



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Part-time work in Europe

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Part-time work has become increasingly commonplace in the European Union. In 2002, around 18% of the total EU working population worked part-time. However, such work is not equally distributed among gender and age groups, nor among countries, sectors or occupations. From a working conditions perspective, the empirical evidence shows that part-time work is associated with several negative working conditions, such as fewer opportunities for training and career progression, weaker job tenure, lower salary levels, and less access to supplementary payments and social protection benefits. Conversely, part-time workers are less likely to report job-related health problems and are more likely to achieve a positive work-life balance.

Introduction and definition

One of the most important changes in Europe’s employment structure over the last 10 years concerns the increasing diversification of working-time schedules. The most evident indicator of this is the rise in the rate of part-time work relative to full-time employment ([Gasparini et al, 2000](#)). The intensification of international competition, new production methods and forms of organisation, increased unemployment, rising female participation rates and more diverse working-time demands from the workforce all contribute to this increase ([Fagan, 2003](#)).

Part-time employment has been publicly praised as a tool for promoting market flexibility and reorganising working time, for family policy and for redistributing existing employment (thereby reducing unemployment). For employers, a part-time option can permit greater flexibility in responding to market requirements (e.g. by increasing capacity or extending opening hours). Working part-time may offer the chance of a better balance between working life and other activities (such as family responsibilities, training, leisure or civic activities), as well as making it easier to enter the labour market or retire from employment. For policymakers confronting the problem of high unemployment, the growth of part-time work may reduce the number of job-seekers or, at least, the number of people registered as such ([ILO, 1997](#)). Indeed, the EU [employment guidelines](#) and [recommendations](#) explicitly encourage the social partners and public authorities to foster the development of part-time work and other flexible working arrangements as a means of modernising the organisation of work.

According to the [European Framework Agreement on part-time work](#) , concluded in 1997 among the European social partners, the term ‘part-time worker’ refers to ‘an employee whose normal hours of work, calculated on a weekly basis or on average over a period of employment of up to one year, are less than the normal hours of work of a comparable full-time worker’ . This definition is very similar to the ILO’s, whose [Convention No. 175](#) defines the term ‘part-time worker’ as ‘any employed person whose normal hours of work are less than those of comparable full-time workers’ . The reason both cases mention the concept of a ‘comparable’ worker is due to the fact that ‘the number of hours per week or per month that are regarded as being normal for full-time employees vary considerably according to the profession or activity concerned’ (ILO, 1992). Both definitions serve to identify the ‘part-time workers’ category on a legal basis, so these workers can be covered by the legislation governing part-time work. It is also worth underlining that part-time work may cover different forms of employment, such as job-sharing, combining work with training (e.g. apprenticeships), and semi-retirement ([Vielle and Walthery, 2003](#)).

Profile of part-time workers

In the last decade, part-time employment as a percentage of total employment has increased in most industrialised countries (O’Reilly and Fagan, 1998). In 1992, 14.2% of the total EU working population defined themselves as part-time workers; by 2002, this figure had increased to 18.1%. This general upward trend has been constant during the 10-year period. However, there are marked differences in part-time employment rates depending on countries, sectors or occupations, as well as individual characteristics such as age or gender.

Table 1 Part-time employment in the European Union, 1992 and 2002, by gender and Member States (% of total employment)

Member States	Total	Male	Female

	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002	
Austria		12.6	18.9	3.6	5.1	24.5	35.7
Belgium		12.7	19.4	2.3	5.9	28.9	37.7
Denmark		23.0	20.6	10.7	11.0	37.1	31.4
Finland		10.4	12.4	7.3	8.0	13.7	17.1
France		13.1	16.2	3.8	5.0	25.2	29.7
Germany		14.5	20.8	2.7	5.8	30.9	39.5
Greece		4.5	4.5	2.6	2.3	8.1	8.1
Ireland		9.1	16.5	3.8	6.5	18.7	30.5
Italy		5.5	8.6	2.5	3.7	11.2	16.7
Luxembourg		6.5	11.7	1.0	1.8	16.2	26.4
Netherlands		34.8	43.8	15.2	21.5	64.4	72.8
Portugal		7.2	11.3	4.1	7.1	11.1	16.4
Spain		6.0	8.0	2.2	2.6	13.8	17.0
Sweden		20.5	21.4	6.8	11.2	36.0	32.9
United Kingdom		22.9	25.0	6.3	9.4	43.8	44.0
Total European Union		14.2	18.2	4.2	6.6	28.8	33.5
Initial data for Italy and Sweden refers to 1993, initial data for Austria refers to 1994. Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2002. Data for 1992 provided in Employment in Europe 2003, Recent trends and prospects							

The figures illustrate the prevalence of women in part-time employment. Whereas a minority of EU men (6.6%) work on a part-time basis, this percentage is much higher in the case of women (33.5%) (data in both cases for 2002). Moreover, a time dynamic perspective shows that part-time work has increased more among EU women than for men, rising by 4.7 percentage points in the 10-year period compared with a rise of 2.4 percentage points for men.

