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## Work Flexibility in Eight European Countries: A Cross-national Comparison\*

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**Abstract:** Flexibility is often attributed to the extent of de-regulation or 'atypical' work, such as part-time employment, fixed-term contracts and self-employment. Based upon a study carried out in 2001 that compared flexibility in 8 countries (UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria) using a representative sample survey of people aged between 18 and 65 (N=10123) and on a study of policy frameworks, the article develops new ways of looking at flexibility, which focus upon the actual work practices of people in the labour market and how they undertake flexibility of time (working hours), place (where the work takes place) and conditions (contract). The article argues that, based upon these definitions, there is in fact a great deal of flexibility in European labour markets, which goes beyond 'atypical' employment alone. It explores this in the context of the different regimes of regulation found in different European countries. Furthermore, the article identifies good flexibility, associated with highly educated people being able to regulate their own working time, and bad flexibility, associated with people with low education, low income, and often with young workers and those found in rural areas. Some types of flexibility were more typical for men and some for women.

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Whilst flexibility is much discussed, it can actually mean a range of things [Pollert 1991]. Apart from the well-documented distinction between functional and numerical flexibility [Pollert 1988], for some, flexibility means the removal of the regulations and institutions protecting workers [Riboud and Silva-Jauregui et al. 2001]. For others, flexibility is defined rather narrowly in terms of the extent of part-time work, the extent of fixed-term contracts and the extent of self-employment. However, in most cases, flexibility is assumed from external variables. That is, it is assumed that if there is less regulation, people will be more flexible.

We decided to test these assumptions by looking at flexibility in terms of the working practices of people in the labour market in 8 European countries. The coun-

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tries were chosen because they represented different approaches to flexibility: the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands in the 'old' EU regions, and Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania in the 'new' EU regions. The project was entitled 'Households, Work and Flexibility' (abbreviated to HWF) (<http://www.hwf.at>) and was carried out between 2000 and 2003. The study considered flexibility in terms of *time* (working hours), *place* (place of work) and *conditions* (contractual arrangements). This report represents an overall summary of many of the findings of the HWF project rather than being an in-depth analysis of any particular kind of flexibility. Further information can be found in the project reports which are referenced throughout.

The opening of capital flows and subjection of national economies to global competition in the 1980s and 1990s forced European countries to introduce flexible labour markets in order to remain competitive. This was done rather successfully in the three North-Western countries considered here, but using different strategies. In the UK there was a de-regulatory strategy, in the Netherlands there was an agreement on increasing the workforce with more part-time and temporary work along with wage restraint, and in Sweden, flexibilisation was introduced within the policies of solidarity and full labour force participation for both men and women. In all these countries, levels of participation in the labour market are very high, and through the 1990s there was growth and prosperity, which is reflected in the optimistic and positive attitudes of respondents in the HWF survey to economic conditions. In these North-Western EU countries there has been a shift from employer-led styles of flexibility to employee-led styles of flexibility. That is, flexibility has become more individualised, reflecting employee needs.

In East Central European (ECE) countries, by contrast, the regimes of full employment which were in place until the end of the 1980s were characterised by state control of the labour market, with low wages compensated by price subsidies and high levels of social protection (for example support for working women). From the end of the 1980s, these were destroyed by the introduction of market de-regulation. This mainly took the form of employer-led flexibilisation and resulted in a deterioration in living standards and job loss for large parts of the population. It was mainly experienced by the populations of those countries as negative, although there was an increase in prosperity after the mid-1990s and the creation of new jobs and opportunities, especially for educated people. This is reflected in the fact that the vast majority of HWF respondents in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary are dissatisfied with their economic situation and they felt that it had deteriorated even in the last five years. In Slovenia and the Czech Republic, where the impact of transition was less harsh, only just over half of respondents were satisfied with the economic condition of their household [Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov 2003].

Many studies have pointed to the implications of flexibility for creating a more precarious labour market for low-paid employees (often women or young people). We might term this the *pessimistic* view of flexibilisation [Dex 1997; Perrons 1998; Burchell and Day et al. 1999; Standing 1999; Beck 2000; Bradley and Erikson et al.

2000]. Others have argued for the potential in using flexibility to enhance personal development and the family-work balance. We might term this the *optimistic* view of flexibilisation [Handy 1994; Hörning and Gerhard et al. 1995; Bridges 1996; Hill and Hawkins et al. 2001; Auer 2002; Spoonley and Firkin 2002; Tietze and Musson 2002]. In other words, are people able to take advantage of flexibility to enhance their lives or are they rather the victims of flexibility?

Whilst time flexibility has been rather well documented [European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2002; Dex 1997; O'Reilly and Fagan 1998], the emphasis has been mostly on the increasingly important role of part-time and a variety of flexible-hours contracts (annualised hours, shift working, evening and weekend working, time sharing, term-time working etc.), which have enabled employees to meet the demands of longer opening hours, round the clock demand, just-in-time production and so on. However, whilst part-time work, for example, is often seen as evidence of flexibility, part-time workers can be rather 'rigid', in the sense of working only fixed hours. Part-time work need not be precarious and it has been the policy goal in countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands to introduce security for part-time workers, with conditions comparable to full-time workers [Boje and Strandh 2003; Jager 2003]. Contract flexibility has also been rather well discussed in terms of jobs, often those with fixed-term contract duration. However, flexibility of place has enjoyed much less discussion, except in the analysis of telework and IT professionals [Huws 1996; Hochgerner 1998]. Nevertheless, we can see this as another way in which the needs of the labour market and the availability of the workers come together in different ways. These are all sources of flexibility within a job. However, another source of flexibility which is seldom considered is the extent to which people might combine several jobs or several sources of income. This kind of additional flexibility can provide new opportunities for some (for example, it can be a way of venturing into self-employment) or a source of hyper-exploitation as people undertake several jobs with declining wages to make ends meet [Nelson and Smith 1999]. Additional job holding has been a common source of economic activity in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in order to augment low or declining wages.

