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# Working part-time in seven EU member states

The impact of gender roles, marginalised job characteristics, working time patterns and gender segregation

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## Abstract

What is the nature of women's part-time employment in the European Union? Statistical analysis have been carried out to predict the likelihood of a woman working part-time. The study is based on the 2009 WageIndicator web-survey, using data from seven EU member states. Four regimes determining part-time employment have been examined. Our findings indicate that the gender roles regime is the best predictor of part-time employment in the European Union. Within this regime, having at least one child living in the household is shown to have a large effect in all countries, immediately followed by the indicator being a secondary earner. The segregated firms regime is the second best predicting cluster, revealing that part-time employment is clustered in female-dominated hierarchical relations, workplaces, and occupations. The third predictor is the optimal staffing regime. We found that women working shifts or irregular hours are more likely to hold part-time jobs, particularly when they are working on Saturdays. In contrast, women working on Sundays and in the evenings are more likely to hold full-time jobs in most countries. The worst predictor is the secondary labour market regime. Here, only two characteristics of the secondary labour market have been measured, but they reveal

that women with fixed-term contracts are more likely to hold full-time jobs and that in half of the countries, women with few years of experience in the job are so too.

## 1 Introduction

In European employment policies, part-time work continues to be a major topic of discussion, primarily because of its marginalized and female-dominated nature. A quarter of part-time employees in the EU usually work at least 25 hours per week (upper quartile) but another quarter usually work 14 hours or less (lower quartile). In Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, these small jobs are even more frequent, as a quarter of part-time employees, men in particular, work 11 hours or less (Van Bastelaer & Vaguer, 2004). The Netherlands is known for the highest part-time rates among both female and male workers (European Commission, 2008). In 2008, almost 75% of its female labour force had a part-time job, compared to slightly over 45% of the female labour force in Great Britain, ranked second. The Netherlands also are known for the lowest percentage of involuntary part-time employment in Europe (European Commission, 2008). In addition, the country is known because the part-time workforce does not have the

marginal characteristics to the extent part-timers have in other European countries. How can this threefold outlier position be explained? How does the Netherlands compare to neighbouring countries?

The research objective of this paper focuses on explaining the incidence of women's part-time employment from their gender roles, marginalised jobs, working time patterns and gender segregation. Section 2 provides the reader with a brief overview of findings in previous research in relation to the explanatory model used in this paper. The model is detailed in section 3, describing the hypotheses, the data and the variables used. Section 4 presents the results of the analysis. Conclusions are drawn in section 5.

## 2 Theories explaining women's part-time working hours

A substantial body of literature focuses on the supply side of the labour market. Reviewing this literature, we can cluster the explanations for the part-time working hours of women into five groups. The first focuses on the presence of children in a household, which will increase the likelihood of part-time work. A study for the Netherlands reveals that women with children at home are more likely to hold a part-time job (Baaijens, 2005). Second, the secondary earners thesis has gained attention in economic literature: women will supply their labour predominantly on a part-time basis as long as there is a principal earner caring for the financial needs of the family. Women who are not the main responsible for the household income, are more likely to be engaged in part-time employment (Tijdens, 2002). The third line of argument considers women's restricted time and explains that decisions regarding working hours are subordinate to their family-centred activities (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997). Fourth, according to the thesis of educational investments (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997); (Wooden, Warren, & Drago, 2009), the higher the level of

education, the more profitable an extra hour of paid work is compared to an hour of household work. Thus, women with more education will consider outsourcing household duties and extending their working hours. Fifth, as outlined by (Drobnic, 1997) for the former socialist economies of Central and Eastern European countries, older workers will work part-time when they are physically unable to spend a full-time week on paid work.

