



FRANCESCA DELLA RATTA-RINALDI

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND SUBORDINATION: HYBRID FORMS OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN THE PLUS 2024 DATA

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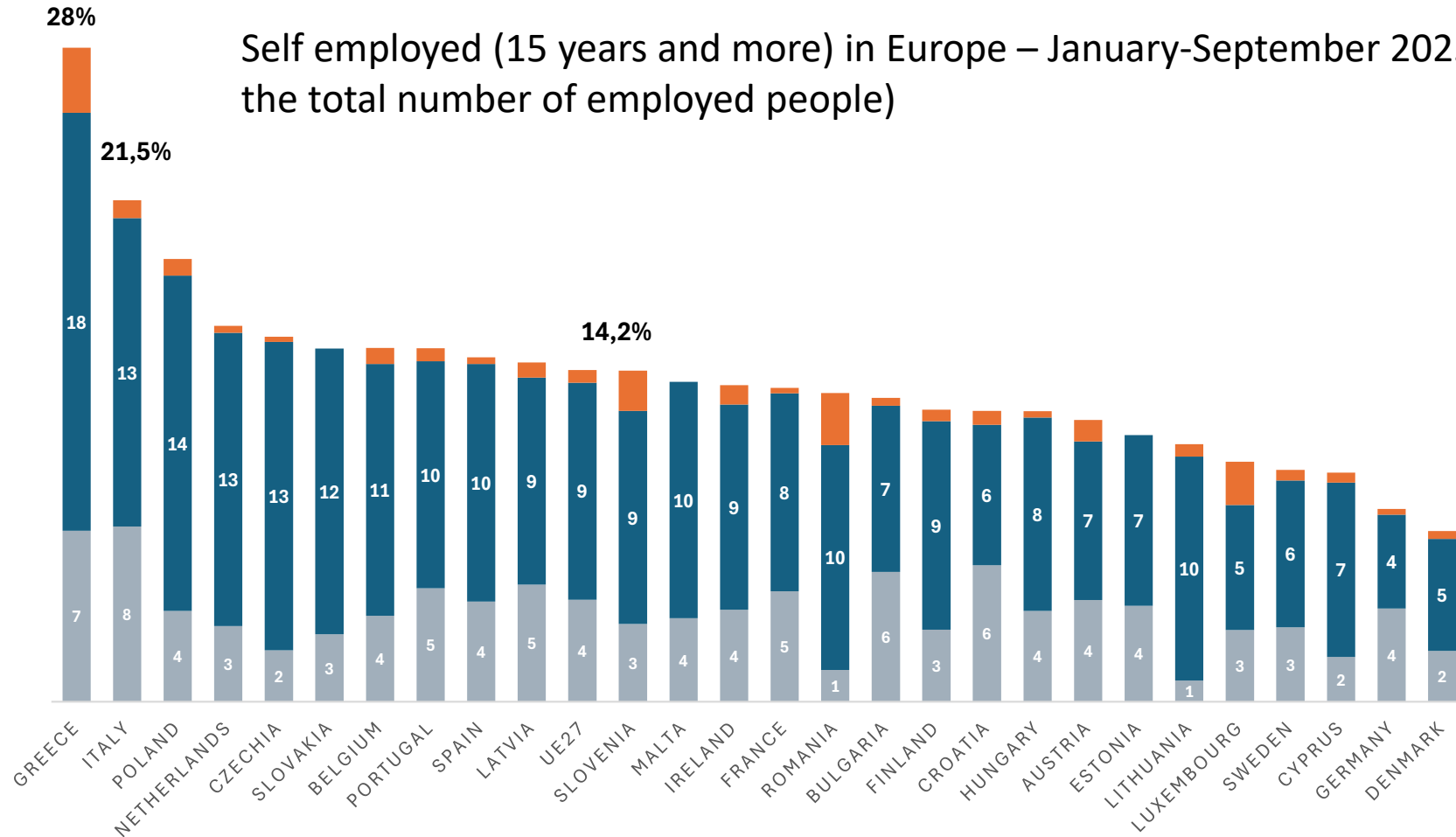


- The term self-employment is often used as **opposed** to employment (not-employees)
- Self-employed workers constitute a heterogeneous group that is characterised by the coexistence of **very different figures**: from the more traditional self-employed, often with employees, to more hybrid figures with several points in common with employees
- The discussion about classification of **platform workers** is actually much broader
- Also due to outsourcing processes, it is increasingly easy to come across **grey areas** where **formally self-employed** workers experience conditions of economic or organisational dependence by their clients
- In recent years, international official statistics have been discussing a more adequate definition of the boundary between the self-employed and employees because hybrid, borderline figures with some points in common with employees (but **less social protection**) are increasing



