contracted workers are

Laws	<p>under the direct supervision of the banks and not of the contracting businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pseudo-contracted workers use the equipment of the banks and not of the contracting businesses • Pseudo-contracted workers never change posts and roles; thus, they cover fixed and ongoing needs at the banks • Contracting businesses conclude “fictitious” project agreements with banks, thus covering up that these workers are leased through TWAs • The Greek Law 4052/2012 and the European Directive 2008/104/EC on pay equality between permanent employees and workers leased through TWAs are violated
6. Impact of Legislative Changes on Pseudo-Contracted Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The abolition of protective provisions in labor legislation (such as those concerning justified dismissal and joint liability between the contractor and the user company) weakens the ability of pseudo-contracted workers to challenge unfair dismissals and creates legal ambiguity regarding the responsibility of the actual employer
7. SYDAPTT Union Victories	<p>SYDAPTT achieved significant victories, inducing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court judgments that accept the complaints regarding “fictitious” agreements, • Re-hiring of dismissed workers and • Ensuring pay rights for the security personnel
8. Conclusion: The Future of Pseudo-Contracted Workers in Banking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pseudo-contracting will rapidly increase in the future • Banks renounce their responsibilities, as they do not incorporate them in their human resources

Source: Data from primary qualitative empirical study, processed by the researchers.

4.2 Common results by thematic section from the interviews of the unions' chairpersons and the pseudo-contracted employees of the banking sector

1. Salary Discrepancies Between Permanent and Pseudo-Contracted Workers

As highlighted in interviews with the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the union representing the contracting company (alias 'X'), and several pseudo-contracted workers, a significant challenge they face is the considerable pay disparity between permanent and pseudo-contracted employees. This pre-existing issue was further exacerbated by labor market reforms implemented during the memorandum period. As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT markedly stated and which was corroborated by others: *'The pay disparity between a pseudo-contracted and a permanent employee is at least twofold. Moreover, the pay gap between a pseudo-contracted worker and a high-ranking executive, such as a "golden boy" manager, is overwhelming, reaching a ratio of one to seventy'* (Interview excerpt, Chairman of SYDAPTT).

2. Non-Payment of Accrued Wages

As highlighted by both the Chairperson of SYDAPIT and several pseudo-contracted workers, a significant issue is the non-payment of accrued wages, particularly among pseudo-contracted cleaning and security staff.

3. Lack of Career Advancement for Pseudo-Contracted Employees

A significant issue highlighted by both the Chairman of SYDAPIT and by employees during the interviews is the disparity in career advancement between permanent and pseudo-contracted workers. Pseudo-contracted employees are deprived of opportunities for professional growth. As noted by numerous employees, as well as the Chairpersons of SYDAPIT and the business-level union of the pseudo-contracting company (alias "X"), there are cases where pseudo-contracted workers have been employed in banks for 15 to 20 years without any career progression. All respondents emphasized that this stagnation negatively impacts both their financial earnings, which remain low, and their overall professional development. These findings are further supported by the results of the

quantitative research conducted as part of the explanatory sequential mixed-method study involving 365 employees.⁶⁸

4. Discriminatory Practices Regarding Maternity Leave

Another problem highlighted by the Chairman of SYDAPTT, the Chairman of the business-level union of the pseudo-contracting company (“X”), and the interviewed employees, is the discrimination against female employees in relation to maternity. Specifically, it is at the discretion of the employer to grant cumulative maternity leave. Furthermore, when it comes to “pseudo-contracted” workers, new mothers are not entitled to the reduced working hours. Also, employees who gave birth were dismissed after the end of the 18-month post-partum period, which is the period during which an employer has no right to dismiss a new mother. As employees characteristically report from their experience, when they faced the issue of pregnancy, they were dismissed by employers under the pretext that they would not be able to cope with their work in their condition.

