

Improving the quality of non-standard jobs helps women

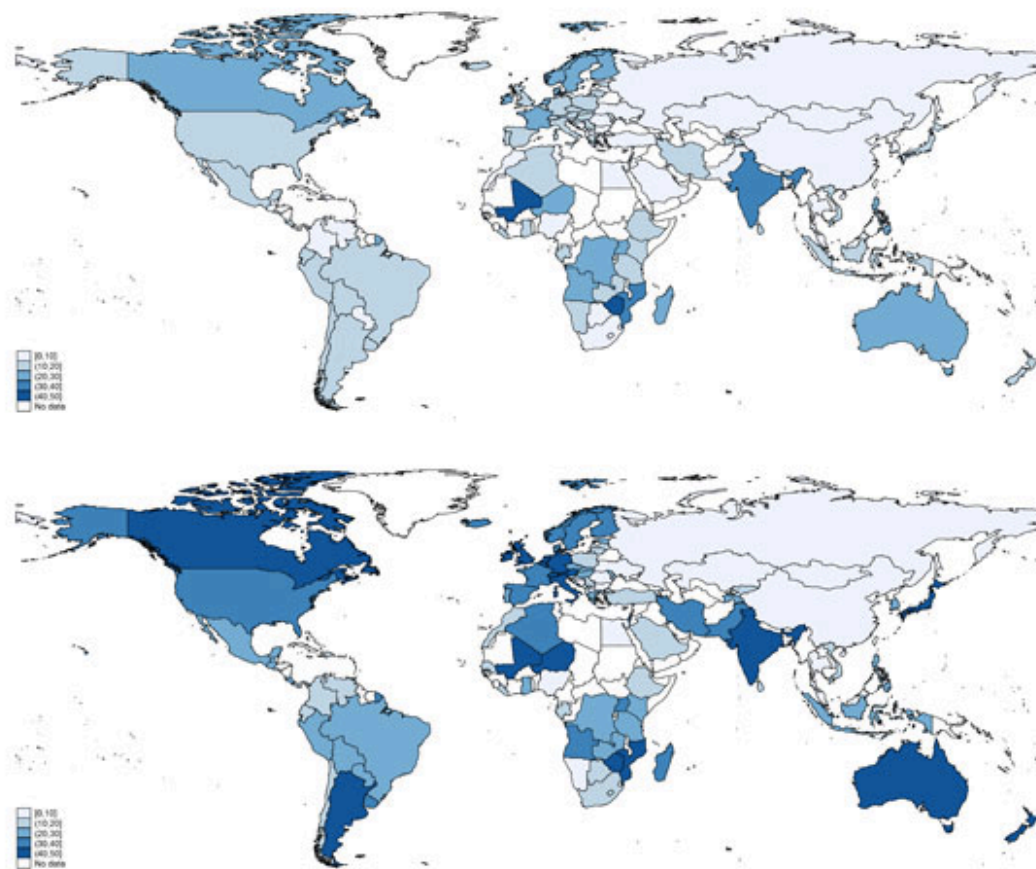
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Non-standard employment is not spread evenly across the labour market. Women are more likely to be employed in non-standard jobs, especially in part-time jobs, as compared to men.

While women make up less than 40 per cent of total employment, globally their share amongst employees working part-time hours is 57 per cent. In 2014, more than half of women worked part-time hours in the Netherlands and Switzerland; similarly high numbers were found in India, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, reflecting the high incidence of underemployment and casual labour in lower-income developing countries (figure 1). Women are also more likely to be found in jobs with very short hours (less than 15 hours per week).

Figure 1. Distribution of part-time work (fewer than 35 hours per week) among male and female wage employees, 2014



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Note: Upper panel: male wage employees; lower panel: female wage employees. Data correspond to the year 2014 or nearest available year, in the range 2014-2011.

Source: *ILO (2016a) on the basis of ILOSTAT.*

The recent ILO report on non-standard employment gives some reasons for the disparity between men and women in part-time jobs. These reasons include the traditional role of women as caregivers, different institutional settings, the relative importance of the economic sectors as well as occupational segregation. As the services sector relies more heavily on part-time work and employs more women, its expansion will likely perpetuate the over-representation of women in part-time jobs. Women's greater presence in jobs with very short hours is also due to their presence in occupations that commonly recruit on an on-call basis. In Italy, 60 per cent of employees in the hotel and restaurant sector are employed on an on-call basis. In the United Kingdom, nearly 30 per cent of all zero-hours contracts are in education, health, public administration, hospitality and retail services.

Women are also sometimes over-represented in temporary jobs. In Japan, women are more than four times more likely than men to hold temporary jobs. In the Republic of Korea, women account for 52 per cent of temporary employment. In Brazil and South Africa, temporary employment is also higher for women than for men, although the situation is reversed in Argentina and Indonesia. The main reasons for the higher incidence of women in temporary work include: reforms to liberalize the use of fixed-term contracts with the objective of encouraging women's increased participation in the labour market; women's lower bargaining power, making them more likely to accept jobs with lower pay and less stability; the perception that women are partially dependent on family income and thus less dependent on wage work.

Both part-time and temporary work have increased female participation in the labour market and, in some instances, have enabled women to integrate into the workforce. Nevertheless, it is important that the choice to work in non-standard forms of employment be voluntary and that the jobs be of equivalent quality to standard jobs. Globally, more women than men report that they are underemployed – meaning that they are willing but unable to work more hours. Many higher-paid jobs are unavailable on a part-time basis, and women wishing to work part-time sometimes have to downgrade to a lower-skilled occupation. Involuntary part-time and temporary employment may result in lower and more unpredictable wages; poorer training opportunities and career prospects; and higher risks of workplace discrimination, which can exacerbate inequalities in labour markets.

Insufficient hours or unstable work can also mean that social security contributions are inadequate, making women more vulnerable than men in the face of unemployment, health problems, and retirement. In contrast, voluntary part-time employment can result in higher hourly wages (as is the case in some Latin American countries). In countries where there is equality of treatment between part-time and full-time workers, and switching between part-time and full-time employment is facilitated either by law or through

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collective agreements, part-time work is usually of high quality, and is often eagerly demanded by women, as well as men. This is the case in the Netherlands.

Making part-time employment decent employment requires certain policies. A critical first step is to ensure equal treatment for women and men in non-standard jobs vis-à-vis standard workers, so that even if they work fewer hours they have access to the same entitlements and benefits, on a pro-rata basis. Establishing minimum guaranteed hours and limiting the variability of working schedules can provide important safeguards for part-time, on-call and casual workers. Policies to support transfer from full-time to part-time work and vice versa should be welcome.

Countries can also adapt their social protection systems to eliminate or lower thresholds on minimum hours, earnings or duration of employment so that women in NSE are not excluded, or make systems more flexible with regards to contributions required to qualify for benefits. These policies can also be accompanied by promoting tax systems that favour second earners, as well as improving the work-family balance for women and men through maternity protection and publicly provided adequate care services.