

Women in Non-standard Employment *

Non-standard employment (NSE), including temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, multiparty employment arrangements, dependent and disguised self-employment, has become a contemporary feature of labour markets across the world. Its overall importance has increased over the past few decades, and its use has become more widespread across all economic sectors and occupations.

However, NSE is not spread evenly across the labour market. Along with young people and migrants, women are often over-represented in non-standard arrangements. This policy brief examines the incidence of part-time and temporary work among women, discusses the reasons for their over-representation in these arrangements, and suggests policy solutions for alleviating gender inequalities with respect to NSE¹.

Women in part-time work

Part-time employment (defined statistically as employees who work fewer than 35 hours per week) is the most widespread type of non-standard employment found among women. In 2014, over 60 per cent of women worked part-time hours in the Netherlands and India; over 50 per cent in Zimbabwe and Mozambique; and over 40 per cent in a handful of countries including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mali, Malta, New Zealand, Niger, Switzerland, and United Kingdom (figure 1). Where casual work is widespread, such as in India and Australia, part-time work is common. In nearly all countries of the world, women are also more likely to be found in part-time work than men. While women make up less than 40 per cent of

total employment, their share of all those working part-time is 57 per cent.² Gender differences with respect to part-time hours are over 30 percentage points in the Netherlands and Argentina. There is at least a 25 percentage point difference in Austria, Belgium, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Niger, Pakistan, and Switzerland.

Moreover, marginal part-time work – involving less than 15 hours per week – features particularly sizeable gender differences (figure 2), including in Brazil, Germany, India, Mozambique, the Netherlands, Niger, and Switzerland, even though in Brazil and Mozambique marginal part-time work is also prominent among men.

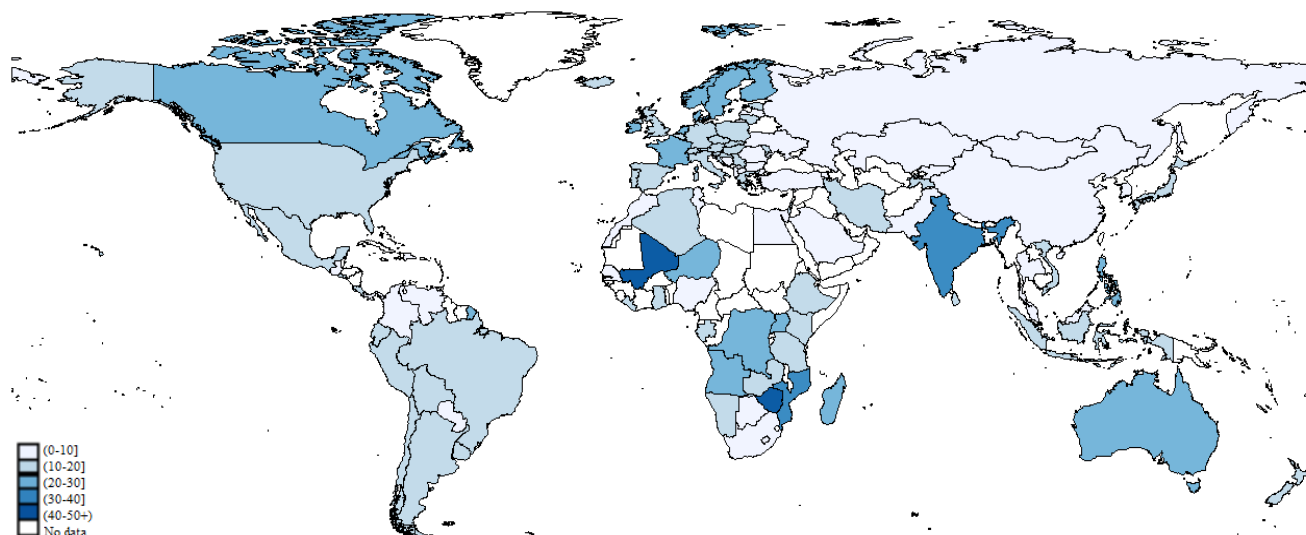
* This document was prepared by Mariya Aleksynska, with guidance and comments by Philippe Marcadent, Shauna Olney and Janine Berg.

¹ Unless stated otherwise, this policy brief draws on ILO, 2016a.

