

WORKING PAPER

SWEDEN: PRECARIOUS WORK AND PRECARIOUS UNEMPLOYMENT

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‘Precarious’ work is not a concept used very often in Sweden, and there is no official definition.¹ Internationally, precarious employment is defined as forms of work for remuneration characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low job tenure, low wages, and high risks of ill-health (Vosko 2006). Even if the concept is not used often, such employment can of course also be found in Sweden.

The aim of this chapter is to describe and analyze the prevalence and the forms of precarious work, and what we call ‘precarious unemployment’, in Sweden, calling attention to differences between women and men. It considers developments mainly from the beginning of the 1990s until today. We concentrate on two main forms, namely temporary employment and part-time unemployment. Other forms such as irregular workers and home-makers (‘housewives’) are discussed less thoroughly, and some forms such as the self-employed and multiple job-holders are touched on only briefly.

PRECARIOUS WORK: OVERESTIMATED AND UNDERESTIMATED

When precarious work is discussed, analyzed and measured, the starting point is often labour force survey (LFS) data and a description of forms of employment such as own-

account self-employment, temporary employment, multiple job-holding and part-time employment.² We argue, however, that this way of conceptualizing precarious work results in an overestimation as well as an overestimation of its prevalence. It is an overestimation because some persons who in the labour force surveys are defined as own-account self-employed workers, temporary workers or multiple job-holders are in these positions on a genuinely voluntary basis and can therefore not be considered precarious. However, data that distinguish voluntary and involuntary participation in own-account self-employment, temporary employment and multiple job-holding are sparse. To make such a distinction between voluntary and involuntary employment situations can furthermore be a complicated matter. In reality choices are often constrained by factors like the gender division of labour and the limitations of the local labour market.

To regard part-time employment in general as precarious employment would also be to overestimate the share of precarious employment in Sweden. For one thing part-time employment is well-regulated and the working conditions and wages do not deviate much from full-time employment. To work part-time is furthermore a right in some circumstances. For example, according to the regulation of parental leave parents have a right to ask for a temporary reduction in their working hours to 75 per cent of full-time until the child is eight years old.³ This does not mean, however, that part-time employment always is a voluntary choice. Involuntary part-time employment should be regarded as precarious.

Involuntary part-time employment in the LFS is included in the category of the underemployed and is sometimes called time-related underemployment (ILO 1998).⁴ A problem with the category of underemployment in Swedish statistics, however, is that it also includes persons who are already working full-time but who state that they want to work more hours. There is a gender aspect to this. The great majority of the underemployed men work what are considered full-time hours, while the great majority of the underemployed women are part-time employed.⁵ We argue that being underemployed is more problematic for someone working part-time than for someone working full-time. In order to draw attention to this precarious situation we argue that it is appropriate to talk about *part-time unemployment*. The category of part-time unemployment includes part-time employed persons who are looking for a full-time position but it also includes part-time employed persons who want their employment to include more hours — that is, longer part-time.⁶ Unfortunately, it is not possible to distinguish between these two groups in the statistics (Forssell and Jonsson 2005; Nyberg 2003, 2005).

We argue that the conventional concept of unemployment is based on a male norm. In conventional accounts a person has to be unemployed on a full-time basis to be counted as unemployed, so even if a person only works one hour per week and is unemployed 39 hours he/she is counted as employed. This means that the unemployed men who usually are full-time unemployed turn up in the unemployment statistics, while women who more often are part-time unemployed become invisible (as they are primarily counted as part-time employed). It makes just as much sense to consider them part-time

unemployed, especially considering that the group of part-time unemployed women is very significant in Sweden (Nyberg 2003, 2005).

So far we have been stressing the danger of overestimation. However, the use of labour force data also risks underestimating the prevalence of precarious work, and this is especially true for those workers who are most precarious. Not only is the practice of precarious work gendered and racialized, but this is also the case with the concept itself and with the data. Again we can detect the operation of a male norm, whereby women who are doing household work full time, so-called housewives, are not considered to be working. Similarly, we can detect a racialized norm, because work performed by ‘irregular’ (that is, undocumented)⁷ migrant workers is not included.

