

# **EMPLOY State-of-the-art Report**

## **Part-Time Work**

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### **Introduction**

The last 25 years saw a rapid growth in part-time employment in most OECD countries, which accounted for the vast majority of the net job growth in the European Union (Brewster et al., 1997; Cowling and De Ruyter, 2001). According to Fagan's (1999) estimate, about 16% of the European Union's labour force worked part-time, making it by far the most common form of 'atypical' or 'non-standard' employment, a category that includes fixed-term contracts, temporary jobs (short-term, seasonal and causal jobs), agency temporary work, labour-only subcontracting and homework. There are, however, wide variations among countries (Bosch et al., 1993). In the Netherlands, about 38% of the labour force work part-time. Part-time employment is also relatively common in North European countries (with the exception of Finland), with over 20% of the labour force working part-time. By contrast, part-time work constitutes relatively small proportions of the labour force in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy (around 5%) (DeGrip et al., 1997; Tregaskis et al., 1998; Thurman and Trah, 1990).

The rapid diffusion of part-time employment has attracted enormous attention from academics and policy makers. A growing body of economic and sociological literature has emerged to explain the origins, dynamics and quality of part-time employment. Some analysts suggest that part-time work represents an effective means of increasing labour market flexibility and reducing mass unemployment (CEC, 1993; Delsen, 1993), although evidence shows that part-time employment serves to increase the overall size of labour force rather than reduce unemployment (Walwei, 1998). It has also been argued that part-time employment, which enables women to reconcile the conflicting demands of family and work, is an important means of integrating

women into the wage economy. Extensive evidence shows that the expansion of part-time work in Europe has coincided with a marked rise in married women's labour market participation. In all industrial countries the part-time workforce is made up predominantly by women (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997; O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998), while for men part-time work is more likely to occur at the point of labour market entry or exit (Delsen, 1998; Quack, 1993; Blossfeld et al., 1998; Hakim, 1996; Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997).

Despite the optimistic view expressed by some analysts that part-time work represents women's chosen solution for meeting the dual demands of employment and parenting, concerns were widely expressed about the quality of part-time employment. It is generally recognized that part-time work differs from full-time work along dimensions other than the length of working hours. Rubery (1998: 137) suggests that „part-time work not only involves fewer hours and a lower weekly remuneration than full-time work, but it can also constitute a different employment form, organized on different principles, and on different terms and conditions to full-time jobs.“

In most countries, the volume of part-time workers tends to be concentrated towards the bottom end of the occupational hierarchy. Substantial research has highlighted the inferiority of the employment conditions of part-time workers. These include low skill (Gallie et al., 1998), low pay (Bassi, 1995; Gornick and Jacobs, 1996; OECD, 1994; Rubery, 1992; EBRI, 1993; Simpson, 1985), reduced access to employment benefits (Euzeby, 1988; Maier, 1992), lack of job security (Belous, 1989), limited opportunities for career advancement (Rosenfeld, 1993; Tilly, 1990; Gallie et al., 1998), inadequate legal protection and lack of collective bargaining coverage (Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989; Meulders et al., 1994). Although there has been some growth of part-time work in higher-level jobs in some countries, in overall terms part-time work remains female-dominated and disproportionately concentrated in low-paid, low-status jobs (Walwei, 1998).

The objective of this report is to review recent developments of research on part-time employment. It starts with a discussion of the definitions and classifications of part-time work, and then moves on to the factors underlying its growth over the last few decades. Finally, it reviews recent research findings on the quality of part-time work relative to full-time work, in particular with respect to employees' skills, pay, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job security.

## **Definition**

Before delving into the issue of the quality of part-time work, it is necessary to clarify what part-time work means. There is no universally agreed definition of part-time work. In Britain, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) regards those who work fewer than 30 hours per week as part-time workers, a definition which is also used by the New Earnings Survey. In contrast, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) makes no attempt to provide an objective definition based on the length of working hours but instead relies on employees' self reports of their contract status. There are also suggestions that the definition of part-time work should be based on entitlement to benefits. For example, those seeking to access in-work benefits, such as the Working Families Tax Credit, must be in full-time work, defined as work of more than 16 hours per week. The National Council for One Parent Families suggests that, for many people, 16 hours per week has come to be associated with the threshold for full-time work.