A cross-country analysis shows important differences in the presence of part-time work. It is more widespread in the countries of northern Europe than in those of southern Europe. The highest presence of part-time workers can be observed in the Netherlands (43.8% of total employment), followed by an intermediate group comprising the United Kingdom (25.0%), Sweden (21.4%), Germany (20.8%) and Denmark (20.6%). The lowest presence of part-time employment can be found in the southern European countries: Portugal (11.3%), Italy (8.6%), Spain (8.0%) and Greece (4.5%). These national differences are caused by a combination of factors including differences in the state of the economy, the labour market, the organisation of childcare, education, and tax and social security systems (O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998). These factors are further described below.

Interestingly, and from a time dynamic perspective, part-time work has increased in all Member States for both men and women in the time period 1992-2002, with the only exceptions of Greece in the case of men and Denmark and Sweden in the case of women (where the percentage of part-time workers has fallen). The proportion of part-time working women has remained almost constant in Greece and the United Kingdom during the same time period.

The gender division in part-time employment can be observed across all the EU Member States, to varying degrees.

The countries with the lowest differences between male and female part-time workers are the Nordic countries of Finland, Denmark, Sweden, as well as the Netherlands. In these countries, the rate of female part-time employment is, at most, three times the male part-time rate. As stated above, Denmark and Sweden are the only countries in the EU where the female part-time presence dropped between 1992 and 2002. Spain, Germany, Austria and Luxembourg show the largest differences between male and female part-time rates. In these countries, female part-time rates are seven or more times higher than those for men.

An age perspective shows an uneven distribution of working time over the life course of individuals. The highest presence of part-timers shows at the beginning and at the end of people's working lives, especially for men, whereas full-time employment is concentrated in the middle years (data obtained from the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, also supported by [Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001](#)). These results suggest that part-time work may facilitate, at least in a number of countries, the gradual entry of young persons into the labour market as well as the gradual withdrawal from wage employment for older workers ([CES, 1997](#)).

Part-time work is to be found mainly in certain sectors and occupations. It is particularly common in the health, education and services sectors, where up to 22.6% work on a part-time basis. This figure contrasts with 16.9% in agriculture and 6.9% in industry. The hotel/catering and retailing sectors show the largest presence of part-time employment (28% and 23.1% of total sector employment, respectively). (Figures from Eurostat Labour Force Survey 2002.) Occupational status is also significant in the sense that part-timers, and specially part-time women, are more likely to be in certain jobs such as 'white-collar professional and clerical' or 'blue-collar operating and labouring manual'. Part-time employment is particularly rare in managerial positions, regardless of gender considerations.

Table 2 Concentration by occupational status, by gender and full-time/part-time status

Occupational status group	Men			Women			All
	Part time	All	Full time	Part time	All		
White-collar managerial jobs	59	5	64	30	6	36	100
White-collar professional jobs	44	7	51	29	20	49	100
White-collar clerical and service jobs	28	4	32	39	29	68	100
Blue-collar craft and related manual jobs	79	5	84	12	4	16	100
Blue-collar operative/labour manual jobs	57	8	65	18	17	35	100
All	50	6	56	26	18	44	100

Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002

It is important to bear in mind that part-time work varies substantially within its own definition. It encompasses working times close to the full-time standard and others that are much lower, so the range of average working times

within and between the countries is also much greater than in the case of full-time work. Some recent studies (e.g. [Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002](#)) have tried to take account of this heterogeneity, distinguishing the part-time category into marginal (up to 19 hours per week) and substantial (20 to 34 hours per week) part-time work.

Table 3 Proportion of full-time (FT), substantial part-time (SPT) and marginal part-time (MPT) work (Dependent employees, horizontal %), by Member States

Member States	Men			Women		
	FT	SPT	MPT	FT	SPT	MPT
Austria	95	3	1	70	24	8
Belgium	91	8	2	61	28	13
Denmark	89	6	5	65	27	9
Finland	96	4	1	86	9	6
France	91	8	1	66	25	9
Germany	92	4	6	59	25	18
Greece	90	6	3	68	23	9
Ireland	88	9	3	65	24	10
Italy	88	9	3	70	23	8
Luxembourg	94	7	1	61	37	4
Netherlands	82	10	9	36	31	35
Portugal	93	4	1	81	13	6
Spain	91	9	0	75	21	6
Sweden	90	7	3	63	31	6
United Kingdom	89	7	4	54	27	21
Norway	91	7	3	59	26	16
EU15 + NOR	91	6	3	60	25	14

Source: Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002

According to these data, substantial part-time work predominates over marginal part-time work in all the countries, with the exception of the Netherlands (for women) and Germany (for men), though the difference is low for Danish and Dutch men. Marginal part-time work (less than 20 hours per week) is widespread among Dutch male (9%) and female dependent employees (35%), as well as among women in the UK and in Germany (21% and 18% respectively). By way of contrast, in countries such as Sweden, Luxembourg and Denmark, the majority of female part-timers are in substantial part-time jobs, many of which involve working times very close to the full-time norm. This result is also confirmed by other studies (e.g. O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998).