Part-time work has long fallen into the homogeneous category of 'atypical work' (Meulders, Plasman, & Plasman, 1994). Increasingly, however, part-time workers are recognized as a heterogeneous group, who work less than full-time for a variety of reasons (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997) (Warme, Lundy, & Lundy, 1992). (Tilly, 1991) argues that shorter hours per se are not what make part-time jobs inferior. He identifies three broad categories of part-time jobs: short-time, secondary and retention. Short-time jobs occur when employers temporarily reduce workers' hours during a business downturn. Secondary part-time jobs are created so that employers may benefit from of low compensation and scheduling flexibility of the worker. Retention part-time jobs are created to keep a company's valued, mostly skilled employees, whose life circumstances prevent them from working full-time. The retention category of part-time employees generally includes women with young children. Although Tilly's claim is about the United States, European authors have also used similar categories. (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997) suggest distinguishing between three categories of part-time jobs. The first category includes jobs of up to 10 hours a week (so-called marginal jobs). The second includes jobs of 11 to 29 hours a week, which are typically organized by the employer on a permanent basis. The third category includes reduced-hours jobs of 30 to 36 hours a week, in which hours a week are just a few less than full-time.

The demand-side of the part-time labour market has been studied less intensively. According to (Tilly, 1991), the increase in part-

time employment has not been caused by an increased substitution of full-time employees by part-time employees due to a compensation gap, but to the changing needs and strategies of employers. Thus, creating part-time jobs plays an increasing role in labour use strategies. Using a survey among establishments with ten or more employees in eight EU member states, (McRae, 1995) distinguishes two corporate strategies. This indicates that employers either accommodate the requests of individual workers who prefer reduced working hours, or incorporate part-time jobs into their labour use policies. The accommodating strategy is likely to be found in the public sector. (Meulders, Plasman, & Plasman, 1994) argue that adapting labour and social security legislation applicable to both part-time and full-time workers promotes part-time work in female-dominated sectors such as the public sector. Second, governments may promote job-sharing policies, which encourage part-time employment. Third, the accommodating strategy is presumably found in all female-dominated sectors. These sectors may face shortages in the supply of part-time workers. Rosenfeld and Birkelund (1995) argue that the service industry will demand part-time workers because this female-dominated industry will otherwise be unable to meet labour demand. In Sweden, however, the growth of the service sector appeared not to be related to the growth in part-time work, as average levels of part-time work rose in all industries (Sundström, 1991).

For labour use policies, the secondary workers strategy and the optimal staffing strategy can be distinguished. In the secondary workers strategy employers will create part-time jobs as a means of obtaining cheap labour. According to (Tilly, 1991), these companies adopt a low-wage, low-skill, high-turnover labour market. They are predominantly found in the trade and service sectors. These firms recruit part-timers because their hourly labour costs are lower due to lower wages and due to quasi-fixed costs. In the United States, for example, most employers will pay health insurance for full-time workers, but only

a few do so for part-timers. The same applies to costs related to sick leave, paid vacation, pension, dental and life insurance. Studies have shown that in the US part-time work expanded most rapidly during periods when part-timers were covered by relatively few insurance programs and protective regulations (Ehrenberg & Smith, 1997). It is assumed that employers will create part-time jobs for repetitive and less-skilled tasks (Warme, Lundy, & Lundy, 1992).

Firms whose services are concentrated on only a few hours a day, for example restaurants or cinemas, are likely to use an optimal staffing strategy of employing part-time workers. The same applies to companies that experience other forms of fluctuations in workload, be it per day, week, month or year. In general, companies' needs to vary hours may go beyond the use of fixed-hours working by full-time workers. Dominant labour use strategies will be matching labour input more closely, avoiding overtime payment, extending production capacity, and adapting to rapid changes in product markets (OECD, 1997). The shift to part-time employment is said to reflect the priority assigned to achieving staffing flexibility (Warme, Lundy, & Lundy, 1992). In the Netherlands, part-time jobs are a means of varying manpower levels during the week, enabling firms to cope with predicted fluctuations in the workload and avoiding paying workers for idle hours. Reasons for these fluctuations include the changing time-related demand for services, just-in-time production, avoidance of peak hours for travelling and the extension of operating hours (Tijdens, 2003). Thus, part-time employment is assumed to have time-related work characteristics. A study by (Meulders, Plasman, & Plasman, 1994) supports this thesis in explaining the existence of unsocial, rotating and split working hours. A study by (Rubery, Smith, & Fagan, 1998) of work on Saturdays and Sundays also corroborates.

