



Increasingly Equalized? A Study of Part-Time Work in 'Old' and 'New' Part-Time Work Regimes

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ABSTRACT

Recent debates on equalization of part-time work alongside full-time work stress the importance of high quality part-time jobs. This paper compares equalization in banking in three countries: two 'old' part-time work regimes, Norway and Sweden, and Ireland, where part-time work started to increase more recently. Banking is particularly interesting as a sector with a high proportion of female employment and good working conditions. One main interest is the role of regulations and how they are enforced at company level. The analysis shows that part-time work in the Nordic countries is normalized in terms of access and general work conditions, while in Ireland access is more restricted. Career opportunities are, however, restricted in all three countries. This paper argues that further equalization may be hindered by 'soft' regulations and a gradual normalization process that also normalizes disadvantages associated with part-time work and the category of the 'working mother'.

KEY WORDS

part-time work / equalization / gender / career / working conditions

Introduction

Equalization of part-time work with full-time work has been identified as crucial to achieve gender equality, to facilitate work–family reconciliation and to boost women's entry into paid work within a context of increasing labor shortages (Messenger 2011; Yerkes and Visser 2006; O'Reilly and Fagan 1998; McCann 2004; Connolly and Gregory 2008). Three conditions for equalization appear particularly important. First, access to part-time work is crucial to ensure equal access to employment for workers of varying capacity. Second, working conditions and social standards must be equal for part-time and full-time workers. Third, career obstacles associated with part-time work must be removed. Together, these three conditions may help equalize part-time work with full-time work and reduce the gendered distribution of part-time work (Ibid; EU part-time directive 97/81/EC; ILO Part-Time Work Convention 1994).

This paper examines the extent to which part-time work is actually undergoing a process of equalization with full-time work in terms of access, working conditions and career opportunities. The paper focus on equalization in the formal regulations, more specific in legislation and collective agreements at sector and company levels. Formal regulations, however, may not be enforced or they may be undermined by informal attitudes or practices (Thomlinson 2006). Therefore, this study is also based on interviews with employer and employee representatives about the enforcement of regulations at company level.



The paper compares countries which represent different phases of adapting to part-time work and female labor market participation. The ‘new’ part-time work regime is represented by Ireland, while Norway and Sweden represent the ‘old’. In Ireland, women did not take paid work on a large scale until the 1990s and the country is in an early phase of adapting to part-time work (Lewis 1992). Bosch (2001, p. 72) argues that Ireland has a very traditional working time structure. The single male breadwinner is still, by clear margin, the dominant form of economic activity in households with children. In the Nordic countries, however, part-time work has been prevalent since women entered the workforce in the early 1970s (Ellingsæter 1992; Bosch et al, 2007). It is reasonable to expect more equalized part-time work in Scandinavia because of the long-standing policy commitments to gender equality, high-quality working conditions and welfare states that facilitate dual-earner families (Esping- Andersen 1990; Gallie 2003; Bosch 2001; Connolly and Gregory 2008). Welfare state development and industrial relations have been influential in structuring distinctly different profiles of part-time work because such institutional features affect both women’s choices and the degree of marginality in part-time jobs (Ellingsæter 1992, p. 135). Based on these differences between the countries, we examine if part-time work has become more equalized in the two ‘old’ part-time work regimes or if it remains associated with disadvantages with regards to access, working conditions and career opportunities.

To examine regulations and their enforcement in a fairly similar context across the countries, the banking sector was selected as a case. Banking is an interesting case for several reasons. It is faced with the challenge of handling work-family reconciliation as it has employed female workers for decades. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect equalized working conditions because of the high coverage of collective agreements. Moreover the workforce is increasingly professionalized after the comprehensive restructuring of the industry in the 1980s and 1990s (Regini et al., 1999, p. 15–20). Whereas regular bank staff in retail banking used to have low formal education, they now tend to have a lower / medium level degree from university or university college. Hence, part-time workers in banking may be regarded as ‘part-time professionals’ (Dick 2010). These differ from traditional part-time work which is characterized by low payment, low skill requirements, few benefits and high turnover in many sectors and countries. To assess the two first conditions for equalization, access to work and working conditions, banking may serve as a critical case: if part-time workers are treated less favorably in this sector, it is reasonable to assume that they will suffer poorer treatment in other parts of the labor market as well. With regards to the third condition, equalized career opportunities, banking may also be a good case. The increased emphasis on performance (Arrowsmith et al. 2010) in a context with a high female employment constitutes a suitable setting for testing equalization of career opportunities.

Analytical perspectives on part-time work and equalization

This section present the perspectives and history behind “equalization of part-time work” before discussing the more specific analytical perspectives related to the three conditions examined; access, working conditions and career opportunities.

The history behind equalization of part-time work is somehow different in the countries. In Norway and Sweden regulations providing equal conditions for part-time

workers were established in the 1970s and part-time work were not seen as atypical work to the same extent as in many other European countries (Ellingsæter 2009, p. 102; Ahlberg 2003). The implementation of the EU part-time directive (97/81/EC) about 30 years later changed little with respect to regulation of equal treatment (Nergaard 2003; Ahlberg 2003). In Ireland, the formal equalization process started later and the first act came into operation in 1991. It was replaced by a new act in 2001 which implemented the EU part-time work directive. In Ireland this amendment was seen as crucial to secure equal treatment of part-timers (Wallace et al 2004, pp. 56–57). In most European countries equalization of part-time jobs was also driven, indirectly, by the emergence of equality legislation in the 1970s that prescribed equal treatment of men and women in paid work (Crompton and Birkelund 2000). Although such legislation removed the open exclusionary practices between men and women to be found in e.g. banking, they were informally reproduced (ibid p. 332). Such gaps between regulations and how they are enforced in practice is highlighted in several studies of part-time work. Thomlinson (2006) argues that organizational policy makers and individual managers will interpret formal requirements and recommendations in different ways, especially if regulations have a soft or suggestive character. Moreover, Ellingsæter (2009, p. 140) argues that the formal equalization in Norway, does not mean that part-time work is acknowledged as a fully worthy working time category in cultural terms. However, several authors think that interventions by formal regulations will contribute to make the level playing field between full-time and part-time employees more even (Visser 2002; Lind and Rasmussen 2008).

