

Unclassified

DEELSA/ELSA/LMG(98)4



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques  
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLIS : 01-Oct-1998  
Dist. : 02-Oct-1998

Or. Fre.

DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

## Changing Labour Market and Gender Equality: The Role of Policy

### FLEXIBILITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF EQUALITY EMPLOYMENT FLEXIBILITY AND GENDER EQUALITY

High level Conference organised jointly by the OECD, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration, Norway  
Oslo, 12 and 13 October 1998

*The attached paper has been prepared by Margaret Maruani, CNRS-CSU, Paris. The views expressed are those of the author and do not commit either the Organisation or the national authorities concerned.*

69875

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine  
Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

DEELSA/ELSA/LMG(98)4  
Unclassified

Or. Fre.

## SUMMARY

1. The changing labour market, mass unemployment and the rapid growth of a variety of forms of flexibility and job insecurity have made employment flexibility a key issue that any analysis of gender equality must address. These developments also make it necessary to broaden our approach of equality on the labour market so as to include forms of employment as well as types of work and working conditions.
2. Policies aimed at increasing employment flexibility are generally presented as being completely unrelated to gender issues, as though flexibility applied to abstract entities such as employment or the labour market, and not to groups of people classified by social characteristics such as gender or age. It is therefore necessary to incorporate gender into the analysis of flexibility; to analyse the consequences of employment flexibility policies on gender inequality in employment; and to assess these policies' impact on female employment itself, i.e. on women's skills, careers and wages.
3. Starting from these observations, this paper will seek to investigate the impact of employment flexibility policies on gender equality. It aims at identifying the actual and potential synergies between flexibility and equality and at disclosing the existing and foreseeable conflicts between these two policies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY.....	1
FLEXIBILITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN? .....	4
Flexibility of what? .....	5
Flexibility for whom?.....	5
TIME AND EMPLOYMENT FLEXIBILITY .....	6
The different forms of flexibility .....	6
Who is concerned by flexibility? .....	6
Who benefits from flexibility? .....	7
PART-TIME WORK: THE ISSUES AT STAKE.....	8
The growth and feminisation of part-time work .....	9
Temporary work and part-time work .....	9
The age structure of part-time workers .....	10
The work schedules of part-time workers .....	10
Segregation, concentration and de-skilling .....	10
The low wages in part-time employment.....	11
The vagaries of social protection .....	11
Questions about the future of part-time work .....	12
CONCLUSION.....	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	14
Table 1: Incidence of temporary employment by sex - OECD 1983-1994 .....	16
Table 2: Part-time employment in the European Union, 1983 - 1996. ....	17
Table 3: Share of part-time in total employment, OECD 1996 - 1997 .....	18
Table 4: Share of part-time and full-time in temporary employment, European Union, 1996 .....	19
Table 5: Share of women working part-time by age group, European Union, 1996 .....	20
Table 6: Regular work on Saturday and Sunday in the European Union, 1996.....	20

## **FLEXIBILITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF EQUALITY**

### **EMPLOYMENT FLEXIBILITY AND GENDER EQUALITY<sup>1</sup>**

1. In debates on employment policy, the issue of flexibility is rarely associated with that of gender equality. The concept of equality between men and women in the world of work is spontaneously viewed in terms of equality in work situations, i.e. occupational equality. Today, the changing labour market, the advent of mass unemployment and the rapid growth of a variety of forms of flexibility and job insecurity have made employment flexibility a key issue that any analysis of gender equality must address. These developments have also made it necessary to broaden our thinking about equality so as to include equality of employment conditions as well as work situations.

2. The principle of equal opportunity between men and women and the corresponding “equality in employment” policies traditionally focus on combating *job* discrimination, i.e. occupational inequality (pay, working conditions, careers, qualifications, concentration in specific activities, etc.). Alongside these policies, which obviously have lost none of their relevance, it is now necessary to analyse inequalities of *employment conditions* (insecurity/stability, full-time/part-time). Gender segregation on the labour market takes the form of a concentration of female employment in specific jobs and failure to recognise women’s qualities and skills as qualifications; but it also develops through *the creation of areas and forms of employment relegated to women*.

3. For this reason, policies aimed at increasing employment flexibility must be given a central place in any discussion of gender equality on the labour market. These policies are generally presented as being completely unrelated to gender issues, as though flexibility applied to abstract entities such as employment or the labour market, and not to groups of people classified by social characteristics such as gender or age. It is therefore necessary to incorporate gender into the analysis of flexibility, to analyse the consequences of employment flexibility policies on inequality in employment between men and women and to assess these policies’ impact on female employment itself, i.e. on women’s skills, careers and wages. In other words, just as there is now a widely acknowledged need to *desegregate occupations*, is there not also a need to *desegregate forms of employment*?

4. Starting from this analysis, this paper will seek to investigate the impact of employment flexibility policies on gender equality. Its aim will be to identify the real and potential synergies between flexibility and equality and to show the existing and foreseeable conflicts between these two policies.