The definition of part-time work not only varies by organizations but also by countries. Owing to the lack of a standard international definition, part-time work could be perceived differently depending on the practices in force in different countries. For instance, in the United States, part-time work is often defined as work that involves less than 35 hours a week, whereas Canada normally uses 30 hours as the cut-off point (Kahne, 1992). In France, part-time is defined as at least 20% below the statutory level of working hours, and in Germany it is less than 36 hours of work per week (Houseman, 1995). According to the European Directive on Part-time Work, part-time work is defined as regular employment in which working time is 'less than the normal hours of a comparable full-time worker'. More specifically, in the 'Methods and Definitions-1992' relating to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), it is suggested that part-time work should seldom exceed 35 hours, and that full-time work usually starts at about 30 hours. Some member states in the European Union have used these guidelines to adjust the spontaneous replies from the LFS respondents on their contract status.

Apart from the various definitions of part-time work, there is also the question of whether part-time work is a relatively homogeneous employment form across European labour markets such that workers with similar preferences and labour-

market skills are employed in similar types of work. Increasingly, part-time workers are recognized as a heterogeneous group, who work less than full-time for a variety of reasons (Tilly, 1991; Warne et al., 1992; Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997). For example, the labour market experience of low- and high-qualified women who work part-time may be very different. And depending on whether part-time employment is part of a continuous or interrupted pattern of labour market participation, the implications of the engagement in this type of work could also be different.

Tilly (1991) classifies part-time workers into three categories: short-time, secondary part-time jobs and retention part-time jobs. 'Short-time employment' occurs when, instead of laying workers off during a business downturn, an employer temporarily reduce workers' hours. When business revives, full-time hours are normally restored. 'Secondary part-time jobs' are the main form of disadvantaged part-time employment. It is typically characterised by low pay, lack of advancement opportunity and high turnover rates. 'Retention part-time jobs', in contrast, are 'good' part-time jobs which are created to retain valued employees whose life circumstances prevent them from working full-time-particularly women with young children.

Similar distinctions were also made by other researchers (Schoer, 1987; Hakim, 1989; Meulders et al., 1993; 1994). For instance, Kahne (1992) argues that part-time work is both 'a hope and a peril', encompassing both good jobs and bad ones that have low wages and few benefits. Blossfeld and Hakim (1997) suggest that 'reduced hours work', with weekly hours a little bit shorter than usual, such as 30-6 or 30-9, is often organized in response to an employee's request, which is thus more of a personal choice rather employers' strategy of reducing costs or increasing operational flexibility. Such work involves no change of occupation or employer and is expected to be of limited duration. By contrast, 'half-time jobs' of around 15-29 hours a week are more likely to be organized by the employer on a permanent basis, with people recruited specifically for these long-term jobs. Further down the ladder is the 'marginal work' which involves very few hours a week, such as less than 10 or 15 hours. Such work is often exempted from income tax and social security contributions, and is sometimes excluded from statutory employment rights or employer benefits.

It is necessary to bear in mind the distinctions between these different forms of part-time employment because the implications of working part-time can differ substantially between the different categories of employees. For some employees, a

transition from full-time to part-time work may serve to keep them in the primary sector of the labour market, while for others a switch to part-time employment may involve significant downward occupational mobility, and a perhaps permanent demotion to the secondary labour market.

### **Factors Underlying the Growth of Part-time Employment**

Since the early 1980s there has been a general expansion in part-time work in every EU country except Greece and Denmark (Smith et al., 1998). What has caused the rapid diffusion of this form of employment?