The share of men in part-time work is regarded as a suitable indicator (O'Reilly & Fagan 1998; Rubery et al. 1997; Yerkes and Visser 2006) to assess the extent of actual (not only the formal) equalization. The rationale is that men would seek part-time work to the same extent as women if part-time work were seen as equally attractive as full-time work. One could argue that a less gendered uptake of part-time work would not necessarily indicate greater equalization, especially if the expanding male part-time work is 'atypical' and associated with low status. However, such a development is unlikely in banking were employees are well educated and do not represent atypical work. In the banking context, more men in part-time is likely to be an indication of actual equalization.

Greater equalization may change the traditional pattern which is characterized by women working part-time much more than men, in the middle of their careers, for longer periods and mainly as a strategy to combine paid work and motherhood, while men typically work part-time in relation to labor market entry or exit (O'Reilly and Fagan 1998; McCann 2004).

Although labor market regulations are identified as crucial to stimulate equalization and less gendering of working time patterns, scholars also argue that it is also of primary importance to undertake a fundamental, formalized, political renegotiation of the 'gender contract', which encompasses home life and the workplace (Ibid; Messenger 2011). Social institutions, such as parental leave and childcare facilities, are seen as important to promote equalization of the gendered working time patterns (Bosch, 2001). Hakim (2006) however argues that any further equalization between the genders in the labor market is hindered by women's lifestyle preferences. Only a minority of women are primarily 'work-centered' and committed to work as a central life goal. Most women prefer an 'adaptive' lifestyle combining work and family while a third category is genuinely 'home-centered'. Hakim has been criticized for underestimating the structuring effect of



institutions in her understanding of mothers' adaptation to work and care (Crompton and Lyonette 2005), but her emphasis on mothers' preferences has been influential. If Hakim is right, equalization of formal regulations cannot be expected to affect the gendered aspects of working time. This study, however, will not collect data about preferences and cannot fully assess this dimension.

Equal access to part-time and full-time work has been identified as the first of three specific conditions for equalization. The most important indicator on increased access would be regulations in labor laws and collective agreements that entitle workers to reduced hours and to transfer from full-time to part-time or vice versa. However, it is recognized that formal regulations pertaining to access to part-time work are insufficient to secure equal access to part-time and full-time work. Much depends on how this is implemented, e.g. which justifications entitle access and the reasons why employers can allow or deny access (Messenger 2004). Moreover, the actual implementation of such access will rely on the general understandings of part-time work in contexts that are specific to the sector or company (Ibid). For example, Dick (2010) argues that part-time work is regarded as especially unfit in professionalized occupations and Smithson (2005) argues that it is seen as unfit for men. Such understandings may limit actual access although regulations are equalized. Hence, this paper will not only examine access in terms of regulations, but also see increased access for men as an indicator of actual equalization of access to part-time work.

Equal working conditions for part-time workers and full-time workers are the second condition for the assessment of equalization. Such regulations in labor laws and collective agreements will serve as important indicators as well as the interview data. For part-timers to be equalized with full-timers, equal working conditions are essential (Messenger 2011). Whereas full-time workers enjoy the stability and social standards associated with the traditional, standard employment relationship (e.g. maximum working hours, rest times, pay, social transfers) (Bosch 2006, pp. 43, 44), part-time workers have more often experienced poorer entitlements and protection. Segmentation theory argues that the working conditions of part-timers depend on their function in the (flexible) firm (O'Reilly and Fagan 1989). In the primary labor market, part-time positions are provided to attract and retain core workers who for some reason cannot enter into a full-time contract. In the secondary labor market, they are offered to less desirable workers under poorer terms and conditions to provide the employer with numerical and financial flexibility. The former is seen as an 'accommodation strategy', while the latter is a 'secondary workers strategy' (Anxo et al. 2007). In segmentation theory, working conditions are mainly regarded as results of employers' strategies towards different categories of workers. The role of formal regulations is insufficiently addressed. Working conditions regulated by legislation will apply to all workers regardless of their functions at a firm. However, it has been discussed whether legislation may be drained of its strength with regards to working time because of the way in which it is linked to collective bargaining. Derogations allowing the social partners in collective bargaining to agree on poorer conditions are particularly worrying in this regard (McCann 2004, pp. 24–25). While it is widely accepted that collective bargaining is particularly appropriate to meet the needs and preferences of workers, it has been discussed whether fundamental rights are better protected by legislation, especially when workers have limited bargaining power (Ibid). Other studies suggest that part-timers are treated less favorably regardless of regulations and occupational group (Webber and Williams 2008).

Equal career opportunities are the third condition by which equalization of part-time work is examined. In the banking sector, workers are generally highly qualified. Women with high qualifications normally maintain a higher and more continuous labor market involvement and have greater career aspirations and opportunities (O'Reilly and Fagan 1998, p. 6) compared to those with low qualifications. However, specific types of career obstacles seem to apply to such contexts. Webber and Williams (2008, p. 755) observe that part-time work is 'less common in professional jobs where careers are structured so that it is very difficult to step off and then onto the career track, making them especially incompatible for workers with care-giving responsibilities'. Moreover, Dick (2010:508) argues that the transition to motherhood and part-time working imposes reductions on the career development of professional workers because they fail to meet the work norms of long hours and constant availability. The conventional full-time schedule is seen as a prerequisite for a career and long hours are often a symbol of commitment and productivity (Smithson 2005; McDonald et al. 2008; Liff and Ward 2001). To combat such normative career disadvantages, regulations must not only ensure equal treatment, but also extend the availability of part-time work across all occupations and position levels (Anxo et al. 2004, p. 203). This, however, is unlikely to suffice as long as domestic and caring activities remain gendered (Ibid). Esping -Andersen (2009) identifies the reconciliation of careers and motherhood as also one of the greatest tensions in modern society. However, scholars disagree about the extent of career penalties associated with part-time work. Some believe that part-time work institutionalizes the gender division of labor and intensifies the invisible barriers to women's access to management positions (ibid). Others argue that the career track is slowed but not permanently closed by part-time work, and that it is better to stay actively employed in the period of enhanced child-rearing responsibilities than to drop out of the labor market (Epstein et al. 1999). Blair-Loy (2003) even considers that elite women in part-time jobs may have the sufficient social status to challenge the ideology of the devoted worker and modify the requirements of work.

