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PART TIME EMPLOYMENT

Introduction and analysis

Part time working has become increasingly common over the last two decades in the European Union. The proportion of part time workers to full time workers equated to 18% of the workforce in 2006 compared with 14% in 1992.

This proportion varied depending on the country of employment. For example, the survey, conducted by the Eurostat Labour Force, showed that in the Netherlands 46% of the workforce consisted of part time workers compared with only 4.5% in Greece. This can be explained by government attitude to work-family balance and cultural history. In UK and Germany the proportions are 25% and 26% respectively.

There are also marked differences in proportions depending on sectors or occupations as well as age or gender. Part time work is particularly common in the health and education and services sectors where up to 22.6% work on a part time basis as compared to only 6.9% in industry. Unsurprisingly hotel and catering and retail sectors account for the largest presence of part time employment at 28% and 23.1% respectively.

In terms of age, the highest presence of part time employees is at the beginning and end of people's working lives in terms of students and semi-retired individuals.

The survey showed that 33.5% of women work part time compared with 6.6% of men. This reflects the higher incidence of 'child and adult' care undertaken by females.

The reason for the rise in part time employment can be explained by an increase in international competition, new production methods and forms of organisation, increased unemployment, rising female participation rates and more diverse working time demands from the workforce. Part time employment can permit greater flexibility in responding to market requirements such as longer working hours; improved work-family balance and makes it easier to enter the labour market or retire from employment.



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Definition

In accordance with the European Framework agreement on Part time Work, a part time worker is defined as 'an employee whose normal hours of work, calculated on a weekly basis or on average over a period of employment of up to one year, are less than the normal hours of work of a comparable full-time worker.' The number of hours that are regarded as being 'normal' can vary widely depending on the profession or activity concerned, hence the requirement to measure against a comparable full time worker.

Part Time Work Directive

In order to combat less favourable treatment of part time employees in the EU, a Part Time Work Directive was drawn up which has been implemented in many member states by the introduction of legislation. In the UK this is by way of the Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 together with 2002 amendments. These regulations ensure that part timers are not treated less favourably in their contractual terms and conditions than comparable full timers, unless different treatment is justified on objective grounds.

The guidance covers reorganisation of hours, promotion, rates of pay including bonuses, profit related pay, shift payments, overtime, sick and maternity and paternity pay, access to occupational pensions, access to training, redundancy, other benefits such as health insurance, company cars etc, annual leave, career breaks and public holidays. Part time employees should be entitled to pro-rata equivalent terms and conditions as full time equivalent staff unless the employer can show that it is necessary and appropriate to meet a genuine aim of the business to not treat them the same.



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Minimum Wage

In the UK and some of Europe part time employees are also subject to regulation on Minimum Wage. The rates vary widely from country to country. In the UK from 1 October 2007 the new rates for the National Minimum Wage come into force as follows:

- £5.52 per hour to adult workers aged 22 and above;
- £4.60 per hour to workers aged 18 to 21;
- £3.40 per hour to workers aged below 18 who are no longer of compulsory school age.

These rates, however, do not apply to workers over compulsory school age and who are required to undertake work experience as part of a further education course.

However in countries such as Germany, there is no overall minimum wage defined by law. There are special regulations and agreements with certain sectors, i.e., construction companies are obliged to pay their workers a minimum hourly wage per an agreement between unions and employers. The position of trade unions is stronger than in many other countries. Every industrial sector has its wage agreements and most companies pay accordingly.

Students

Many businesses, particularly in retail and leisure sectors, employ students to allow extended opening in evenings and at weekends and also to provide holiday cover. Students over 16 from within the European Union may be employed without restriction. There are restrictions on employment of students under 16. Students from non-European Economic areas are permitted to undertake some work provided their conditions of entry permit it, and they are given leave to remain as a student for longer than six months. There are strict conditions on the type of work undertaken and the hours of work. They can be employed:



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- For up to 20 hours per week only during term time or;
- Full time only outside of term time and;
- They must still have valid leave.

They may not engage in business or self-employment, provide services as a professional sportsperson or entertainer or pursue a career by filling a permanent full time vacancy. These conditions do not apply to work placements as part of their course.

Conclusion

In conclusion, part time workers form an increasingly significant percentage of the labour force. With further policy reforms to improve the work-family balance in Europe, it is likely that the proportions will continue to increase. Regulations now ensure that rights of part time workers are protected to encourage individuals to consider the option of working part time. This should help to redress the balance.