5. Health Benefits Disparities for Pseudo-Contracted Workers

Another very important problem underlined by both the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairman of the business-level union of the pseudo-contracting company (X), as well as several employees, concerns the huge differences in health benefits. As they characteristically stated: “*Pseudo-contracted employees*” are not integrated into the TYPET health institution like the rest of the permanent employees of the banking sector and consequently the pseudo-contracted workers have no access to the TYPET clinics.” Several employees also mentioned the discrimination regarding other benefits, e.g. transportation by corporate buses only if there are vacant seats, which usually are covered for permanent employees.

⁶⁸ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

R. Magnani, K. Sabin, T. Saidel, & D. Heckathorn, Review of Sampling Hard-to-Reach and Hidden Populations for HIV Surveillance, op. cit.

6. Human Dignity Violations and Adverse Working Conditions

Some “pseudo-contracted” workers reported a series of cases and events that violate human dignity. As a standard example, several workers spoke about a refusal from their pseudo-contracting company to grant their employees permission to attend a colleague’s funeral during work hours. Other cases reported to us concerned highly adverse working conditions in call centers located in a specific area of Athens. As many pseudo-contracted workers characteristically stated: *“They time the breaks, the visits to the toilet, the back office...”* Other employees reported, *“They time every call we make...”* and *“they forbid the use of personal mobile phones at the office, resulting in us not being able to communicate, not being reachable even if an emergency occurs for our family”* etc. (excerpts from interviews with employees). The Chairperson of SYDAPTT mentioned the dismissal of a “pseudo-contracted” employee from the contracting company after she reported offensive attitude from the manager of the user undertaking—the threats, provocations, the *“flying”* files, and the written insults she had received. The employee, however, addressed the issue to the pseudo-contracting company (fictitious employer) in vain and when she reported the incident, according to what the Chairman of SYDAPTT states, she received the following response: *“Did something happen? It must have just been your idea. Think it over a bit... We're closing the issue (i.e., the mouth) and moving on “, as ... (X ..name of Bank)... is one of the largest clients of our contracting business”*. A few days later, as the Chairman of SYDAPTT claimed in the interview, the pseudo-contracted employee was unfortunately fired.

Furthermore, the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the union of the pseudo-contracting company (alias X), as well as several employees reported incidents of colleagues being victims of sexual harassment and “bullying.”

As the Chairman of SYDAPTT characteristically stated and others confirmed:

“This is how the 'pseudo-contracted' bank employees are treated. Those who don't reveal the highly adverse working conditions and the personal insults continue to work. They consider us people from another world...second or even third class...they diminish us, they treat us as slaves.” (excerpt from an interview with the Chairman of SYDAPTT).

7. Payroll Mistakes and Discrimination in Remuneration

Both the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the union of the pseudo-contracting company (X), as well as several employees reported

the frequent mistakes in payrolls—mistakes that are “accidentally” to the detriment of the employees. In addition, several employees in the interviews claimed that the managers of their user undertaking discourage them from claiming what has been illegally withheld.

8. Dismissals and Issues regarding Sick Leave

Another important problem that arose for employees involved sick leave. As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT reported, employees who have taken many sick leaves were laid off, despite the presentation of required doctors' documentation. Also, the Chairperson of SYDAPTT herself told us about the case of an employee who requested leave from her boss because she was not feeling well. Unfortunately, the boss refused. The employee was admitted, whilst enduring severe pain, to the hospital that same evening for surgery.

9. Issues with Fixed-Term Contracts and Employee Recycling

The Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the union of the contracting company (X), and several employees highlighted problems that “pseudo-contracted” employees face regarding fixed-term contracts, which are continuously renewed year after year. They also mentioned the “recycling” of employees, the adverse working conditions, and the intimidating behavior of bank executives.

The SYDAPTT Chairperson stated: *“There are individuals working for three to four years, signing contracts with a term of one to three months, changing the contracting undertaking depending on the project offer that the bank receives.”* This result is also backed up by the results of the quantitative research which was part of the explanatory sequential mixed method in 365 employees.⁶⁹ More specifically, 23.8% of the workers are employed with constant renewals of fixed-term agreements, with an average term of 4 years of employment. The remaining 76.2% work under indefinite term agreements, with an average service of 10 years, and they cover fixed and ongoing needs of the banks while being trapped in “pseudo-contracting,” without having the opportunity to join a banks’ permanent human resources.