### 3 Data & method

This study focuses on the nature of women's part-time work in seven EU member states. The study is limited to female workers, because the male and female labour forces differ substantially in the factors determining the likelihood of holding a part-time job. Based on the literature review in the previous section, four regimes of part-time employment are distinguished in the analysis which follows:

- (1) *The gender roles regime*, in which part-time employment is primarily seen as a supply-side characteristic, whereby the probability that a women holds a part-time job depends on the gender roles in her household.
- (2) *The secondary labour market regime*, in which part-time employment is primarily seen as a demand-side characteristic, whereby the probability that a women holds a part-time job depends on the firms' policies to concentrate temporary and high-turnover jobs in part-time employment.
- (3) *The optimal staffing regime*, in which part-time employment is primarily seen as a demand-side characteristic, whereby the probability that a women holds a part-time job depends on the firms' response to fluctuations in workload over the day or the week.
- (4) *The segregated firms regime*, in which part-time employment is seen as a both a demand-side and a supply-side characteristic, whereby the probability that a women holds a part-time job predominantly depends on the gender segregation in the workplace.

The data used to test the incidence of the four regimes in the EU member stem from the WageIndicator web-survey, which is part of the national WageIndicator websites (see for a detailed methodological exploration, [www.wageindicator.org](http://www.wageindicator.org) and (Tijdens, 2004).

The analysis is based on the data for seven EU member states: Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom. The dataset used in this study has been collected from January 2009 to September 2009, using 13,256 valid observations.

The dependent variable in the analysis is the respondent's self-perception of working in a full-time or a part-time job. The independent variables are clustered according to the hypotheses. For the gender roles regime, the analysis focuses on the impact of having a partner, having one or more children in the household, being the self-perceived prime responsible for the household income, and being the self-perceived prime responsible for the household duties. For the secondary labour market regime, the analysis focuses on the impact of having a fixed-term contract, and being less than two years in the current job. For the optimal staffing regime, the analysis focuses on the impact of working shifts, on Saturdays, on Sundays and in the evenings. For the segregated firms regime, the analysis focuses on the impact of working with a female supervisor, working in a female-dominated job and working in a female-dominated occupations. All analyses have been controlled for age and education.

### 4 Findings

Figure 1 reveals the results of the analysis. Coloured cells have been used to show whether the incidence of working either part-time or full-time increases if the predictor is true. Red and orange are used to indicate the chance that a woman holds a part-time job, whereas light and dark blue is used to indicate the chance that she works full-time.

Regarding the gender roles regime, Figure 1 reveals that in all countries women with one or more children at home are much more likely to hold a part-time job. In Finland however, the effect is smaller compared to the other six countries. Not surprisingly, all women who are responsible for the household income are

much more likely to hold a full-time job. In the UK the effect is lower, compared to the other six countries. It is also not surprising, that in all countries the prime responsibility for household duties increases the likelihood of a part-time job, particularly in the Netherlands and Spain. Unfortunately, these two survey questions have not been asked in Finland and Sweden. Finally, the figure shows that having a partner increases the chance of working full-time, particularly in Spain. Sweden is the exception. In this country having a partner increases the likelihood of working part-time. Overall, we find much support for the gender roles regime in all countries under study, with the most support in Spain and the least support in the UK.

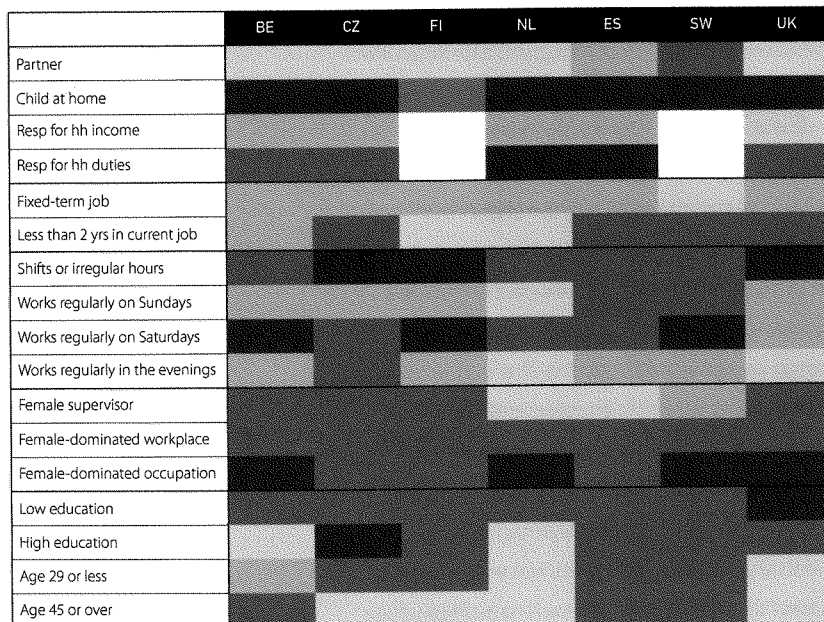
Regarding the secondary labour market regime, the graph shows that this assumption does not hold for fixed-term contracts. In all countries, women on fixed-term contracts are more likely to hold a full-time job. In four countries women working less than 2 years in the current job are more likely to hold a part-time job, and in three countries the reverse holds. Overall, we find no