#### **FLEXIBILITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

5. Praised by some and damned by others, flexibility, whether defended or criticised, is not a simple concept. The range of possible definitions makes it necessary to begin by analysing the different meanings it can have and the different ways the term is used. Admittedly, the dictionary states that it is

---

1. This paper has been prepared by Margaret Maruani, CNRS-CSU, Paris, for the conference on “Changing labour markets and gender equality: The role of policy”, Oslo, 12-13 October 1998.

synonymous with adaptability. But this raises two questions: *What* is being adapted? And *who* is it for? Is it flexibility of time, organisation, work or employment? Is it flexibility for employers or employees?

### **Flexibility of what?**

6. The first question then is to determine whether “flexibility concerns production, technology, the organisation of work, working time, the structure of jobs, employment contracts, the labour market or all of these” (Pollert, 1989). According to the economist Robert Boyer’s attempt at classification (Boyer, 1987), there are at least five definitions of flexibility that refer to five different objectives:

- the greater or lesser adaptability of the organisation of production;
- workers’ aptitude for changing jobs within a given overall organisation;
- the degree of legal constraints governing work contracts;
- the sensitivity of wages (nominal and/or real) to the economic situation;
- the possibility for enterprises to free themselves from government regulations that restrict their managerial freedom .

7. The aspect of flexibility that concerns us here is employment, i.e. work contracts and managerial freedom. It is also the aspect known as external flexibility, as opposed to internal flexibility. A legal expert has described it as a “movement to circumvent salaried status” (Aubert-Montpeyssen, 1997). Employment flexibility is therefore defined in reference and in contrast to job security. Consequently, it encompasses the full range of what are known as “atypical jobs” or “specific forms of employment”, i.e. all those jobs that are an exception to the “norm” of full-time, indefinite-term employment: temporary work, fixed-term contracts, subcontracting, etc. It also increasingly includes all forms of diversification of working time: working hours set on an annual basis, part-time work, flexible work schedules, etc.

8. A distinction must therefore be made, within employment flexibility, between contractual flexibility and flexibility of working time. The former concerns variation in employment contracts, while the latter refers to variation in working time. While the 1970s were marked in most OECD countries by the development of specific forms of employment -- contractual flexibility -- since the early 1980s, employment flexibility has increasingly involved working time (Maruani and Michon, 1998). And it is precisely in the field of working time that women are affected more than men, and that flexibility is at the expense of equality.

### **Flexibility for whom?**

9. The second crucial question is who benefits from the increased adaptability generated by employment flexibility? It is widely held that employment flexibility policies result in a situation in which “a firm requires workers to take on some of the uncertainty it formerly assumed when it engaged in traditional hiring” (Gazier, 1992). Can it also be held that the diversification of forms of employment and working time can give increased adaptability to employees?

10. In fact, everything depends on who decides about flexibility and who has the initiative to make this choice. For employees, flexibility imposed by the employer adds to the constraints (rigidity) rather

than to freedom (adaptability). It is difficult if not impossible to make a breakdown of the forms of flexibility that are beneficial to employees, i.e. that loosen constraints, and those that are in the employers' interest. For what matters here is who controls the process. From this standpoint, it is only when it is voluntary and reversible that flexibility can be considered as providing freedom for employees.

## **TIME AND EMPLOYMENT FLEXIBILITY**

11. Temporary contracts, fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, home work, seasonal work, casual employment, traineeships and apprenticeships, part-time jobs, subcontracting: employment flexibility takes many forms, and it is impossible to characterise it in a single, homogeneous description.

### **The different forms of flexibility**

12. Although employment flexibility is an underlying trend that has developed across all OECD countries for many years, its forms, dimension and dissemination are remarkably diverse: "flexibility policies trigger the emergence or reappearance of various forms of atypical jobs characterised by factors as diverse as working hours, the duration and type of contracts, schedules, workplace and form of remuneration" (Meulders, 1995; Plantenga and Rubery, 1997).

13. Specific forms of employment are developing everywhere. But "specific" in relation to what? Atypical from what standpoint? There is no universal definition of a "normal" job. Admittedly, most European countries agree that a normal job is a full-time, indefinite-term job with a secure work contract. But is this the case in the United States, Japan or Mexico?

14. What is more, normal employment is currently being undermined by change that does not necessarily involve insecure work contracts, but a diversification of working time patterns: part-time work, in the first place, but also working hours on an annual basis, overtime, working at night or on weekends, etc.

### **Who is concerned by flexibility?**

15. Be this as it may, the trend is very real and employment flexibility is expanding rapidly and has become a permanent fixture of the economy. Obviously, it is practically impossible to measure or assess it. International comparisons are particularly difficult to make because of the many different types of flexibility and because the definition of each form of flexibility vary across countries.

16. Is it possible to identify the categories of workers concerned? And is there an unequal distribution of men and women in specific forms of employment? Overall, as is well known, the answer is yes: "women are over-represented in these specific forms of employment, and their access to the labour market is mainly through atypical jobs that are particularly disadvantageous in terms of status, pay, work schedules and prospects for advancement" (Meulders, 1998).

17. But on a more detailed level, is it possible to trace the precise gender dividing line across specific forms of employment? Some elements are well known: part-time work and homework are female-dominated, while night work is predominantly male. But what about temporary agency work, which in some countries concerns skilled industrial work (and therefore men), while in others it comprises service jobs (and therefore women).