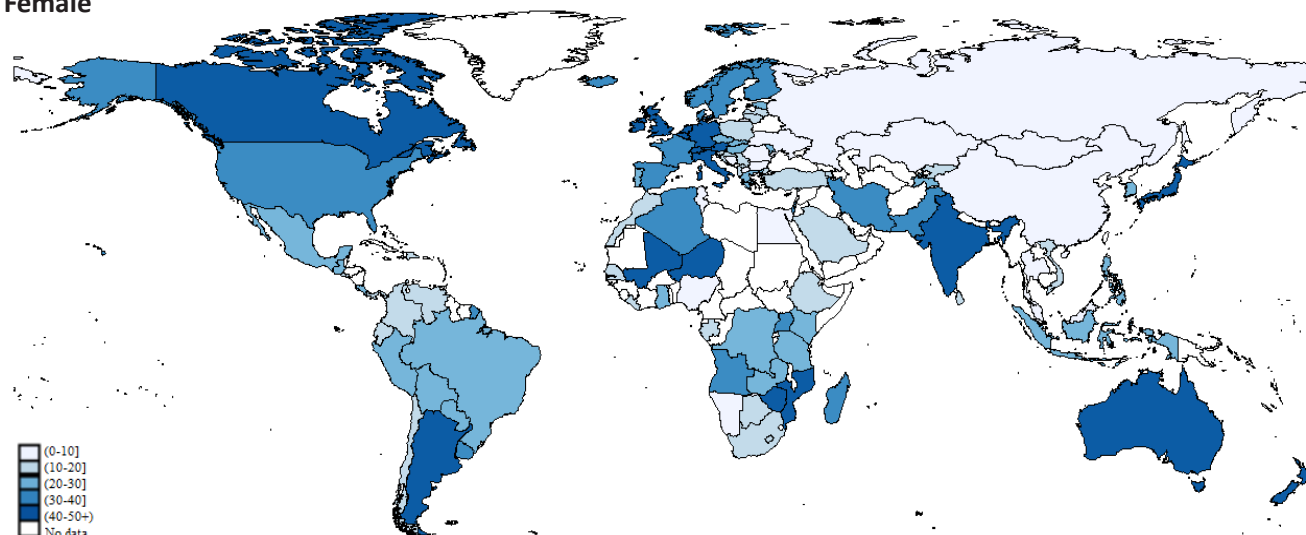
² ILO, 2016b.

Figure 1. Distribution of part-time work (fewer than 35 hours per week) among male and female wage employees, 2014

Male



Female



Note: Upper panel: percent of part-timers among male wage employees; lower panel: percent of part-timers among female wage employees. Data correspond to the year 2014 or nearest available year, in the range 2011-2014. Source: ILO (2016a) on the basis of ILOSTAT.

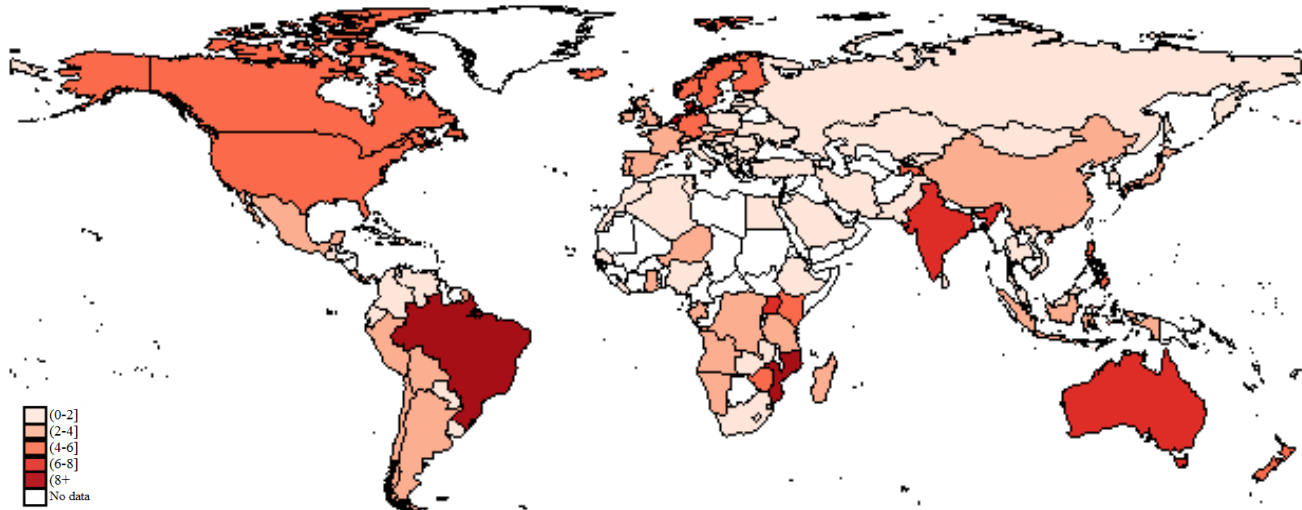
By far the main reason for women being over-represented in part-time work is their traditional role as caregivers. In Europe in 2014, 27 per cent of all female part-timers reported choosing this type of work because of the need to look after children or incapacitated adults, against only 4.2 per cent of male part-timers.³ This reason also echoes the unequal distribution of unpaid work that women undertake in the home and the consequences of this inequality on the likelihood of obtaining standard jobs in general – given the hours and availability that some standard employment requires – as well as the reservation that some employers have in hiring women because of other demands on them outside work.