There are at least three overlapping and related groups of factors that may potentially explain the patterns of change in part-time employment. Research focusing on the supply side of the labour market suggests that married women serve as a 'reserve army' of labour. Visser (2002) argues that the rapid diffusion of part-time employment in the Netherlands was mostly the outcome of a spontaneous process driven by the late entry of married women in the labour force. Research shows that there have been important changes in female labour supply in the post-war period. In all European countries and in the US, women have experienced major increases in the average educational attainment level (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993), shifts in the process of family formation, dramatic changes in fertility and household structure over the life-course (Blossfeld, 1995). According to the 'thesis of educational investments', better qualified women are more likely to maintain a higher and more continuous labour market participation during motherhood than women with lower educational qualifications (Dex, 1985; Crompton et al., 1990; McRae, 1991; Dale and Egerton, 1995; Rubery et al., 1995; Spain and Bianchi, 1996). This is because increased levels of educational attainment and higher wages not only increase the opportunities costs of staying at home but also increase women's career aspirations. Thus the expansion of education among women is expected to increase the supply of both female full-time and part-time workers. In addition, in all modern Western societies, retirement ages for men and women have fallen over time, increasing the number of healthy elderly people who can seek to supplement their pensions through income based on part-time work.

In contrast to the literature focusing on the supply side of the labour market (e.g., women's educational attainments, the presence of children in the household,

family structure, individual work preferences and orientations and etc.), there is a second perspective which sees the diffusion of part-time employment as a result of the changes in the structure of occupations and industries. A major factor driving the increase in part-time work has been the growth in the service sector. Official statistics for Western Europe and the US in recent decades show that there has been a gradual shift away from manual and productive jobs to non-manual service and administrative jobs (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). Service industries employ the vast majority of part-time workers-in 1994, 84% of European Union part-time workers worked in the service sector (Smith et al., 1998). This is because part-timers can be brought in for specific hours, and their flexible work schedules can be better adapted to the fluctuations in service demand. In the Netherlands, for example, part-time jobs are a common means of varying staffing levels during the week, enabling firms to cope with predicted fluctuations in the workload and to avoid paying workers for idle hours (Visser, 2002). Smith et al. (1998) find that in the EU countries, sectoral shifts accounted for about one-third of the rise in part-time work between 1983 and 1992. Similarly, Nardone (1995) finds that the growth in part-time work in the US since the early 1980s was mainly due to the expansion of industries that typically employ many part-timers (services, retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate) rather than to the substitution of part-time for full-time workers within industries.

A third perspective emphasizes the role of state policies and broader political and ideological country contexts. It argues that women's market resources and plans on their labour supply must be interpreted within the incentive structure created by state policies and other institutional arrangements. Institutional factors such as taxation, union wage policies, employment bans and equal pay legislation are likely to have a major impact on the distribution of part-time jobs in different countries. For instance, the 'public sector' hypothesis (Esping-Anderson, 1990; 1993) suggests that the growth of the welfare state in Northern European capitalistic countries during the 1960s and 1970s significantly expanded employment opportunities in the public sector, which provides an attractive labour market for female part-time work. Rosenfeld and Birkelund (1995) use data from nine advanced industrial countries and find that the organizational power of labour-defined as a corporatist and leftist national policy-together with a large public sector, are the two factors associated with most significantly with a high proportion of part-time workers in the female labour force. In addition, countries differ substantially in terms of the childcare support

provided for working mothers and normative attitudes concerning maternal employment. While the employment policies in Scandinavian countries provide incentives for integrating married women into the labour market, such policies are much weaker in countries such as Britain and Germany.

The reasons underlying the overall growth in part-time work are varied and inter-related. Multiple supply and demand factors are likely to be in effect across OECD countries. The deployment of part-time jobs probably reflects the employment strategies of employers, the impact of state policies and labour market institutions, as well as changes in the characteristics and preferences of women themselves. Any comprehensive analysis of the origins of part-time work requires taking into account both the individual and the structural factors which combine to influence the levels of part-time employment observed in across European labour markets.