⁶⁹ E. Rompoti & A. Ioannides, “Pseudo contracted workers as a means of bypassing labor law in Greece,” op. cit.

R. Magnani, K. Sabin, T. Saidel, & D. Heckathorn, Review of Sampling Hard-to-Reach and Hidden Populations for HIV Surveillance, op. cit.

10. The Impact of Fixed-Term Contracts on Job Security

The SYDAPTT Chairperson stated that Banks, under the pretext that their employees do not perform their jobs well, recycle them again and again with fixed-term contracts through the pseudo-contracting companies. The same Chairperson states:

"The situation is really bad, one month "leased" to a company, the next month to another. They "lease" you one month and "let you go" the next one, by sending a text message. These people are continuously under the fear of dismissal, they live in anxiety and constant insecurity" (interview extract of the SYDAPTT Chairperson).

11. Obstruction of Trade Union Freedom and Layoffs

Some other important problems highlighted by the Chairpersons and many of the employees interviewed are dismissals of an employee when joining a union and being elected to the Board of Directors of a union. These people stated that this is a clear case of obstruction of trade union freedom. They also reported blackmail and the "filing" of employee's personal data by pseudo-contracting companies. They also shared cases where a union is prohibited from distributing leaflets or holding meetings at the workplace. According to the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, union meetings are only allowed outside working hours.

12. Exploitation of Pseudo-Contracted Security Personnel

Furthermore, the Chairperson of SYDAPTT highlighted a case of pseudo-contracted security personnel who were not given regular leave during the summer months. Specifically, as the president of SYDAPTT stated: *"A well-known pseudo-contracting company that hires security guards was exploiting its employees. The employees were not paid the statutory extra pay for night shifts (twenty-five percent of the salary) nor for work on Sundays (seventy-five percent). It granted annual leave of only ten days instead of the statutory twenty-two (one day off every ten days) and would withhold six euros for each day of leave. Their gross salary was five hundred and fifteen euros".*

13. Layoffs Linked to National Collective Agreements

As the Chairpersons and several of the employees stated in their interviews, there were significant layoffs following the change in the national general collective agreement that took place in early 2012. This change occurred because some pseudo-contracted workers refused to

accept the changes to their working conditions. Consequently, as noted by the respondents, there has been a deregulation of Collective Bargaining and the promotion of individual employment contracts (individualization of employment relations and remuneration). Additionally, all these individuals reported that workers are experiencing salary reductions and a simultaneous decrease in working hours. Specifically, hours and salaries were reduced to avoid further layoffs. However, “reductions and layoffs” still occurred; full-time employees were let go and replaced by part-time workers, who worked only four or five hours a day.

14. Mass Layoffs and Pseudo-Contracting Company Practices

The Chairperson of SYDAPTT also mentioned mass layoffs of many “pseudo-contracted” employees even after the financial crisis was over. Specifically, between the summer of 2019 and January 2020, the dismissal of at least 50 employees at a large bank in Greece is particularly notable.

As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT stated:

“Pseudo-contracting companies are pushing workers into unemployment and social exclusion. They send them home until they need them again... if they need them!!! They often tell them, ‘I’m sorry, your contract is not being renewed... If we need you, we will contact you. We have your phone number.” Workers with serious health issues and financial problems are being laid off. (excerpt from an interview with the Chairman of SYDAPTT).

15. Overtime Practices and Lost Job Opportunities

The issues with overtime (paid or unpaid) were significant. Over a six-month period, the Board of Directors of SYDAPTT calculated fifteen thousand (15,000) overtime hours at a single bank headquarters. The Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the union at a pseudo-contracting company (X), and the employees believe that this overtime accounted for—and still accounts for—lost job positions, as new staff could have been hired instead. Currently, overtime for pseudo-contracted employees has been limited because of union strategies. SYDAPTT is pushing for new employees rather than relying on the overtime of both “pseudo-contracted” workers and other employees.