## Methods

The HWF project used a variety of approaches to explore flexibility in each country. The first research strategy was to collect national statistics and contextual knowledge to describe and analyse the patterns of work and household behaviour in general in the target countries.

The second research strategy was to implement a standardised representative sample survey in each country (face-to-face and telephone), aiming at a representation of the working-age population between 18 and 65 in each country. The survey was designed to examine the ways in which the activities of different household

members combine, covering all forms of work, including domestic work, childcare, work in the informal economy, self-provisioning, additional casual and occasional jobs, and various kinds of regular employment, and to look at attitudes to flexibility as well as actual behaviour, the ways people arrange their work and their preparedness to be flexible (N=10123). More detailed results of the survey can be found in Wallace [2003c], Wallace [2003d], and Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov [2003].

The third strategy was to document and compare flexibility and family policies in different national contexts, which were then compared in a comparative report. This was done mainly by asking partners to provide accounts of labour market and family policies and by putting these accounts together in comparative tables. These can be found in the HWF reports [Wallace 2003a; Wallace 2003b].

### **Regimes of regulation**

The Western EU countries in the HWF project have all embraced flexibilisation as a way of modernising the labour market. However, they have used different strategies, and these take place within the context of different prevailing regimes of regulation [Regini 2000]. The regimes of regulation are based upon government policies and the different kinds of traditions of social dialogue in different countries, which are analysed in this section of the report. They are also affected by the different traditions of family policy, which integrate family and work in different ways, although this is usually ignored by regulation theorists [Lewis 1992]. However, regulation regimes are also affected by the culture of the work, and by the culture of care, and these are analysed elsewhere [Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov 2003].

The HWF countries can be grouped according to their labour market regulation regimes, which are summarised in table 1. In the UK, there were de-regulatory policies in the 1980s and early 1990s, characterised by a progressive removal of job protection and wage protection. Conditions for part-time workers were reduced. Dismissal was made easier and the trade unions subdued – they no longer formed part of the national negotiations over labour market policies. In the UK it is also very easy to set up a small business. After 1998 and the election of the Labour Government, this was partially reversed: a minimum wage was introduced, along with protection for part-time workers, albeit mainly in response to EU Directives on working time. In 1997 the Directive on part-time work was introduced and came into force in 2000, the 1999 Directive on fixed-term work took force in 2002, and a new Directive on temporary-work agencies has also come into force in 2003. Although the situation for non-standard workers has improved, they still do not enjoy the security and conditions that they have in the Netherlands and Sweden, which is why we have termed the UK ‘partially de-regulated’.

In Sweden, flexibilisation strategies were adopted to pull the country out of the recession of the 1990s and they took the form of making work more flexible within the context of the norm of regular full-time work for both men and women.

In the Netherlands, since the 1980s a distinctive strategy has been adopted of getting more women into the labour market by encouraging part-time work. This was extended to a concern over managing the working timetable so that hours of work could be made flexible and individualised for all employees. However, this was in the context of job protection and offering job security, which has been dubbed 'flexicurity' and forms part of collective as well as individual labour negotiations. In both countries self-employment was encouraged and the situation of people on fixed-term contracts improved so that after a certain time they must be offered full-time jobs (this is also a response to the EU Directives). However, there was also legislation to protect the position of part-time employees so that they had the same entitlements as full-time employees. Both Sweden and the Netherlands therefore practice what we might call 'regulated flexibility'.

The Accession countries of ECE did not at first set themselves the goal of becoming 'flexible', nevertheless provisions for self-employment and part-time work, as well as fixed-term contracts, were introduced in the early 1990s. Indeed, at that time, the neo-liberal model of reform prevailed, which implied that it was better to get rid of all regulations and leave the market free to take its own course. There was therefore an ideological consensus against regulation. The disastrous effects of this policy in terms of unemployment, impoverishment and the criminalisation of the economy led to a backlash against market reform in some countries and the election of governments that instead put on the brakes. Once again there was no strategy for regulated flexibilisation. However, a great deal of spontaneous flexibilisation in fact took place as people moved jobs, moved professions, became self-employed or took on casual work. Informal methods of flexibilising rather the rules also took place, for example with regard to the official salaries on which social insurance was paid and the top-up salaries which were provided unofficially. At least some of this was hidden by the grey economy, as the legislation to control and incorporate economic activities often did not keep pace with the changes in economic behaviour. Where there have been progressive labour market and taxation policies, more and more activities have moved out of the grey economy and into the formal economy, as is the case in the Czech Republic and Hungary [Wallace and Haerfper 2002]. As a result, we might call these 'partially regulated flexibilisation', even if they did not embrace flexibility in the same way as the North-European countries did. Slovenia, by contrast, is a country that has been slow to introduce reforms, buoyed up by a prosperous economy and levels of GDP closer to the EU average. It could begin such reforms only after independence in 1991, and not earlier as in the Czech Republic or Hungary [Sicherl and Stanovnik et al. 2003].

In general the economies of all three of the more 'prosperous' Accession countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia – started to recover after the middle of the 1990s and have generally been improving since then. In the Czech Republic, an ideological battle between liberalisation and social protection has raged around the concept of flexibility [Večerník 2002]. Nevertheless, a range of legislation has been introduced which can aid flexibility, and its implementation was



assisted by a buoyant labour market with very low unemployment in the first part of the 1990s, enabling people to move between jobs with little risk of ending up unemployed.

