

Developed Countries

In North American, European Union, and other OECD countries, available evidence suggests that the workforce has become flexibilized or informalized. In these regions, statisticians and researchers use the concept “non-standard” work for the forms of work that are flexible or informalized. The term “non-standard work” as commonly used includes a) jobs that entail an employment arrangement that diverges from regular, year round, full time employment with a single employer without secure; and b) self-employment with or without employees (Carré and Herranz 2002). The common categories of non-standard wage work are temporary work, fixed-term work, and part-time work. Increasingly, inter-firm sub-contracted work in the service sector (such as janitorial services and home care) and in the manufacturing sector (such as garment making and electronic assembly) is also included.

Although not all part-time workers and temporary workers are informally employed, in the sense of being unprotected, many receive few (if any) employment-based benefits or protection.¹ Comparable data on other categories of employment that are even more likely to be informal in nature – namely, contract work, industrial outwork, and casual day labour - are not readily available in developed countries. What follows is a brief summary of trends in three categories of non-standard work - part-time work, temporary work, and self-employment – in Europe, including differences by sex (Carré and Herranz 2002, Carré 2006).

Part-Time Work - Since the early 1970s, there has been a marked growth in the proportion of part-time workers in total employment. By 1998, part-time workers accounted for 16 per cent of total employment in European Union (EU) countries and 14 per cent of total employment in Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

In virtually all EU and OECD countries, the incidence of part-time work is much higher among women than men: in some countries it is twice as high. By 1998, women represented 82 per cent of all part-time workers in EU countries. Further, rates of part-time work are high for women, but not men, in their prime working years.

Temporary Employment - For the EU as a whole, and in a majority of EU nations, the share of workers in temporary employment, including both direct hire and agency hire, increased from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. By 1998, temporary employment accounted for around 10 per cent of total employment in EU countries.

Temporary employment, like part-time work, is primarily a female phenomenon, although there is wide variation among EU countries. In all countries except Austria, the

¹ It should be noted that whether part-time work is informal (i.e. unprotected) varies across and within countries. In the Nordic countries, part-time work is often long-term with social protection. In the USA, however, part-time workers are offered very few benefits: in the mid-1990s, less than 20 per cent of regular part-time workers had employer-sponsored health insurance or pensions (Burchell *et al* 1999).

incidence of temporary employment among female workers is higher than among all workers. And, like part-time work, temporary employment is concentrated in the service-producing industries. Interestingly, in regard to temporary agency employment, women account for the majority of agency temps in countries where such employment concentrates in services while men account for the majority of agency temps in countries where such employment concentrates in manufacturing and construction: that is, “the gender composition of employment mirrors that of the sectors in which temporary agency assignments take place” (Carré 2006: 13).

Self-Employment - Self-employment, including both employers and own account workers, has increased in many OECD countries over the past 25 years.² Indeed, outside of agriculture, self-employment has grown at a faster rate than total employment in 14 (out of 24) OECD countries where data were available. Also, as self-employment has been growing, so has the share of own account self-employment within total self-employment. As a result, in OECD countries today, more self-employed persons are own account workers, rather than employers.

In 1997, women comprised one in three self-employed persons in OECD countries and this proportion is growing. For EU countries as a whole, the incidence of own account work is greater for men (11%) than for women (7%). But, in some countries, a higher proportion of women than men are own-account work. Age is a factor in own account work: with workers aged 45 and above more likely than younger workers to be working on their own account (Ibid.).

² Statisticians distinguish three main sub-categories of self-employment: 1) “employers”, the self-employed who hire others; 2) “own account workers”, who do not hire others; 2”; and 3) “unpaid contributing family workers”. However, many statistical analyses, such as those by the OECD reported by Carre 2006, exclude unpaid family members because they are considered “assistants”, not “entrepreneurs”. Since the majority of unpaid family workers in most contexts are women, this exclusion understates the real level of women’s labour force participation and entrepreneurship (Carre 2006).