16. Job Insecurity, Dissatisfaction and Declining Employee Morale

As the Chairpersons and several of the employees interviewed stated, several problems are linked to leave time. Permanent employees always

had priority in selecting the dates for their annual leave, narrowing down the periods for pseudo-contracted worker's leave. Additionally, all the participating employees reported an increase in insecurity, a drop in morale, heightened anxiety, and work-related stress during the crisis. Some employees also claimed that working in shifts and on weekends led to a lack of quality free time and an imbalance between employees' personal and professional lives. As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT and many employees mentioned in interviews, no one knows how many pseudo-contracting companies there are, who they are, what services they provide, why they were established, or when they were established. There is also uncertainty about who they actually serve and who is truly pulling the strings behind them, suggesting a possible close cooperation between pseudo-contracting companies and executives of user undertakings, particularly the banks. As many employees aptly stated:

"Pseudo-contracting businesses are sprouting... like MUSHROOMS."

17. Challenges in Labor Relations and Employee Rights on Permanent Employees and Pseudo-Contracted Employees in the Banking Sector

Both the chairpersons and several of the employees interviewed emphasized that the "voluntary exits" of permanent employees during the economic crisis and beyond have significantly affected pseudo-contracted employees, as they replace permanent employees in full-time jobs, effectively preempting their "hostage" status in this form of employment. As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT argued, unions fear that their employers are trying to replace all permanent bank employees with pseudo-contracted workers. These fears are confirmed in several ways. First, it's confirmed by a large bank's announcement (2020) to transfer eight hundred and fifty (850) permanent bank employees to a third-party contractor for managing non-performing loans. Secondly, threats from management in another powerful bank were angled toward permanent employees, stating that they should accept their transfer to another third-party contractor.

Also, according to the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, a large bank in Greece had already laid off twenty-four (24) permanent employees before January 2020. These are the first layoffs after many years (since the era of the dictatorship).

As the Chairperson of SYDAPTT, the Chairperson of the business-level union of the pseudo-contracting company (X) and several employees argued in their interviews that there are mass layoffs of pseudo-contracted

workers when they are no longer needed and that there are hirings or rehirings with worse working conditions during periods of increased demand for personnel to meet any needs. The increased obligations of pseudo-contracted workers during periods of high demand and their employment under worse working conditions have negatively affected labor relations.

It is worth noting that the Chairperson of SYDAPTT reported that in 2019, 2,656 permanent bank employees in Greece were either directly or indirectly forced to leave their jobs. This is a 6.7% reduction in jobs. Also, permanent bank job positions have shrunk by 44% in the last ten years. This happened either due to employee retirements, through “voluntary exit,” or through the sale of a part of a bank to another company.

18. Pseudo-Contracted Workers and Union Membership

A significant portion of pseudo-contracted workers reported that they joined unions in their effort to negotiate sectoral or business-level collective labor agreements alongside union Chairpersons. Specifically, they seek not only salary increases but, more importantly, pay equality—meaning they want the same level as permanent employees of the Banks. They advocate for improved working conditions, fair labor relations (e.g., reduced working hours, higher wages, health and safety measures, and equality), the promotion of social dialogue, and the elimination of ‘two-, three-, or multi-tier’ employment categories.

As many pseudo-contracted workers characteristically state in their interviews: “I am a member of the union and my motivations are summed up in the phrase”...

Worker: *“Unity makes strength”* (P, 55 years old).

Worker: *“Joint action always brings better results”* (Dim, 26 years old).

Worker: *“The union provides security to protect my job”* (Iak, 46 years old).

Worker: *“Through collective action, we seek to limit layoffs or even to become permanent employees in the Banks at some point”* etc. (Olg, 33 years old).

