

## **Who follows whom? Female part-time employment in West Germany, East Germany and Poland<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Extended abstract**

The development of atypical employment forms and particularly part-time employment is closely related to various processes of social change. In Western Europe, these changes have taken place during the last forty years, whereas in its Eastern part, they occurred with some delay, substantially gaining momentum at the beginning of the 1990s. The most appealing symptoms of these changes are the shift of demographic structures and the structural change of work. They could be seen as a result of globalisation and rising competitiveness leading to increased uncertainty in the markets and, consequently, a change in the structure of labour demand, destabilisation of employment and development of more flexible employment forms. In this context, the development of atypical employment in Western Europe is closely related to the growth of the service sector that contributed to an increase in the demand for female labour. Women, who since the 1960s had been entering the labour market in large numbers, took mainly part-time jobs facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life. This trend could be observed mainly in those countries that have not adjusted their welfare states to the rising female labour force participation through the development of, for instance, childcare facilities. Against this background, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (including East Germany) present a completely different picture. Due to the communist ideology forcing the maximum utilization of the labour force potential, female full-time employment was nearly as high as male's. The high integration of women into paid employment in the CEE countries was institutionally supported through the well-developed childcare facilities and generous social programs offered by public enterprises. Together with an uncompetitive labour market, it allowed

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fertility to be held on a relatively high level, particularly in Poland. Nevertheless, female labour potential was primarily regarded as a means to fulfill the needs of the production system in a period of rapid industrialisation. Hence, the apparent gender equality observed in the labour market did not translate into equality in household-related tasks. Women, in spite of their professional duties, were expected to perform homework and provide care.

These patterns have changed considerably after the breakdown of the communist system. The economic transition and a rapid development of the service sector caused a significant change in the structure of labour demand that shifted towards much better skilled and mobile workers. Moreover, it resulted in a sudden drop in employment. Although the situation of men also worsened substantially, it was much more difficult for women to compete successfully in the labour market. Furthermore, the declining role of the state in the economy accompanied by rapidly diminishing financial resources resulted in reduced public support for families, both in terms of income and provision of services. These developments made it much more difficult to reconcile work and family, which finally led to a sharp drop in female employment and fertility. In the following years, the fall in employment was weaker and as a consequence, unemployment spread rapidly, especially among women. Parallel to the worsening situation in the labour market, the total fertility rates fell sharply in the 1990s. As a consequence they have reached the level below 1.3 in all CEE countries.

In spite of the described difficulties in the labour market and the resulting relatively low labour force participation in post-socialist countries, the gender employment disparities in this part of Europe are much lower than in the majority of the "old"15 EU member states, particularly if measured in full-time equivalent. Although women in CEE countries adopted some Western discontinuous female employment patterns (spread of fixed-term contracts, career breaks due to childcare responsibilities and difficulties in returning into the labour market after the care period), part-time employment has not become very common. Furthermore, the existing part-time employment disparities between men and women are much lower in CEE countries than in the West. The only exception is the East Germany where an increase in part-time employment have been observed during the period of economic transition. Nevertheless, it is still much lower than in West Germany, especially among mothers. Moreover, various surveys suggest that the increase in part-time employment in East Germany was caused by the unification process, the adoption of West German cultural norms and the corresponding political, legal and economic framework rather than resulting from an informed choice of German women. Whereas part-time employment has not become very popular in CEE countries in Western Europe it has been growing since the 1960s contributing to a large extent to the rise in female employment. In the last years this employment form has also become more and more often regarded as a family friendly policy measure aimed at enabling mothers an effective work and family reconciliation. Nevertheless, the experience of some countries, like Germany, show that it does not have to go hand in hand with high fertility.

Taking these developments into account, the objective of the paper is to examine the determinants of part-time employment in Poland, West and East Germany. This comparison should allow tracking the evolution of the work and family reconciliation strategies in post-socialist countries with similar past experience in terms of labour market and family formation conditions. In this point a question arises how much mothers facing decreasing public childcare opportunities to the levels observed in West Germany have been adopting the West German employment patterns.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first part we give a broad overview of the theories describing the relations between family formation and female labour force participation. We focus mainly of the effect of children, marriage and husband's income. This part is followed by a description of the employment patterns and changes in family and employment policies in the 1990s in Poland and Germany (separated into West and East). We also turn attention into the socio-cultural norms determining employment decisions of women. Finally, in the empirical part, we focus on the part-time employment determinants resulting from the labour supply side. For this purpose we examine female labour force participation with respect to the working hours by various socio-economic characteristics paying special attention to the child, marriage and husband's income effects. These issues are addressed by implementing multinomial logit models using the German Mikrozensus and the Polish Labour Force Survey for the years 1996 and 2001. The choice of these two different points in time, in the middle and by the end of the economic transition in Poland and East Germany, enables us to investigate the changes in labour market behaviour during that time.

The results reveal some adoption of the West German employment patterns by East German women in respect to the employment discontinuity and reduction in the working hours. Nevertheless, women in East Germany are still much more in favour of full-time employment than West German women. While the latter are most likely to withdraw from employment after the childbirth and then, as the child grows up, to switch into part-time, the East German women are relatively more likely to choose part-time work when having a young child and then to come back into full-time employment. On the other hand, in Poland a clear polarisation between full-time and non-employment is to be observed. Nevertheless, although having young children makes Polish women withdraw from the labour market, they are much more likely to enter the full-time employment than the West German women.

Being married to a working man also exerts an influence on female labour force participation. This effect varies, however, across countries. Being married to an employed man in Germany generally reduces the propensity of women to work full-time, but does not push them out of employment. This effect is getting stronger with an increase in husband's wage. Moreover, it is not only weaker in East Germany, but it also declined over the period 1996-2001. It suggests that although East German women adopted some of the West German employment patterns they still reveal high labour market orientation. Interestingly, similar marriage and husband's

income effect was not found for Poland. On the contrary, Polish married women are generally more likely to work than the not married and this effect becomes even stronger with the rise in husband's income. Hence, the right to decide freely about their labour force participation did not result in a situation that mainly women living in the households with highest economic necessities remain active in the labour market. Still, it is difficult to predict if this high labour market attachment of Polish and East German women results from a strive for independence and self-accomplishment or rather from a desire to achieve higher living standards or a fear of a husband's job loss.

The comparison of the employment determinants of the Polish, East and West German women reveals some significant differences in behaviour that may result from the norms adopted in the past but also from the existing family and employment policies. Nevertheless, the fertility levels in the studied countries remain on the similarly low levels. For these reasons a question on the effectiveness of part-time employment as a family policy measure arises. From the analysis it could be concluded that it should be accompanied by other solutions making work and family reconciliation easier.