Hungary embraced flexibilisation from the late 1980s, but Hungary also provides an example of how not all legislation that was introduced was successful [Kopasz 2003]. One programme introduced subsidies to encourage self-employment in 1991. By 1997 only 1–2% of the self-employed who were eligible had taken up such opportunities, and the story is the same in many other ECE countries, such as Romania. A second scheme tried to encourage employers to employ the unemployed as casual workers. Employers were given a free 'work book' and they received subsidies for their social security. The unemployed had an incentive to participate because they became eligible once more for unemployment benefits after a certain number of days work. However, the scheme was not a great success. An act to encourage part-time work by subsidising employers to make people part time rather than lay them off was introduced in 1991. This at first attracted 30 000 participants, but later the numbers fell off to just one-sixth of the original figures. In 1997 it was replaced with another, similar scheme targeted at particular groups of employees, but this was also unpopular. However, new measures were introduced through the National Employment Fund. It is possible that such flexibility measures were introduced too soon, before either employers or employees were ready for them, and that there will be more take up in future. High rates of unemployment make flexibility by employees a personal risk. There are even important differences in the way in which labour markets were flexibilised in the Czech Republic and Hungary [Keune 2003].

In Romania and Bulgaria many of the policies to encourage flexibilisation were even contradictory. For example, although it is possible to become self-employed, there is a dense forest of restrictions and permits that must be negotiated. Legislation is mainly concerned with maintaining the working week rather than with reducing it.

The fact that policies aimed at encouraging flexibilisation are not many in number and are often contradictory or not well implemented or received in ECE does not mean that there is little flexibility. Both employees and employers have found a variety of ways to create flexibility of pay, conditions, and hours on an informal basis, either by creating additional informal and casual jobs that evade the legislation, or by creating additional conditions within the existing jobs, such as 'top-up' salaries. Furthermore, the large numbers of casual and agricultural workers are forced to be flexible, since they have no alternative employment. Many live on casual jobs from day to day. Some flexibility is even a continuation of the former second economy [Stanculescu and Berevoescu 2003].

In all Accession countries, the transition led to an increasing polarisation of income, differentiation within the workforce, job loss and rising poverty. Ethnic groups such as the Roma were especially affected, but so were young people and those in rural areas. Poverty was especially acute in the two least prosperous

**Table 1. Regimes of regulation**

1980s	1990s and 2000s	
De-regulated flexibility	Partially de-regulated flexibility	UK
Regulated non-flexibility	Regulated flexibility	The Netherlands Sweden
Strongly regulated anti-flexibility	Partially regulated flexibility	Hungary Czech Republic Slovenia
Strongly regulated anti-flexibility	Mainly unregulated flexibility	Bulgaria Romania

Accession countries, Romania and Bulgaria, whose economies did not pick up from the transition slump until the end of the 1990s [Kovacheva and Pancheva 2003; Stanculescu and Berevoescu 2003]. This improvement affected the population in very patchy ways, with a small number prospering and large numbers remaining poor or getting even poorer. Labour market and social security reforms were slow and often inappropriate or contradictory and could not match the impoverishment of the population, so that many people fell out of coverage altogether. The result was that more activities were pushed into the informal economy as people had to make ends meet without official incomes and inadequate or absent benefits [Wallace and Haerfper 2002]. In Romania, this job loss, accompanied by land restitution, led to large numbers (many of whom had been forcibly urbanised in the recent past) returning to the land and to subsistence production as a household strategy [Wallace 2002]. This flexibility takes place in spite of the lack of reform, and so we might call this ‘unregulated flexibility’. However, it is also a product of the over-regulation and over-taxation of some sectors, such as self-employment, making it very difficult for people to legally become entrepreneurs.

The process of EU integration has introduced a new dynamic into this picture by including various labour market and social policy reforms as part of the Accession negotiations. In all countries it has been necessary to set up a National Employment Action Plan in response to the EU Employment Strategy.

### **Traditional flexibility**

Let us begin with the conventional definitions of flexibility – part-time and temporary work, sometimes called ‘a-typical’ employment. Starting with part-time work, table 2 shows that it is most often carried out in the North-Western EU countries and that in those countries it is mainly women who do this work. In ECE countries, part-time work is marginal and is as likely to be done by men as by women. Shift



Table 2. Types of flexible work\* by sex by country

	Part time			Shift work			Self-employed			Farmer			Casual worker		
	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All
UK	4	25	16	16	11	13	13	4	8	-	-	-	1	2	2
NL	*		26	4	3	4	9	7	8	1	1	1			
Sweden	6	25	16	8	6	7	11	4	8	1	-	1	3	3	3
Slovenia	1	1	1	21	25	23	8	2	5	3	1	2	4	4	4
Czech Republic	1	3	2	12	18	15	12	7	9	1	-	1	0.4	0.3	0.3
Hungary	2	3	3	7	10	8	10	4	7	2	1	1	2	1	1
Romania	4	3	4	14	18	16	6	2	4	26	16	20	11	4	7
Bulgaria	4	4	4	18	21	19	8	5	7	2	-	1	3	1	2

\* In the Netherlands there is the most part-time work, done mainly by women, but in the HWF questionnaire this question was asked in a different form in the NL [see Jager 2003].

work is found more often in the ECE countries, reflecting the dominance of industry in the structure of employment. However, shift work is also quite often carried out in the UK. In the West, shift work is most often done by men, and in the East by women. Self-employment is rather common in the Western European countries and in the Czech Republic. However, it represents a small but significant share of the workforce in all countries. Men are more likely than women in all countries to be self-employed. However, whilst for some this was a way of being better off, for many people, especially in Bulgaria and Romania, self-employment meant simply doing marginal work (such as selling stuff on a market), which was an alternative to unemployment. Farmers are very unevenly distributed. In EU countries they represent only a very small number of the employed, but in Romania, 20% of the workforce are farmers, reflecting a re-ruralisation of the population, a point which is discussed further on in this report. Casual workers, like farmers, are most common in Romania, where they represent another aspect of forced flexibilisation. We can see from this table that especially part-time work, shift work and farming show very large variations between countries. However, many different forces are hidden behind these trends. Whilst in most countries farming employs a declining number of people, in Romania their numbers are increasing. Shift work reflects the structure of employment in different countries, whilst the number of fixed-term contracts is often a response to a labour market with high job protection rather than vice versa. By looking only at such data, we are not really comparing like with like in terms of flexibility across different countries. This is why we decided to broaden the picture of flexibility in our research.