18. The category of “temporary work”, which includes many forms of employment (temporary agency work, fixed-term contracts, casual employment), can serve to illustrate the issues. Admittedly, the category is vaguely defined, and depending on the country may or may not include temporary agency work, seasonal jobs, apprenticeship or casual employment (OECD, 1996). An international comparison is therefore quite impossible. However, the comparison of temporary work trends within each country and of the share of temporary work performed by men or women reveals very interesting results.

19. In some OECD countries temporary work has increased significantly over the past decade, between 1983 and 1994. This was the case in Australia (from 15.6 to 23.5 per cent), France (from 3.3 to 11 per cent), Ireland (from 6.1 to 9.4 per cent), the Netherlands (from 5.8 to 10.9 per cent) and Spain (from 15.6 to 33.7 per cent). In other cases, it has remained stable, as in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In Greece and Portugal it has declined.

20. Despite this diversity, women are over-represented in temporary work with great regularity. Except for Canada, Denmark, Greece and the United States, women hold temporary jobs much more frequently than men. The difference is particularly marked in Australia, where the rate of temporary work is 18 per cent for men and 31 per cent for women, Japan (5 per cent for men and 18 per cent for women) and the Netherlands (8 per cent for men, 15 per cent for women) (Table 1).

21. In addition to this quantitative assessment, it should be pointed out that the gender inequality with respect to flexibility is reinforced when different forms of flexibility are compounded, i.e. part-time and temporary work or part-time and week-end work, as will be seen below.

### **Who benefits from flexibility?**

22. Flexibility is an instrument facilitating adjustments on the labour market and it is used by employers for deregulating employment conditions. Can it also be a means of enabling workers to introduce more freedom into their working lives -- and into their daily lives in general? The question applies at two levels: has flexibility become one of the ways of entering into working life in today's world? And can it be, for women in particular, a way of managing the difficulties of combining a job with domestic life?

23. Sociological and economic discussions on the various forms of temporary work most often focus on the initial question: is temporary work a stepping-stone to secure employment or a road to unemployment? There is no clear-cut answer to this question, for in different countries and at different times, depending on economic conditions and forms of regulation, temporary work may be the first step towards finding a secure job or the prelude to unemployment. What we know is that temporary jobs are most often held by young people (OECD,1996), for whom they are a way of entering the labour market. It is only after this period of labour market entry that the differences between men and women appear: “although temporary work becomes less common for men after the age of 24, for women it remains a form of employment they encounter throughout their working lives” (Meulders, 1998).

24. If we change the focus from temporary work for that of flexible working time, the question is posed in different terms: can flexible working time give employees greater freedom and simplify their lives, in particular for women? The question directly raises the issue of “reconciling” a job with family life. This issue must be addressed here, but with the stipulation that reconciling job and family is not the natural and exclusive responsibility of women, even though they do in fact assume the bulk of household tasks in the household division of labour. This raises a real dilemma, for by taking into account the reality

of the gender division of labour within the family, do we not in a sense give it the stamp of approval? On the other hand, if we refuse to acknowledge it, do we not side-step one of the major problems faced by the vast majority of working women?

25. Under what conditions then can flexible working time benefit women without undermining gender equality? This is not easy to achieve and successful examples are rare, but they deserve to be mentioned. Can some forms of annualisation of working hours bring a better balance between working time and time devoted to the family? On the other hand, does the time flexibility required of managerial staff not reduce seriously the amount of time available for family life? Do certain forms of parental leave, such as those found in Scandinavian countries, make men and women's lives easier? But under what conditions? In this regard, we now know that any "benefit" granted only to mothers also has negative effects for women by producing gender inequality. Similarly, any form of flexibility that is not voluntary and reversible becomes a constraint and a factor of rigidity.

26. Any attempt to analyse flexibility from the perspective of equality therefore has to deal with considerable ambiguity and complexity. The analysis is particularly complex as regards part-time work, which in fact encompasses all the issues at stake.

#### **PART-TIME WORK: THE ISSUES AT STAKE**

27. A controversial and hotly debated subject, part-time work has its advocates and critics, those who recommend it and those who deplore it. It is a central issue in the debate on flexibility, for it is one of the forms of flexibility that has been developing most widely since the early 1970s in most OECD countries. It also mainly concerns women and therefore brings gender equality at the heart of the flexibility debate.

28. The debate on part-time work is both complex and controversial. Whether or not such work is voluntary is an underlying and recurring question: is part-time work a rare instance of a miraculous conjunction of the supply and demand for flexibility, of women's desire to reconcile work and family life and firms' need for flexibility? Or on the other hand, under the guise of "reconciling work and family life", are women being forced into a specific and therefore discriminatory form of underemployment? Does the argument that flexibility enables women to "reconcile work and family life" in reality make them bear the brunt of the working time flexibility sought by firms?

29. The real situation is not simple to describe or analyse. Part-time work can be different things to different people: an advantageous work schedule freely chosen for some, or a fragmented and rigid schedule forced upon them for others. More or less regulated, more or less flexible, sometimes freely chosen sometimes imposed, part-time work is a multi-faceted and enormously contrasting and varied phenomenon. In the Netherlands two-thirds of women work part-time, compared with one woman out of two in Iceland and Switzerland and fewer than one-tenth in Greece, the Czech Republic or Hungary. Part-time concerns workers who have chosen to reduce their own working time and wages, as well as workers resigned to taking a poorly paid job for a few hours rather than be unemployed.

