



# FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME WORK: REALITIES AND OPTIONS

## Employment Options of the Future

During the summer and autumn of 1998 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions carried out a major survey on Employment Options of the Future across the 15 EU Member States and Norway. Who wants to work? When? and Why? were the major questions examined in the survey, which sought the views of people currently in paid employment or who intend to enter the labour market within the next five years. This leaflet summarises the main findings of the survey on the full-time/part-time dimensions of employment.

### Key findings

- Four-fifths of those engaged in paid employment work full-time. While the majority of men (91%) work full-time, only 62% of women do so.
- In most countries, approximately three out of four of the part-timers are women.
- Permanent employment is the employment norm for most of the employed population, with the majority (81%) working under a permanent contract.
- Age is the key variable when identifying those who are in non-permanent employment: the younger the person interviewed, the more likely they are to be on a non-permanent employment contract.
- The majority of people working full-time would like to reduce their working hours, while this is true for only one in three of the part-timers.
- The average working week in the survey consists of 39 hours per week, but the general wish expressed by those interviewed is to have this reduced to 34.5 hours.
- When asked what type of part-time work people would prefer, the answers were extremely varied. However, the most popular option was 'some days per week in full-time, some days off' (38%), followed by 'reduced hours every working day' (26%).
- Nearly half (47%) of those interviewed feel that switching to part-time would damage their career prospects, and a sizeable number also (43 %) are of the opinion that part-timers are worse off with regard to social protection and social security.
- Less than one in three (31%) of those in full-time employment feels that their employer would view their request to reduce working hours favourably.



## Introduction

Working hours have been the focus of great interest in the 1990s, due mainly to the relatively high unemployment rates in the EU. Policies aiming to reduce working time have been high on the political agenda in many European countries, and the underlying assumption has often been that if people currently employed reduce their working hours, these hours will allow for the increase of labour market participation in the form of new jobs for those not currently in paid employment. While the overall picture is more complicated than this, there is a real need for information concerning the extent to which these policy aspirations are in line with current realities and individual preferences.

Most research has emphasised the necessity for joint analysis on both the levels of employment and the situation concerning working conditions and work organisation. The policy debate on flexibility has taken various forms, but has seldom been linked to and supported by empirical data, especially in the area of people's current and preferred working hours. We have very little information on when people want to work and how many hours they want to work, per day, week, month and year. How do people want to work: full-time, part-time, in permanent employment or perhaps on a fixed-term contract? Would they prefer to be self-employed or in dependent employment? And where do people want to work: at home or in the office with other colleagues? Last but not least, why do people wish to work in certain cycles and ways: just to earn a living or for other reasons also?

The Employment Options of the Future project sets out to help increase understanding of the many complexities in the future employment scenario. This paper will provide you with some preliminary insights into the working time issues covered in the survey, the first European-level survey ever carried out on this subject. It will focus on people in dependent employment, looking at both their present situation and their preferences for the future, as well as providing some figures at the individual country level.

*Table 1* Full-time employment in the 15 Member States and Norway

Country	Total %	men %	women %
Belgium	83	65	35
Denmark	80	62	38
Germany	75	68	32
Greece	84	65	35
Spain	83	75	25
France	82	65	35
Ireland	82	65	35
Italy	86	67	33
Luxembourg	85	67	33
Netherlands	66	76	24
Austria	83	65	35
Portugal	90	60	40
Finland	90	47	53
Sweden	73	65	35
United Kingdom	74	67	33
Norway	75	59	41

*Base:* All those in paid employment.

## Who are the employed ?

The survey reveals that at the time of the interviews 63% of the working age population in the EU and Norway were in paid employment: 58% of these are men, 42% women. More than a half of all those in paid employment are between the ages of 30 and 49, although gender differences in different age categories are considerable. The participation of women in paid employment clearly decreases with age, while the labour market participation of men remains quite constant throughout the age categories.

Most of the employed population – two out of three – live with a partner: in most cases, the partner is also in paid employment, at least on a part-time basis. Four-fifths of the employed work on a full-time basis, but here gender differences play a significant role. While the majority of men (91%)

*Table 2* Full-time and part-time employment by gender and age

(10-year age bands)	Employed men						Employed women					
	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-64	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-64
Full-time	57	87	95	95	92	81	55	72	60	60	60	43
Part-time	42	13	5	4	7	19	44	28	40	39	40	53
No answer	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Base:* All respondents who were in dependent employment or self-employed

work full-time, only 62% of women do so. Across the EU Member States, there are substantial differences to be observed between the genders in the division of full-time employment (see Table 1).

The picture is reversed when the gender breakdown for part-time work is examined. As in the case with full-time work, the country differences were quite significant, but in most countries approximately three out of four of the part-time workers are women.