## **New ways to look at flexibility**

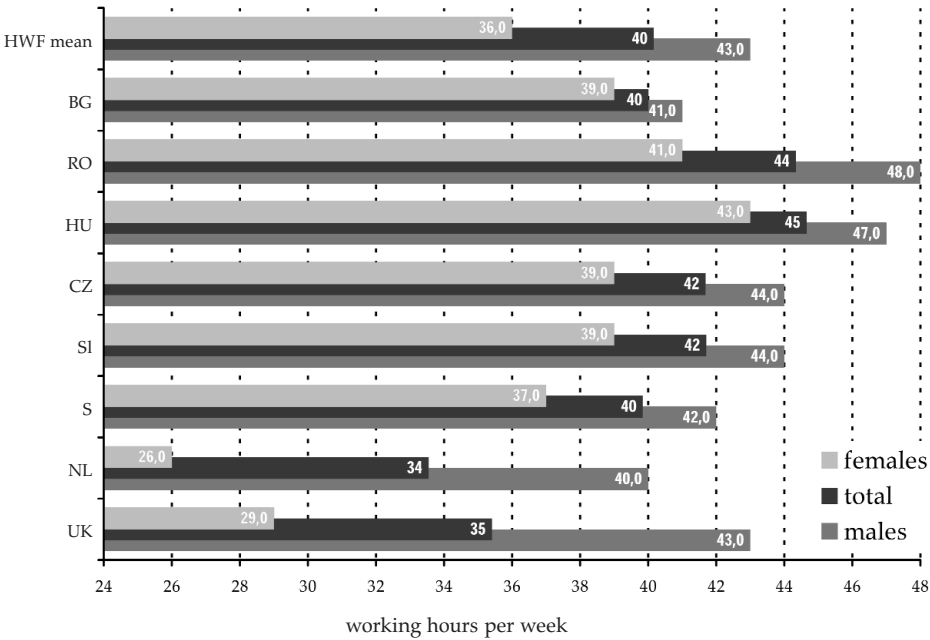
Traditionally, numerical flexibility is seen in terms of the removal of job protection and trades-union influence, and in terms of the ease of dismissal or the number of part-time, self-employed and temporary workers. As we have shown, the first definition is unsatisfactory because it assumes that flexible behaviour will follow from these measures. By contrast, we show that the regulation of flexibility by social partners can lead to more flexibility overall and to more sustainable flexibility in particular (meaning socially acceptable and leading to quality jobs in the long term). We also demonstrate that the definitions of part-time work and self-employed activity are so varied across East and West Europe that it is not really helpful to look at these indicators alone. Furthermore, the reasons for pursuing one or the other are highly variable and may have nothing to do with flexibility. Finally, the number of temporary workers is likely to be a response to the lack of flexibility in labour market regulations rather than its existence. For these reasons, we do not regard these conventional indicators as being very good measures of flexibility in a comparative perspective.

For this reason, we have developed some new ways of looking at flexibility by considering the actual work practices of people in the labour market. We consider flexibility to mean the way in which people will vary their place or time of work. Seen in this way, we can measure flexibility as something related to typical rather than atypical employment. In other words, we can measure the degree of flexibility within regular, full-time jobs or part-time jobs. This is a broader notion of flexibility and closer to the variety of working patterns that do in fact exist. In addition, we take into account the extent that people can control their hours of work and their reasons for doing flexible work. Below, a more detailed explanation is given of some of these measures.

## **Flexibility of time**

To begin with, we considered the number of hours worked per week in terms of the mean and the median. Since 'part time' means something different in every country, this is perhaps a better way to look at the length of the working week. On average, the people in the Accession countries work the longest hours, but that is because there is no tradition of part-time work in those countries. In the old EU countries, we see clear differences between men and women, reflecting the tradition of the part-time option for women. In the UK, the average working week for men is 43 hours, whilst for women it is 29 hours. In the Netherlands the difference is 40 and 26, and in Sweden the gap narrows to between 42 and 37. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia the gap between men's and women's working hours is also 5 hours, but both men and women work longer hours. This is also the case in Romania, where the longest hours are worked on average (although the median is not so different to other countries): 48 for men and 41 for women. In Bulgaria the difference is very

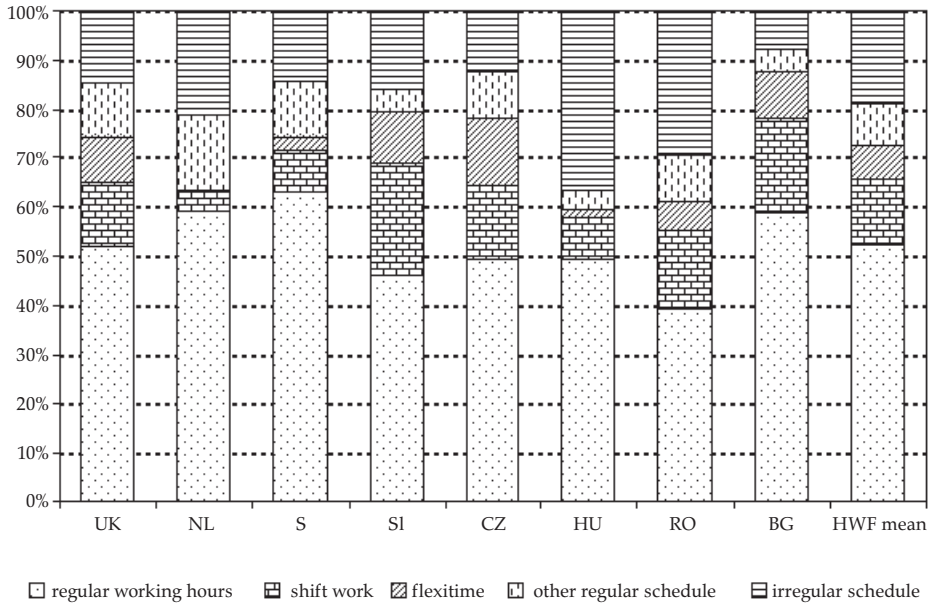
Figure 1. Mean hours worked per week by country



