



# Employment status and working conditions

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## Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s there was a change in employment relations. In most countries, the full-time job with a permanent contract became less important. On the other hand, there was an increase in part-time jobs, in non-permanent jobs and in self-employment. Work organisation has been changing very rapidly and employment relations have become more flexible. This trend is not without its consequences for the employees involved. Many of these new jobs have been called 'precarious' and several research studies have concluded that the working conditions of the so-called precarious workers are worse than those of permanent workers. Traditional prevention systems in the field of occupational safety and health may not be sufficient to protect these precarious workers. Although some of the traditional risks have become less important, working conditions on the whole do not seem to have improved, as is revealed in the Foundation's Third Survey, and new risks have emerged, such as ergonomical problems and work pressure.

The Foundation carried out its third European Survey on Working Conditions in 2000. This leaflet uses data from the survey to look at changes in employment relations between 1996 and 2000 and to analyse the relationship between employment status and working conditions. It is based on a longer report published by the Foundation in 2002.

## Concepts of employment status and working conditions

The concept of employment status is two-dimensional. On the one hand, we have distinguished between two types of employment contracts: permanent or open-ended contracts versus non-permanent contracts (fixed term, temporary, seasonal contracts). On the other hand, we have distinguished between full-time (>35 hours) and part-time employees (10-35 hours). These two dimensions are linked together, with a higher proportion of part-time jobs with non-permanent contracts. In some situations, the combination of both a non-permanent contract and a part-time contract may lead to a cumulative situation in terms of working conditions. In other situations, however, there will be an opposite effect. We not only looked at the employees, but also at the self-employed without personnel (the sole traders), since the distinction between employees and these groups of self-employed has become slight.

The concept of working conditions is also two-dimensional. In the first case, we have analysed the conditions of work, describing the practical conditions under which people work and cope with a specific technical and organisational environment. In the second case, we have analysed the conditions of employment, describing the rules and status under which people are employed, trained and paid. In the report three possible scenarios are analysed in the relationship between employment status and working conditions:

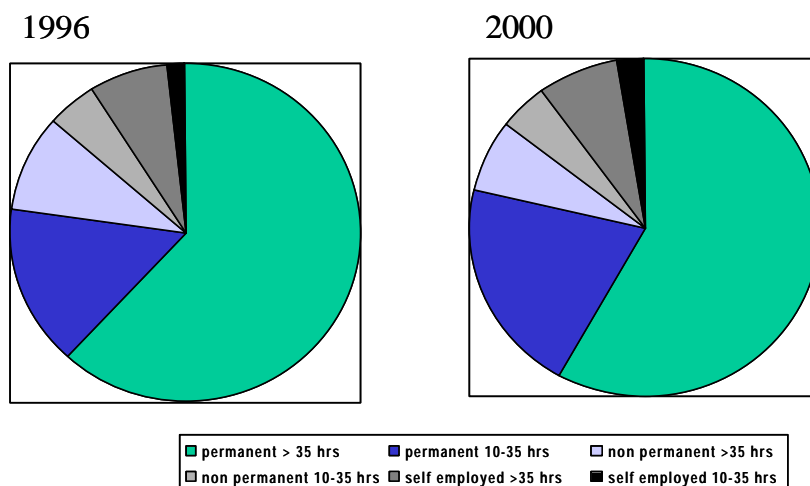
1. In the first scenario, the exposure to risk is shifted to the external, flexible workers or subcontractors. These are the people who do the dirtiest, most dangerous and the most monotonous jobs under relatively poor ergonomic conditions. They are not as well protected as permanent employees since they often fall outside the jurisdiction of committees that monitor working conditions or labour unions.
2. In the second scenario, there is no difference in actual conditions of work, but a gap does develop between permanent and non-permanent workers, or full-timers and part-timers, in terms of job security, access to training, career prospects and remuneration. The flexible workers get assigned the least favourable work times and have little opportunity to improve themselves.

3. The third scenario does not involve the flexible workers or part-timers, but a company's own, permanent employees. Due to the intensification of work, and a higher internal flexibility, these employees are put under more pressure.

### Trends in employment status

On the basis of the comparison between the Second and Third European Surveys on Working Conditions, we can conclude that:

- There has been no further growth of non-permanent contracts in the EU. On the whole, the percentage of non-permanent contracts among employees has decreased from 15% in 1996 to 13% in 2000.
- The growth in part-time employment has continued, the percentage of part-time jobs among all employees having grown from 22% in 1996 to 28% in 2000.
- There has also been a slight increase in the percentage of self-employed (without personnel) versus employees (from 9% in 1996 to 10% in 2000).