## **Quality of Part-Time Work**

### *Skills and Wages*

The discussions of part-time employment are often framed in labour market segmentation theory, which suggests that employers pursue different manpower strategies for different types of the workforce. In particular, it postulates a distinction between a 'core' and a 'peripheral' workforce, with the former being permanent workers who enjoy higher skills levels, better pay and greater employment protection, in contrast to the latter which consists of a low-skilled, poorly paid and dispensable workforce which is seen by employers as of only short-term value to the organization. Part-time workers are often regarded as a marginal labour force which is mainly used to meet fluctuating workload and minimize costs by avoiding overtime salaries for full-time workers. Such workers are often perceived by employers as not seeking demanding work with opportunities for training, skill development or promotion (Hunt, 1975; Beechey and Perkins, 1987; McRae, 1995).

A number of empirical studies have confirmed the disadvantaged nature of part-time work in terms of the skill contents of the job. In most countries part-time jobs are disproportionately concentrated in the service sector at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy, such as sales, catering, cleaning and related personal services (Meulders et al., 1993; OECD, 1994). It has been widely observed that part-time workers possess lower levels of general and specific skills than full-time workers.

Gallie et al. (1998) find that part-timers in Britain are characterised by relatively low skill levels, restricted opportunities for skill improvement, low pay and very poor career opportunities. Other studies also find that by comparison with full-timers, women working part-time are more likely to be in sales jobs, in semi-skilled domestic work, and in unskilled work (Burchell et al., 1997; Watson and Fothergill, 1993). Horrell, Rubery and Burchell (1990) suggest a polarization within the female workforce between those women with higher educational qualifications who work full-time and the increasing number of part-timers whose jobs are less skilled (see also Rubery et al., 1994). Whilst there are some moves towards opening up management jobs on part-time basis, these are still embryonic (Burchell et al., 1997).

Aside from skills, the economic consequences for women to engage in part-time rather than full-time employment have also been documented by a large number of studies. It has been generally observed that part-timers earn lower hourly wages than full-timers, even after taking into account occupational and industrial characteristics and/or human capital factors (Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990; OECD, 1994; Paci et al., 1995; Gornick and Jacobs, 1996; Tilly, 1996; Ferber and Waldfogel, 1998). Bardasi and Gornick (2000) use cross-nationally comparable data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and find unadjusted part-time wage penalties in five industrialized countries range from 8-12% in Canada and Germany, to 15% in the UK, to as high as 22% in the US and Italy. Although Hirsch (2005) finds that much of the part-time wage disadvantage stems from differences between part- and full-time workers in job characteristics, preferences and accumulated skills, most studies conclude that a sizable part-time penalty remains even after controlling for workers and job attributes. For example, Blank (1990) obtained part-time penalty estimates of 19% and 26% for women and men, respectively, after controlling for worker, job and labour market characteristics. It has also been suggested that fixed employer costs may be an additional factor that produces a wage differential. Costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and training, as well as nonwage benefits not proportional to hours (for example, health insurance), increase the average hourly costs of part-time relative to full-time workers. It follows that fixed employment costs make it likely that part-time employees receive fewer non-wage benefits than full-time workers.

Apart from wages, part-timers also tend to receive fewer fringe benefits than full-timer workers. In many countries part-timers have restricted rights to unemployment benefits, pensions and sick pay, particularly when they fail to meet

earnings or hours thresholds (Ginn and Arber, 1998). In the UK, most full-timers do receive paid holidays, but around one-third of part-timers have no paid holiday entitlement according to the Labour Force Survey estimates. In the US, health insurance is paid for full-time workers, but not for part-timers (Drobnic and Wittig, 1997). Kalleberg (1995) finds that even those engaged in the most favourable form of part-time employment-‘retention’ part-time workers-generally do not receive the same health insurance and medical benefits as those granted to full-time workers. In Europe, many countries now do require part-timers to receive both pro rata pay and benefits (for example, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands), although others (e.g. Germany) still exclude part-timers working below certain hours thresholds from collective agreements and state benefits.