or very little support for the secondary labour market regime in the countries under study. However, the secondary labour market was only measured with two characteristics. A study with more measures for the secondary labour market might reveal other results.

Regarding the optimal staffing regime, we find mixed results. Women working shifts or irregular hours are more likely to hold a part-time job. Similarly, women working regularly on Saturdays are more likely to hold a part-time job, with the exception of the UK. In contrast, working regularly in the evenings points to full-time jobs, with the exception of the Czech Republic. Working regularly on Sundays increases the likelihood of having a full-time job, apart from Spain and Sweden. In these countries, women who do so are more likely to hold a part-time job. Overall, we find some support for the optimal staffing regime.

Regarding the segregated firms regime, figure 1 reveals an overwhelming support. In all countries, women with a female supervisor, women in female-dominated workplaces and women in female-dominated occupations are more likely to hold a part-time job. The only exception is Sweden, where a female supervisor increases the likelihood of having a full-time job. The analyses have been controlled for two additional characteristics, notably education and age. Figure 1 reveals that in all countries women with low educational levels are more likely to hold a part-time job. On three countries, women with high educational levels are also more likely to hold a part-time job, leaving the women in middle educational levels holding a full-time job. In four countries, women with high educational levels are also more likely to hold a full-time job.

Figure 1 – The estimated odds ratios of the incidence of having a part-time job using a model with four explanatory clusters.



= the likelihood being employed in a part-time job is very large  
 = the likelihood being employed in a part-time job is large  
 = the likelihood being employed in a full-time job is very large  
 = the likelihood being employed in a full-time job is large

Source: WageIndicator data 2009.

As for age, the picture is mixed. In four countries, women under age 29 are more likely to hold a part-time job, whereas in three countries the reverse holds. This mixed picture depends very much on country-specific characteristics whether students hold jobs on the side. Women aged 45 and over also reveal a mixed picture. In three countries, this group is more likely to hold a part-time job, in four countries the reverse holds.

## 5 Conclusion

What is the nature of women's part-time employment in the European Union? Statistical analysis have been carried out to predict the likelihood of a woman working part-time. The study is based on the 2009 WageIndicator web-survey, using data from seven EU member states. Four regimes determining part-time employment have been examined. Our findings indicate that the gender roles regime is the best predictor of part-time employment in the European Union. Within this regime, having at least one child living in the household is shown to have a large effect in all countries, immediately followed by the indicator being a secondary earner. The segregated firms regime is the second best predicting cluster, revealing that part-time employment is clustered in female-dominated hierarchical relations, workplaces, and occupations. The third predictor is the optimal staffing regime. We found that women working shifts or irregular hours are more likely to hold part-time jobs, particularly when they are working on Saturdays. In contrast, women working on Sundays and in the evenings are more likely to hold full-time jobs in most countries. The worst predictor is the secondary labour market regime. Here, only two characteristics of the secondary labour market have been measured, but they reveal that women with fixed-term contracts are more likely to hold full-time jobs and that in half of the countries, women with few years of experience in the job are so too.

It must be noticed that although the analysis assumes a causal relationship this cross-sectional

analysis basically does not allow to derive conclusions about the causalities. Thus, it may well be the case that part-time workers are more prone to have female co-workers, thereby generating gender segregation in the firm. For policy recommendations, a better view on the causal relationships is necessary.

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