This shift, with a decrease in the share of non-permanent contracts and an increase in the share of part-time permanent contracts, can be found for both men and women and for all age groups. Although there are large differences between sectors and occupations, the decrease in non-permanent contracts and the increase in part-time employment can be found everywhere.



The standard picture of employees in the different employment contracts did not change:

- men work more in full-time jobs or as self-employed than women;
- women work more in part-time jobs and under non-permanent contracts than men;
- the non-permanent employees are either young (<25 years) or old (65+); and
- the share of self-employed without personnel increases with the age of the workers.

### Impact on working conditions

In the report, the relationship between employment status and working conditions was analysed. Employment status is not the only variable that may lead to poor working conditions, and will certainly not always directly lead to poor working conditions. The structural characteristics of the job, and even some individual characteristics, will also be important in explaining working conditions. That is why we have not only analysed the direct relationship between employment status and working conditions. We have also performed multivariate analyses, taking into account several structural and individual characteristics, such as sector, occupation, sex and age.

## Employment status and working conditions

Non-permanent contracts:	Unfavourable conditions	Favourable conditions
excluding structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ergonomic conditions</li> <li>● discrimination</li> <li>● low job control</li> <li>● low time control</li> <li>● no skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ambient conditions</li> <li>● low job demands</li> <li>● social support</li> </ul>
including structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● low job control</li> <li>● low time control</li> <li>● no skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● none</li> </ul>

Part-time contracts:	<i>Unfavourable conditions</i>	<i>Favourable conditions</i>
excluding structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ergonomic conditions</li> <li>● discrimination</li> <li>● low time control</li> <li>● no skills</li> <li>● no training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ambient conditions</li> <li>● low job demands</li> <li>● high job control</li> <li>● less non-standard hours</li> </ul>
including structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● low time control</li> <li>● no skills</li> <li>● no training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ambient conditions</li> <li>● less non-standard hours</li> </ul>

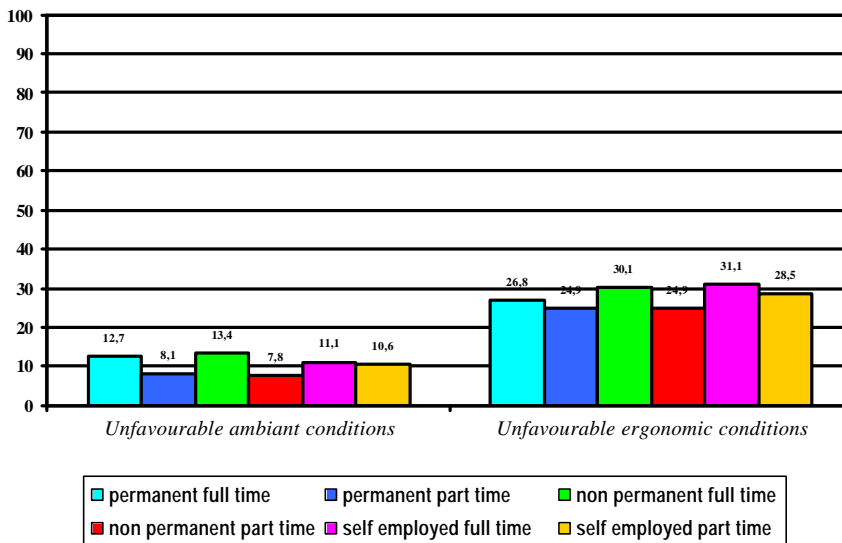
Self-employed without personnel:	<i>Unfavourable conditions</i>	<i>Favourable conditions</i>
excluding structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ergonomic conditions</li> <li>● non-standard hours</li> <li>● no task flexibility</li> <li>● no social support</li> <li>● no training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ambient conditions</li> <li>● no discrimination</li> <li>● low job demands</li> <li>● high job control</li> <li>● no shifts</li> <li>● high time control</li> </ul>
including structural/individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ergonomic conditions</li> <li>● non-standard hours</li> <li>● no task flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● low job demands</li> <li>● high job control</li> <li>● high time control</li> </ul>

The results of the analysis based on the Third European Survey on Working Conditions indicate that:

### Physical hazards, ergonomic and ambient conditions

- There is find no evidence of the transferral of physical hazards to the flexible workers.
- There are some differences between permanent and non permanent employees (non permanent employees face worse ergonomic conditions), but these differences can be explained by different sectors and occupations.