Factors underlying the development of part-time work practices

This section analyses the main factors (both macro and micro) that affect (positively or negatively) the decision of individuals to work on a part-time basis. The macroeconomic factors include ([Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner,](#)

):

- The employment situation. A sustained employment situation enhances employees' individual and collective bargaining power for better realising their preferences on increased/decreased working time. To give an example, the Eurostat data show that, generally speaking, those EU Member States with the highest unemployment rates also show the highest presence of involuntary part-time workers (see below for a definition of involuntary part-time work).
- The general regulatory framework (i.e. the tax and social security systems), as well as the institutional and social environment (i.e. the quality and extent of childcare provision). These may (or may not) reward part-time jobs (especially marginal part-time work), thereby affecting the working-time decisions of individuals. In this respect, it is worth underlining that most Member States, encouraged by the European Union (for example, through the [e3European Strategy for Employment3](#)), strongly foster the development of part-time employment practices.
- The existing work organisation patterns within companies. Many employers have argued in favour of the development of more flexible forms of employment that may enable them to control labour costs and respond to international competition and fluctuations in demand ([Gómez et al., 2002](#)). However, it is not clear that all employers have come to terms with the concept of part-time work. This is due to organisational difficulties and the fact that many fixed costs apply per worker which may increase overall labour costs if the proportion of part-time work is increased. Fewer than one in three (31%) of the EU's full-time employees believe that their employer would favourably view requests to work reduced hours ([Gasparini et al., 2000](#)), although empirical evidence shows that women managers are more in favour of part-time work practices ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)).
- The expansion of several tertiary activities (health and education, sales, hotels and catering, and domestic workers) which rely particularly on the use of part-time workers. In addition, the increasing labour market participation of women in the EU has resulted in a greater demand for alternative ways of organising work (i.e. on a part-time basis) that may allow them to combine work with other duties.

A number of micro factors also affect the individuals' decisions to work on a part-time basis ([Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002](#)):

- The composition of the household, in the sense that decisions on the hours that might be worked are not usually taken by individuals in isolation but rather in the context of households as a whole. Their decisions towards labour supply depend on the division of roles among the members of the household. The presence of children (especially of young children) increases the probability of women working in part-time jobs. This is due largely to the fact that women in nearly all EU countries still shoulder the main burden of unpaid household and family work.
- The household's economic situation. This has a clear influence on working-time decisions. Couples who are 'well off' tend to prefer less time in paid work, whereas couples experiencing financial difficulties prefer to spend more time in paid work, either on a part-time basis (for those who are not working) or on a full-time basis (for those working part-time). From an individual perspective, available empirical evidence shows that, for a large share of full-time workers, cutting down on hours is not financially feasible ([Gasparini et al., 2000](#)).
- The existing working conditions associated with working on a part-time basis, especially in terms of salary conditions or opportunities for career promotion and/or learning and training (see the following section for a full discussion on these issues).
- The characteristics of individuals, such as their qualification levels or their value systems. Workers with identical characteristics (income, education, domestic situation, etc.) can develop very different life itineraries due to differing value systems. For instance, Dutch research shows that men are more career-oriented than women. This applies even before they enter the labour market and despite the fact that they may follow the same professional education as their female counterparts ([van Schie, 1997](#)).

Information on why individuals decide to work on a part-time basis abounds. The Eurostat Labour Force Survey reveals that up to 31.9% of the EU15 population working on a part-time basis do so because they do 'not want to work full time' while a much higher figure than the 14.1% who say they work part-time because of the 'impossibility of finding a full-time job' (involuntary part-time work). The results from the Third European Survey on Working Conditions, 2000 ([Paoli and Merllié, 2001](#)) show that 22% of European part-time workers would like to work more hours than they currently do (24% for men and 22% for women), while 10% of EU part-timers would prefer to work fewer hours (17% and 8% among men and women, respectively).

Interestingly, available empirical evidence ([Gasparini G et al., 2000](#)) shows that 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%). However, only 14% have ever tried to change to part-time employment. Women tend to be more interested in considering working on a part-time basis.