Another set of reasons reflect different cultural and institutional settings, as well as occupational segregation. While manufacturing is generally characterized by full-time hours, the services sector, where most women work, relies heavily on part-time work.⁴ As the demand for workers in services continues to grow, it is anticipated that more women than men will continue to be found in part-time jobs. In Europe, in services such as health and social work, education, and in hotels and restaurants over 20 per cent of workers are employed part-time,⁵ and these sectors are likely to continue to expand. Low-skill jobs in retail sales and cleaning employ very high numbers of female part-timers, with the incidence surpassing over 70 per cent among women in Germany and a handful of other EU countries (figure 3).

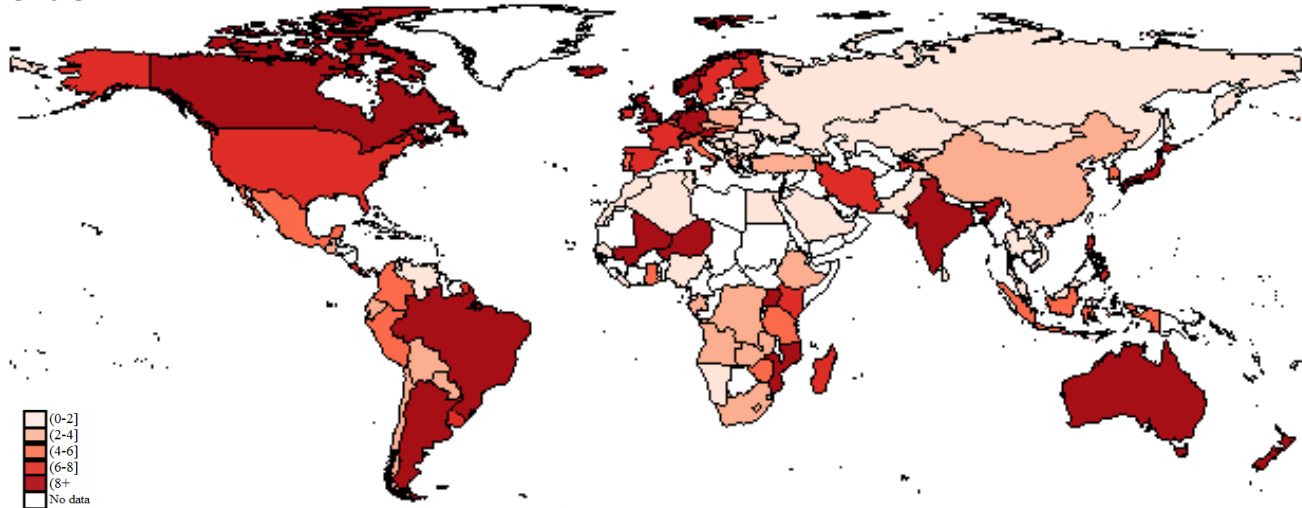
³ Schmid and Wagner, 2016; calculations based on ELFS.
⁴ Euwals and Hogerbrugge, 2006; Fallick, 1999; Thévenon, 2013.
⁵ Eurofound, 2012.