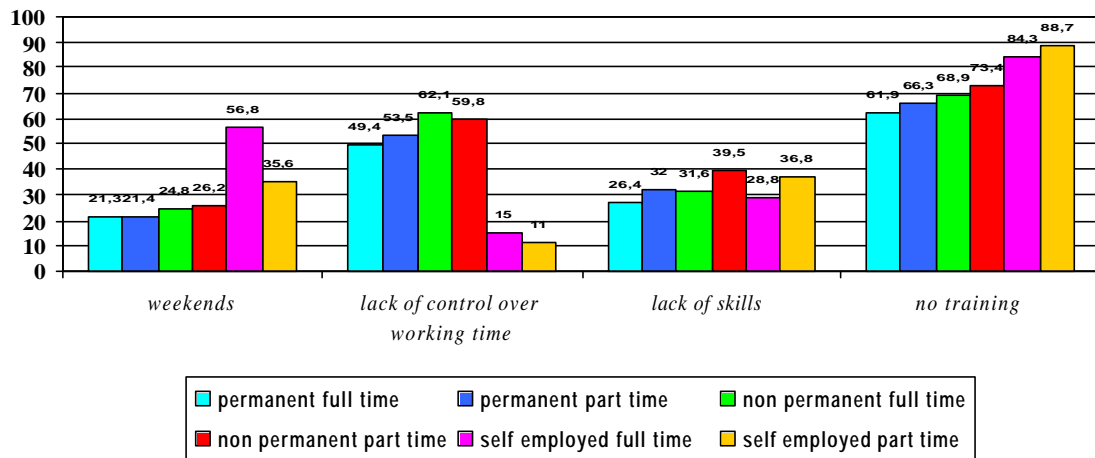
- The differences between permanent and non permanent employees have grown smaller, because of a higher risk for the permanent employees.
- Even when structural and individual characteristics are taken into account, part time employees have jobs with more favourable ambient conditions.
- Even when structural and individual characteristics are taken into account, self-employed (without personnel) face more unfavourable ergonomic conditions.



### Working time, skills match and training

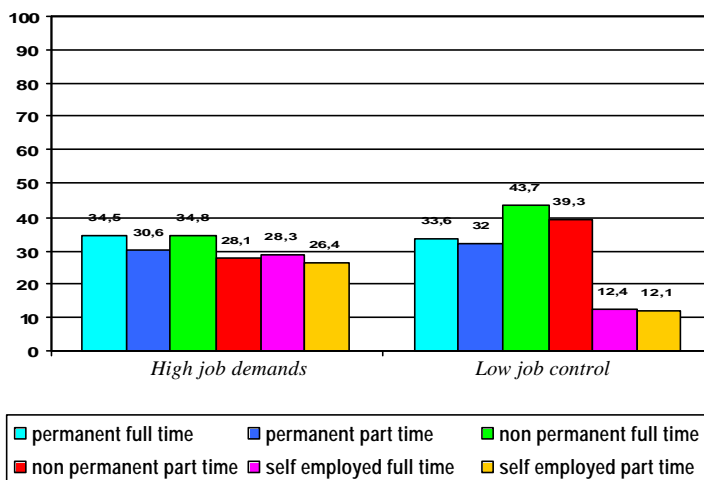
- We can also only partly explain the differences in conditions of employment (working time and skills development) between groups of employees.
- Differences in actual working hours (non-standard hours) and differences in social support or task flexibility are no longer valid, when other aspects of the job are taken into account.
- Even when structural and individual characteristics are taken into account, we did find that employees with non-permanent contracts have less time control and perform less skilful tasks.
- Having a non-permanent contract and working part-time will worsen this situation, since part-time contracts can be characterised by having low time control, performing less skilful tasks and receiving less training.
- The employment status of the self-employed without personnel is highly linked to the conditions of employment. Their situation is, however, various; when structural and individual characteristics are taken into account, we find that self-employed receive less training, have less task flexibility and less social support, but they have higher time control, higher job control and face less job demands than the employees.

## Employment status and working conditions



## Job demands and job control

- When we only consider the relationship between employment status and psycho-social job demands, it seems that intensification of work is experienced more by the 'core workers': permanent employees face higher psycho-social job demands than non-permanent workers and full-time employees face higher job demands than part-time employees.
- However, when structural characteristics are taken into account, there are no longer significant differences between part-time and full-time employees in the field of job demands and job control.
- When structural characteristics are taken into account, there are also no differences between permanent and non-permanent employees in job demands.
- When structural characteristics are taken into account, non-permanent employees still have less job control.
- So, when we also look at job control, as a way of coping with high demands, it may be so that the consequences of intensification can be experienced more by non-permanent employees, since they have less job control.



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