The Eurostat data also show that up to 25.8% of EU individuals working part-time suggest 'child and adult care reasons' as motivating their decisions. Other factors include 'other reasons', 'involvement in education activities' or 'sickness' (11.7%, 10.9% and 3.1% of individuals, respectively). As can be inferred from these data, for the largest share of EU part-timers, this working time arrangement is freely chosen as a way of reconciling participation in paid work with other activities. Only for a small (but significant) share of EU part-timers does this represent the only possible form of paid work (at least temporarily).

Table 4 Main reasons for working on a part-time basis by gender, EU15, 2002

Main reason	Men	Women	Total men and women
Impossible to find a full-time job	19.0	12.8	14.1
Do not want to work full time	31.0	32.2	31.9
Involvement in education or training activities	23.6	7.6	10.9
Sickness or disability	5.9	2.4	3.1
Child and adult care	4.2	31.5	25.8
Other reasons	11.8	11.7	11.7
No reasons	4.5	2.0	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey, 2002			

The reasons for working part-time are very different if gender considerations are taken into account. Whereas 23.6% of part-time men cite 'education' reasons, this percentage drops to 7.6% among women. By way of contrast, 'child and adult care' reasons are stressed by 31.5% of EU women part-time workers, whereas only 4.2% of their male counterparts cite this reason. Involuntary part-timers are more common among men compared with women (19.2% versus 12.8%, respectively), which shows that the option of part-time work is more attractive for women than for men. However, the fact that part-time work is an option in the context of limited alternative forms of childcare might reveal that the notion of 'choice' is ambiguous and contingent ([Fagan and Warren, 2001](#)). Thus, some part-timers would prefer full-time work if childcare services were more extensive or if full-time working hours were organised in more family-friendly ways.

The Eurostat data also show that, whereas in all the southern European countries (Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal), together with Finland, the main reason for part-time work is the inability to find a full-time job, in the remaining Member States, the majority state different motives. Thus, 'education' reasons are particularly relevant in the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries, whereas 'child and adult care' reasons are particularly relevant among Austrian, German, Belgian and British individuals. Meanwhile, differences by gender show that the 'child and adult care' reasons are the most relevant for women in nearly all countries (with the exception of the southern European countries and Finland, where 'involuntary' part-time is again the main motive).

Quality of work and employment

The previous section has shown that the working conditions associated with part-time employment may have an influence on the decision of individuals to work full or part-time. This section analyses the existing evidence of the

working conditions of part-time workers.

It has already been shown that part-time work is particularly concentrated in the lower paid areas of employment (e.g. clerical and elementary manual jobs) and in certain tertiary sectors (e.g. hotel/catering, retailing or real estate). Of course, this situation impacts significantly on the working conditions of part-time workers in these areas.

The available empirical evidence shows that part-time workers (especially women) report higher levels of general satisfaction with their working conditions than full-time workers (Hakim, 1996 and [Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)). However, this positive result is probably due to high satisfaction levels with working hours specifically, whereas part-timers are also conscious (as will be shown) of their inferior working conditions in a number of issues such as payment rates, access to training or promotion opportunities.

Table 5 Satisfaction with working conditions, by gender and full-time/part-time status

Full time	Men		Women		All		
	Part time	All	Part time	All	Part time	All	
Very satisfied	26	31	27	28	37	32	29
Fairly satisfied	57	50	56	56	51	54	55
Not very satisfied or not at all satisfied	17	18	16	16	12	14	15
Don't know	1	2	1	0	0	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002

Satisfaction with working hours

In the EU as a whole, most people working part-time do so voluntarily as a means of combining work with other activities or commitments. However, this does not apply to all part-timers. According to the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, 14.1% of EU part-timers (data for 2002) are in this situation involuntarily due to inadequate full-time employment opportunities. The actual figures vary between men and women (19.0% and 12.8%, respectively). The Third European Survey on Working Conditions, 2000 ([Paoli and Merllié, 2001](#)) suggests that up to 22% of European part-timers would like to work more hours (which does not mean that all of them would like to work on a full-time basis). Again this is more significant for men than for women.

In these cases, part-time work becomes, following the ILO's definition, a form of 'underemployment', as it affects people 'involuntarily working less than the normal duration of work determined for the activity, who [are] seeking or available for additional work' (ILO, 1998). Of course, this mismatch between the usual volume of hours worked and the preferred arrangement can be considered as a negative working condition by itself. It is therefore not surprising to find that part-time workers are more likely to hold multiple jobs than full-time workers (14% of male part-time workers and 8% of female part-time workers hold more than one job, compared with 5% of male full-time workers and 4% of female full-time workers) ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)).