We might expect therefore that certain outcomes would occur in the three countries because of differences in both the regulations and in the stages of adjusting to part-time work. The strength of regulations regarding access, working conditions and career opportunities are likely to be 'stronger' in Norway and Sweden. Hence, we a priori expect a higher equalization in these countries than in Ireland. Moreover, the gender differences in the take up of part-time work may be smaller in the two Nordic countries because of the greater public provision of parental leave and childcare facilities which relieves mothers of burdens related to work-family reconciliation. If women, on the other hand, work part-time because of lifestyle preferences we cannot expect social institutions to promote more similar working time patterns for men and women.

The interaction between regulations and the time dimension is important as well. The length and experience with part-time work would lead to its wider diffusion and equalization in Norway and Sweden, both in terms of regulations and in terms of practices at company level. After all, these 'old' part-time work regimes are twenty years ahead of Ireland in the process of making and enforcing regulations as well as adjusting the gendered aspects of work-family balance. Although it has been observed that the gendering of working time regimes persist over time, structures and values may change. Whereas Pfau-Effinger (1993) argues that the nationally specific gender cultures tend to be relatively constant over time, Gershuny et al. (1994) argue that the adjustment



of gendered work roles is likely to take place through a process of ‘lagged adaptation’. However, a long time span is required for such adaptation because the renegotiation of work roles is related to a wider process of redefining social norms, especially the gendered norms related to paid and unpaid work. Such norms change – but with a certain lag’ (ibid, p: 188).

Data and research design

Although Norway and Sweden represent similar cases compared to Ireland in the context of north-western Europe, there may be interesting differences between them related to minor institutional differences. The research design thus combines a ‘most similar’ and a ‘most different’ approach to case studies (Ragin 1987) in the search for conditions that explain equalization processes. These processes take place at different societal levels and this paper focuses on the regulations and their link to enforcement at company level.

Document studies were conducted in terms of EU legislation, national labor laws and collective agreements at sector and company level. Information about enforcement of regulations at company level is provided by statistics and interviews at sector and company level. The company level is represented by one bank from each country. The selection of only one bank from each country raises problems in terms of representativeness. This problem is somehow reduced by the interviews at sector level. Representatives at sector level trade unions and employer associations are well informed about the sector and are able to assess whether practices at the case banks were typical for the entire sector. Altogether ten interviews were conducted. At each bank, the trade union (TU) official and the Human Resource (HR) manager were interviewed, and at sector level, representatives from trade unions and employer associations. There were, however, two exceptions. At the Swedish bank the employer was unwilling to be interviewed. In Ireland, there has been no employer association at sector level since sector bargaining ceased in 1992 (Hayes 1993).

Interviews with employer and employee representatives were seen as particularly fit because they have first-hand information about regulations and how they are enforced. Besides there were practical reasons for limiting the scope of interviews as the study also is based on document studies and the statistical information. However, these expert interviewees may, deliberately or not, give skewed accounts. This is a problem in all types of qualitative interviews and the researcher can only rely on his/hers experience and other interviews within the case to detect such skewed representations. Case studies may suffer from the general misunderstanding about case-study research that “general theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge”, and hence leaves little scope for generalization (Flyvbjerg 2006:221). Generalization, however, depends on how the cases are chosen and how well it is described. This study may contribute to a more general understanding of equalization of part-time work in banking or in similar sectors. The comparison between the countries may increase the scope of generalization if similarity and/or difference can be related specific contextual characteristics (Hyman 2001; Ragin 1987).

Each interview followed a semi-structured questionnaire to ensure comparability of the cases and lasted for one to three hours. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed thematically. The interview data were supplemented with information

from the companies' personnel files concerning the distribution of part-time work between men and women and between the different occupational ranks. The files serve as useful indicators of how part-time work is practiced although the information from the personnel files is not exhaustive and the files could not be accessed in the Swedish bank. The names of the banks are confidential and they will be referred to as N-bank (Norway), S-bank (Sweden) and I-bank (Ireland). These banks are comparable in terms of product range, market share and skill formation, and are among the largest banks in their countries. At all three banks, retail banking constitutes about 60% of the activity and female employees, accounting for 60% of staff, are concentrated in retail. Rounded up, N-bank has 3400 employees, S-bank has 9100 and I-bank has 6700. Trade union membership is high, 70%, 74% and 84% respectively.

The introduction of call centers, however, give grounds for expecting a segment of lower quality part-time jobs as well, as these can be operated by less costly temporary workers. Call centers exist at all three case banks, but the interviewees claim that these involve a rather small proportion of the workforce and that the use of temporary workers is limited.

In the subsequent sections I first present information about the three countries, including crucial welfare state arrangements and statistics on part-time work. For the country and sector levels, statistical files from 1980 onwards were supplied by the national statistical offices of each country. Second I examine labor market regulations concerning access, working conditions and career opportunities. The descriptions of regulations are supplemented with interview data about the enforcement of regulations at company level. Ultimately the various results are discussed.

Part-time work prevalence and context in the 3 countries

Since the 1980s, the proportion of part-timers has remained stable in the Nordic countries while it has tripled in Ireland (Table 1). Hence, Ireland is closing the gap with Norway and Sweden in terms of providing access to part-time work and increasing the female share of the workforce. Despite a slight increase in the number of males in part-time work, patterns remain highly gendered across the three countries. This is true even in Norway and Sweden where a larger change was expected. In contrast to states of a liberal bent, welfare state intervention in gender and the family has been accepted and expected since the 1970s (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006, p. 2). Moreover, long-lasting 'dual earner/dual carer' policies have aimed to facilitate gender equality in the labor market (Ibid, p. 7). In Norway, the growth of part-time work in the 1970s resulted from an 'unintended' work reform generated by women's choice and was not initiated by state policies (Ellingsæter 1992, p. 114). In Ireland, the increase in part-time work was largely initiated from 'above' during strong economic growth and a labor shortage in the 1990s (Wallace et al. 2004).