Self employed (15 years and more) in Europe – January-September 2025 (percentage values of the total number of employed people)

■ employers ■ SE without employees ■ contributing family workers



High quota of self-employed in Italy, although down by 1 million since 2004 and by -1.8% since 2019



Some step



- 2015-2017 • European LFS ad hoc module (2017) on self-employed, finalised to detect the *dependent self-employed* (DSE), as self-employed with less autonomy and dependency from a main client. DSE are self-employed without employees that in the previous 12 months had a **main client** (almost 75% of earnings) who can **decide working times** (the start and the end of the working day) (In Italy 218 thousand, the 6% of self-employed without employees)
- 2018 • The ILO, during the 20th ICLS (International Conference of Labour Statisticians), after a long preparatory work, adopted a resolution for a new classification of employment status (ICSE18, replacing ICSE93) that recognised the need to remove **dependent contractors** from the self-employed, to be placed **among subordinate** figures (alongside employees and family workers)
 - Istat introduced ILO questions to detect dependent contractors
- 2021 • Eurostat launches the work of a task force finalised to translate the new ICSE18 into the new Labour Force Survey in the future
- 2023 • ILO better defines [criteria](#) for detecting DCs and introduces the new classification in all 2023 ICLS analyses
- 2022-2025 • Inapp inserted as well the questions useful to detect the number of DC, in the PLUS survey (2022 and 2024) and in the QdL (2025)



ICSE93

1. **Employers**
self-employed with employees
- 2 3. **Own-account workers**
self-employed without employees
- 3 **Employees**
4. **Members of producers' cooperatives**
5. **Contributing family workers**

Two criteria to define independent/dependent difference:
type of authority/control over one's work and level of economic risk (salary or profit)

How translate it in Italian?

Dependent contractors: workers who **depend** on another **organisational unit** to **perform** their work or to **access** the market

Independent workers

- A Employers
- B Independent workers without employees

Dependent workers

- C Dependent contractors
- D Employees
 - 41 Permanent employees
 - 42 Fixed-term employees
 - 43 Short-term and casual employees
 - 44 Paid apprentices, trainees and interns
- E Contributing family workers

ICSE-18 dichotomy between Independent workers and Dependent workers based on type of authority

<i>Independent workers</i>	<i>Dependent workers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own the economic units in which they work, and control its activities • Make the most important decisions about the activities of the economic unit and the organization of their work • Are not supervised by other workers • Are not dependent on a single other economic unit or person for access to the market, raw materials or capital items • May work on their own account or in partnership with other independent workers and may or may not provide work for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not have complete authority or control over the economic unit in which or for which they work • If employed for profit they have no employees • Do not make the most important decisions about the activities of the economic unit for which they work, • They include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dependent contractors - Employees - Contributing Family Workers

Two forms of dependency

Economic

All or most of the self-employed worker's income is derived by a main client/client/intermediary

or

there is no full freedom of access to the market (e.g. impossibility to determine independently the prices of the goods or services produced)

Higher economic risk linked to possible fluctuations in demand

Organisational

the worker is strongly integrated into the organisation of the client/customer, who decides how, where and when the work is to be done (definition of times and places, but also ownership of tools)

The intensity of these two forms of dependency is decisive in determining the degree of autonomy of the worker



Measurement



2018

Price control approach

DC= self-employed workers without employees who have no autonomy in pricing their work

Organisational dependence elements, e.g. number of customers, time and location constraints, ownership of work tools and payment of social security contributions, are also useful

2023

Two step approach

1. Identification of **dependency relationship** (main customer, sole supplier, customer intermediary)

2. presence of elements of **operational or economic dependency** (whether the client decides where, when or how the work is to be done and/or whether it defines the prices of the products or services offered)

DC= self-employed without employees who are dependent on a main client (or an intermediary) and have at least one element of dependency



Among **2.6 million** self-employed without employees, **21.2%** declared a main client in the last 12 months or an intermediary (from whom they derive at least 75% of their income)

Of these:

494,067 present a sign of dependency too (18.5% independents without emp)