Table 2. Main findings per thematic section drawn from the interviews with the unions’ chairpersons and the workers

Thematic Section	Key Findings
1. Salary Discrepancies Between Permanent and Pseudo-Contracted Workers	Permanent bank employees are paid double compared to pseudo-contracted workers. The senior executives of the banks hold the most advantageous, skyrocketing the salary discrepancy to 70:1

	between bank executives and pseudo-contracted workers.
2. Non-Payment of Accrued Wages	Many pseudo-contracted workers, especially in the departments of cleaning and security, are not paid for work performed.
3. Lack of Career Advancement for Pseudo-Contracted Employees	Pseudo-contracted workers are excluded from any career advancement opportunity, even after 15-20 years of service. No professional progression is possible.
4. Discriminatory Practices Regarding Maternity Leave	There have been cases where women are deprived of the right to accumulated maternity leave since it is at the discretion of the employer to allocate the leave. They have no right to reduced working hours and are dismissed after they give birth.
5. Health Benefits Disparities for Pseudo-Contracted Workers	Pseudo-contracted workers have no access to the TYPET Healthcare Fund and are also deprived of other corporate benefits compared to permanent employees.
6. Human Dignity Violations and Adverse Working Conditions	There are complaints for conditions that harm human dignity, such as the prohibition to contact family members while on duty, even in emergency, strict control of breaks, and unfair dismissals.
7. Payroll Mistakes and Discrimination in Remuneration	Frequent mistakes in payrolls, always to the benefit of the employer. Managers discourage workers to claim what is owed to them.
8. Dismissals and Issues regarding Sick Leave	Dismissals of workers facing health issues after they have taken multiple sick leaves and even though they presented all medical reports. Refusal to grant a sick leave even in case of emergency.
9. Issues with Fixed-Term Contracts and Employee Recycling	Pseudo-contracted workers: Conclude fixed-term work agreements (e.g 1-3 months) with the contracting businesses and these are renewed constantly for years (approx. 4 years of work) Conclude indefinite term agreements with the contracting businesses (approx. 10 years of work) without a perspective for stable work relation with the banks and are thus trapped in the practice of pseudo-contracting.
10. The Impact of Fixed-Term Contracts	Workers under fixed term agreements are

on Job Security	consumable for the contracting businesses and experience high work insecurity, fearing dismissals.
11. Obstruction of Trade Union Freedom and Layoffs	Dismissals due to participation in union activities and restriction of trade union freedoms.
12. Exploitation of Pseudo-Contracted Security Personnel	Exploitation of security guards by contractors, as the latter violate the work rights (e.g. not granting summer leaves) and violate statutory pays (e.g. unpaid overtime, salary below the statutory minimum).
13. Layoffs Linked to National Collective Agreements	Layoffs of workers that refused to accept the individual contracts after the change of the national labor collective agreement in 2012.
14. Mass Layoffs and Pseudo-Contracting Company Practices	Between 2019-2020, 50+ pseudo-contracted workers were dismissed despite the end of the crisis.
15. Overtime Practices and Lost Job Opportunities	Overtime (e.g. 15,000 hours overtime) in a bank branch substitute the need for hiring and lead to the reduction of new job openings.
16 Job Insecurity, Dissatisfaction and Declining Employee Morale	Pseudo-contracted workers get limited time off, have low morale, live in anxiety and have no balance between their professional and personal life.
17. Challenges in Labor Relations and Employee Rights on Permanent Employees and Pseudo-Contracted Employees in the Banking Sector	Permanent employees are replaced by pseudo-contracted workers under worse working conditions.
18. Pseudo-Contracted Workers and Union Membership	Joining a union raises hope for pay equality, collective labor agreements, better conditions at work, high quality and fair labor relations and permanent jobs at the banks.

Source: Data from primary qualitative empirical study, processed by the researchers.

5 Discussion

This research highlighted the unique and problematic conditions that pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector face. Although they cover fixed and ongoing needs, they are employed under vulnerable contracts and are deprived of basic labor rights that those leased through lawful TWAs and permanent employees enjoy. This reality creates a

unique class of “invisible” workers who suffer from systematic inequalities in terms of pay, social rights, and professional perspectives, even though they perform the same duties as permanent bank employees.