small, with 41 for men and 39 for women. Thus, only in the Netherlands is the 40-hour week the average for men: everywhere else, men work longer than 40 hours on average. The longest hours are worked by people in the middle- (prime) aged groups, who, we can assume, are often those with family responsibilities. Those with better education are generally working longer hours, although in Romania it is the reverse, reflecting the fact that many of those with long hours would be working on the land. Also a reflection of this fact was the finding that longer hours were usually associated with higher income, except in Romania.

In order to capture all forms of flexibility, we asked respondents first about the regular working schedule, Monday to Friday, and then about deviations from that schedule (assuming that the precise peculiarities of the schedule would differ from country to country). According to this question, the respondents in Sweden were most likely to have a regular working schedule, with almost two-thirds (63.2%) giving a positive response to the question. Bulgaria came next with 58.9%, and the Netherlands with 54.2%. In the UK, 51.9% of people had a regular working schedule, in Hungary 49.4%, and in the Czech Republic 49.2%. This figure fell to 46.1% in Slovenia and 39.4% in Romania. The regular Monday-to-Friday schedule was most often found among those with better educational levels and better incomes. We can assume that having a regular schedule was a privileged situation in most countries, although less so in the UK and the Czech Republic.

Figure 2. Working schedule by country

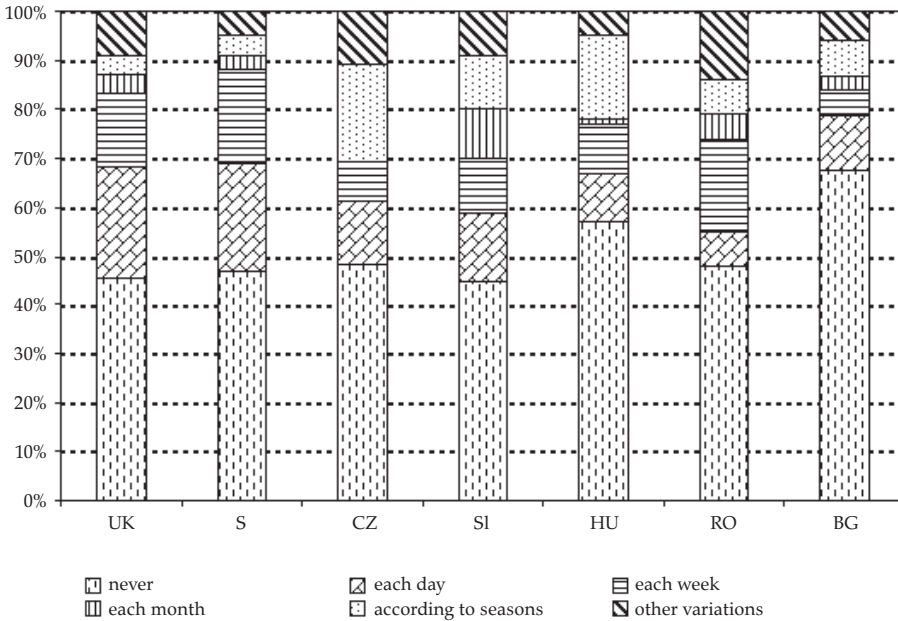


Flexitime schedules were most often found in the Czech Republic (14.1%) and Slovenia (10.7%), followed by Bulgaria and the UK (9.3%). Hungary had the least number of flexitime people, with only 1.7% (again the question was asked differently in the Netherlands, which is why it is not included here). In the Czech Republic it was most often men and those with high incomes who had this kind of freedom, whilst in Slovenia there was not much difference between the sexes but it was often those with high income who had flexitime schedules. In Bulgaria it was men, and in the UK women, who were likely to have such schedules. In most places flexitime was associated with higher incomes, so we could say that it was a privileged kind of working schedule [see Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov 2003].

Altogether 8.7% indicated ‘other regular working schedule’ as theirs. However, in the Netherlands this went up to 14.5%, in Sweden 11.6%, and in the United Kingdom 11.3%. This probably reflects the prevalence of part-time work in those countries. The ECE countries had generally fewer ‘other’ schedules. Slovenia, Bulgaria and Hungary had the least number of people with these kinds of schedules.

A large number of people had an irregular working schedule (around one-fifth). The highest numbers were found in Hungary (36.7%) and Romania (29.5%), substantially above the HWF mean. The lowest numbers with irregular working schedules were found in Bulgaria (7.7%). The Netherlands, the UK and Sweden were

Figure 3. Variations in working hours by country



around the same, with between 14% and 19%. The Czech Republic had 12.4% and Slovenia 15.8%. When we look at the data in this way, more than half of the respondents in four of the eight countries did not have regular working hours and in a further three countries nearly half were on non-regular schedules.