In sum, pay for part-time employment is unlikely to be sufficient to provide an acceptable standard of living in all but the most highly paid occupations (Rubery, 1998). Therefore part-time work often results in economic hardship unless there is recourse to additional income transfers through family relationships or Welfare State entitlements. Although the expansion of part-time work is frequently cited as a way of increasing employment (Walwei, 1998), it requires policies to remove the financial disincentive for those with unemployment benefit entitlements to enter part-time work. In addition, there is also a need to adapt benefit systems to discontinuous working careers and bring the entitlements to social benefits for part-time workers in line with those of full-time workers.

### *Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction*

Employers tend to stereotype part-time workers as less a stable and less committed category of workforce (Hunter et al., 1993). Emphasizing the heterogeneity of women’s sex role preferences and work orientations, Hakim (1997) suggests that comparative analyses of women’s employment positions should consider the full-time and part-time segments separately because part-timers are not fully committed workers and are subject to more intense processes of segregation (Hakim, 1992; 1993). She argues that part-time work can act as a good proxy to distinguish ‘grateful slaves’ from ‘self-made women’ in Western European labour market (Hakim, 1991; 1993). While ‘self-made women’ have a high work commitment and tend to pursue a full-time, continuous life cycle work pattern similar to men, ‘grateful slaves’ are

characterised by a low non-financial work commitment and a more traditional 'marriage career'.

A few studies undertaken in Britain in the 1980s did reveal a lower work commitment among women part-timers compared to women full-timers (Hakim, 1991; Dex, 1988). However, in a subsequent article Hakim (1992) analyses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey and argues that by the end of the 1980s a similar level of work commitment was found for women full-timers and part-timers working at least ten hours a week. Rubery (1996) questioned the validity of using part-time status as a proxy identifier for women with lower work commitment. Instead, she finds that in the Netherlands and Denmark a significant proportion of women employed part-time are engaged in education or training. It suggests these women are making human capital investments in preparation for future career development. In addition, the high levels of involuntary part-time work found in some Southern European countries also call into question the interpretation of part-timers as less committed employees queuing up for part-time jobs in preference to full-time work.

Kalleberg (1995) finds that in the US part-time workers were as likely as full-time workers to regard work as a central life interest. Although they are concentrated in lower grade and lower-paid jobs which offer poorer promotion prospects, there is no evidence that part-timers are less committed to their work than their full-time counterparts. The organizational commitment of part-time workers compared to full-time workers is also examined by other analysts. A substantial body of research shows that there is no strong evidence that women in general, and women working part-time in particular, are less attached to their work organization (Marsh, 1991), that part-time workers are more unstable than full-time workers (Dex, 1987) or that part-time jobs have particularly high turn-over rates (Elias and White, 1991). Mellor et al. (2001) argue that shorter and more flexible working hours can even increase employees' affective organizational commitment because it helps avoid pitfalls associated with overemphasizing continuance commitment, the state in which people are trapped by their organizations because of the high personal cost of leaving or lack of alternative employment opportunities.

Apart from organizational commitment, the issue of job satisfaction has also been of central interest to social scientists as it represents an important barometer of the quality of work life. In a broad sense, job satisfaction refers to employees' overall affective orientation toward the work roles they are presently occupying (Kalleberg,

1977). Much research on the impact of part-time work on job attitudes finds no systematic differences in overall levels of job satisfaction between part-time and full-time employees (Rotchford and Roberts, 1982; Thorsteinson, 2003), and some analysts even find that part-time workers enjoy higher levels of jobs satisfaction than full-time workers, with their objectively more rewarding and higher status jobs (Hakim, 1991; Nerb, 1986; Curtice, 1993). For instance, the 1980 Women and Employment Survey for Great Britain shows that women working part-time express higher levels of overall satisfaction with their jobs, and in particular are happier with their working hours than are women working full-time.

Several strands of theories in the psychology and sociology literature have attempted to explain this paradox. For instance, the ‘person-environment fit’ theory proposed by psychologists suggest that individuals’ job satisfaction is not only dependent on their actual working conditions but also on their perceptions of how well their needs are met in the job (Puccio et al., 1995; Ton and Hansen, 2001; Burke and Greenglass, 2000; Keil et al., 2000; Krausz et al., 2000; Morrow et al., 1994; Kristof, 1996). The consistency between preferred and actually work schedule can be a source of difference in job satisfaction, whether the contract is full-time or part-time (Barlin and Gallagher, 1996). In support of this argument, Burke and Greenglass (2000) find that nurses whose work status is congruent with their preferred work status report higher job satisfaction than those whose work status is incongruent with their preferred work status.