30. Nevertheless, there are some regular patterns amid this diversity.



### **The growth and feminisation of part-time work**

31. The first general characteristic of part-time work is its very high level of feminisation: no other form of employment is so female-dominated. From Northern to Southern Europe and in all OECD countries, part-time work is automatically associated with women. In the fifteen EU countries in 1996, 32 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men worked part-time. Although over the past few years the number of men working part-time has risen very slightly, a preponderance of women in this kind of work remains the rule. In the European Union, the rate of feminisation of part-time work is 81 per cent, and for the entire OECD, 74 per cent<sup>2</sup>.

32. Although the feminisation of part-time work is widespread, it is unevenly distributed across countries. In the EU, there is a clear geographical divide, with large proportions of women working part-time in Northern Europe, while in the South they do so on a marginal basis. In five countries of Northern Europe, more than one-third and in some cases even more than half of working women work part-time: 69 per cent in the Netherlands, 45 per cent in the United Kingdom, 42 per cent in Sweden, 35 per cent in Denmark and 34 per cent in Germany. At the other extreme, in Greece (9 per cent), Italy (13 per cent) and Portugal (13 per cent), barely one-tenth of working women hold part-time jobs (Table 2).

33. In other OECD countries, these percentages vary considerably across countries. Part-time work is quite widespread among women in Canada (29 per cent), Australia (41 per cent), Iceland (33 per cent), Mexico (30 per cent), Switzerland (48 per cent), Japan (37 per cent), Norway (37 per cent) and New Zealand (37 per cent). It is relatively common in the United States (19 per cent) but not so in Turkey (13 per cent), Korea (8 per cent), Hungary (5 per cent) and the Czech Republic (6 per cent) (Table 3).

34. In countries where this form of employment has developed significantly, women have mainly contributed to employment growth through an increase in part-time employment: this is the case in particular in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France. In other words, where part-time work grows substantially, it hinders the growth of full-time employment. In France, for example, according to a report by the CSERC (CSERC, 1997), between 1989 and 1996, dependent employment grew by 470 500: - 40 000 full-time jobs and + 510 000 part-time jobs. More recently, this trend has spread throughout the European Union. Of male jobs created in 1995, 71 per cent were part-time and 29 per cent full time, while for women these figures were 85 per cent for part-time jobs and 15 per cent for full-time jobs (European Commission, 1996).

### **Temporary work and part-time work**

35. The second significant fact is the conjunction of temporary employment and part-time work. From year to year, the job insecurity associated with temporary employment increasingly goes hand in hand with part-time work. Since accurate OECD data are lacking, Eurostat data can be cited. Except for Greece and Ireland, in all countries for which data are available, the share of workers on temporary work contracts working part-time is rising significantly, for both men and women. For women this trend results in even greater job insecurity: in the Netherlands, 80 per cent of the women with temporary jobs work

---

2. Unless otherwise indicated, the EU data of the Eurostat Labour Force Survey have been used throughout this section, which differ fairly substantially from the OECD's. For the OECD part-time work only concerns people working fewer than 30 hours per week. For Eurostat, part-time work is defined according to a self-evaluation by workers. As a result, OECD data tend to underestimate the magnitude of part-time work by excluding part-time work above 30 hours per week. The use of two indicators -- Eurostat and OECD -- is therefore indispensable. On this subject, cf. van Bastelaer et al., 1997.

part-time, while in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Sweden nearly 60 per cent do so. For the EU as a whole, 38 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men in temporary employment have a temporary part-time job (Table 4).

### **The age structure of part-time workers**

36. The third important point concerns the age of part-time workers. Contrary to common belief, women in the 25-49 year age group are not those who most often hold part-time jobs. In most countries in Europe, for example, the highest rates of part-time employment are among women over 50. The European average, in 1995, was 37 per cent of women in the 50-64 age group and 53 per cent of women over 64, as opposed to 30 per cent for women between 25 and 49. In some countries such as Denmark, France, Spain, Greece, Finland and Sweden, the lowest percentages of women working part-time are in the 25-49 age group (Table 5). This being the case, can part-time work be systematically considered as a choice made by women to reconcile work with family life? This is perhaps true for some women working part-time between 25 and 49, but it is certainly not the case for women under 25 or over 50.

### **The work schedules of part-time workers**

37. Part-time work obviously affects work schedules. But the effect is very different depending on whether those concerned chose to work part-time, often organising their work schedule at their own convenience (one day off per week, half-time, etc.) or whether they do so because this was a condition imposed at the time of hiring. In the latter case, part-time jobs very often makes workers' lives more difficult rather than enabling them to reconcile work and domestic life, for in the sectors in which part-time work is imposed at the time of hiring (hotels and catering, cleaning, retail trade, etc.), it is often combined with atypical schedules that interfere with the normal patterns of family life. This is the case of shop assistants or check-out operators who work four or five hours a day, but split between two hours in the morning and three at the end of the day or who work night shifts or weekends. It is also the case of cleaning women who clean offices between 6 and 9 in the morning and/or 6 and 9 in the evening, etc.

38. In fact, we now know that "part-time working is also used to extend working hours into evenings, nights and weekends" (OECD,1998, p.8). European data show that regular weekend work is considerably more frequent for part-time than for full-time workers (CSERC,1998). In the 15 EU countries, 29 per cent of full-time employees and 39 per cent of part-time workers work regularly on Saturdays or Sundays. This trend is particularly marked in France (23 per cent of full-time and 37 per cent of part-time workers), in Belgium (15 and 31 per cent), the Netherlands (28 and 48 per cent) and in Sweden (20 and 43 per cent) (Table 6).

