

In fact, many higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs are simply unavailable on a part-time basis, and there are significant obstacles to movement from part-time to full-time jobs due to the related skills requirements. This is also linked to the higher administrative costs involved in hiring two or more higher-skilled part-time workers in lieu of one full-time worker, which might also explain why part-time work tends to cluster in the low-skilled professions (Rau Binder, 2010, cited in Messenger and Ray, 2015), although, as Manning and Petrongolo (2008) suggest, the higher cost is due to hiring and training for high-level jobs. Consequently, employers may be more in favour of allowing existing workers to switch from full-time to part-time work, as opposed to hiring new employees who want to work part-time.

Consequently, the higher share of women in part-time employment further contributes to the crowding of women into a narrow range of sectors and occupations, leading to greater occupational segregation. As Sparreboom (2014) demonstrates in a study of 25 economies in the European Union, the impact of part-time employment on occupational segregation depends on the female and male part-time employment-to-population ratios.⁴⁰ If there is a large gap between the female and male part-time employment-to-population ratios, increased part-time work will encourage the crowding of women in a narrow range of occupations. Conversely, if the gender gap in the part-time employment-to-population ratio is small, there will be lower levels of segregation, as men would crowd into part-time occupations which are largely female-dominated, and thus reduce occupational segregation.

In addition, women may have to change to a lower-skill occupation to accommodate their need for reduced working hours. This phenomenon is known as “occupational downgrading”, whereby employees working full-time who want to reduce working hours, often in order to free themselves for family responsibilities, have to change jobs in search of shorter work hours. A study of the part-time pay penalty incurred by British women shows that the uptake of part-time work could entail switching from a higher-skill occupation to a lower-skill occupation. Some professional women move to occupations such as clerical or sales workers or care assistants, which underuse their educational and professional training. According to the authors, the downgrade is more severe for women in high-skilled occupations than those in medium-skilled occupations (Connolly and Gregory, 2008). This undoubtedly contributes to a decrease in earnings and affects potential future career prospects and seniority. A similar study demonstrates that switching employers to accommodate flexible work further promotes occupational downgrading (Neuburger et al., 2011).

Because part-time employment is commonly found in lower-paid occupations and in a narrower range of jobs, the hourly wages of a part-time worker may be lower than the hourly wage of a full-time worker, owing to the pay differences in the sector and occupation (Matteazzi et al., 2013).⁴¹ For instance, the wage gap between women employed full-time and part-time exceeds 20 per cent in the Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. After accounting for the full-time wage gap between women and men and the female full-time and part-time wage gap, the study reveals that the majority of the part-time wage penalty may be attributed to occupational segregation and, to a lesser extent, the disparity in labour market experience and education levels between full-time and part-time workers.

The “part-time pay penalty” is only partly attributable to occupational segregation, however. The primary form of inequality in part-time work is the lower hourly wage rate relative to a full-time worker in a comparable situation (see Manning and Petrongolo, 2008 and Fernández Kranz and Rodríguez-Planas, 2009, cited in Messenger and Ray, 2015). Even when full-time and part-time workers have the same hourly wage, they may not have access to the same bonuses, including profit-sharing, performance pay, over-time pay and team-based bonuses (OECD, 2015a). In addition, part-time workers may not qualify for overtime pay (Lee and Yoo, 2008) or be subject to contractual penalties. This, for instance, is the case for domestic workers who work on an hourly basis for many employers.

Part-time work is more likely to result in labour market inequalities when it is designed to reduce employers’ labour costs or to accommodate substantial fluctuations in market demand (Messenger and Ray, 2015). Some employers may choose to employ part-time workers because they do not meet the minimum threshold for social security benefits (Carré and Tilly, 2012; Greenhouse, 2012). In some countries, such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and South Africa, eligibility to unemployment benefits among employees is restricted by fixing a minimum number of hours of work, with obvious consequences for part-time, casual and temporary workers, including domestic workers, whose hours are below the minimum threshold (Fagan et al., 2014; ILO, 2015c).⁴²

40. The study covers a period between 2002 and 2011 for 25 developed economies in the European Union except for Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania and does not include Switzerland and Norway. The notion of “part-time” is understood to mean a working time of under 30 hours.

41. The authors’ study is based on calculations of the full-time and part-time wage gap for women in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

42. A minimum of 20 scheduled working hours per week in Japan; at least 60 hours a month or 15 hours a week in the Republic of Korea; and more than 24 hours a month in South Africa.