We argue that when discussing precarious work the conventional notions of work should be broadened and the point of departure should be the whole working-age population living in the country, irrespective of whether they are included in the LFS and irrespective of whether they are regular or irregular workers. With this starting point, the first dimension when establishing the degree of precariousness in Sweden is whether a person has access to social rights or not, that is, rights to the social security system. If people do not have such social rights, their position is very precarious (see Clement *et al.*, this volume, on the broader notion of precarious lives). This is true for irregular working migrants. However, social rights can also be differentiated. The Swedish social security system can be said to be a two-tier system: one for those of working age not in employment, which provides only basic rights and low allowances, as with registered permanent residents who are not employed (for example housewives);

and one for the least precarious group who are registered permanent residents and employed. They have social rights based on their continuity in employment — pensions, parental, sickness, unemployment and other allowances that are related to earnings and are therefore higher than the basic allowances.

A similar categorization can be made for the unemployed. The most precarious are those outside the social security system, who cannot receive unemployment benefit or the basic allowance. There is a medium group that covers those who are entitled to the basic allowances, and the least precarious are those who are fully integrated within the social security system and receive the earnings-based unemployment benefit and who can also take part in labour market policy programs.

Our discussion of precarious work and precarious unemployment is limited by the availability of data and will therefore be uneven. For some groups, there are hardly any data at all, for example irregular migrants. For others, data can be found in the LFS, for example, workers who are temporarily employed, but without distinctions between voluntary and involuntary.

PRECARIOUS WORK IN SWEDEN — THREE CATEGORIES

Highly precarious work — no rights to the social security system

The Swedish welfare state has been characterized by comprehensive social provision, where entitlement to benefits and a wide variety of services is based on citizenship or

residence (Esping-Andersen 1990, Sainsbury 1999).⁸ The difference in rights between ‘insiders’ (registered, permanent residents who are employed) and ‘outsiders’ (irregular migrant workers) is therefore large.⁹ The most precarious group is made up of persons who do not have any rights in relation to the Swedish social security system. Neither do most of them have a right to be in the country. This makes them very vulnerable in relation to the employer, and as a consequence their jobs are often characterized by employment insecurity, poor working conditions and low pay.

The reason for lack of access to the Swedish social security system is that some persons have entered the country and/or stay in the country without the right to do so. According to Khosravi (2006: 290), irregular immigration in Southern European countries is mainly labour force immigration, while in the Nordic countries irregular immigration is related to the asylum system. The majority of the irregular migrants are asylum seekers who have been denied the right to stay in the country, but who stay anyway.¹⁰ Reliable data on the size of this group are lacking. But according to a network, *Papperslösa i Stockholm* (Paperless in Stockholm), the number of irregular migrants in Sweden is today estimated to be 25,000–35,000 (Fastighetsanställdas förbund 2008: 32).

Irregular migrant workers are often found working in restaurants and in the cleaning sector. Many men work in cleaning firms, some of which use unregistered residents as employees as part of a business strategy to lower labour costs (Fredholm 2003; see also Fastighetsanställdas förbund 2008). Women too work as unregistered cleaners (Ernsjö-Rappe and Strannegård 2004). We do not know much about these women, except that they often migrate from Poland and other former Eastern Bloc countries and mainly

clean in private homes. As they are seldom registered in Sweden and some stay on three-month tourist visas, they do not have a right to work in Sweden and have no rights in relation to the social security system.

Irregular workers are also found in agriculture and construction. One increasingly common way of avoiding taxes and social security is to use self-employed status. Swedish employers may set up enterprises such as ‘Rent a Builder’, where the workers mainly come from the Baltic countries and Poland and are registered as independently self-employed.

Moderately precarious work — basic rights to the social security system

Because the Swedish social security system can be said to be a two-tier system, so-called housewives or home-makers, who perform unpaid household work full-time (and are provided for by a spouse), do not receive the higher allowances based on earnings. However, the number and share of home-makers of all women 16–64 years of age in Sweden is very small and declining. The proportion was about 4 per cent in 1990 and is about 2 per cent today. The proportion of house-husbands is negligible (Statistics Sweden).¹¹

Although the number of home-makers is declining, they are still about twice as prevalent as the estimated number of irregular migrant workers. But, contrary to the irregular migrant workers, the home-makers have more chances to enter the labour

market and the earnings-based social security system, and they can thereby escape from their somewhat precarious situation.