### **Segregation, concentration and de-skilling**

39. The development of part-time work also aggravates the process of gender segregation in employment by compounding occupational segregation with segregation in terms of employment conditions. Where part-time work develops, it leads to an even higher concentration of female employment by restricting it to an even more limited range of occupations and skills. This is especially true in services where vast numbers of women work part-time as cooks, waitresses, shop assistants, employees in retail trade and home helps. This is not a temporary and isolated trend. It is growing markedly in many countries, as recent research across OECD countries shows: "in most OECD countries part-time employment is highly concentrated in female-dominated sectors and follows therefore the

gender-specific segregation of labour markets. It is even restricted to a more limited range of occupations and industries than female full-time employment. This concentration of part-time employment is mainly in low-paid, low-skilled jobs (Maier, 1991).

40. The concentration of part-time female jobs is not the only problem. There is every indication that part-time work is itself a factor that generates de-skilling, that it affects the value of work qualities and skills. Overall, we now know that part-time work mainly consists of low-skilled or unskilled jobs, for the obvious reason that these are the types of jobs where part-time is offered, imposed or chosen. But there is more. The same job, depending on whether it is full or part-time, does not have the same social status, recognition or qualification. The division between full-time and part-time work constitutes a real social divide that serves to differentiate and classify workers and introduces a hierarchy in the value of work.

41. Statistics provide little relevant information in this regard, but these mechanisms have been analysed in monographic research. A number of surveys on employment conditions in distributive trades in France (Maruani and Nicole-Drancourt, 1989; Cattaneo, 1996; Alonzo, 1998) have shown how in this sector, in which part-time employment is particularly prevalent, it acts as a sorting mechanism that defines the status of various categories of employees, differentiating between young and old, men and women, skilled and unskilled workers. The distinction between full and part-time employees is by no means limited to work schedules, but concerns skills, career profiles and job security.

### **The low wages in part-time employment**

42. Last but not least, part-time work has a significant impact on pay. Obviously part-time work means partial pay. But in fact the problem is twofold.

43. The *hourly pay* of part-time workers is lower than that of full-time employees. The OECD report on *Women and Structural Change* makes this quite clear: “part-time jobs pay even less per hour than their full-time equivalents (...). Wages paid to part-timers are generally lower than those paid to full-time employees in comparable occupations, jobs and industries...”(OECD,1994). Recent Eurostat data show that the hourly pay of part-time workers is only 85 per cent of that of full-time workers in Sweden, 71 per cent in France, 69 per cent in Spain and 60 per cent in the United Kingdom.

44. The *monthly income* of part-time workers is often extremely low. This is not only because they are working part-time, but also because they are quite often working in low-skilled or unskilled jobs that are poorly paid. Consequently, part-time work automatically generates areas of female poverty and underemployment. In France, for example, a recent study showed that 80 per cent of low and very low salaries (i.e. below the monthly minimum wage) are earned by women and that nearly all these sub-minimum wages (77 per cent) are earned in part-time jobs (Concialdi and Ponthieux, 1997). Consequently, one can see a process of pauperisation under way through the development of a marginal group of working poor, people who are neither unemployed, “outsiders” or “on welfare”, but who work without managing to make a living. In the vast majority of cases, these people are women.

### **The vagaries of social protection**

45. The development of part-time employment also raises issues of social protection. Situations in this regard are very diverse and the impact of part-time employment on social protection varies across countries. This is particularly true of workers in short part-time jobs, who often do not meet the

requirements in terms of hours worked or income that would entitle them to social protection, i.e. unemployment benefits. Research conducted on the situation in European countries shows that 20 per cent of part-time workers work fewer than ten hours per week and 42 per cent between 11 and 20 hours. These data “show that the majority of part-time workers have no protection against the risks of unemployment” (Meulders, 1998, p. 244; Rubery et al., 1995).

46. In addition, the rapid growth of part-time work poses a crucial problem of retirement pensions in the longer term. In most OECD countries, the problem does not apply for the time being, since in many of them, the generations of women currently reaching retirement age have had few or no periods in which they worked part-time. But the threat for the future is very real: what will become of the generations of women entering the labour market today and of all those women who have worked in part-time jobs for the past 10 or 15 years? Ultimately, there will be a problem of “part-time” pensions.

### **Questions about the future of part-time work**

47. All the data available on part-time work remain ambiguous as regards a key question: is part-time work developing as part of the proliferation of flexible forms of employment, or is it driven by the behavioural trends of women? Obviously, both factors play a role and a clear-cut or definitive answer cannot be given (Fagan et al., 1998).

48. In fact, we know that the patterns and use of part-time work vary considerably across countries and that, in each country, there is a segment of women who work part-time by choice, and another segment who do so in response to decisions made by employers. But at present there is really no way of distinguishing between the two. To do so, it would be necessary to separate in the statistics part-time jobs and reduced hours and reduced hours at the request of employees. This would entail being able to process separately what is a form of underemployment from what is time freely chosen.