The Eurostat data also show that the proportion of part-timers who would prefer to work full time is particularly high in Greece (44.2%), Finland (31.5%), Italy (31.1%), France (24.1%), Sweden (22.4%) and Spain (19.1%), whereas the proportions are considerably lower in Austria (9.3%), United Kingdom (8.3%), Luxembourg (7.2%) and the Netherlands (2.3%). In all the EU countries with the exception of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and Portugal, the percentage of involuntary part-time work among men is higher than among women.

Table 6 Involuntary part-time work as a % of total part-time employment, by gender and Member States, 2002

	Men	Women	Total men and women
Belgium	18.7	15.2	15.8
Denmark	10.6	18.2	16.0
Germany	18.4	11.1	12.3
Greece	47.1	42.8	44.2
Spain	20.1	18.8	19.1
France	33.0	22.3	24.1
Ireland	27.9	9.5	13.7
Italy	40.9	27.5	31.1
Luxembourg	-	-	7.2
The Netherlands	3.4	1.9	2.3
Austria	12.3	8.7	9.3
Portugal	13.1	20.4	17.9
Finland	26.7	33.8	31.5
Sweden	20.5	23.2	22.4
United Kingdom	16.1	6.3	8.3
Total European Union	19.0	12.8	14.1
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey, 2002			

Involuntary part-time employment is low (2.4%) among the young and those at the start of their career (15-24 years old). It is also low (2.6%) among those approaching retirement (50-64 years old). Both these groups contrast with the 9% figure for involuntary retirement among those in the intermediate age group (25-49 years old), according to Eurostat data. Interestingly, Finnish evidence confirms that there are large differences among sectors with regard to the presence of involuntary part-time work ([Kauhanen, 2003](#)). French evidence ([Bué, 2002](#) and [Galtier, 1999](#)) underlines that the working conditions of part-time workers are strongly related to the fact that their decision to work part-time may be either imposed (by the employer) or freely decided. Voluntary part-timers seem to have better employment and working conditions in terms of higher degrees of autonomy at work, better salary conditions and more social working times.

Employment tenure and contract conditions

Part-time workers tend, on average, to stay in their jobs for a shorter period than full-time workers, both for men and women ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)). This result, also confirmed in a Finnish study ([Kauhanen, 2003](#)), is probably explained by the fact that part-timers are disproportionately employed in those sectors with the highest turnover rates (such as sales, and hotels and catering). In addition to this, part-time workers also show a higher propensity to exit the labour market or to change jobs (especially among women with young children).

Table 7 Employment tenure with company and in present job, by gender and full-time/part-time status

	Men			Women		
	Part time	All	Full time	Part time	All	
Full time						

Short tenure	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed in their current job for 1 year or less	18	32	19	20	28	23
Employed by the company for 1 year or less	18	32	19	20	27	22
Long tenure	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed in their current job for 10+ years	42	33	42	37	31	35
Employed by the company for 10+ years	45	36	44	40	33	37
Average tenure	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average number of years in current job (median)	8	4	8	6	5	6
Average number of years with the company (median)	7	4	7	6	4	5

Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002

This weaker employment tenure among part-timers has a clear influence on work contracts. Part-time workers are more likely to work under temporary employment contracts (fixed-term contracts, temporary agency contracts or apprentice contracts). The Third European Survey on Working Conditions, 2000 ([Paoli and Merllié, 2001](#)) suggests that 28% and 25% of European part-time workers have a fixed-term or a temporary agency contract, well above the 16% who have an indefinite contract. Meanwhile, a gender perspective shows that 16% of women part-timers and 21% of male part-timers have a fixed-term contract or are temporary agency workers compared with 11% of women and 9% of men employed full time ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)).

These results are also confirmed in a Dutch study, which again shows that non-permanent contracts are more common among part-timers than among full-time employees. In the Netherlands, part-time work is particularly common among on-call workers and freelancers ([Goudswaard et al., 1999](#)). Part-time employees with a permanent contract show higher job satisfaction levels in comparison to those with a non-permanent contract ([Goudswaard and Andries, 2002](#)).

For permanent employees, the probability of working part-time decreases with the years of service within the same company. In this sense, part-time work affects, in decreasing order, employees with less than one year of service (24.8%), followed by those with between one and two years of service (18.7%), and finally those with over two years of service (14.5%) ([Boisard et al., 2002](#)). However, as was noted earlier, it should not be forgotten that, in the latest stages of people's working lives, the probability of working part-time increases.

Wage conditions

One of the key areas where part-timers suffer from relatively worse working conditions vis-à-vis their full-time counterparts relates to their remuneration levels. Part-timers are more present than full-time workers in the lowest earning groups (in monthly terms) (Fagan and Burchell, 2002). Once again, it is women who are most at risk of low pay (47% of women part-time workers fall into the lowest earnings band, compared with 32% of male part-timers).