The strong links between female labor force participation and social institutions (Bosch 2001), calls for a closer description of the countries in this regard. The Irish equal opportunity policies have not been reinforced to the same extent by parental leave rights or publicly provided and funded childcare facilities. The Maternity Protection Act, 2004 (originally from 1994) entitles mothers to 26 weeks of paid leave and an additional 16 weeks of unpaid leave. The Parental Leave Act, 2006 (originally from 2001) entitles parents to unpaid leave for a maximum of 14 weeks until the child reaches



the age of 8 years. In Norway, parental leave is longer (46 or 56 weeks) and the wage compensation is high (100% or 80%). In Sweden, the Parental Leave Act provides paid leave for 480 days. As regards childcare, in 2007 only 19% of Irish preschool children (0–5 years) were in day care (crèche/Montessori/playgroup) (CSO 2009). In 2009, comparable figures for Norway and Sweden for 1–5 year-old children were respectively 88.5%¹ and 82.1%². In the two Nordic countries the publicly funded childcare are

Table I Proportion of part-time workers in all sectors and in banking according to gender and total (%)³

		1980* (N)		1980 (N)		2000 (N)		2008 (N)	
Norway	Male	9		8		10		12	
	Female	52	14697	49	11012	44	13970	43	13651
	Total	28		27		26		27	
All Sectors	Male	6		8		9		12	
	Female	46	not given	45	144632	41	117202	41	135326
	Total	25		26		25		26	
Ireland	Male	2		3		7		8	
	Female	15	47919	17	48782	30	45697	32	34611
	Total	6		8		17		18	
Norway	Male	4		3		5		2	
	Female	39	382	30	840	27	698	17	413
	Total	23		18		17		10	
Banking	Male	5		4		6		7	
	Female	39	not given	33	2645	23	1700	33	1875
	Total	27		21		16		21	
Ireland	Male	0		1		2		2	
	Female	6	855	6	951	19	1235	21	929
	Total	3		4		13		14	

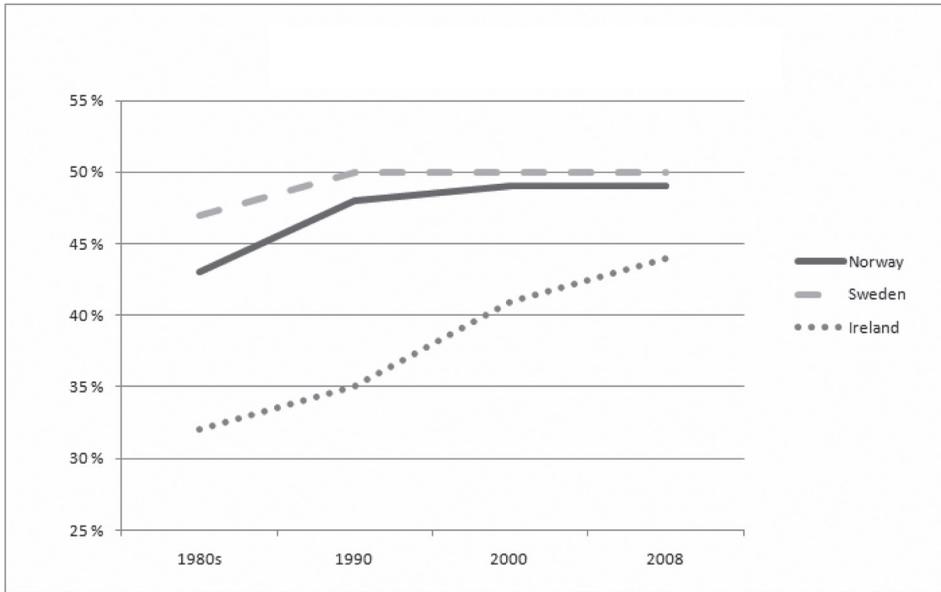
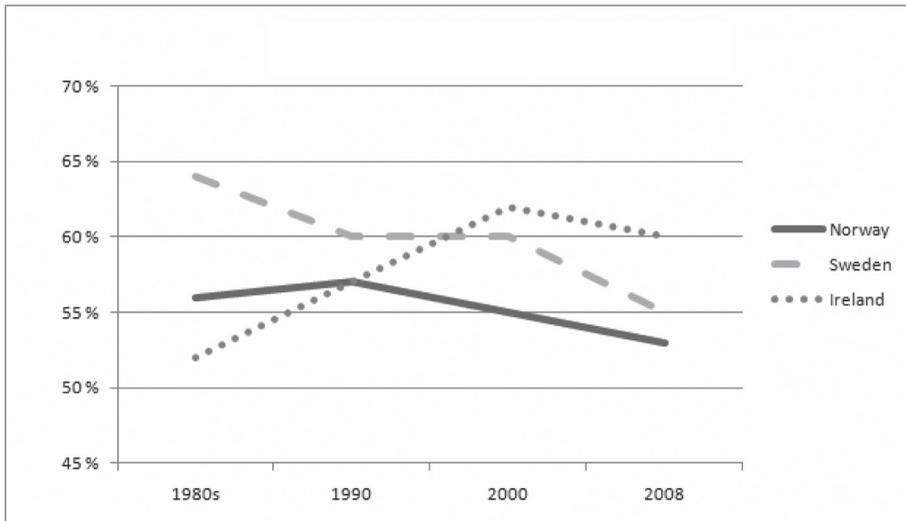
much cheaper for parents than it is in Ireland where childcare is funded entirely by parental pay (CSO 2009; Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006).