49. Be that as it may, it is clear that the growth of part-time work tends to slow down the trend towards more uniform employment conditions for men and women. At best, when it is freely chosen, part-time work interrupts the continuity of women’s working lives with periods of partial withdrawal from work. At worst, when it is imposed, it forces a segment of working women into underemployment and poverty. A substantial portion of the working poor are women who work part-time.

50. In the light of these observations and despite all the ambiguities, three sets of questions must be addressed:

- is the proliferation of part-time jobs not going against the trend towards more uniform male and female job behaviour that has been observed throughout Europe and in many OECD countries over the last 30 years? By re-establishing areas and forms of employment reserved for women, are we not recreating “female specificity” and building discrimination?
- if the rise in part-time employment increases the occupational concentration of female employment, is this compatible with the policies of diversification of female activity that have been implemented for a number of years?
- if part-time work in fact creates pockets of female poverty and underemployment, is this not in contradiction to the very idea of social justice?

51. In fact, the development of part-time work represents a major challenge that casts great uncertainty on the future of female employment. Its growth and the forms and ways in which it develops deserve the most serious attention. For “part-time work did not spring from nowhere” (Jenson, 1995). It is the outcome of public policies in the field of employment and working time and of employers’ strategies, and these same policies determine whether it will be loosely or strictly regulated.

52. Part-time work is a political, economic and social choice. One choice is to encourage the growth of an uncontrolled and deregulated form of specifically female underemployment, which offers maximum flexibility for employers but is rigid and constraining for workers. Another choice is to regulate and manage a way of reducing working time over which employees would have control. Still another choice is to stop the expansion of part-time work by developing collective forms of reduction in working time that do not place women on the front line and do not jeopardise gender equality.

## CONCLUSION

53. Employment flexibility does not operate in a gender neutral way. Both men and women are affected, but differently and unequally. In the labyrinth of the proliferating forms of employment and the diversification of working time, working time flexibility seems to be the most discriminatory.

54. There seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between the principle of equality of opportunity and the need for flexibility. As they are now developing, working time and employment flexibility in fact produce inequalities between men and women. Through part-time work, this flexibility is propelling a *process of re-segregation of the labour market*.

55. Can these effects be prevented? Can flexibility be managed so that it does not generate inequalities? The differences between OECD countries show clearly that both government regulations and collective bargaining can strongly influence the content, forms and thus the consequences of increasing the flexibility of working time and employment.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALONZO, P., 1998. "Les rapports au travail et à l'emploi des caissières de la grande distribution : des petites stratégies pour une grande vertu", *Travail et Emploi*, n° 76, September.
- AUBERT-MONTPEYSSSEN, T., 1997. "Les frontières du salariat à l'épreuve des stratégies d'utilisation de la force de travail", *Droit Social* n° 6, juin, pp. 618-620.
- van BASTELAER, A., LEMAITRE, G. et MARIANNA P., 1997. "The Definition of Part-time Work for the Purpose of International Comparisons", *OECD, Labour Market and Social Policy Occasional Papers*, No. 22. Paris.
- BOYER, R., 1987. "Crise et flexibilité" *Les Cahiers Français* n° 231, mai-juin, pp. 4-5.
- CATTANEO, N., 1996. *Le travail à temps partiel : un rêve ou un cauchemar ?* Thèse de sociologie de l'Université Paris VII.
- CONCIALDI P. et PONTHEUX, P., 1997. *Les bas salaires en France*, Rapport DARES-IRES, Document d'études DARES n°15, October.
- CSERC (Conseil Supérieur de l'Emploi, des Revenus et des Coûts), 1997. *Inégalités d'emploi et de revenus, les années 90*, La Documentation Française, Paris.
- CSERC, (Conseil Supérieur de l'Emploi, des Revenus et des Coûts), 1998. *Durées du travail et emplois*, La Documentation Française, Paris.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1996. *Employment in Europe*.
- FAGAN, C., O'REILLY J. et Jill RUBERY, 1998. "Le travail à temps partiel aux Pays-Bas, en Allemagne et au Royaume-Uni : un nouveau contrat social entre les sexes" in Margaret Maruani (ed) *Les nouvelles frontières de l'inégalité - Hommes et femmes sur le marché du travail*, Ed. La Découverte-Mage, (forthcoming in October 1998).
- GAZIER, B., 1992. *Économie du travail et de l'emploi*, Précis Dalloz, 2ème édition, p. 328.
- JENSON, J., 1995. "Le travail à temps partiel pour les femmes : choix de qui, solution à quoi" ? in Ephesia, *La place des femmes*, Ed. La Découverte, Paris.
- MAIER, F., 1991. *Part-time Employment*, OCDE, Paris.
- MARUANI M. et NICOLE-DRANCOURT, C., 1989. *La flexibilité à temps partiel*, La Documentation Française, Paris.