Table 8 Earnings distribution of employed workers and wage structures of employees, by gender and full-time/part-time status

Net monthly earnings scale	Men			Women			All
	Part time	All	Full time	Part time	All		
Net monthly earnings scale (%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lowest	8	32	10	15	47	28	18
Low-medium	20	14	19	30	14	24	21
Medium-high	23	11	22	20	8	15	19
Highest	22	16	21	12	7	10	16
Don't know/refused	27	27	28	23	24	23	26
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Wage structure of employees (%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fixed salary or wage	93	85	92	95	90	93	92
Piece rate or individual bonuses	9	8	9	4	3	4	6
Sunday work premiums	9	8	9	8	8	8	9
Payments for bad working conditions	5	2	5	2	1	2	3
'Other' individual payments	16	8	15	11	8	10	13

Company profit sharing scheme	6	5	6	4	2	3	5
Group performance bonus	3	2	3	2	1	1	2
Income from shares in the company	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
Other pay additions	7	4	5	5	4	5	5
Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002							

Several reasons can be suggested for explaining part-time workers' lower hourly payment levels in comparison with full-time workers ([ILO, 1997](#)):

- Part-time workers tend to work in sectors, and indeed in branches of sectors, where the payment rates are lower in comparison with the national average, such as retailing, sales, hotels and catering, etc.
- Part-time workers also tend to be employed in some of the lowest paid jobs in the economy (mainly clerical work or menial tasks), and they are usually excluded from supervisory posts.
- Women and 15-25 year-olds make up a disproportionate percentage of part-time workers; both groups are characterised by lower payment levels (the former as a result of discriminatory practices, the latter because of their recent arrival into the labour market).

The available empirical evidence also shows that part-time workers are less likely to receive a fixed salary or wage, and are more likely to be excluded from supplementary payments such as bonuses or premiums (Sunday work premiums, payments for poor working conditions, profit sharing and performance bonus, etc), especially women part-timers ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)). Of course, the fact that part-time workers are more present in certain sectors and occupations may also explain this result.

In addition to these remuneration conditions, part-time workers also suffer discrimination regarding access to social benefits. In a number of Member States, a minimum number of hours of work are required to qualify for certain social benefits and entitlements. Thus, part-timers are often excluded or benefit less from certain pension and social protection entitlements (for a further discussion on this issue, see [Vielle and Walthery, 2003](#)).

In recognition of this problem, the [EU Directive \(97/81/EC\) on part-time work](#) urges Member States to set up a legal framework for the equal treatment of part-time workers by the employment and social protection systems. As a consequence of this, Member States have designed several legislative reforms modifying the unemployment benefit systems, providing more flexible and part-time retirement measures, promoting part-time work through collective agreements or extending entitlements to work part-time as a means of reconciling work and family life. (For a further discussion on the existing national legislation transposing Directive 97/81/EC, see [European Commission, 2003](#).) The most concerted attempt to develop equal treatment of part-time workers has taken place in the Netherlands.

The Dutch Equal Treatment Act

The Equal Treatment (Working Hours) Act (Wet verbod op onderscheid naar arbeidsduur, WOA) became law in the Netherlands in 1996. This Act prohibits an employer from discriminating between full-time and part-time employees, unless there is an objective justification for doing so. The underlying principle of the Act is that part-time work is equivalent to full-time work. Permanent and other employees should not face uncertainty about their legal status or experience discrimination on the basis of their working hours. It is also unlawful to discriminate between part-timers who work more or fewer hours. A part-time worker is proportionally entitled to the same pay, the same bonuses and the same number of days' holiday. This also applies to pension rights. In

February 2000, the Part-time Employment Act (Deeltijdwet) was passed, giving employees the right to reduce or increase their working hours, with employers able to deny employee requests for such changes only on the grounds of specific conflicting business interests. The Part-time Employment Act is part of the framework Work and Care Act (Kaderwet Arbeid en Zorg), which brings together numerous existing and new leave provisions (such as time off to care for family members) aimed at helping reconcile employment and family care responsibilities. This legislation responds to a trend that was already set in a considerable number of collective agreements. In 1999, two thirds of the collective agreements in the Netherlands contained provisions on the adjustment of working hours for individuals. Source: Portegijs et al, 2002

Job content and career development

The available empirical evidence on working conditions shows that part-time workers also experience poorer job content, as well as lower promotion opportunities and reduced access to training possibilities.

Part-time workers are less likely to have planning and supervisory responsibilities (Fagan and Burchell, 2002). Male and female part-timers with supervisory roles account for 12% and 8% of the total, respectively, whereas these shares are doubled in the case of full-time workers (25% and 17% among men and women, respectively). Part-time workers' jobs are also characterised by higher levels of monotony and lower levels of task complexity and problem-solving aspects. Interestingly, part-timers are most likely to say their skills are under-used. On the other hand, no significant differences in task rotation between part-time and full-time workers can be discerned.