On a theoretical level, the findings support the approaches around the precariat⁷⁰ and labor market segmentation,⁷¹ offering an empirical documentation of the existence of a “new lower class” of workers. The practices that employers use in pseudo-contracting violate the European Directive 2008/104/EC, they undermine collective bargaining, and they also undermine the concept of institutional protection of work. As Streeck⁷² underlines, the decline of institutional mechanisms and collective bodies is a main feature of the neoliberal deregulation – and this is vividly noted in the case of Greece.

International comparison at an institutional/legal level further emphasized the significance of the findings. Similar forms of pseudo-contracted work that are seen in Greece are also noted in other southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, where in-house outsourcing often conceals the actual leasing of workers.⁷³ On the contrary, the relevant legislation on TWAs in Germany has been amended to tackle unlawful leasing of personnel. Case law in Germany has also set strict conditions for the distinction between pseudo-contracting and leasing of workers.

The experience of pseudo-contracted workers (in-house outsourced workers) is a characteristic example of the consequences of neoliberal deregulation, which requires a clear political and legal reply aiming to restore labor equality and dignity.

Despite the objective difficulties, the actions of the two trade unions, “SYDAPIT” and “X” (contracting undertaking) shows that even under a status of precariousness, trade union organizations can deliver concrete outcomes. Their victories – such as court rulings, avoidance of pay reductions, re-hirings, and establishment of fundamental rights – underline the significance of collective action and institutional vindication. It should be noted that the geographical and sectoral limitation of this study affects the ability to generalize the results in other sectors. Although the sample is considered adequate for a hard-to-reach population, there is a clear need to expand the research to different sectors and geographical areas.

⁷⁰ G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, op. cit.

⁷¹ P. Doeringer & M. Piore, Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis, op. cit.

⁷² W. Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*, op. cit

⁷³ M. Tiraboschi, The Italian Labor Market after the Biagi Reform, op. cit.

The Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) methodology was successfully implemented in approaching an “invisible” population, offering a useful tool for future research—both on a national and on a comparative level among the EU countries—in the field of vulnerable work, especially when official or reliable data are not available.

Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for institutional regulation, which includes strengthening labor inspection mechanisms, clarifying the role of contracting companies, the compliance of lawfully operating TWAs with the European Directive, and strengthening collective forms of representation.

6. Conclusions

This article presented the findings from primary empirical research on pseudo-contracting workers in the Greek banking sector, combining qualitative interviews with trade unionists and 365 workers, within the framework of a mixed research design (explanatory sequential mixed methods design).

An attempt was made to answer a series of research questions regarding unionism and the labor relations of these workers in the banking sector. Specifically, questions were asked about the establishment of unions, their members, their actions, their victories, and the labor relations within their sector. The study brought to light a largely invisible category of workers who are employed under fixed-term agreements even though they cover fixed and ongoing needs for the banks under more unfavorable terms compared to those of permanent employees.

The research confirmed the two main hypotheses that were set at the beginning. First, these workers are essentially leased employees, and the contracting companies operate unlawfully as Temporary Employment Agencies (TWAs). This practice allows employers to circumvent the obligations of Temporary Work Agencies, particularly the obligation of equal pay treatment, as stipulated by Law 4052/2012 and the European Directive 2008/104/EC. Second, the pseudo-subcontracted workers experience increased precarity, inequality, and exclusion from career advancement, even though they perform the same duties as permanent employees. This situation was significantly exacerbated during the crisis period.

The data on pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector highlight systematic inequalities in wages, benefits, and inclusion in collective agreements. Many remain trapped in successive fixed-term contracts, living with a constant fear of non-renewal and without opportunities for

promotion or full integration into the organization (the user undertaking). The simultaneous existence of two “employers” obscures responsibilities and weakens labor rights.

The findings related to pseudo-contracted workers in the banking sector are undoubtedly consistent with other empirical studies that focus on several types of precarious forms of employment (e.g. temporary or part-time work, leasing etc). Most vulnerable workers are employed in low-quality jobs, characterized by lower wages and limited benefits compared to their permanent colleagues. They are often trapped in a vicious cycle of successive temporary contract renewals, with minimal prospects for transitioning to stable or permanent employment. Furthermore, they get no opportunities for career advancement and experience high job insecurity, limited access to further training, and low levels of job satisfaction.