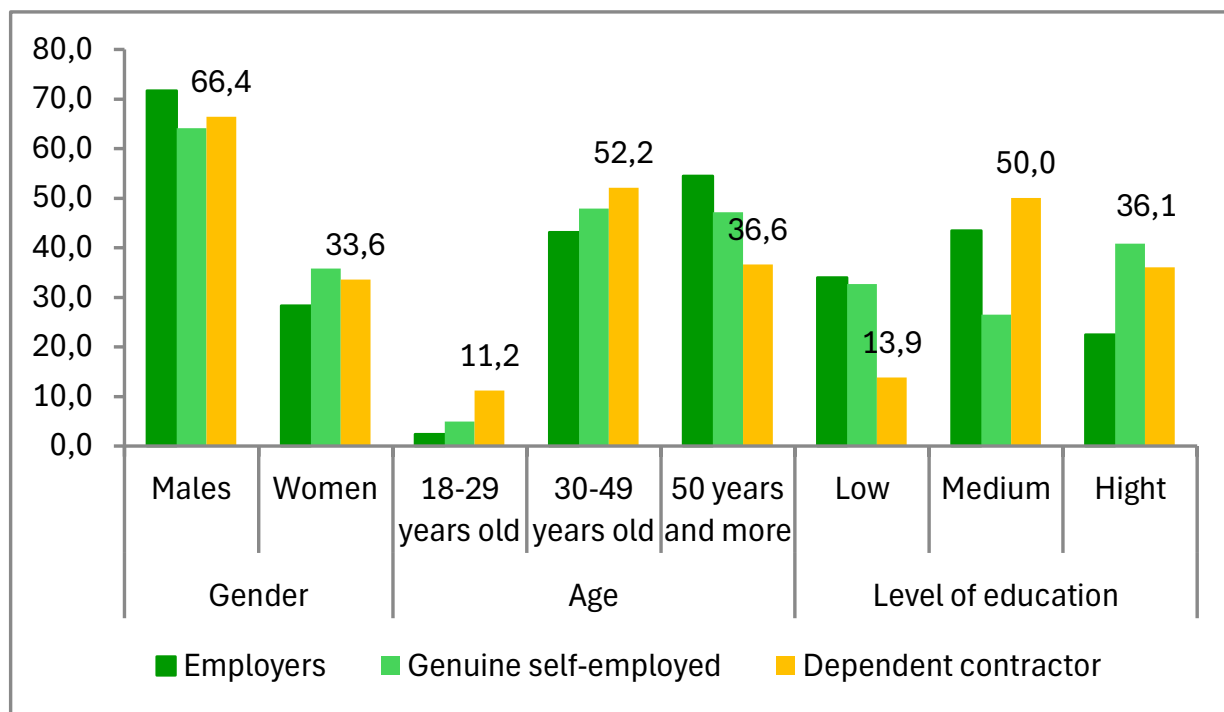
Dependent contractors

Even if among all self-employed workers without employees, the proportion of those experiencing only one of the two conditions is close to 50% (47.1% plus 2.7%)

	With organisational constraint	Without organisational constraint
Without economic dependency	47,1	31,7
With economic dependency	18,5	2,7



Self-employed by status in employment and characteristics (%)



- More 18-29 year olds, medium level of education
- Sectors: high incidences in communications, business services, transport, banks and financial intermediation, education
- They also work in the public sector (4.4%)
- Most common professions: call center workers, unskilled office cleaners, taxi drivers, marketing technicians, switchboard operators and delivery workers
- Shorter hours than genuine self-employed: 20.6% between 18 and 35 hours and 53,5% 36-40h
- **Lower incomes:** more than half up to 15 thousand euros per year and 32.9% between 15 thousand and 28 thousand



THERESHOLD



If we consider the threshold of 50% of the income received by a main client, the estimate of dependent contractors rises to 650.500, but the characteristics of the subjects become less clear.