Table 9 Characteristics of job content and % of workers receiving training, by gender and full-time/part-time status

	Men			Women		
Full time	Part time	All	Full time	Part time	All	
1. Problem-solving	-	-	-	-	-	-
No problem-solving or learning	9	11	9	11	15	12
Some problem-solving or learning	24	33	26	26	31	29
Both problem-solving and learning	67	56	65	63	54	59
2. Task complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-
Monotonous tasks, no complex tasks	16	25	17	18	25	21
Both monotonous and complex tasks	25	18	24	23	14	19
Neither monotonous nor complex tasks	21	30	22	26	35	30

Complex tasks, no monotonous tasks	38	27	37	33	26	30
3. Planning responsibilities	-	-	-	-	-	-
No planning responsibilities	57	59	57	66	77	70
Some planning responsibilities	16	19	17	15	13	14
More extensive planning responsibilities	27	22	26	19	10	16
4. Matching of skills with job demands	-	-	-	-	-	-
The demands of my job match my skills	9	5	85	9	5	85
The demands of my job are too high for my skills	85	81	8	84	85	8
The demands of my job are too low for my skills	6	14	7	6	10	8
% who have supervisory responsibilities	25	12	24	17	8	13
% who received no training from their employer in the last 12 months	69	74	69	66	72	69
Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002						

Working part-time makes it more difficult to build a career. Nearly half (47%) of EU full-time workers believe that switching to part-time would damage their career prospects ([Gasparini et al., 2000](#)). This result is also confirmed by Finnish evidence ([Kauhanen, 2003](#)), which shows that part-timers perceive less career development opportunities in comparison with full-time workers.

Regarding access to training, empirical evidence also shows that part-timers are less likely to receive training than full-time workers (OECD, 2001). Moreover, part-timers with a non-permanent contract are less likely to benefit from training compared with part-timers with a permanent contract ([Goudswaard and Andries, 2002](#)). The Third

European Survey on Working Conditions shows that the less typical the employment contracts, the worse the working conditions and training opportunities ([Paoli and Merlié, 2001](#)). A Dutch study shows that access to training is more limited the lower the number of working hours ([Goudswaard et al, 2000](#)). Several characteristics of part-time workers can explain this result, such as short-term employment relations, lower academic qualifications or lower task-complex jobs, making the incentive for an employer to train a part-time employee smaller than for their full-time counterparts ([Gómez et al, 2002](#)).

Exposure to hazards and working time determinants

Contrary to the profile of poorer working conditions described above, research on the exposure to risks among part-time workers shows that, generally speaking, these workers enjoy a better situation in comparison to their full-time counterparts ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)). Part-time workers are less exposed to a number of hazards (loud noise, vibrations, handling/breathing dangerous substances, high/low temperatures, radiation), both in the sense of fewer hours of exposure and lower risks of exposure. In addition, part-time workers are less exposed to poor ergonomic conditions than full-time workers (repetitive hand/arm movements, painful/tiring positions, carrying/moving heavy loads). Similar results are also obtained in a Dutch report ([Houtman and De Vroome, 2002](#)). The clerical occupations and service sectors where part-timers most often work may explain these outcomes.

As far as working time determinants and their effect on working conditions are concerned, the available empirical evidence ([Fagan and Burchell, 2002](#)), based on the results of the Third European Survey on Working Conditions, seems to support the view that:

- Part-time work does not necessarily protect workers from being involved in schedules that fall out of the 'standard' of daytime, weekday hours. Indeed, part-time workers have higher rates of involvement in evening, night-work and weekend work than full-time workers. Moreover, part-timers are also more likely to work a variable number of days and hours per day. This evidence is supported by a Dutch study, which shows that full-time workers have more regular working hours than part-time workers. Working only at weekends, evenings or at night is most common among part-timers, especially among those who work less than 16 hours per week ([Goudswaard and Tijdens, 2000](#)).
- The incidence of shift-work is similar for full-time and part-time workers. Women shift-workers are more likely to work nights on either a permanent or rotating basis if they are employed part-time; 58% of female part-time shift-workers include night-work as part of their shift compared with 40% of female full-time shift-workers and 53% of male shift-workers.
- Generally speaking, part-timers are less at risk of high levels of work intensity (although it should be noted that an opposite result was obtained in the Second European Survey on Working Conditions, 1995). This reduced risk means that part-time workers are slightly more likely to be in jobs where they never have to work at very high speed. In addition to this, they are much less likely to be in jobs where they have to work to tight deadlines or have insufficient time to do their job. These results, also confirmed by Danish empirical evidence ([Arbejds miljøinstituttet, 2001](#)), explain why part-time workers report less need to work overtime than their full-time counterparts.
- Part-time workers have slightly more influence over their working hours than full-time workers. Part-timers are also less likely to have their pace of work set by external factors (i.e. demand of customers, work done by colleagues, machine speeds, managers/supervisors' control). Unforeseen interruptions at work are more prevalent for full-time than part-time workers.
- Part-time workers report that their work lives are more compatible with other commitments, probably due to their decreased working times and higher influence over working hours.