Despite the difficult environment, the actions of the unions have proved fruitful. The two active unions of the sector, including the SYDAPTT, achieved specific wins: prevention of wage cuts, conversion of contracts to permanent status, and protection of pregnant workers. These successes underline the fact that collective representation and organization is feasible even under conditions of precariousness.

The study demonstrates that pseudo-subcontracting does not create new jobs but serves as a strategy to reduce labor costs, thus reinforcing the segmentation of the labor market and undermining collective bargaining. The findings are linked to theoretical approaches such as labor market segmentation and the precariat and align with the broader critique of neoliberal deregulation of labor relations, as argued by Streeck.

It is imperative to reconsider the legal framework related to the leasing of workers, to clarify the limits with pseudo-contracting, and to boost control mechanisms. At the same time, all employees must be covered by collective agreement and the representation by unions must be institutionally enhanced.

Future research can expand to other sectors where similar practices are engaged to gain a fuller understanding of pseudo-contracting and to accelerate efforts for fair and equal labor relations.

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Appendix A

THE EXPLANATORY SEQUENTIAL MIXED METHOD DESIGN

Quantitative research

A. DEMOGRAPHIC/INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTIC

(Mark the correct answer in the box)

1. What is your gender? 1. Man 2. Woman
2. What is your birth year? (year)
3. What level of education do you have?
 1. Primary school graduate 2. Lower secondary school graduate
 3. Higher secondary school graduate 4. Graduate of Vocational Educational Institutes /O.A.E.D (post-high school) 5. University graduate 6. Holder of a Master's Degree 7. Holder of PhD
 4. In which city is your place of work?
 1. Athens 2. Thessaloniki 3. Patras

(not all closed-ended questions contained in the questionnaire are presented here, but only those related to demographics).

Qualitative research

The semi-structured interview guide for pseudo-contracted workers covers the following themes:

1. Could you please state the most significant problems that a pseudo-contracted employee faces at the premises of banks?
2. Have labor relations been affected during the period of the financial crisis and of the memoranda?
3. Are you a member of a union? If yes, what are the reasons you joined the union?

(open-ended questions were incorporated in the quantitative questionnaire. However, they are also separately presented in Appendix C, since qualitative research was also conducted).

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

Appendix B

Qualitative research

The semi-structured interview guide with the Chairman of SYDAPTT and the Chairman of the business-level union of a large pseudo-contracting company (X) covers the following themes:

1. When was your union founded?
2. Is your union a business-level, sector-level or more general union?
3. What rights-competences does your union have?
4. How many members are in your union?
5. Who are entitled to become members of your union?
6. At what positions do the members of your union work?
7. Do you sign a “Sector” or “Business-Level” or “National General” Collective Work Agreement?
8. What are the terms of the Collective Agreements (SSE in Greek) that you have signed as a union?
9. Has your request for classification of these employees as Bank Employees been accepted by the Federation of Bank Workers of Greece (OTOE in Greek)?
10. Have you filed any complaints against any agency to defend your employment rights?
11. Have you opted for recourse to the Mediation and Arbitration Organization (OMED in Greek) regarding any dispute between any workers and their employers?
12. Could you kindly mention some setbacks and some victories of your union?
13. What are the impacts of the financial crisis and the reforms in labor relations of the pseudo-contracted workers?
14. What are the dominating labor relations in your industry? What are the most crucial problems that pseudo-contracted workers face (e.g., pay inequalities, lack of advancement, long-term employment on the same project, etc.).

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

Appendix C

Qualitative research

The semi-structured interview guide for pseudo-contracted workers covers the following themes:

1. Could you please state the most significant problems that a pseudo-contracted employee faces at the premises of banks?
2. Have labor relations been affected during the period of the financial crisis and of the memoranda?
3. Are you a member of a union? If yes, what are the reasons you joined the union?

(open-ended questions were incorporated in the quantitative questionnaire. However, they are also separately presented in Appendix C, since qualitative research was also conducted).

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

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