Figure 2. Distribution of very short hours work (fewer than 15 hours per week) among male and female wage employees, 2014

Male



Female



Note: Upper panel: percent of part-timers among male wage employees; lower panel: percent of part-timers among female wage employees. Data correspond to the year 2014 or nearest available year, in the range 2011-2014. Source: ILO (2016a) on the basis of ILOSTAT.

The higher presence of women in marginal part-time jobs can also be explained by their presence in occupations that commonly recruit on an on-call basis. In Italy, 60 per cent of all employees in the hotel and restaurant sector and 13 per cent of all employees in education, health, social and personal services are employed on an on-call basis.⁶ In the United Kingdom, many zero-hours contracts are found in education, health and public administration (30 per cent of all zero-hours contracts) and hospitality and retail services (27 per cent of all zero-hours contracts).⁷ This form of work presents a challenge as it contributes to the trend in lower earnings for women. Without minimum hours, workers in on-call employment are at risk of

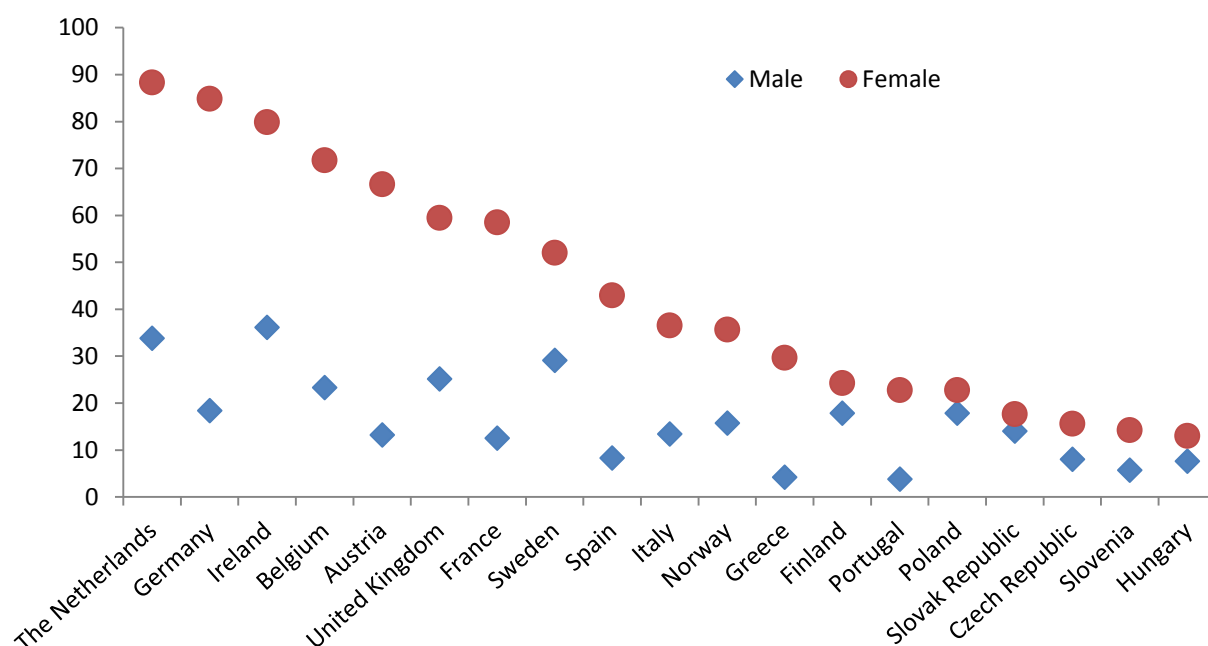
economic instability and considerable work–family conflict, as they may not be able to anticipate the earnings they will receive.⁸

⁶ Eurofound, 2015.

⁷ Brinkley, 2013.

⁸ ILO, 2016b.

Figure 3. Gender gap in part-time work, in the elementary sales and cleaning services sector, selected European countries, 2009–10.



Note: Percentage of employees working part-time.
Source: EU SILC, 2009–10 pooled. Tabulated data from Leschke, 2015.

Part-time work is sometimes seen as an important means for enabling women to integrate into the labour force.⁹ However, whether it can help promote gender equality, or rather reinforce stereotypes, will depend on the quality of the part-time work and how it is viewed by society. For example, many higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs leading to careers are simply unavailable on a part-time basis, and there may be significant obstacles for moving from part-time to full-time jobs, in part as a result of skill requirements, but also because of perceptions about women’s commitment to full-time work as well as the difficulties women can face in working extended hours at a paid job.¹⁰ In some instances, women wishing to switch from full-time to part-time may have to change to a lower-skilled occupation,¹¹ thus also partly explaining the high incidence of female part-time employment in the lowest paid jobs (figure 3).