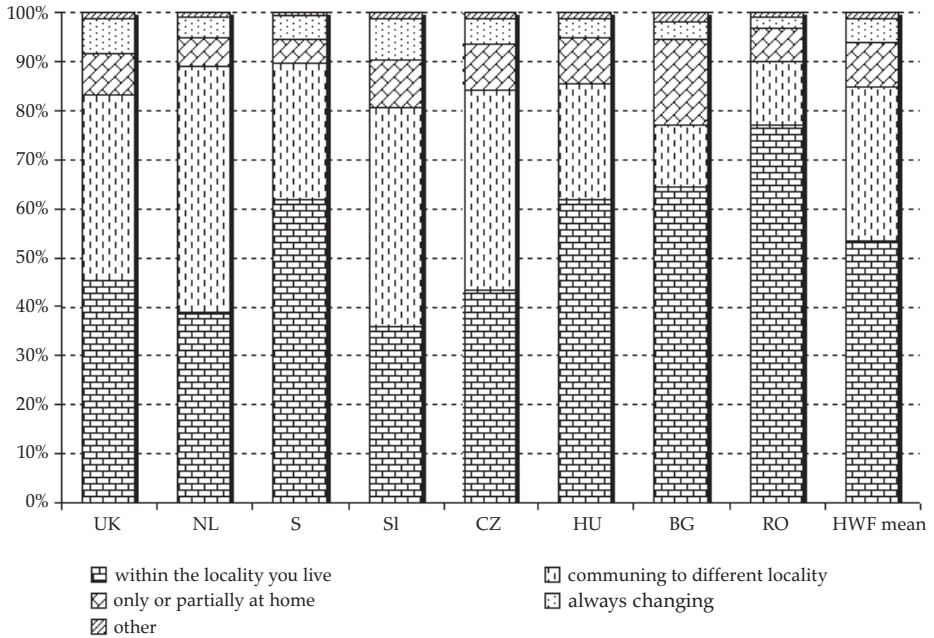
Respondents were asked if their working hours varied at all. This was another way of asking about flexibility. For the largest share of people, their hours never vary, but in all the countries, apart from Hungary and Bulgaria, more than half of the people who answered this question had varying hours. The most common were hours that varied by the week or even by the day. The most flexible in this respect were Slovenia, the UK and Sweden.

In fact, as we can see, there were many ways of varying time flexibility, both in the context of a full-time regular working week and outside of it. This indicates that it is useful to take a broader perspective based on working practices, rather than only looking at the conventional 'atypical' definitions of flexibility.

### Flexibility of place

In the questionnaire we posed a series of questions about flexibility of place, which are summarised in chart 4. Many people work within the locality in which they live.

Figure 4. Place of Work



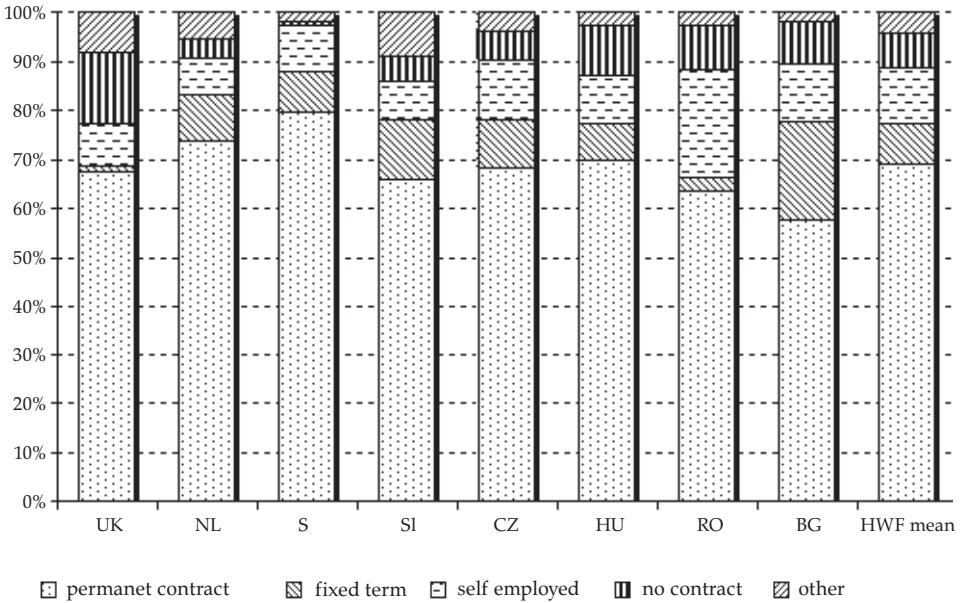
However, commuting is rather common in the Netherlands (50.3% of people), Slovenia (44.8%) the Czech Republic (40.8%) and the UK (37.7%). A small number of people worked partially or wholly at home (8.9%). This was most common in Bulgaria, although between 7% and 10% of respondents did so in most countries. Working from home was more common in the ECE countries than in Sweden or the Netherlands. In Bulgaria and Slovenia, this is likely to be people who are working in subsistence agriculture since it is they who tend to be found in rural areas, although this was not the case in the Czech Republic or Hungary. For 4.9% of the sample, their place of work was always changing, a feature most common in Slovenia (8.4%) and the UK (7.1%). The majority of people therefore still have a traditional pattern of travelling to a workplace.