In banking, the proportion of part-timers is stable in Sweden, increasing in Ireland and falling in Norway. Although the drop in Norway is not the main concern of this paper, it is surprising and calls for a brief comment. Changes in formal regulations or policies cannot explain it, nor can statistical errors because similar trends appear in the staff and pay statistics provided by the Nordic banking employers' associations⁵. Moreover, it is surprising that Norway differs from Sweden and neither of the social partners are sure why, although they suggest that the greater labor shortage in Norway may push more staff into full-time work.

The figures for part-time work in the banks are presented below. They are based on the entire staff, except at S-bank where we could only access figures for the trade union members.

Share of part-time work, in total and by gender (%). All staff is included at N-bank and I-bank⁶. Only trade union members are included at S-bank).

At S-bank, the total share of part-time is higher than at N-bank and I-bank. Even when S-bank's comparatively high share of 'senior part-timers' is removed, the pro-

Figure 1: Female share of the workforce in all sectors (%)⁴**Figure 2:** Female share of the workforce in banking (%)

portion of part-time work remains quite high and constitutes 17%. Across the banks, very few men work part-time. Although we could not access the exact gender ratio for S-bank, the trade union official at S-bank observed that part-time work is overwhelmingly performed by women. Nevertheless, 45% of the 'senior part-timers' are



Table 2 Proportion of part-time work, in total and by gender (%). All staff are included in N-bank and I-bank. Only trade union members are included in S-bank

	N-bank 2009 (N)		I-bank 2008 (N)		S-bank (N)	
Total share of part-time	8,5		11		28	
Women share of part-time	94	284	98,8	713*	-	1891
Men share of part-time	6		1,2		-	

*part-time measured as full-time equivalents

men, which may indicate a process of gender equalization in older age groups. On the other hand, this complies with a traditional pattern of part-time work; men work part-time only when entering or exiting the labor market (O'Reilly and Fagan 1998). Moreover, senior part-time work differs from traditional part-time work because it is more detached from domestic structures as the senior workers do not have as many childcare responsibilities. Hence, these data do not suggest that part-time work is undergoing any tendency to de-gender at any level, either in the 'old' or 'new' part-time work regimes.

With regards to career opportunities, the figures show that part-time work is rare among managers and this indicates that careers at top level are irreconcilable with part-time work.

The typical part-time worker at I-bank and N-bank is a woman in a non-managerial position. The collective agreement at I-bank formally limits access to part-time

Table 3 Part-time workers at N-bank by occupational rank (%)

Assistant managers	4,2
Senior bank officials	19,7
Bank officials	76,1
Total	100

Table 4 Part-time workers as full-time equivalents at I-bank by occupational rank (%)

Executive	0,0
Senior Manager	0,7
Junior Manager	16,1
Senior Clerk	42,0
Junior Clerk	40,3
Temporary Clerk	0,9
Student	0,1
Total	100

work for managers, but the figures for N-bank show the same tendency, even without any regulatory restriction. We do not have figures for S-bank, but the social partners observe a similar pattern there. Even the less gendered senior part-time arrangement is not utilized by managers. This may indicate that regulations do not matter and that the Nordic countries are not more advanced with regards to equalization of part-time work. The interviews however, may help to interpret these patterns.

Equalization of part-time work— the regulations and how they are enforced

This section compares equalization of part-time work regulations and practices between the countries. First it addresses access, second working conditions and then career opportunities. In banking part-time work is regulated in two ways. Statutory legislation provides basic rights to all workers. Collective agreements at sector and/or company levels may complement legislation. Collective bargaining over working time has become more decentralized in banking in all the three countries during the 1990s, and thus provides more leeway for regulation at company level.

Access to part-time work is subject to legislation in all three countries. Since 1982 the Norwegian Working Environment Act has granted a conditional right to part-time work to workers with valid reasons unless it is of serious inconvenience to the employer. Single parents or those whose child is under ten are entitled under this legislation. This act does not specify the amount of part-time work, but list examples, e.g. shorter days, shorter weeks or time off during school holidays. It also grants a right to return to full-time work when the period of part-time work ends. Access to part-time work is moreover granted under the parental leave regulations in the National Insurance Act. Here, a scheme allows the flexible uptake of leave and hence facilitates part-time work.

In Sweden, access to part-time work is even more closely related to parenthood. It is unconditionally granted under the 1995 Parental Leave Act. Parental leave was first introduced in 1974 and the current act forms part of a broader family welfare policy. The entitlement to time off is far more extensive than the entitlement to benefit leave. Some of the arrangements under this act convert parts of the leave into part-time work, e.g. 1) time off carrying entitlement to parental allowance in the form of a reduction in normal working hours of not more than 75% and not less than 25%; 2) time off without entitlement to parental allowance in the form of a 25% reduction in normal working hours until the child reaches the age of 8; and 3) time off with occasional entitlement to parental allowance until the age of 12 (EMIRE).

In the Nordic countries, the enactment of the EU part-time directive resulted in minor changes (Nergaard 2003; Ahlberg 2003). In Ireland, however, this directive represented substantially new regulations and was implemented by way of the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act, 2001. This legislation does not oblige employers to provide part-time work, but they must as far as possible consider requests by employees to transfer from full-time to part-time work and vice versa, provide information on the availability of both part-time and full-time positions and facilitate access for part-time employees to vocational training. Moreover, the Labour Relations Commission may study an industry to identify obstacles to part-time work and this may result in a Code



of Practice. The Irish legislation on parental leave, maternity leave and leave for carers does not facilitate part-time arrangements to the same extent as comparable legislation in the Nordic countries.

Generally, access to part-time work is not specifically addressed in the collective agreements in banking in Norway and Sweden. The agreements refer to legislation, except in the case of 'senior part-time' which was introduced at both N-bank and S-bank in the 2000s. Senior part-time is widespread in the sector and is an employer initiative to retain staff and balance costs related to early retirement. Senior workers are entitled to reduce their working time by 10% and receive normal pay, or by 20% and receive 90% of normal pay. At I-bank, however, the collective agreement is the major instrument for regulating access to part-time work. It is supplied by a flexible working program, 'Choices 2000'. Six years of service are required to qualify and workers can avail themselves of it for a maximum of five years. 'Choices' is clearly a 'limited' resource and 200 employees were on the waiting list in 2008. Those who access 'Choices' can choose between '*job-sharing*', involving two staff members sharing one full-time post, and '*personalized hours*', whereby the worker can choose any combination of hours between 14.5 and 31.25 per week.