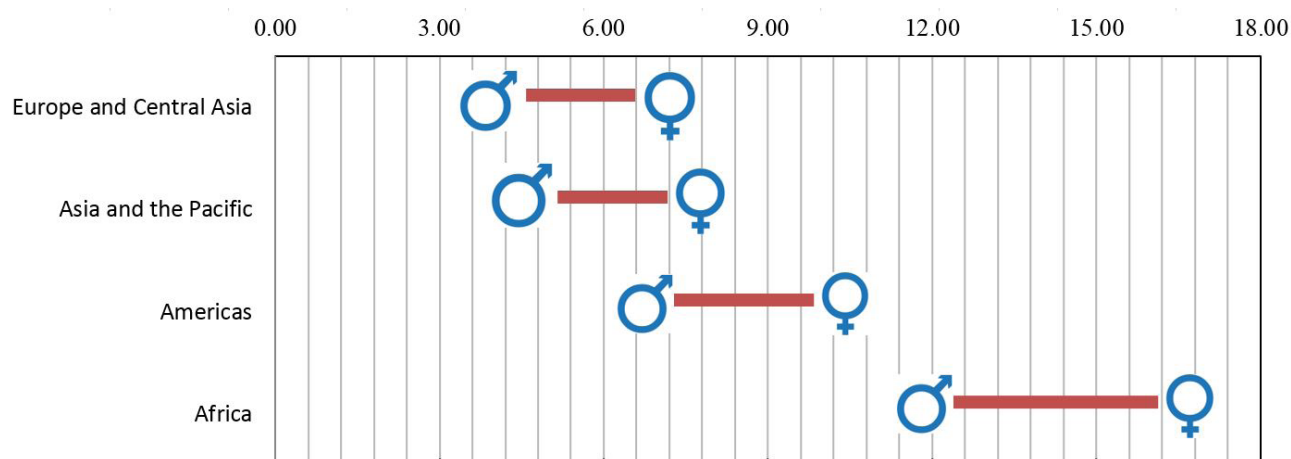
When working part-time is voluntary, it can be advantageous and allow for a better work-family balance. Yet, throughout the world, more women than men report that they are underemployed – meaning that they are willing but unable to work more hours (figure 4). The involuntary part-time employment often results in lower wages, lower training opportunities, and poorer career prospects for women. Moreover, insufficient hours of work may also result in inadequate social security contributions, or even exclude women from social security coverage if they work less than a specified threshold number of hours. As a result, women may be more vulnerable than men in face of unemployment, health problems, and financing retirement. In addition, in countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Ghana, and United States, women are more often than men obliged to hold multiple jobs in order to provide a steady stream of work and income - once again confirming that part time is often an involuntary “choice” (ILO, 2016a).

⁹ Fagan et al., 2012.

¹⁰ Sirianni and Negrey, 2000.

¹¹ ILO, 2016b.

Figure 4. Incidence of time-related underemployment, as a percentage of all persons in employment, 2010