**Flexibility of contract**

Turning to types of contract (figure 5) we can see that, whilst the majority of people have permanent contracts, there is much variation from country to country. By this definition (people least likely to have a permanent contract) we might view Bulgaria as the most flexible country, whilst in Sweden and the Netherlands, where there have been policies to encourage permanent contracts, along with flexibility within



Figure 5. Types of contract by country



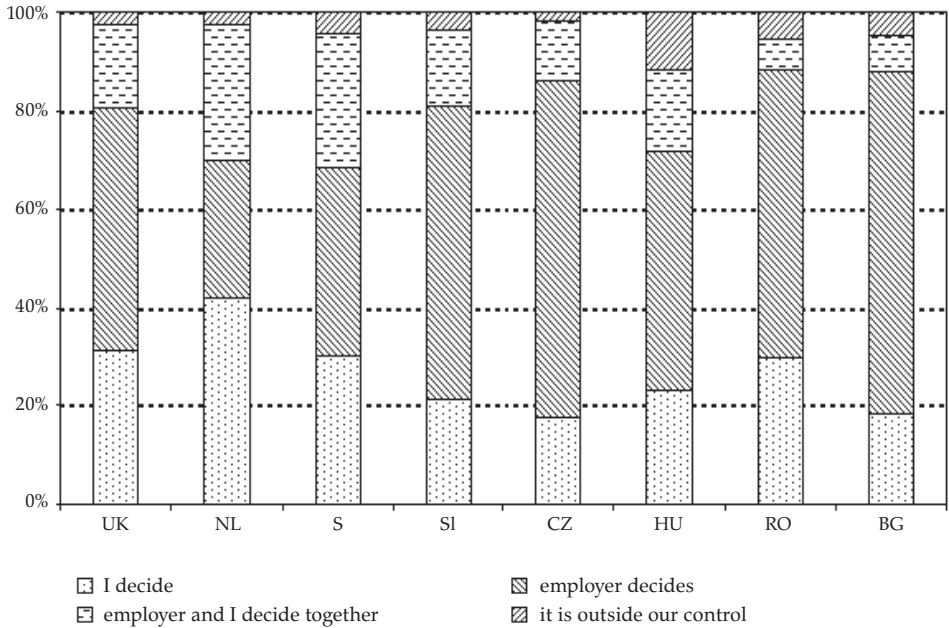
them, the majority of people do indeed have permanent contracts. However, we should also take into account that large numbers in the UK, for example, have no contract and that this is also the case in many of the ECE countries. The number of fixed-term contracts is in fact a better indicator of the regulation rather than the deregulation of the labour market, because in countries where there is little job protection there is no need to have fixed-term contracts to the same extent. In this survey, fixed-term contracts were the most un-typical form of flexibility.

### Control over flexibility

A very important factor to emerge from the literature reviews is the extent to which people have control over the flexibility that they experience. Respondents were given the options 'I decide', 'employer decides', 'employer and I decide together', and 'it is outside of our control'. We asked about control over the working schedule, control over the hours of work, control over overtime hours and control over the place of work.

It was the employer who mainly controlled the hours of work in the Accession countries and also in the UK— this was the case for half or more than half of the respondents in each country. In Sweden and the Netherlands people were more likely to state that they control the hours of work or that they decide together with their

Figure 6. Control over hours of work



employer. This was especially the case in the Netherlands, where 42.3% of people claimed to be able to control their hours of work themselves. This is perhaps an outcome of the employee-led flexibilisation policies in the Netherlands. In Romania, a rather high number of people controlled their hours of work, but we can assume that this is because of the large agricultural sector rather than on account of flexibilisation policies.

Men are more likely to be able to decide on their hours than women, and older workers more than younger workers [Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov 2003]. Those with better education controlled their hours more than those with lower education. In all countries, the higher income groups controlled their hours the most. There seemed to be more control over the hours of work for employees in the Netherlands and Sweden, but less so in the UK. In ECE countries, lack of control over the hours of work reflects a more traditional pattern.

Almost one-quarter of respondents controlled their place of work themselves, and they were most likely to be found in Romania (33.2%), Sweden (25.5%) and the Netherlands (25.6%). The employers decided for 57.7% of respondents, and they were most often found in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. The place of work was negotiated with the employer in one in ten cases, most often in the Netherlands (17.7%), Sweden (14.7%), the Czech Republic (11.4%)

Figure 7. Control over the place of work (main activity)



Question: 'Regarding this activity, do you decide or someone else decide on: place of work?'

and Hungary (10.1%). In 9.4% of cases it was outside of everybody's control. Sweden and the Netherlands, therefore, do seem to have negotiated a flexibility in which the employee has a good deal of control. In Romania the employee also has control, but for different reasons.

Those with higher income and higher education control their place of work the most, and men control their place of work more than women [Wallace, Nagaev and Chvorostov 2003].

The ability to control flexibility is important since it helps to distinguish good flexibility from bad flexibility. One-quarter of respondents could control their hours of work, their working schedule, overtime and place of work. Generally speaking these were better-educated people, older people and people with higher incomes. Men had more control over their flexibility than women. Those in Western countries, especially Sweden and the Netherlands, had the most control (although Romania was included in those countries with the most control, which is because of the high number of farmers – Romanians were also in the category of people with the least control).

### The extent of flexibility

Now we can look at the numbers for those who have time, place, and contract flexibility, to which we can add income flexibility for those with multiple income sources. *Time flexibility* is defined as people on a non-regular or irregular working schedule.<sup>1</sup> *Place flexibility* is defined as people working at home either the whole time or part of the time, working abroad, or with an irregular place of work (commuters were excluded). *Contract flexibility* was defined as people having anything but a permanent regular contract (i.e. no contract, fixed-term contract, on call, with a temporary-work agency, on a fee only basis, subject to performance, or on a work experience project). *Income flexibility* includes all those with more than one income source. As to the more complex flexibility measures, while *combined flexibility* covers those with time and/or place and/or contract flexibility, *cumulative flexibility* covers those characterised by all three forms of flexibility simultaneously.

Using this measure of flexibility, we find large numbers are income flexible in the United Kingdom and in the Czech Republic, with time flexibility most common in the UK and the Netherlands, and place flexibility most common in Romania, whilst contract flexibility was most common in the ECE countries and in the UK. Here we find that more than half of workers are flexible on more than one indicator in the UK, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, whilst only just under half are flexible in this respect in most of the other countries.

