

Part-time work

By [Françoise Milewski](#)

Part-time work as a share of total employment has increased significantly. This increase was limited in the 1970s and then accelerated in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s. During the 2000s and early 2010s, changes in the long-term trend were less pronounced. Overall, the share of part-time work more than doubled in the last forty years and now accounts for nearly one-fifth of employment.

This development is the result of a number of social and economic trends. It reflects both changes in the labour market – growth in the tertiary sector to the detriment of industry and the proliferation of categories of employment – and inequalities between women and men. It is also the fruit of public policy.

Part-time jobs are occupied mostly by women. They are also predominantly held by employees aged 25 to 49, although a trend towards part-time work has emerged among seniors. Part-time jobs are usually low-skilled. Although these jobs often involve working 15 to 29 hours a week, working times can vary greatly, with a trend towards a greater portion of shorter work weeks. Part-time employees generally are not on fixed-term contracts, so it is a stable form of employment. Whether monthly or hourly, wages are low, and part-time employees are overrepresented among minimum wage and low-wage workers. Work schedules that are atypical and which can involve multiple shifts, with fluctuating unpredictable schedules, generally mean poorer working conditions.

Part-time work is heterogeneous in terms of both the reasons given by employees who may request it as well as the ways businesses are organized in different economic sectors. There are thus multiple logics involved in part-time work (which in

French leads to use of the term “des temps partiels” to account for this multiplicity).

The development of the service sector has spurred the increase in part-time work. Part-time jobs in sectors such as retailing and distribution, hotels and catering, cleaning, personal services and some public services are predominantly occupied by women. This reflects the type of training women have acquired, stereotypes about the natural aptitude they supposedly have to care for others, and their overrepresentation in low or unskilled work. The tradeoffs women make between work and family tasks reinforce these trends, either because full-time work seems incompatible, or because after parental leave they prolong the reduction in work that they have experienced. After an extended leave, it can sometimes be very difficult to reintegrate the world of work.

Increasing labour flexibility in recent decades has reinforced these trends. The multiplication of forms of employment has affected women in particular, both because they work mainly in the sectors that have been at the origin of this trend and because women are at a disadvantage in the labour market and more readily accept poorly paid jobs.

During certain periods public policy has favoured part-time employment while at others it has sought to limit its impact. At the junction between employment-related goals and family-related goals, policy has sometimes suffered from being inconsistent.

There are sometimes significant differences between countries within the European Union, as a result of specific historical developments, different social consensuses, and specific regulations on the labour market.

Analyzing the current situation and identifying the changes underway provides a glimpse of the potential changes to come

and thus fuels debate about these developments and their implications for policy makers. Do part-time work and full-time work develop according to the same dynamics? Is there a trend within part-time work towards greater flexibility, or less? To what extent is women's autonomy being challenged by the development of part-time work as a stable form of employment? Is part-time work a form of underemployment or a way of getting into the labour market and full-time work? All of these are questions that influence the development of public policy^[1].

For further information, read the [OFCE Note, no. 38 of 13 December 2013](#).

^[1] This article summarizes a study by the Labor and Employment section of the Conseil économique, social et environnemental [Economic, Social and Environmental Council], "Part-time work ," Françoise Milewski , Les Editions des Journaux officiels, December 2013, forthcoming.

The situation on the labour market in France*

By [Eric Heyer](#)

The French economy is facing a number of imbalances, with the two main ones being:

- a public deficit that at end 2012 is likely to come to about 4.5 GDP points, or close to 100 billion euros;
- a lack of jobs, which is leading to mass unemployment.

While the first point is the object of great attention, and while it has been and remains the main or even the sole concern of every EU summit over the last three years and is at the heart of the European strategy on the crisis, it must be acknowledged that this is not unfortunately the case for the second point. However, it is not unreasonable to ask whether the priority in a country as rich as France should actually be to reduce the deficit at all costs even if this may worsen the plight of society's most vulnerable and make it more difficult for them to access the labour market.

Since the beginning of the crisis in early 2008, the French economy has destroyed more than 300,000 jobs, and the number of unemployed as defined by the International Labour Office has increased by 755,000. More than 2,700,000 French are now without jobs, i.e. 9.6% of the active population.

And this figure undoubtedly underestimates the real situation. The French economy is currently creating only mini part-time jobs that don't last long; in the last quarter, 4.5 million job contracts were signed: 3 out of 4 of these were contracts lasting less than one month (mostly 1 day to 1 week). Someone who signed one of these contracts and is looking for a job at the end of the same month is not counted as unemployed. Their inclusion would increase the jobless numbers and push the French economy a little further into mass unemployment.

Moreover, and this is more disturbing, the unemployed are getting older while remaining jobless – the number of long-term unemployed is continuing to shoot upwards – and thereby lose out in terms of both job skills and financially as they shift from unemployment benefits onto the social minima; in a study we conducted at OFCE for the National

Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion (ONPES), we estimated that in France 100 additional unemployed during this crisis will lead to 45 more people in poverty in 2012. Thus, even stabilizing unemployment would not lead to halting the deterioration of people's situation – on the contrary.