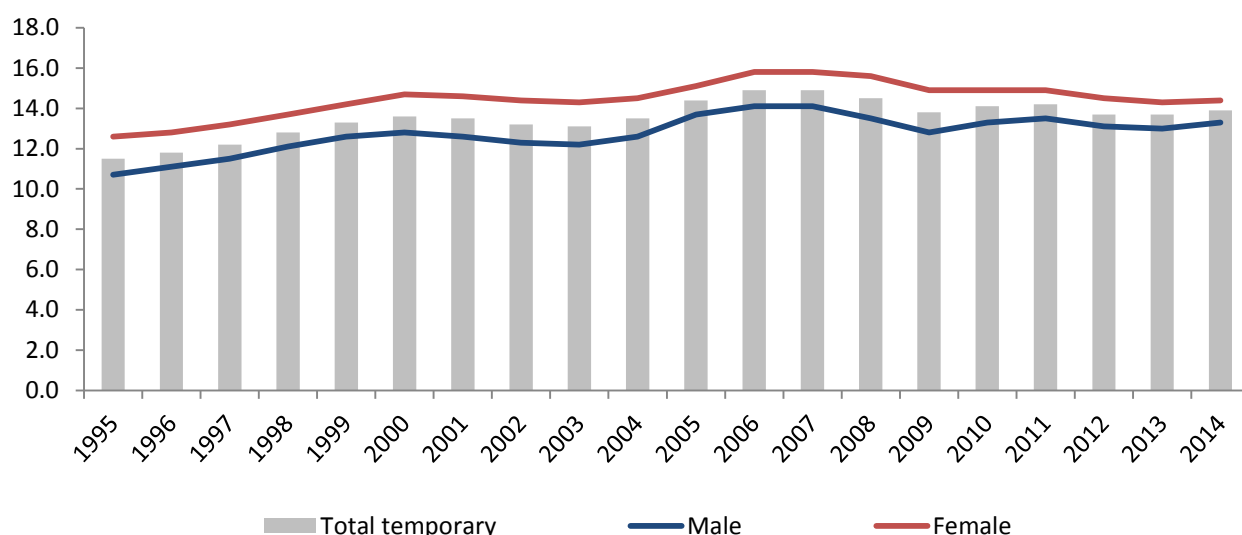


Note: Data coverage: 87 countries. Definitions of regions correspond to the ILO Regions; data for Arab States are unavailable.
Source: ILO (2016a) on the basis of ILOSTAT.

Women in temporary employment

Women are also often over-represented in temporary, rather than in permanent jobs, though the situation varies substantially across countries. For example, in Europe, between 1995 and 2014, the incidence of fixed-term contracts (FTCs) among women remained on average two percentage points higher than that of men (figure 5). In Japan, women are over four times more likely than men to hold temporary jobs.¹² In the Republic of Korea, women account for 52 per cent of temporary employment (and 59 per cent of non-renewable temporary contract employment) despite making up 43 per cent of overall wage employment.¹³ In Brazil and South Africa, temporary employment rates are also higher for women than for men; the situation is however reversed in Argentina and Indonesia.

Figure 5. Employees with fixed-term contracts as a percentage of the working population aged 15 to 64, total and by sex, selected European countries, 1995–2014



Note: Quarterly data for 1995 excludes Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom.
Source: ILO (2016a), on the basis of European Union Labour Force Survey 1995–2014 (Eurostat). Countries included: Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom; yearly data used except for 1995 (only quarterly data available) and weighted for annual estimates.

¹² OECD, 2014.

¹³ Jung, 2010.

One of the reasons for the higher incidence of women in temporary work is to be found in the reforms to liberalize the use of fixed-term contracts that some countries undertook with the stated goal of stimulating or accommodating women's increased participation in the labour market (for example, in Italy). Another reason is that in many countries, the traditional position of women in societies and their unequal care-giving responsibilities may undermine their bargaining power, making them more likely to accept jobs with less stability.¹⁴ The perception that women are partially dependent on family income – and thus less dependent on waged work – may result in lower remuneration offered to women (ILO, 2016b). In contrast to this perception, the recent ILO-Gallup study shows that most women consider their income from work to be at least a significant contribution to the household income (ILO and Gallup, 2017). In addition, women tend to receive less support in the form of unemployment benefits as a result of gaps in contribution periods, thus perpetuating their need to accept jobs of inferior quality as compared to men.¹⁵ Regarding young women, there is some anecdotal evidence that managers may be reluctant to hire them on permanent contracts in order to avoid costs associated with maternity leave.¹⁶

Like part-time work, temporary employment may have its advantages and disadvantages, and a key question is to what extent it is voluntary or not. In Europe, sixty-three per cent of women state that they engage in temporary jobs because they could not find a permanent one. This incidence is slightly higher than for men; moreover, empirical evidence shows that for women, there is a higher probability that temporary jobs will not lead to permanent employment, but rather confine women to temporary jobs or result in unemployment or inactivity. Temporary jobs are also often characterized by lower pay, as compared to permanent jobs in the same sectors and occupations. For example, women in temporary jobs face wage penalties, as compared to women with similar personal characteristics and in similar though permanent jobs, reaching 15 per cent in the Republic of Korea, 13 per cent throughout EU-15 countries, and 7 per cent in

New Zealand.¹⁷ Temporary jobs also often result in poorer social security outcomes; longer hours of work including unpaid over-time; poorer health outcomes, including in terms of stress and exposure to harassment; poorer training options; higher risks of exclusion from collective bargaining and freedom of association (whether in law or in practice) and higher risks of workplace discrimination. All of these issues contribute to low-pay and poor skill upgrading of women, exacerbating gender inequalities in the labour market. Moreover, they also pose societal challenges, as couples in unstable jobs often delay marriage and child-bearing until they find stable employment, thus contributing to demographic decline.