A similar argument is that job satisfaction depends on the importance employees attach to the different job facets. Higher levels of job satisfaction can arise from achieving those outcomes that are valued in work. For instance, it has been found that part-time workers weight factors such as scheduling flexibility higher in their overall assessment of job satisfaction than full-time workers (Logan et al., 1973; Rotchford and Roberts, 1982). Hakim (1997) suggests that women who seek part-time work are likely to give priority to their domestic roles and activities. Since these workers prefer jobs ‘with no worries or responsibilities’, they are hence concentrated in lower grade and lower-paid jobs which offer convenient working hours with which they are satisfied (Hakim, 1997). In addition, part-time workers are also likely to be exposed to fewer organizational problems and politics, which may prevent the development of negative attitudes (Eberhardt and Shani, 1984).

A third important factor affecting reported level of job satisfaction is likely to be people's reference framework when making comparisons. This explanation is loosely based on equity theory. The theory suggests that people tend to compare themselves to others in similar situation. If they perceive a difference (e.g., that they are under-rewarded), it is likely to lead to dissatisfaction (Adams, 1965). Some analysts (e.g. Logan et al., 1973) speculate that part-time employees are not more dissatisfied because they compare themselves to other part-time workers rather than full-time workers. Feldman and Doeringhaus (1992) find that 82% of part-time workers in their sample report using other part-time workers as a comparison, providing evidence that part-time and full-time workers do have different frames of reference. The results of Feldman and Doeringhaus (1992) also support the view that part-time workers generally use other part-time workers as referents. However, Eberhardt and Moser (1995) find that approximately half of the part-time employees under their investigation use full-time employees as a referent, while the other half used part-time employees. Due to the practical difficulties associated with assessing people's comparative reference framework, this explanation has not been extensively tested. Further research needs to be carried out to evaluate the validity of the reference framework hypothesis.

### *Job Security*

The promotion of part-time employment has been identified as a way to combat mass unemployment and to increase labour market flexibility. However, there are several dimensions to flexibility. While functional flexibility is associated with a broadening of tasks and skills which improve the competence of employees, 'numerical flexibility' entails matching labour input to the fluctuations in production/service demand, which consequently involves increased risks of involuntary layoffs. It is with this dimension to flexibility that the issue of part-time work is usually connected. According to the labour market segmentation theory, an important distinction between the 'peripheral' and the 'core' workers is the different levels of employment protection offered by the job.

For instance, part-time workers may be more vulnerable to job loss because of different social security entitlements. While equality of treatment of full- and part-timers is enforced by labour law in some countries (e.g., Sweden, France, Belgium and the Netherlands), part-timers with earnings or hours below a certain threshold are

less protected in Germany and in the UK (Maier, 1994; O'Reilly, 1996). Further, even where employment regulations require pro rata treatment of part-time employees, such workers may still be more vulnerable to job loss due to their concentration in certain types of work where there is a heavy reliance on numerical flexibility through seasonal and cyclical lay-offs (Smith et al., 1998). The disadvantages associated with part-time work may also result from the fact that such workers are less likely to receive training to update their work skills (Buchtemann and Quack, 1990; Quack 1993), which tends to push them into a precarious labour market characterised by low skills and poor employment protection. For instance, Bednarzik (1975) suggests that part-time workers who take part-time jobs because they are unable to find full-time work and those who work below 35 hours a week are especially vulnerable to the health of the economy and labour market conditions. Last but not least, the lower coverage of trade unions among part-time workers is also a factor that can increase their unemployment risks.