In the Irish interviews access to part-time work was a major topic. This was a remarkable contrast to the interviews in Norway and Sweden where part-time work was generally absent from the agenda. The low level of attention towards the issue probably reflects both that access was no problem and that the trade union members did not raise any concerns. I-bank, on the other hand, had a long waiting list and struggled to provide part-time work to everyone who wanted it. Unlike Norwegian and Swedish legislation, Irish legislation does not provide parents with rights to part-time work and arrangements related to childcare do not to the same extent support dual earner/dual carer families. This seems to leave more of the responsibility for resolving work-family reconciliation to families and to the employers in Ireland.

Equal working conditions for part-timers, including workers' protection, were established in the Nordic countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of women entering the labor market (Ellingsæter 1992). In Ireland, as mentioned previously, the EU directive played a major role in securing equal working conditions as it extended protection of employment legislation to all part-time workers and entitled them to conditions on a pro rata basis (Wallace et al. 2004, p. 56, 57). Prior to this legislation, the Irish banking trade union was struggling to achieve pro rata conditions for part-time workers. The first part-time arrangement, the 'permanent part-time' grade, was established in 1980. Step by step over ten years, part-timers gained access to educational support, were paid casual sick leave, the standard pay scale, overtime pay and weekend attendance. This was not an issue in Nordic banking because part-timers were covered by legislation and collective agreements.

The interviews showed that equalization of working conditions for part-timers was not on the agenda at either bank. All the interviewees, at company and sector levels, maintained that working conditions were equalized with those of full-time workers in line with the regulations. However, there were differences in how the interviewees reflected on the part-time work practices. These were related to the gendered uptake of part-time work. The male take up were low in all three countries, but in contrast to the interviewees in Norway and Sweden, the HR manager in Ireland thinks the gendered uptake of part-time work is problematic and expects future change with reference to the

on-going restructuring of norms and regulations of childcare. The interviews in Norway and Sweden, on the other hand, generated few reflections related to part-time work. This is how they replied a question about the gendered distribution of part-time work:

‘There might be a slight stigma attached to working less than 35 hours a week and 1.2 percent (male proportion of part-timers) is very low. It would be easier to do it if there were more of a change. We have paternity leave. That is 5 days paid leave for each child, normally right after the child is born. And everyone takes that. Then you might take parental leave. So it is starting to creep in’. (HR manager, I-bank)

‘We hardly ever have any problems related to part-time work and our members are not preoccupied with it. It is not on our agenda’ (TU official, N-bank).

‘It is women who work part-time and the majority are parents. In line with the parental leave act, they work either 70% or 75% of full-time’ (TU official, S-bank).

The absence of concern about gendered part-time work practices in the two Nordic countries is surprising because of the longstanding and high profile of gender equality. One possible explanation would be that the disadvantages connected to part-time work have become minimized, but the statistical indicators for equalization presented in the previous section do not suggest so. Perhaps the gendered distribution of part-time work has come to be taken for granted and normalized in the old part-time work regimes instead of remaining on the agenda and change attempted?

Across the three countries the interviews also indicate that there are similar trends which may hinder actual equalization in access and working conditions although regulations do not. Banking now requires a ‘full-time presence’ because of the way in which work is organized and staffed. After the restructuring of the industry, banks were downsized and increasingly oriented towards sales, performance and results (Regini et al. 1999). At results-oriented workplaces, activities are typically self- or customer-driven and the worker is required to work whenever and for how long it takes to complete tasks (Ibid). Hence, the part-timers, who are present for less than standard hours, face particular difficulties meeting the expectations of customers, colleagues and managers.

‘If you need to have a meeting with the whole staff on a Thursday and the flexible working person doesn’t work that day, you have a problem of coordinating (...) there are a lot of issues, for instance in a sales department where they have a company car—how do you share that? And I guess continuity was a problem. If a customer starts a business with you, they like you to be the person that sees it through with them from the first point to the last point. (HR manager, I-bank).

‘Employers think it is trouble. When they are having staff meetings, some part-timers aren’t there. Colleagues also find it difficult to handle’ (TU official, S-bank).

‘There is little debate about part-time work, but there is an employer preference for more staff working full-time because of the constant downsizing. It is preferred that everybody is there all the time’ (TU official N-bank).

In the subsequent paragraphs, the paper will examine career opportunities for part-timers. This is not addressed by any national legislation. The social partners in Nordic banking have not been particularly attentive to career aspects of part-time work since the early 1980s, when surveys showed that men occupied a greater proportion of mana-



gerial positions in Norway (Mjelde 1996, p. 54, 55) and that the 11,000 part-timers in Swedish banking were assigned the least desirable tasks (Edvardsson 1994, p. 55, 60, 61). At I-bank, however, regulation in the collective agreement prohibits part-time work for managers, something which is a formal 'career barrier'. 'Choices' is only for staff up to and including assistant managers. The ILO Part-Time Convention (1994) first coined the principle of equal career opportunities and this was written into law through the adoption of the 1997 EU Part-Time Directive. This directive requires employers to facilitate access to part-time work at all levels, including skilled and managerial positions, and to provide career opportunities for part-time workers. The generally weak regulation of career opportunities for part-time workers in the countries leaves great leeway for company level practices. In this respect, I will first present the Irish case. At I-bank the HR-manager was ambivalent about the effect of part-time work on career opportunities. He suggests that part-time work has ceased to be atypical, but he also said there is 'a slight stigma' that discourages men from seeking it.

'I think most people in the organization have got used to flexible work now. And it is probably very much accepted that there are people on personalized hours and job sharing. These atypical working patterns, if you like, they are not so atypical anymore. It's accepted as the norm' (HR manager, I-bank).

The trade union official, however, thinks that part-timers do suffer from career penalties. These penalties seem related to the understandings of working mothers and to the organizational problems caused by part-time work.

