

Part-time employment limits access to better career prospects, the related pay rises, and skills development. Part-time workers are assumed to be less career-oriented, as working fewer hours sends a signal to some employers that the worker has other priorities. This means that part-time workers are less likely to be promoted to higher-paid positions (McDonald et al., 2009). In terms of training opportunities, part-time workers generally have less access to training than full-time employees, and this is especially the case for part-time workers under non-permanent contracts (Fagan et al., 2014; Asao, 2011).

2. Overrepresentation of women among marginal part-time workers

Over the last decade, marginal part-time employment has become a more common form of non-standard work, entailing very short hours of less than 15 hours or less than 20 hours a per week, depending on the national threshold (Messenger and Wallot, 2015). Marginal part-time work includes “on-call” contracts and “zero-hours” contracts. The hours of such part-time work can be highly variable, unpredictable and insecure. In some cases, workers may not know when work begins or ends. Domestic work is one sector in which women are highly overrepresented, and in which working hours are highly unpredictable and insecure. Many domestic workers also work significant periods of on-call time (ILO, 2011b; ILO, 2014f). Atypical working hours, especially if involuntary, are associated with poorer working conditions. In the absence of minimum hour provisions, employers may be under no obligation to provide a minimum or specific number of hours of work (ILO, 2015c). The extent of marginal part-time work and legal protection offered to marginal part-time workers differs greatly from country to country (Messenger and Wallot, 2015).

Moreover, uncertainty in working hours can lead to conflicts between paid work commitments and personal life needs (ibid.; Keller et al. 2012). The on-call basis of marginal part-time work makes it easier for employers to hire and dismiss workers. Workers working casually are less likely to receive training and other benefits. In Ireland, on-call workers are 47 per cent less likely to receive training when compared to employees on a permanent contract (Layte et al. 2008).

As observed in 13 developed countries, women are more likely than men to be in marginal part-time work (figure 29). This could be explained by the occupations dominated by women that commonly recruit on an on-call basis. In Sweden, the hospitality and elderly care services tend to hire workers under these arrangements. 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 (Eurofound, 2015a). In the United Kingdom, many such “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) (Brinkley, 2013). Many workers in elderly care services in the United Kingdom are also on zero-hour contracts (Koehler, 2014). Given that many of these sectors have an overrepresentation of women workers, this could explain why women are so overrepresented in marginal part-time work. Marginal part-time work presents a challenge as it further contributes to lower earnings for women and puts them at risk of economic instability.

Figure 29 Share of employed women and men working 14 hours or less per week, 2014