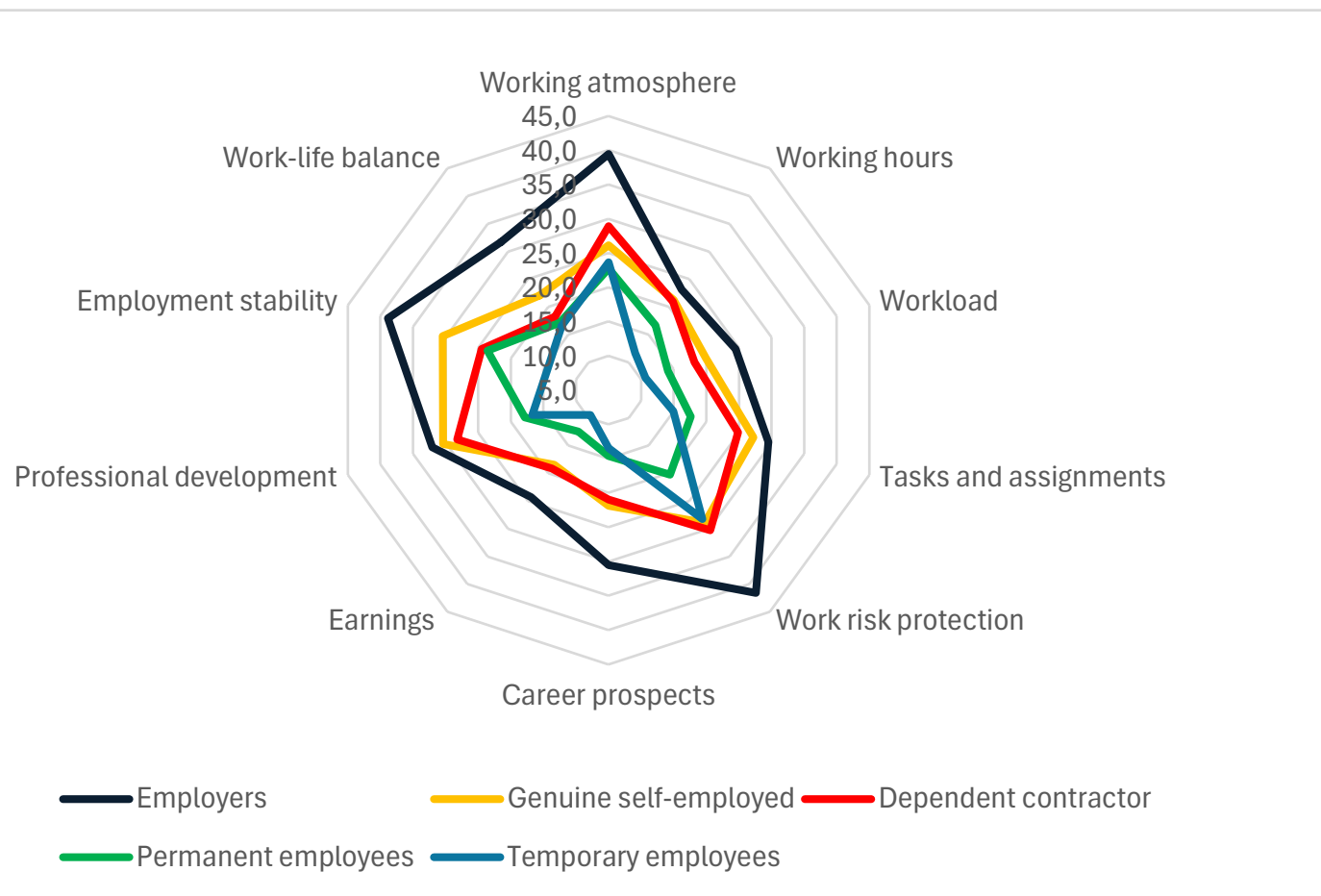
With this definition (proposed by Eurostat), there would be an increase in men, people over 50 years old, low levels of education, employed in technical or manual professions, mainly in agriculture or healthcare.

In the Italian market, having an important customer probably corresponds also to a position of 'strength' and is not necessarily (only) a symbol of risk.

However, it is clear that there is a variable border area that needs to be further explored.



Self-Employed declaring satisfaction on several aspects



Job satisfaction data shows a more critical situation amongst dependent contractors (in red)