Age is another significant variable in the full-time/part-time labour market division, but this factor is only really significant when examined in combination with gender. While the majority of men in all the age categories work full-time, so too do most women, albeit to a lesser degree (see Table 2 on page 2).

### Job security: permanent versus non-permanent employment

Permanent employment is still the main employment norm for most of those interviewed. Over four-fifths (81%) of the employed population hold a permanent employment contract, while temporary employment contracts are held by 17% (the missing 2% can be explained by the 'no answer' category). Some country differences can be noted (see Table 3), but more significantly, age is the main variable where employment status is concerned: the younger the person interviewed, the more likely he/she is to be on a non-permanent employment contract. A large proportion (59% ) of the 16-19 year olds turn out not to be employed on a permanent basis. Even in the next age category of 20-29 year-olds, the percentage remains as high as 30%, but then decreases rapidly

Table 3 Non-permanent employment in the EU and Norway

	Permanent	Non-permanent	No Answer	Total
Belgium	81	18	1	100
Denmark	84	16	0	100
Germany	81	16	3	100
Greece	81	17	2	100
Spain	71	27	2	100
France	80	19	2	100
Ireland	76	23	1	100
Italy	84	16	1	100
Luxembourg	87	13	0	100
Netherlands	76	22	2	100
Austria	85	12	3	100
Portugal	78	20	3	100
Finland	81	18	0	100
Sweden	78	22	0	100
United Kingdom	86	13	1	100
Norway	80	19	0	100

Base: All those in dependent employment

at the following age level. Women are only slightly more represented among non-permanent workers (19% compared to 16% of men).

### Current realities: the desire to work less - the need to work more?

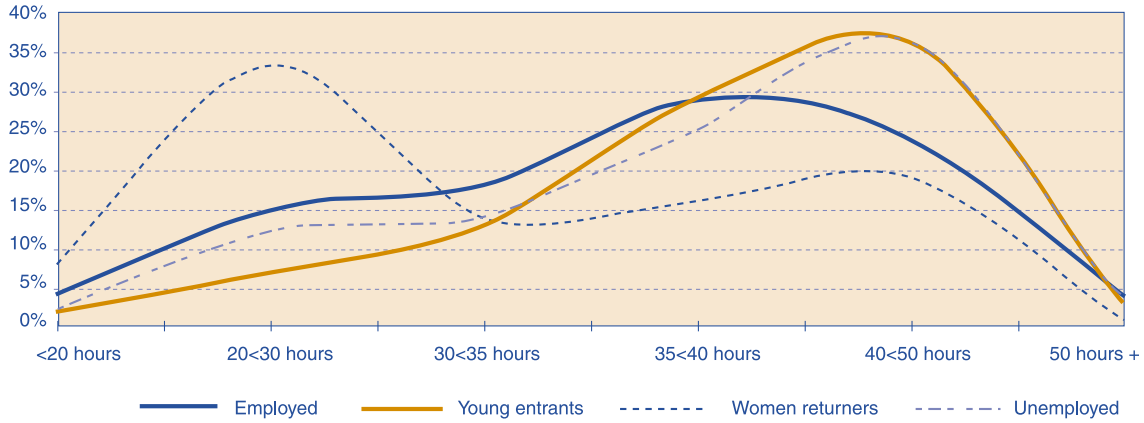
While the average working week constitutes 39 hours (see Figure 1 on page 4), the general desire expressed by the survey respondents is to reduce weekly working time to an average of 34.5 hours.

Table 4 Difference between current and preferred weekly working time, among full-time and part-time workers, by gender

Working hour preferences						
	Full-time workers			Part-time workers		
	Men 67 (%)	Women 33 (%)	Total 100 (%)	Men 24 (%)	Women 76 (%)	Total 100 (%)
More than now	5	4	5	44	32	35
Equal	33	32	33	36	48	45
Less than now:						
Up to 5 hours	9	9	9	2	3	2
5-10 hours	16	18	17	7	5	6
10-15 hours	12	15	13	4	3	3
15 hours and over	19	17	18	3	5	5
No answer	6	5	5	4	4	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Base: Those currently employed. The question asked was: 'Provided that you (and your partner) could make a free choice so far as working hours are concerned and taking into account the need to earn one's living: How many hours a week would you prefer to work at the present?'

Figure 1 Present working time profiles



(NB smoothed curves)

Source: Foundation report by John Atkinson, *Employment options and labour market participation*.

Despite this expressed preference, the reality is that many of those currently in paid employment frequently work overtime: nearly one in five at least once a week (18%), and equally around one in five every working day. Most people (56%) are able to take time off as compensation, but 43% of those interviewed are not in a position to do so. Men seem to be engaged in overtime work slightly more often than women, but the differences are not very significant. Overall, it is the self-employed who work the longest hours: an average of ten hours more than those in dependent employment.