It is therefore urgent to reverse current trends with respect to employment and unemployment.

The surest way to do this is to put the French economy onto a trajectory of dynamic growth: recall that low but positive growth is not enough for the French economy to create jobs again, as, given gains in productivity, the country's economy needs to grow by more than 1% in order to unleash a spiral of job creation. Moreover, given the continuation of demographic growth and the postponement of the retirement age, the labour force is increasing by 150,000 people every year. It is thus necessary to create more than 150,000 jobs in France before unemployment will begin to fall, which corresponds to growth of over 1.5%.

However, in light of the austerity policies being implemented in France and by our European partners, this level of growth seems unthinkable in 2012 and 2013.

So how can a further explosion of unemployment be stopped in the near future?

The first step would be to change Europe's strategy by establishing, among other things, a "more moderate" austerity.

The second step would be to adopt the strategy Germany is using for the crisis, that is to say, to reduce working time by massively resorting to part-time work and to partial unemployment schemes. Remember that 35% of German employees are hired part-time, as against 17% in France. Furthermore, during the crisis 1.6 million Germans have been on a partial unemployment programme, compared with 235,000 in France. All this has helped Germany to keep unemployment down during the

crisis.

The last solution is to use what in France is called the “social treatment of unemployment”. As the private sector is still destroying jobs, the public sector would offset part of this by creating subsidized jobs.

The government seems to be taking this last path: 100,000 “jobs for the future” will be created in 2013 and 50,000 in 2014.

In the short term, given the economic situation, this strategy seems to be the most effective and the least expensive. However, in the medium term, it cannot replace a policy of growth.

* This text is taken from a series of reports by Eric Heyer for the programme “Les carnets de l’économie” on France Culture radio. It is possible to listen to the series on [France Culture](#).

What employment policy during a crisis?

By Marion Cochard

After a lull of only a year, unemployment figures started to rise again in April 2011. We are seeing a replay of the dynamics of the 2008 recession: a hiring freeze and the non-renewal of temporary and fixed-term (“CDD”) contracts, with

redundancies to follow later in the year. The reason, of course, is the current economic downturn, which is hitting while French business margins are still in bad shape after the shock of 2008-2009, particularly in industry. The weakened companies no longer have the strength to cushion the fall as they did four years ago. The French economy is thus expected to slide into recession in the fourth quarter of 2011, and we foresee a fall in activity of 0.2% in 2012. Given that annual growth of 1.1% is needed to kick-off job creation, the resumption of job losses seems inevitable. If we add the existence of a growing workforce to this bleak picture, the number of unemployed will surpass the 3 million threshold by year end.

On the eve of a tense social summit, what are the options for cushioning the impact of the crisis on the labor market? Given the urgency of the situation, the government has two main levers that are responsive and inexpensive: partial unemployment and subsidized jobs in the non-profit sector.

Partial unemployment can cushion the economic hardships faced by business and retain skills in the companies. There is substantial room to expand its use. By way of comparison, in 2009 maximum compensation for partial unemployment was extended to 24 months in Germany, versus 12 months in France. In addition, the greater level of state coverage in Germany partly explains how extensively it is taken up there: partial unemployment affected 1.5 million people at the peak of the crisis, but only 266,000 in France. Nor does this put much of a burden on public finances, as the 610 million euros disbursed by the States on partial unemployment in 2009 were offset by savings on unemployment benefits and the preservation of human capital.

But partial unemployment benefits workers in stable industrial jobs above all, while the brunt of the crisis is being borne by those in precarious employment and young people. These are the sections of the population targeted by subsidized

employment. Again, the government has some leeway, because 70,000 subsidized non-profit contracts were eliminated since end 2010 and 300,000 since the early 2000s, and it is also not a very expensive scheme. The creation of 200,000 jobs would for instance cost the state 1 billion euros – contrast this with the shortfall of 4.5 billion euros due to the tax exemption of overtime, which, furthermore, is inconsistent with the logic of partial unemployment. These programs are targeted at those among the unemployed who are most isolated from the labor market – the long-term unemployed and unskilled – and would lower their risk of dropping out of the labor market.

However, even though these tools should be used immediately, they are still just stop-gaps. Partial unemployment remains confined to 80% of industry and designed for short-term use. If today's dire economic situation continues, we know that this approach will only delay layoffs. Similarly, subsidized jobs are not intended to be long-term. These are low-paid part-time jobs intended to deal with reintegration into the labor market, and not a long-term approach.

The biggest challenge is really a correct diagnosis of the current economic situation. By focusing negotiations on the issue of partial unemployment and subsidized jobs, the government seems to be betting on a quick recovery. Yet it is precisely the combined effect of austerity plans throughout Europe that will weigh on growth in the years to come. Furthermore, the policy of reducing public deficits, which will cost 1.4 percentage point of growth in France in 2012, is expected to continue at least into 2013. It is difficult in these circumstances to expect to pull out of the stagnant situation quickly enough to avoid the looming social catastrophe. Unless there are plans for a new permanent reduction in working hours and the creation of public sector jobs, the best employment policy remains growth. It is thus the issue of macro-economic governance that is posed above all

today in France and throughout the euro zone.