Worse situation only among employees, especially fixed-term

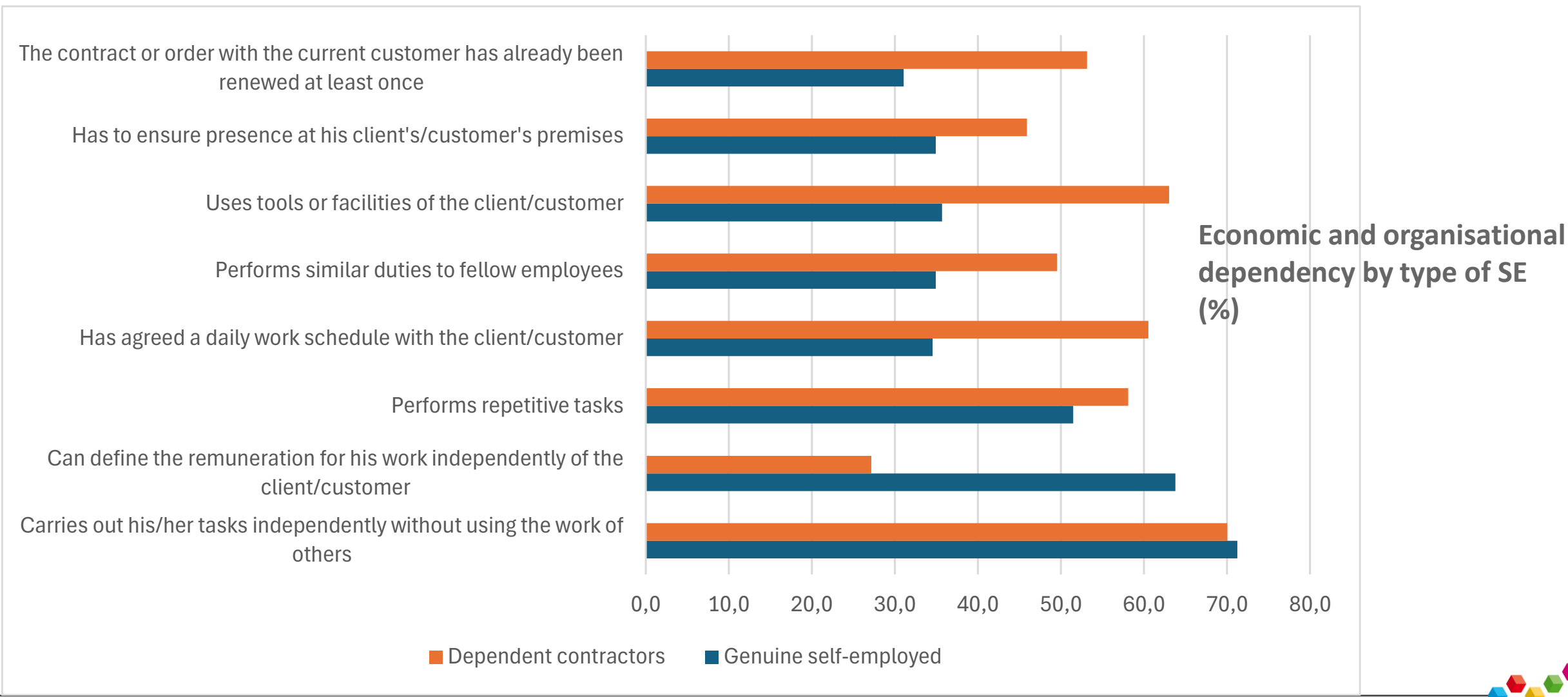
Similar aspects with genuine self employed about working atmosphere, working hours and work risk protection. More critical issue: employment stability



Professional motivations to be a self-employed

	Employers	Genuine self-employed	Dependent contractor	Total
At the client's request	0,8	13,5	48,2	10,9
There were no other job opportunities	35,1	26,2	12,1	30,1
Total no other choice	35,9	39,7	60,2	41,1
To have greater independence in organising work	78,5	66,5	48,9	71,9
To make the most of his skills	77,0	63,2	44,9	69,5
An opportunity arose	69,2	51,5	60,4	61,5
To continue a family business	55,0	26,3	23,0	41,4
Due to different tax/social security treatment	45,7	27,7	22,3	37,0





CONCLUSIONS



- Boundary between self-employed and employees are not easy to define (there are also hybrid workers who experience both conditions)
- Shares of autonomy also among employees (teleworking)
- In grey areas, where hybrid figures are found, there are greater risks of vulnerability: access to protection
- Employers' preference to use formally self-employed figures (platforms)
- Focus on universal protections labour law and EU directives
- Need to fight false self-employment but also to extend protections



CONCLUSIONS



Official statistics: continue experimenting

Difficult relation with administrative data

INAPP surveys continue to experiment, next step Job quality

[Inapp report Inapp](#): INAPP, della Ratta-Rinaldi F. (a cura di) (2024), *Riflessioni sulla qualità del lavoro autonomo, fra aspetti regolativi ed evidenze empiriche comparate*, Inapp Report n. 49, Roma Inapp

[Policy Brief INAPP: DIPENDENTI O INDIPENDENTI? I DIVERSI GRADI DI LIBERTÀ DEL LAVORO AUTONOMO](#), n. 37 gennaio 2026





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION
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