Addressing work deficits for women in NSE

As with other working arrangements that may pose challenges and result in unequal outcomes, the point is not to forbid non-standard jobs, but rather to render them decent. Also, many women aspire to working part-time, and some prefer having a temporary job at some point in their life. Thus, the key questions are how to create good-quality non-standard jobs that will be voluntarily taken up by both women and men, how to improve the quality of those NSE jobs that exhibit deficits in working conditions, and how to improve transitions towards better-quality jobs, including standard jobs. While some of the policies aimed at achieving these goals are clearly specific to the nature of the NSE jobs, it is also important to have policies that concern the general improvement of social outcomes for women and for their families. With respect to part-time and temporary work, it is essential to ensure equal treatment for women and men alike, and also in comparison with standard workers. This is important not only to avoid discrimination based on occupational status but also as a way of ensuring that NSE are not used solely to lower labour costs by offering worse conditions. Given the over-representation of women in NSE, ensuring equal treatment for non-standard workers helps to combat gender discrimination at the workplace. Establishing minimum guaranteed hours and limiting the variability of working schedules is an important safeguard for part-time, on-call and casual workers. Policies to support transfer from full-time to part-time work and vice versa should be instituted more widely. Establishing limits on temporary work, such as allowing their use only for genuinely temporary but not for permanent tasks, can help preventing abusive hiring on temporary contracts.

¹⁴ Rubery and Grimshaw, 2009; Grimshaw, 2011.

¹⁵ Azmat et al., 2004.

¹⁶ The Guardian, 2014, describes the results of a survey of 500 British managers and shows that 40 per cent of them generally avoided hiring young women to avoid maternity costs.

¹⁷ Lee and Eun, 2014; OECD, 2015; Dixon, 2011.

Countries should also strengthen, and sometimes adapt, their social protection systems to ensure that all workers benefit from social protection coverage. Of particular relevance for women, this may include eliminating or lowering thresholds on minimum hours, earnings or duration of employment so that workers in NSE are not excluded; or making systems more flexible with regards to contributions required to qualify for benefits, allowing for interruptions in contributions, and enhancing the portability of benefits between different social security systems and employment statuses. Such policies can be complemented by measures to recognize care work (e.g. child rearing) as contribution periods counting towards social security entitlements, which can facilitate the access of women to social security benefits and reduce gender inequalities in social insurance systems, as is the case in Chile, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.¹⁸ These changes should be complemented by efforts to guarantee a universal social protection floor. Many of the NSE jobs that women perform, especially the involuntary ones, are informal and offer low pay. Many also are disproportionately found in occupations and sectors that are sometimes not covered by minimum wage policies and collective agreements, such as the domestic work sector. It is thus important to make minimum wage policies and collective bargaining more inclusive of women in general, but especially in sectors that pose particular risks in terms of quality work. Promoting formalization of such sectors should also be a priority.

Broader public policies aimed at women in non-standard work can either reinforce gender stereotyping – and its subsequent ramifications in the labour market – or remedy it. Indeed, differences in labour force participation rates frequently reflect prevailing social welfare policies, tax policies and the provision of public services. In this regard, it is important to institute policies aimed at increasing overall labour force participation of women by promoting tax systems that favour second earners, and making it easier for women and men to reach better work-family balance through publicly funded and adequate care services, public transfers, and suitable and quality workplace working time.¹⁹ Maternity protection remains one of the most important policy measures allowing women to remain attached to the labour market in general, and it is essential to ensure the adequate effective coverage of all women, regardless of employment status.²⁰


¹⁸ Fultz, E. 2011.

¹⁹ Blau and Kahn, 2013; Leschke, 2015.

²⁰ ILO, 2014.

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Further information:

Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and
Working Conditions Branch (INWORK)
International Labour Office
4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22,
Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 799 6754
Fax: +41 22 799 8451
E-mail: inwork@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/inwork

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