'Our position is that we are seeking it because our members are demanding it. But I think the bank looks at the people who have choices like they are taking a step back. Some people have admittedly, you know, they have prioritized, they have small kids or whatever and need time off. The bank, I think, well we have a lot of male management and they hate the choices. It's very hard to manage, you know, disrupting the staff and everything else. But they would see it then as if someone who takes the choices is not really interested in a career. Then my argument would be; I know from experience that someone might do more work in a three-day week than someone else during a five-day week. And the thing about it as well, is that all the women that are on choices don't apply for promotion. You know, they have taken a step back' (TU official, I-bank).

'I know the job-sharer in the (x) group says that management has totally changed its attitude towards him. That he has been written off as having a career in the bank and was referred to in the performance appraisal as well. He couldn't get the rating of 'very good' because he was only working on a part-time basis' (TU-Official, I-bank).

The understandings of part-time workers as people who primarily adapt their work to care responsibilities are much in line with the preference theory (Hakim 2006). In their study of why women are underrepresented in managerial jobs at UK banks, Liff and Ward (2001) stress the role of informal communication; managers and colleagues communicate to women that promotion and senior roles require long hours and are incompatible with active parenting. A similar message seems to be mediated through informal communication at I-bank and prevents part-time working women applying for promotion, even in cases when they are not hindered by regulatory barriers. The quota-

tions, however, show that notions about working mothers are not the only factor. The organizational challenges caused by part-time working ('disrupting the staff and everything else') probably represent another barrier, especially among line managers who face this 'part-time fuss' on a daily basis.

In the old part-time work regimes, however, the interviewees are more reluctant to connect part-time work to career penalties or to reflect on it more generally.

'I have not heard anyone saying that part-time work represents any career problem. A capable person is a capable person' (Official, Swedish Employers' Association).

'It is difficult to answer the question about part-time workers and career opportunities. It will vary because it depends on the judgment of individual managers. But I think the competence of the workers is essential, not the part-time contract' (HR manager, N-bank).

'I think it is has a lot to do with the individual person. If you show dedication it is no problem. But if you are the annoying parent who always puts your child first, that is not appreciated' (Official, Swedish Industry TU).

Compared to the Irish case, there were few reflections and statements about career penalties and the issue was not on the agenda. This may be related to actual differences in types of part-time work. At S-bank and N-bank, short part-time work is prevalent and the typical part-timer works 70%–80/90% of a full-time workload. Part-timers at I-bank work either 50% (job-sharing) or 40–90% (personalized hours) and are more absent from work. Several studies link career penalties to part-timers' failure to meet the demand for (at least) full-time presence (e.g. McDonald et al. 2008). Longer part-time working probably increases the problems related to absence. Regardless of short or long part-time working, it is obvious that it remains concentrated among non-managers in the three countries. Another similarity is that it remains performed by women. These two circumstances indicate that part-time work is still connected with career penalties in both the 'old' and the 'new' part-time work regimes. An interesting difference, however, is that the career penalties seem less controversial in the 'old' part-time work regimes. The opposite was expected, but the career disadvantages of part-time workers have not been on the trade unions' agendas since the 1980s (Mjelde 1996; Edvardsson 1994). Instead of continuing to be subject to change, it seems like these career disadvantages have become normalized. The career disadvantages and the gendered uptake of part-time work raise more concern at I-bank whose experience of part-time work is shorter. At I-bank, however, future change is expected because the gendered adaption to paid and unpaid work is seen as something that is 'under transformation'.

Summary and conclusions

This paper set out to explore the equalization of part-time work alongside full-time work with regard to access to work, working conditions and career opportunities in countries with 'old' versus 'new' part-time work regimes. A higher proportion of men in part-time work are generally regarded as an indicator of the successful equalization of part-time work (O'Reilly and Fagan 1998; Messenger 2011), but this paper finds that it remains highly gendered, at national level and in banking. This holds true even in the



Nordic countries where a greater change was expected due to their longstanding traditions for gender equalization in paid and unpaid work.

The paper examined the regulation of part-time work. Access to part-time work is now secured in a fairly similar way by legislation, but not in collective agreements. In Swedish legislation, part-time work is an unconditional right for parents with young children. In Norway and Ireland it is a conditional right for a wider group of employees and employers shall facilitate transfers from full-time to part-time and vice versa unless this would seriously inconvenience them. However, access is more limited at I-bank because of the company collective agreement and how it is practiced. I-bank has a long waiting list of workers who want part-time work, but it is argued that access must be limited to avoid too large organizational problems. In Ireland, the individual worker, trade union and the employer are left with more responsibility for resolving work-family reconciliation, partly because of the relatively shorter parental leave and the low provision of childcare facilities. The devolution of responsibility to company level is reinforced by the decentralized bargaining system in Irish banking. One of the acknowledged advantages of more centralized bargaining structures is that complex issues may be resolved at a higher level (Traxler et al. 2001). With regards to working conditions, however, no substantial differences are in place. As accounted for (pp. 12, 13) equalized working conditions for part-time workers, e.g. entitlement to holiday, pensions, overtime pay and employment protection are established at all regulative levels in the three countries. However, in Irish legislation equalization of access to work and working conditions for part-timers occurred later and resulted from a different regulative impetus, partly of a supranational character. As to career opportunities, the ILO convention and the EU part-time work directive prescribes the provision of part-time work at all occupational levels and equalized career opportunities for part-time workers. This is, however, not reflected in any regulations in the countries. The collective agreement at I-bank even prohibits part-time work in managerial roles.

To sum up: in the 'old' part-time work regimes, regulations for part-timers are more equalized with regard to access whereas working conditions are secured in all the cases. Regulations concerning promotion and career, on the other hand, are weak in all three countries. Because the greatest obstacles to equalization of part-time work seem related to career opportunities for part-time working mothers, this will be particularly discussed in what follows.