Bearing in mind the generally lower exposure to hazards, it is not surprising that part-time workers, particularly women, are less likely to report that their paid job impacts on their health or exposes them to health and safety risks. Part-time workers report slightly fewer health problems than full-time workers. Dutch evidence also confirms that part-time employees have a lower level of 'emotional exhaustion' due to working conditions than full-time employees ([Goudswaard et al, 1999](#)). This positive situation probably explains why the problem of absenteeism is less significant among part-time workers in comparison with their full-time counterparts.

Table 10 Perceptions of the health impacts of employment and absenteeism rates, by gender and full-time/part-time status

	Men			Women		
	Part time	All	Full time	Part time	All	
Job affects their health in some way	62	55	61	61	53	58
Health or safety is at risk because of their job	32	25	31	24	19	22
Absenteeism in the last 12 months:	-	-	-	-	-	-
- At least one day due to an accident at work	10	6	9	6	5	6
- At least one day due to health problems caused by work	10	7	10	12	9	10
- At least one day due to other health problems	34	29	33	40	34	36
Compatibility of working hours with family and other commitments (% of respondents that answer very or fairly well)	78	81	78	80	91	84
Source: Fagan and Burchell, 2002						

Commentary

Part-time work has expanded, to varying degrees, in all EU countries during the last 10 years. In 1992, 14.2% of the total EU working population defined themselves as part-time workers, rising to 18.1% in 2002.

Notwithstanding this growth, part-time work is not equally distributed among gender and age groups nor among countries, sectors or occupations. Only a minority of EU men (6.6%) work on a part-time basis in comparison with women (33.5%).

Part-time employment is particularly concentrated at the beginning and at the end of people's working lives, especially for men, whereas full-time employment is concentrated in the middle years. Part-time employment is

more widespread in the countries of northern Europe (especially in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany and Denmark), in the tertiary activities (specially in hotel/catering and retailing/repairs sectors) and in the lowest occupational status categories ('white-collar clerical' and 'blue-collar operating and labouring manual' jobs).

From a working conditions perspective, it is worth noting that not all part-time workers freely choose this possibility. Around 14% of EU part-time workers are in this situation involuntarily due to a lack of full-time employment opportunities. In addition, part-time jobs are typically more monotonous and have fewer opportunities for learning and formal training compared with full-time ones. Part-time jobs also imply fewer planning and supervisory responsibilities, inferior career opportunities, less job tenure and a higher presence of non-permanent employment contracts.

Part-time workers are over-represented in the lowest income groups, and are less likely to receive a fixed salary or wage and to be entitled for supplementary payments such as bonuses or premiums. Part-timers in several countries also suffer from restricted access to social protection benefits and rights. Part-time work does not necessarily protect workers from being involved in schedules outside the standard daytime, weekday hours. Indeed, part-timers have higher rates of involvement in evening, night-work and weekend work than full-time workers. The fact that most of the part-time jobs are segregated into a specific range of occupations and sectors has a clear influence on these results.

However, part-time work is also associated with several positive dimensions. The available empirical data seem to support the view that part-time workers have lower rates of exposure to physical, material and ergonomic hazards and are less likely to have an intense pace of work. Probably as a consequence of this, they are less likely to report health problems derived from their jobs in comparison with full-time workers. Also, part-time workers have more opportunities to reconcile their family and social life.

The fact that there are several facets to part-time work makes any analysis complex. When it is freely chosen by workers who are in a relatively strong position in the labour market and accompanied by adequate legal protection in accordance with the principle of non-discrimination, working part-time can be an excellent means of dividing individuals' time between economic activity and other pursuits. However, when part-time work is imposed on or endured by workers in secondary jobs (precarious, poorly paid jobs with no prospect of promotion), concerns over possible discriminatory measures arise for these workers.

Methodology

This report has been elaborated within the framework of the European Working Conditions Observatory. It combines pan-European central sources ([European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions](#) , [Eurostat](#) reports and studies) and national information collected from a network of seven European [correspondents](#) , through a questionnaire prepared by the report co-ordinator. It is important to emphasise that available information on working conditions for part-time workers is not as extensive as information on the extent and rationale of part-time work in Europe.

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