Consistent with the theoretical expectation, O'Reilly and Bothfeld (2002) find that only a tiny proportion of employees are able to use part-time work as a bridge back into a full-time job, whereas a substantial proportion ends up dropping out of employment, based on an analysis of the British and German Household Panel data. Similar findings were recorded by Harley (1994) who used Australian data to demonstrate that workers in part-time jobs fare less well than full-timers in terms of job security even after controlling for workplace size. However, there is also contradicting evidence showing that part-time work does not necessarily represent a marginalized form of precarious employment. For instance, Gallie et al. (1998) find that part-timers in Britain do not suffer greater job insecurity compared to full-time workers. Although they are disadvantaged in terms of skills, pay, training, promotion and the level of intrinsic reward from the work, there is little evidence that part-time workers are subject to high risks of involuntary layoffs. It has also been suggested that part-time workers may react less strongly to job insecurity than full-time workers because job continuity in the same organization is not an integral part of their set of expectations (Jacobson, 1991). Since the discrepancy between the level of expected job security and the perceived job security is less dramatic for such workers, they may underreport the risk of unemployment compared to their full-time counterparts.

To date there is a dearth of conclusive evidence to show whether part-time work tends to provide an integrative bridge into paid work or generate a ghettoised trap of

precarious employment that frequently results in job loss. The claim that part-time work represents a precarious form of employment often takes the form of theoretical argument or of case studies of specific parts of industry, rather than being based on large-scale and nationally representative statistical data. The implications of part-time employment for job security await further quantitative empirical research.

### **Cross-National Comparisons**

The expansion and consolidation of the European Union stimulated substantial cross-national comparative research on part-time employment. The ‘Universalist’ theorists tend to focus on similarities in part-time employment patterns across countries. For instance, it has been shown that part-time work is primarily performed by women in all industrialised countries and such work generally offers inferior employment conditions relative to full-time employment (Meulders and Plasman, 1989; Marshall, 1989). Moreover, the growth of part-time employment has often been associated with a period of industrial restructuring and a growing presence of women in the labour market.

Despite such common trends, much research has pointed to the persistence of differences in the prevalence and quality of part-time work across countries. Taking the proportions of workers in part-time employment for example, northern European countries recorded generally higher levels of part-time work than the southern European countries (OECD, 1994; Rubery et al., 1998; Smith et al., 1998). The trends in the level of part-time employment also differ between countries. In Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece, numbers of part-time jobs declined over much of the 1980s. In Germany, France, and Belgium, however, part-time jobs accounted for a significant proportion of the total job growth during the same period. The expansion of part-time employment was particularly rapid in the Netherlands and Austria (Fagan, 1999).

Apart from the incidence of part-time work, significant country differences have been identified in the extent to which motherhood is associated with part-time work (Dale and Glover, 1990; Dex and Walters, 1989; Meulders et al., 1993), differences in the terms and conditions associated with part-time work, including hours of work, pay levels, access to benefits, and degree of job security (CEC, 1992; Meulders and Plasman, 1989; Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989; Rubery, 1989; Rubery and Fagan, 1994; Schmid, 1991; Ellingsaetter, 1992). Taking pay for example, in Scandinavia and to a

large extent the Netherlands, part-time work has been incorporated into standard labour market norms and remuneration on a pro rata basis is not challenged (Ellingsaeter, 1992). By contrast, part-time employees in the UK are less likely to receive comparable pay relative to their full-time counterparts (Rubery and Fagan, 1994; Rubery, 1991; 1992; Plantenga and van Velzen, 1993).

Such differences are widely attributed to the role of different societal systems (Maurice et al., 1986; Rubery, 1988; Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989). The function of part-time work is different across European labour markets, and women's choices to work part-time are influenced by a range of social and economic factors, such as labour market structures, macro-economic conditions, social insurance rules, union preferences, public policies on part-time employment, the availability of child care provisions or employers' flexibility strategies, the system of household organization and general public attitudes towards part-time work.