- MARUANI, M. et MICHON, F., 1998. "Les normes de la dérégulation : questions sur le travail à temps partiel", *Économies et Sociétés*, série A.B. n° 20, 3/98.
- MEULDERS, D., 1995. "Flexibilités" in Ephesia, *La place des femmes*, ed. La Découverte, p.534.
- MEULDERS, D., 1998. "La flexibilité en Europe" in Margaret Maruani (Ed) *Les nouvelles frontières de l'inégalité - Hommes et femmes sur le marché du travail*, Ed. La Découverte-Mage, Paris, à paraître en octobre 1998.
- OCDE, 1994. *Women and Structural change: New perspectives*, Paris.
- OCDE, 1996. *Employment Outlook*, July 1996. Paris.
- OCDE, 1998. *Employment Outlook*, July 1998, Paris.
- PLANTENGA J. et Jill RUBERY (Eds), 1997, *Women and The Labour Market:the State of the Art* - Report for the European commission, DGV.
- POLLERT, A., 1989. "L'entreprise flexible, réalité ou obsession ?" *Sociologie du travail*, n° 1/89, p. 76.
- RUBERY J., SMITH M., FAGAN C., GRIMSHAW D. (1995), *Women and the European Activity and Employment Patterns in the European Union*, Report for the European Commission DGV/D/5, Manchester, UMIST.

**Table 1: Incidence of temporary employment by sex - OECD 1983-1994**

(percentages)

	Men		Women		Total	
	1983	1994	1983	1994	1983	1994
Australia <sup>a</sup>	9,0	17,9	26,2	30,6	15,6	23,5
Belgium	3,8	3,5	8,5	7,5	5,4	5,1
Canada <sup>b</sup>	6,9	9,2	8,2	8,5	7,5	8,8
Denmark	12,2	11,1	12,7	12,9	12,5	12,0
Finland <sup>c</sup>	9,3	12,3	13,3	14,7	11,3	13,5
France	3,3	9,7	3,4	12,4	3,3	11,0
Germany <sup>d</sup>	9,0	9,8	11,5	11,0	10,0	10,3
Greece <sup>e</sup>	16,6	10,2	15,4	10,5	16,2	10,3
Ireland	4,7	7,4	8,8	12,1	6,1	9,4
Italy	5,2	6,1	9,4	9,3	6,6	7,3
Japan	5,3	5,4	19,5	18,3	10,3	10,4
Luxembourg	2,2	2,0	5,5	4,4	3,2	2,9
Netherlands	4,1	7,9	9,3	15,0	5,8	10,9
Portugal <sup>f</sup>	13,5	8,5	15,9	10,5	14,4	9,4
Spain <sup>g</sup>	14,4	31,4	18,4	37,9	15,6	33,7
Sweden <sup>g</sup>	9,7	12,3	13,9	14,6	12,0	13,5
United Kingdom	4,2	5,5	7,3	7,5	5,5	6,5
United States <sup>h</sup>	...	2,0	...	2,4	...	2,2

... Data not available.

a) 1984 and 1994.

b) 1989 and 1994.

c) 1982 and 1993.

d) 1984 and 1994. Data are referring to West Germany before 1992.

e) As a modification has been made in 1992 definitions, data are not strictly comparable with those of 1983.

f) 1986 and 1994. As a modification has been made in 1992 definitions, data are not strictly comparable with those of 1986

g) 1987 and 1994.

h) February 1995

Source : OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 1996.



**Table 2: Part-time employment in the European Union,  
1983 - 1996.**

	% of male employment		% of female employment		% of total employment	
	1983	1996	1983	1996	1983	1996
EU 10	2,8	-	27,6	-	12,1	-
EU 15	-	5,5	-	31,6	-	16,4
Belgium	2,0	3,0	19,7	30,5	8,1	14,0
Denmark	6,6	10,8	44,7	34,5	23,8	21,5
Germany	1,7	3,8	30,0	33,6	12,6	16,5
Greece	3,7	3,3	12,1	9,0	6,5	5,3
Spain	-	3,1	-	17,0	-	8,0
France	2,5	5,2	20,0	29,5	9,7	16,0
Ireland	2,7	5,0	15,6	22,1	6,7	11,6
Italy	2,4	3,1	9,4	12,7	4,6	6,6
Luxembourg	1,2	1,5	18,0	18,4	6,7	7,7
Netherlands	6,9	17,0	50,3	68,5	21,2	38,1
Austria	-	4,2	-	28,8	-	14,9
Portugal	-	5,1	-	13,0	-	8,7
Finland	-	7,9	-	15,6	-	11,6
Sweden	-	8,9	-	41,8	-	24,5
United Kingdom	3,3	8,1	42,1	44,8	19	24,6

Source : Eurostat, *Labour force Survey*, 1996.

**Table 3: Share of part-time in total employment,  
OECD 1996 - 1997**

(percentages)

	Men		Women	
	1996	1997	1996	1997
Australia <sup>b</sup>	14,9	...	41,3	...
Austria	1,9	2,1	22,2	22,0
Belgium	5,0	5,0	34,0	34,3
Canada	10,7	10,5	28,9	29,4
Czech Republic	2,0	1,9	5,3	5,5
Denmark	10,6	11,9	24,4	24,7
Finland	5,2	4,8	10,5	10,2
France	6,0	6,3	24,6	25,6
Germany	3,3	...	29,8	...
Greece	5,3	5,3	13,9	14,2
Hungary	1,8	1,8	4,6	5,0
Iceland <sup>c</sup>	6,7	...	33,0	...
Ireland	7,1	8,0	26,5	27,1
Italy	4,6	5,1	22,6	24,0
Japan <sup>b, d</sup>	11,7	...	36,6	...
Korea <sup>b, e</sup>	2,7	3,3	6,9	7,8
Luxembourg	2,1	...	25,3	...
Mexico	8,0	8,6	25,3	29,9
Netherlands	10,8	10,6	55,2	54,6
New Zealand	10,4	10,9	37,3	37,4
Norway	8,0	7,9	37,3	36,8
Portugal	2,5	2,7	13,5	14,1
Spain	2,4	2,8	15,8	16,6
Sweden	6,7	6,5	24,1	22,6
Switzerland	9,4	7,9	49,1	47,8
Turkey	4,0	2,9	13,9	12,7
United Kingdom	7,2	7,6	40,6	40,1
United States <sup>c</sup>	7,7	...	19,1	...
European Union <sup>f</sup>	5,2	6,1	29,4	29,6
Europe OECD <sup>f</sup>	4,8	5,9	27,2	28,5
Total OECD <sup>f</sup>	6,4	6,6	23,8	26,5