**Table 3. The rate of the different flexibility types by countries (%)**

	Income flexibility	Time flexibility	Place flexibility	Contract flexibility	Combined flexibility	Cumulative flexibility	N
United Kingdom	14	41	17	33	58	7	682
The Netherlands	10	40	11	28	55	4	785
Sweden	10	20	10	20	35	2	1185
Slovenia	7	30	19	34	51	7	584
Czech Republic	24	32	16	32	50	8	1072
Hungary	6	36	14	30	49	7	745
Romania	7	39	23	36	47	18	851
Bulgaria	9	21	9	42	45	5	1012
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6916</b>

<sup>1</sup> In the second table, however, time flexibility also covers those who work part-time (less than 29 hours a week).

**Table 4. Correlation between flexibility (%)**

	Income flexible	Time flexible	Place flexible	Contract flexible
Income flexible	1	0,088	0,079	0,080
Time flexible		1	0,196	0,243
Place flexible			1	0,150

\* All correlation is significant at the  $p=0.01$  level.

### The relationship between time, place and contract flexibility

Applying a narrower definition of flexibility (excluding farmers, self-employed and part-time workers who are flexible by definition) we can use correlation coefficients to see how time, place and contract flexibility are associated. The overall association among the four forms of flexibility is a low level of positive correlation (table 4). This means that the different kinds of flexibility tend to be associated with one another and this is the general 'European' model of multiple flexibility. However, contract flexibility and time flexibility are the most strongly correlated and this is followed by place flexibility and time flexibility. Place flexibility seems to follow a different dynamic.

### How flexibility relates to the life situation

In order to understand how flexibility is associated with a person's life situation, we can look at its relationship to age, sex, education, income, and the urban-rural dimension.

Flexibility, especially contract flexibility, affects younger workers more than other age groups. Young people are also most likely to combine more than one form of flexibility.

Males are more likely to be affected by all forms of flexibility than are females, except in the case of contract flexibility. Education has a strong impact on flexibility. The lowest educated are the most flexible on all dimensions, whilst the higher educated have only more time flexibility. Living in a rural area increases the chances of all forms of flexibility. Being male is more strongly associated with flexibility of all types, apart from contract flexibility. Being flexible is generally associated with being on a lower income.

This would seem to confirm the pessimistic views of flexibility – that it leads to the erosion of work conditions and particularly affects the most vulnerable in the labour market. However, looking more closely we can identify different kinds of flexibility. We could tentatively suggest that there are two divergent types of flexi-

**Table 5. Types of flexibility by basic socio-demographic indicators**  
(%, N=5316 and 4294 for income quartiles)

	Income-flexy	Time-flexy	Place-flexy	Contract-flexy	Combined-flexy	Cumulative-flexy	N
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5316</b>
18-29 years old	3	25	10	34	46	3	1578
30-59 years old	4	20	9	16	33	2	2746
60+ years old	6	23	10	20	34	3	992
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>0,001</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,519</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,024</i>	
Male	5	23	12	21	38	3	2867
Female	3	21	6	23	35	2	2449
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,062</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,038</i>	<i>0,009</i>	<i>0,120</i>	
Primary Education	2	27	13	31	44	4	461
Secondary Education	4	20	10	23	36	3	3648
Tertiary Education	5	24	7	14	36	1	1191
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>0,047</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,003</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,004</i>	<i>0,005</i>	
Urbanized area	4	22	8	20	35	2	1697
Intermediate area	4	21	9	20	36	2	2250
Rural Area	4	23	12	27	41	4	1357
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>0,689</i>	<i>0,276</i>	<i>0,001</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,001</i>	<i>0,000</i>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4294</b>
Low income	5	20	10	30	37	4	996
Mid-low income	5	21	9	21	36	2	954
Mid-high income	3	20	9	19	35	2	1084
High income	3	22	8	16	35	2	1260
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>0,097</i>	<i>0,878</i>	<i>0,544</i>	<i>0,000</i>	<i>0,700</i>	<i>0,006</i>	

bility: the *good flexibility* of better educated people, which is associated more with having flexibility of time, and *bad flexibility*, which is associated with lower levels of education, being male, being younger or older and living in a rural area. It is associated with contract, place and time flexibility, and with the combination of all of these.

## Conclusions

The first conclusion from this project is that there is a great deal of flexibility in European countries from the point of view of the worker, even ones that are deemed 'inflexible'. This flexibility varies in its predominant forms from country to country, depending on the nature of the labour market, the division of labour between the sexes, the traditional work culture and the regime of regulation. Looking at the ex-



tent of part-time, self-employed and fixed-term contract work alone is insufficient and even misleading.

Another conclusion is that there are 'good' and 'bad' forms of flexibility. To summarise the information contained in many of the HWF reports, we find that bad flexibility is associated with low job satisfaction, with a lack of control over employment by the employee, and with low education and income. Some forms of flexibility are associated with job satisfaction, with higher wages and control over working hours. These are found most often in Western Europe and among the more middle-class groups in Eastern Europe. By contrast, bad flexibility was associated with low pay, short-term contracts, little control over work and low job satisfaction. It was found in all countries, but was most widespread in Eastern and Central Europe, where flexibility has not yet been harnessed in a positive way to labour market reform. In ECE countries, bad flexibility is associated with males, but in Western Europe it is more likely to be associated with females. Good flexibility reflects the increasing trend in Western Europe towards employee-led flexibility, allowing workers to negotiate the hours and place in their work contracts.

Flexibility is associated with certain kinds of workers, in particular with male workers (except for contract flexibility), younger workers (and to some extent with older workers), and with less educated people, with the exception of time flexibility, which is also associated with the higher educated, and with lower incomes and rural areas.

There do seem to be different kinds of flexibility (and we have not considered all of them here). Although time and contract flexibility are associated together, place flexibility seems to follow a different dynamic.

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