The difficulty of using regulations as an instrument to secure equal career opportunities for part-timers is addressed in the debate about the EU part-time directive. Thomlinson (2006, pp. 66, 70), however, emphasize the difference between 'hard' and 'soft' legislation'. Whereas less preferential treatment of part-time workers with regards to e.g. rates of pay and benefits are unlawful ('hard'), the regulations of equal career opportunities are softer, prescribing that employers as far as possible shall facilitate e.g. access to part-time work at all levels and provide career opportunities for part-timers. The lack of regulation of career prospects at national level, and the soft legislation at supranational level, seem to undermine the positive perspective for gender equalization and this may explain why gender inequality has been maintained in Norway and Sweden despite a long history of regulation.

In cases of soft regulations it is likely that organizational policy makers and individual managers will interpret requirements and recommendations in different ways (Ibid). At company level the differences between the countries seems to be related to

both institutional characteristics and to different perspectives on the dynamics on part-time work, equalization and gender. The formal career barrier at I-bank may be explained by the difference in how part-time work is structured. At I-bank the part-timers work shorter hours, which results in more absence from work. Absence is seen as very negative, and that applies in all countries, because it causes organizational problems in coordination for colleagues, customers and managers. The problems of absence are supported by other studies of part-time work in professionalized occupations (e.g. Dick 2010; Charlesworth and Wittenbury 2007; Webber and Williams 2008). These studies, however, thematize to a small degree the differences between long and short part-time working. This paper argues that long part-time working, unsurprisingly, seems to accentuate the 'part-time fuss' in the banking organization, where a full-time presence is increasingly required.

Another interesting cross country difference at company level relates to the perception of part-time work and career. Career penalties are acknowledged by the interviewees at I-bank, but much less so at N-bank or S-bank although career disadvantages obviously exist at all three banks. This difference was also manifest in the interviews with trade unions and employer associations at sector level. Across the banks, part-time work is concentrated among women at the low end of the occupational ladder. With reference to the notion of 'lagged adaption' (Gershuny et al. 1994), we expected the Nordic countries to be more advanced in the full equalization of part-time work. Instead, we find that the gendered uptake of part-time work and the career penalties are less controversial and more normalized in the old part-time work regimes. In Norway and Sweden the legislation and practice of part-time working did not continue to encourage a more 'radical' equalization of part-time work. It has in fact worked to limit and constrain expectations, whereas in Ireland the new legislation helped to raise people's expectations which ultimately were restrained at the level of the company. The unexpected results for the two Nordic countries may support the argument of Pfau-Effinger (1993) who contends that nationally specific 'gender cultures' are relatively constant over time and influence individual and collective practices. These gender cultures consist of the employment system, the welfare state, the family and the household system and together these factors affect the particular form of women's economic integration. Moreover, the long-standing link between mothering and part-time work in the Nordic countries may help explain why these issues have evaporated from the agenda of the trade unions and HR departments. When part-time work is understood as a result of individual choice (e.g. because of mothering), the organizations are often absolved of blame for the lack of career opportunities and the employees themselves often assume responsibility for their 'choices' regarding working part-time (Webber and Williams 2008).

We do not have data about the workers preferences and cannot use this material to fully assess whether Hakim is right in her claim that career development is first and foremost hindered by women's lifestyle preferences. However, this paper make probable that the career disadvantages cannot only be seen as a result of women's choice, but are also related to 'soft' regulations which makes greater leeway for company level perceptions of part-time workers as a homogeneous group not suitable for manager roles. The findings in this paper may suggest that over time, full equalization of part-time work is hindered by a gradual normalization of the disadvantages attached to part-time work and the category of the 'working mother'.

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End note

¹ <http://www.ssb.no/barnehaager/> Accessed 20.4.2010.

² <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/1664#paragraphAnchor0> Accessed 20.4.2010.

³ Source: Statistics were provided by the Central Statistics Office in Ireland, Statistics Norway via the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and Statistics Sweden. For Ireland, figures for 1985 and 1990 are based on the Labour Force Survey and on the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for 2000 and 2008. For Norway and Sweden, figures are based on the Labour Force Surveys (AKU).

Definition of part-time work: There is no universal definition of part-time work, but a common approach is to define a part-time worker as someone whose normal hours of work are less than those of a 'comparable full-time worker' (Nergaard, 2010). Quantitative analysis is normally based on information from employees as to whether their position is full or part time. Eurostat mainly uses information about whether the position is full time or part time and hence arrives at higher figures for shares of part-time work than the OECD statistics based on a cut-off at 30 hours. If such information is not available, a cut-off is normally made at 30 or 35 hours (Ibid).

Here, the distinction between full-time and part-time work is based on a spontaneous response from the respondent. Respondents are also asked about their usual hours per week. For 1980 in Norway and 1981 in Sweden, it is based on number of hours worked per week.

Period/ Years: For Ireland, no comparable figures could be provided for before 1985 and in Sweden, figures from 1981 are used because there was a major industrial dispute in 1980. Figures for Norway are based on LFS 1. Quarterly data. Figures for Ireland in 1985 and 1990 are based on the annual LFS. Figures for Sweden and Ireland (2000) are annual averages.

⁴ The explanatory notes for table 1 also applies to figure 1 and figure 2. For Norway, the numbers are based on an average of three years (the actual, previous and following year) to adjust for small sample sizes within the banking sector, except for 2008 which is based on an average of 2007 and 2008 only because industrial classifications changed in 2009.

Industrial classification: Classification of the banking sector is based on national versions of the international industrial classification standards. These are ISIC for 1980/1981 and 1990 for Norway and Sweden, (ISIC 81), NACE Rev 1 for 2000 (all countries) and 2008 Norway (NACE 65), NACE Rev 2 for 2008 for Ireland and Sweden (NACE 64). For Ireland, 1985

and 1990 the statistics are based on 'banking and finance' based on industrial classifications used in the 1981 Census of Population. The classification of banking has changed slightly over a number of years, but basically contains the same type of employees: the employees of banks and central banks.

⁵ <http://www.finarb.no/statistikk/nordiskstatistikk/nordiskbankstatistik2008.pdf?1=1&showDirect=true> Accessed 19.3.2010.

⁶ For I-bank, the proportion of part-timers in the total staff is measured by full-time equivalents instead of actual number of part-time workers.