... Data not available.

a Regular working hours of less than 30 hours per week semaine.

b Actual hours worked.

c Employees.

d Less than 35 hours.

e Civilian employment.

f Only countries in the table.

Source : OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 1998.

**Table 4: Share of part-time and full-time in temporary employment,  
European Union, 1996**

(percentages)

	Men		Women		Total	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
<b>Germany</b>	92,7	7,3	80,6	19,4	87,4	12,6
<b>Austria</b>	94,1	5,9	78,3	21,7	87,3	12,7
<b>Belgium</b>	81,6	18,4	56,3	43,7	67,5	32,5
<b>Denmark</b>	78,6	21,4	71,9	28,1	75,3	24,7
<b>Spain</b>	94,4	5,6	74,6	25,4	86,6	13,4
<b>Finland</b>	79,8	20,2	74,7	25,3	76,7	23,3
<b>France</b>	78,0	22,0	52,8	47,2	65,2	34,8
<b>Greece</b>	84,0	16,0	75,1	24,9	80,4	19,6
<b>Ireland</b>	46,9	53,1	33,7	66,3	39,4	60,6
<b>Italy</b>	78,4	21,6	62,2	37,8	71,0	29,0
<b>Luxembourg</b>	78,9	21,1	50,1	49,9	66,3	33,7
<b>Netherlands</b>	49,3	50,7	19,8	80,2	32,9	67,1
<b>Portugal</b>	96,3	3,7	88,0	12,0	92,3	7,7
<b>Sweden</b>	63,8	36,2	39,5	60,5	49,6	50,4
<b>United Kingdom</b>	71,1	28,9	40,3	59,7	54,0	46,0
<b>EU 15</b>	84,4	15,6	62,1	37,9	73,9	26,1

Source : Eurostat, *Labour Force Survey*, 1996.

**Table 5: Share of women working part-time by age groupe,  
European Union, 1996**

(percentages)

	<b>Less than 25</b>	<b>25 - 49</b>	<b>50 - 64</b>	<b>65 +</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Germany</b>	11,1	34,5	42,7	61,4	33,6
<b>Austria</b>	13,7	31,1	31,8	66,7	28,8
<b>Belgium</b>	24,7	31,1	31,2	28,9	30,5
<b>Denmark</b>	51,0	28,9	36,8	65,6	34,5
<b>Spain</b>	19,9	15,9	17,8	40,4	17,0
<b>Finland</b>	50,2	11,6	14,0	58,8	15,6
<b>France</b>	37,0	28,4	30,1	37,2	29,5
<b>Greece</b>	11,1	6,8	11,3	34,4	9,0
<b>Ireland</b>	16,5	21,9	32,0	31,1	22,1
<b>Italy</b>	12,8	12,8	11,9	17,1	12,7
<b>Luxembourg</b>	10,0	18,9	25,9	35,3	18,4
<b>Netherlands</b>	62,8	68,2	78,5	84,3	68,5
<b>Portugal</b>	7,9	9,1	21,6	43,7	13,0
<b>Sweden</b>	55,5	38,8	42,8	80,2	41,8
<b>United Kingdom</b>	36,7	43,1	54,6	81,6	44,8
<b>EU 15</b>	26,9	30,6	37,2	53,2	31,6

Source : Eurostat, *Labour Force Survey*, 1996.

**Table 6: Regular work on Saturday and Sunday in the European Union, 1996.**

(percentages)

	Full-time workers			Part-time workers		
	Saturday	Sunday	Saturday or Sunday	Saturday	Sunday	Saturday or Sunday
<b>France</b>	18,2	4,8	23,0	31,0	6,3	37,3
<b>Germany</b>	17,9	7,3	25,2	20,9	5,1	26,0
<b>Italy</b>	27,2	5,5	32,7	32,9	6,3	39,2
<b>Belgium</b>	9,9	4,8	14,7	24,5	6,7	31,2
<b>Netherlands</b>	18,9	8,8	27,7	36,0	11,7	47,7
<b>Spain</b>	32,2	11,3	43,5	31,4	12,2	43,6
<b>Sweden</b>	10,8	9,6	20,4	25,1	17,8	42,9
<b>United Kingdom</b>	22,8	9,6	32,4	32,0	14,0	46,0
<b>E U 15</b>	21,3	7,8	29,1	28,8	9,7	38,5

Scope : Private sector employees

Source : Eurostat, *Labour Force Survey*, 1996, in CSERC.