Scandinavian countries provide an exemplar of relatively high quality part-time employment. The democratic welfare-state regimes emphasize the general principle of egalitarianism and the reduction of class and gender inequalities (Esping-Anderson, 1990). In Denmark and Sweden, for instance, employment policies seek to integrate married women into the labour force by promoting the reconciliation of family and market work. Policy measures such as proportional earnings, full social benefits, expansion of public childcare, and the introduction of separate taxation of spouses tend to increase the relative attractiveness of part-time work for women. Moreover, the governments created large numbers of part-time jobs in the public sector which offer relatively favourable employment conditions. Consequently, most part-time work in Denmark and Sweden shows few signs of being a marginal employment relationship (Ellingsaeter, 1992) and is often not very different from full-time work in terms of skill level and employment protection (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997).

By contrast, the 'Liberal' regimes in Britain and the US emphasize the principle of free market mechanisms. Unlike Scandinavian countries, the proportion of part-time workforce in the public sector is relatively low. State policies are focused on means-tested assistance and modest social-insurance plans. Provision of day-care and after-school facilities is generally lacking. The relatively unregulated labour market tends to create a high proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled part-time jobs that provide low pay, poor employment benefits and little career prospects (O'Reilly and Bothfeld, 2002; Maurice et al., 1982; Streeck, 1992; Crouch, 1993; Crouch and

Streeck, 1997; Soskice, 2000). These factors also influence the consequences of opting for part-time work for one's subsequent employment career, as part-time work tends not to be integrated into training programmes and is often deemed as undemanding and lacking career prospects.

In Conservative welfare states of the Netherlands and West Germany, employment policies are committed to the promotion of traditional male breadwinner family model (Esping-Anderson, 1990). Policy measures are designed to encourage women's economic dependence on their husbands rather than the dual full-time earner marriage. Public day-care services are generally underdeveloped in these countries. In West Germany, the tax system stimulates married women's choices for non-employment against part-time work, and part-time work against full-time employment. Apart from the effect of such institutional-structural framework, the perceived desirability of part-time employment is also influenced by the conservative cultural attitudes to child-rearing and the domestic division of labour (Pfau-Effinger, 1998), which is negligible in egalitarian welfare-state regimes in Nordic countries.

From the above discussions, it can be seen that there are substantial country differences in whether the use of part-time work represents a marginalization strategy that provides employers with a source of cheap labour or an integration strategy used to encourage women's labour market participation. An important source of difference among countries is related to labour law and employment regulations. While in some countries labour law enforces equal treatment between full-time and part-time workers, in other countries part-time employees whose hours or income fall below certain thresholds are excluded from the coverage of certain laws (Houseman, 1995; O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998). The overriding characteristics of these employment systems thus have important implications for the level and quality of part-time work in different countries across Europe.

### **Summary**

Part-time employment showed significant growth in the majority of European countries over the last two decades. However, important country differences remain in the incidence and quality of this type of employment. Although part-time workers are disadvantaged relative to full-time workers in all EU member states, the degree of disadvantage varies between countries. The persistence of such national differences

suggests that part-time work cannot be regarded as corresponding to a similar employment segment across European labour markets. Instead, common trends in the supply and demand of part-time work have been suppressed or sustained by broader institutional and ideological country contexts and hence have produced quite diverse tempos and heterogeneous patterns of part-time employment over time. Therefore, comparative research needs to take into account the impact of the institutional framework in different countries on the composition of the part-time labour force, the occupational structure of part-time work, the degree of gender segregation found between full-time and part-time work, and the implications of part-time work for skills, pay, employment protection and career development opportunities.

On the other hand, however, more research is needed to shed light on how European Union directives influence the development of part-time employment in recent years. For instance, in 1997 the European Union Part-Time Directive was launched. It requires equal treatment of part-time and full-time workers, partly as a means to increase part-time work. The directive was interpreted in diverse ways in the EU member countries and it was also implemented at different points in time. This raises the interest of comparing the new developments in part-time work across countries that might be attributed to the Part-Time Directive. For instance, how has the Directive influenced the cross-national variations in the trends and quality of part-time work? Will these differences persist or converge? Will the changes be in the direction of more integrated forms of part-time work which provide increased scope for continuity of employment, thereby potentially decreasing occupational segregation? More empirical research based on rigorous, representative and nationally comparable data is needed to address these issues.

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