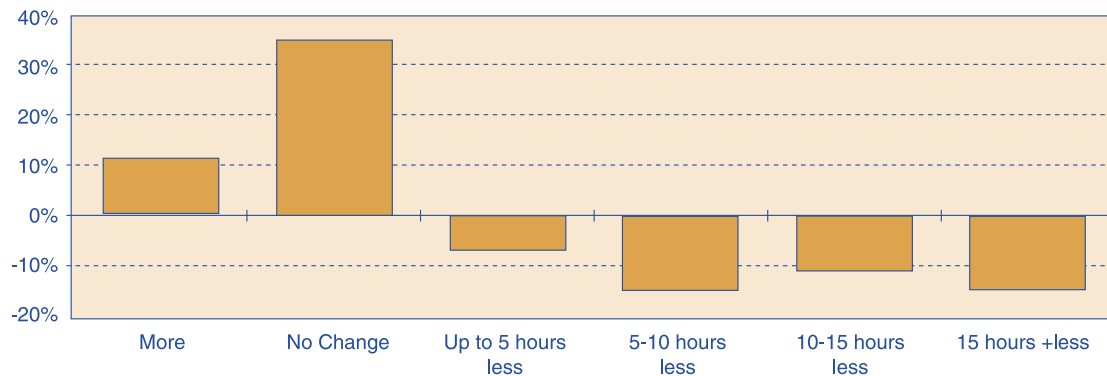
received half pay or no pay at all, more than 40% reply positively. Interestingly, one in four (23%) is even prepared to avail of this option without pay.

Although the majority of people working full-time would like to reduce their weekly working hours, this is true for only one in three part-timers (35%). Only one in ten of those currently employed (mostly women) express a wish to work longer hours, and approximately one in six say they wish to reduce their working hours by 15 hours or more (see Table 4 on page 3).

The majority of those in dependent employment (57%) say that they would be interested in 'having a longer break of several weeks or months' in their work. Two out of three (64%) of this group would be interested in pursuing travel and leisure activities, while one in four would use the break in order to go into further education. When asked if they would still be willing to opt for the sabbatical if they only

Therefore, while in general people want to work less (see Figure 2 on working time preferences), one in three of the full-time employed and nearly one in two of the part-time employed are happy with the number of hours they work at present. For those with partners, the preferred number of weekly working hours for partners is less, 33.1 hours. Only 11% of respondents would prefer their partner not to

Figure 2 Working time preferences of those currently in paid work



Source: Foundation report by John Atkinson, *Employment options and labour market participation*.

work at all. This differs significantly from the present situation where 23% of those interviewed have a partner who does not work. The preferences concerning the partner's working hours differ also according to whether those interviewed work full-time or part-time themselves. Full-time employees more often express a preference for their partners to work a reduced number of weekly working hours (this is especially true for men working full-time), while those working part time do not show this aspiration so explicitly.

### Different forms of part-time work

A quarter of those currently working full-time state that they would prefer a part-time job, either on a permanent basis (11%) or for a given period (12%), but only 14% has ever tried to change to part-time employment. Women tend to be more interested in considering working on a part-time basis. Most of those who work full-time yet express a preference for working part-time would consider working part-time only for a limited period of two years or less. When asked what type of part-time employment they would prefer, the answers are rather heterogeneous (see Table 5).

When these full-time workers are asked why they wish to work part time, the reasons given are varied. The most popular reason for wanting to reduce working time was to have 'more time for self and one's activities', followed by 'to reduce the strains resulting from a full-time job', and by 'more time for the children'.

Table 5 Type of part-time work preferred by full-time workers, by gender

Type of part-time work preferred			
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)
Reduced hours every working day	22	30	26
Some days per week in full-time, some days off	36	40	38
Longer periods of full-time work followed by longer periods off	14	9	12
Flexible working time arrangements with your actual working hours fixed at short notice	23	17	20
Other	2	1	1
No answer	4	2	3
Total	100	100	100

Base: Full-time workers who would prefer part-time work

While it is clear that many full-time workers would prefer to work part-time, the question is, could they afford to do so? When asked if they could financially afford to work less, only one in five (18%) answers yes. Nearly one third (32%) say that this would mean cutting down expenses, but for the majority of people (44%) cutting down on hours is not financially feasible at all. It is interesting to note that 2% state that reducing working hours would be possible only if other household members decide to work more hours: this seems to suggest that people view their working hours (and financial arrangements) on quite an individual basis even within the one household.


Table 6 Perceptions on how well part-timers are covered by employment law and social security

Country	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Belgium	29	34	37
Denmark	49	41	10
Germany	44	48	8
Greece	67	16	15
Spain	51	30	18
France	34	54	11
Ireland	62	23	14
Italy	19	63	17
Luxembourg	37	47	16
Netherlands	25	50	24
Austria	43	48	9
Portugal	51	20	28
Finland	40	32	27
Sweden	47	43	10
United Kingdom	64	19	15
Norway	49	43	8
TOTAL	43	42	15

Base: All respondents who were working full-time. Question asked: 'Do you think that in general part-timers are worse off than full-timers so far as protection by employment law and social security is concerned?'

### Part-time work and career development

The survey reveals contrasting attitudes concerning the effects of part-time work on professional development: 47% of those interviewed are of the opinion that working part-time would damage their career prospects. However, almost the same number (45%) do not share this view. When asked if they think that part-time workers are worse off with regard to employment law protection and social security coverage, 43% answer 'yes'. The differences between the replies of different countries regarding this question are considerable (see Table 6).



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While most of those in full-time employment (58%) feel that it would not be possible to carry out their present job while working part-time, another 39% hold the opposite view. However, many people are of the opinion that their employer would not favourably view requests to work reduced hours: less than one in three (31%) say that their employer would be positive towards such an initiative. The differences between the sexes are noticeable here: 65% of men think that their working part time would not be an option considered by their employer, while the equivalent percentage for women is 47%.

### Reasons for seeking to work part-time

As mentioned earlier, roughly three out of four of those employed on a part-time basis are women. The reasons for working part-time are varied, but the main reason given by just over half of the part-time workers (51%) for this working time arrangement was 'don't want to work full time'. Some 17% are still studying or at school, and one in five (19%) gives as the reason: 'could not find a full-time job'. Country differences in this aspect are quite significant, but due to small sample sizes further differentiation was not possible here.

The main reason for men working part-time is education, while the majority of women state that they do not wish to work full-time. However, while both men and women express a strong desire to 'have more time for self and one's activities', it was mainly the women who declare 'time for children' as their reason for working part-time.

### Conclusions

The analysis shows that the influence of age, education, and personal economic situation on working-time issues is more or less strong, according to cases. However, gender is the single factor which most influences people's working time

patterns. It is interesting to note that while real situations are very gender-shaped, individual preferences are less so.

The focus on the part-time/full-time aspects of the survey indicates the continuing importance that part-time work holds today, especially for women employees. The survey data suggests, on the whole, that part-time work performs different functions respectively for women and for men. For women, it seems to act as a major instrument in combining paid work with family duties, particularly in the case of women with children. Male part-time workers, on the other hand, are more interested in using part-time work as a means to combine study and work better, as well allowing them more time for themselves and their leisure activities.

However, part-time employment should not be viewed simply as a 'neutral' alternative to full-time employment, as it covers a whole range of employment situations and does not preclude the quality/stability of the employment relationship. Contrary to the full-time norm that has structured the world of work in Europe for several decades, part-time work goes hand-in-hand with an intense diversification trend regarding work and employment. As such, a comprehensive approach should consider such aspects as: 1) Is part-time work voluntary and individually arranged or collectively negotiated? 2) Is it substantial rather than marginal part-time, and 3) Is the employment relationship permanent or non-permanent?

In conclusion, the research results show that women in the EU still hold a particular position concerning working time, as compared to men. Working women represent a crucial bridge between the labour market and the family system: this has remarkable implications and consequences on the elaboration of EU policies, both in terms of employment and family measures.



## About the Employment Options of the Future survey

This survey, carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions over the summer and autumn of 1998, involved 30,557 telephone assisted interviews with people aged between 16 and 64 years across the 15 EU Member States and Norway. The survey provides information on both the current situations and future preferences of those interviewed concerning employment. At the time of the interviews, 43% (7 749 out of 17 908) of the non-employed expressed the wish not to work in five years. This group was not included in further analysis. At the first stage of analysis, four main target groups were defined:

**Employed Persons:** persons who declare themselves employed or who answer 'yes' to the question on whether they worked last week (N=12 649).

**Young Entrants:** persons who are at the beginning of their working lives and who do not yet have substantial working experience (due to studying, for example) and are less than 30 years of age (N=3 932).

**Women Returners:** women who want to take up paid work again after a break in their careers. They have previous work experience and a minimum break of one year from employment. A shorter break is accepted only if the respondent terminated the last job because of giving birth to a child or because she had to take care of elderly, ill or disabled persons (N=3 499).

**Unemployed persons:** persons who declare themselves unemployed (N=2 537).

Definitions used in the text:

*part-time* = less than 35 hours a week (unless otherwise mentioned)

*full time* = 35 hours a week or more.

*temporary employment* = non-permanent employment (including fixed-term and temporary agency contracts)

*self-employed persons* = persons who declare themselves to be self-employed.

This paper has been prepared by Professor Giovanni Gasparini, Università Cattolica, Milano, in collaboration with Agnès Parent-Thirion, Mia Latta and Matthieu de Nanteuil, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.





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### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the Employment Options of the Future survey may be found on the Foundation website ([www.eurofound.ie](http://www.eurofound.ie)) or by contacting:

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