Least precarious work — full rights to the social security system

The least precarious work is that performed by registered, permanent residents who are employees. They are part of the top tier of the social security system, with earnings-based benefits. Within this group there are, however, workers who are more precarious than others because of continued elements of differentiation in the access to social rights. One large group in the Swedish labour market is those employed on a temporary basis. Although they are often called fixed-term contract workers, only some of them have a fixed-term contract, while others are on-call and work more or less by the hour, and we therefore prefer to use the broader term of ‘temporary’ employment.

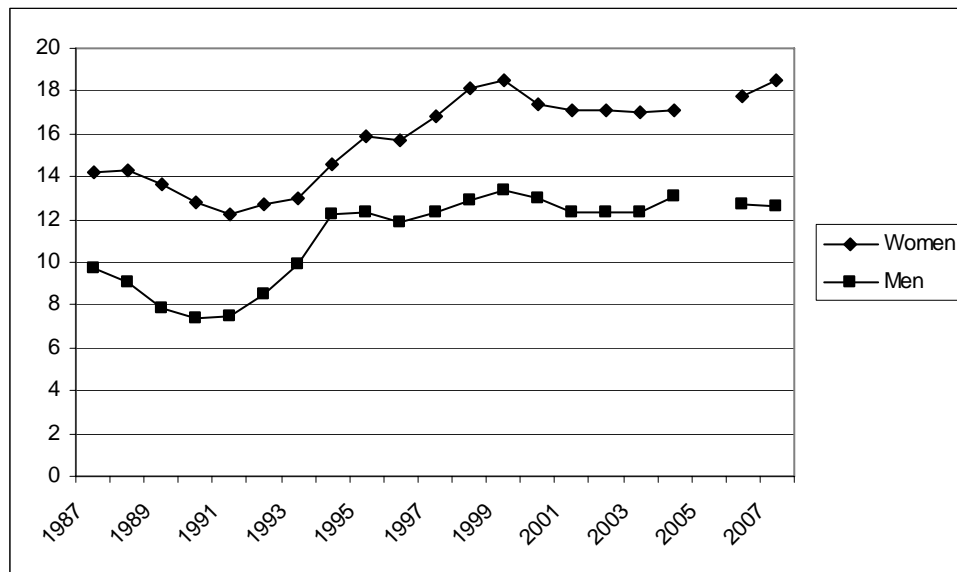
The category of temporary employment includes several different forms with very different conditions: seasonal employment; holiday work; leave replacement; trial period of employment; employment on a special project; and employment by the hour. In 2005 the most prevalent forms were ‘leave replacement’ and ‘employed by the hour’, which each accounted for around one-third of all temporary employed persons, while those employed on special projects represented one-fifth; those employed on trial around 10 per cent, and the group of seasonal employed only 4 per cent (Nelander and Goding 2005: 11). Results from earlier studies suggest that those who are employed by the hour are the most precarious. They have more limited possibilities for on-the-job training, and they are often hesitant to call attention to problems of the working

environment. Furthermore, they find themselves in a tough situation privately, with reduced chances to plan their life, as they can be called in to work with short notice and they have a very uncertain economic situation (Håkansson 2001; Nelander and Goding 2005).

The division between permanent and temporary work is shaped by labour law. Swedish employment protection legislation dates back to the 1970s *Employment Protection Act (Lagen om Anställningsskydd)*. This Act remains intact despite some amendments. The law presumes that, unless otherwise stipulated, employment is a permanent position. A new Bill for fixed-term contracts was adopted by the Parliament in April 2006. Its aims are to simplify the regulations and reduce the growing incidence of temporary employment. If an employee has been employed on a temporary contract for a period of 14 months during the last five years, the employer is required to provide a permanent contract.

Figure 12.1 shows the extent and trends in temporary employment from 1987 to 2006, though with a break in the data in 2005. The majority of employees in the Swedish labour market have permanent positions, but a significant minority are temporary. The proportion of temporary employees is higher for women than for men. In 2007 the proportion of temporarily employed among female employees was almost 19 per cent compared to almost 13 per cent for males.

Figure 12.1 Temporary employees as a proportion of all employees, by sex, 16–64 years, Sweden, 1987–2007 (%)



Source: LFS (Statistics Sweden 2007).

Figure 12.1 shows that during the 1990s, the Swedish labour market experienced an increase in the proportion of temporary employees, coinciding with the severe recession which began early in the decade. When the economy recovered, the increase in the proportion of temporary employees stopped and even declined, but it remained on a higher level. However, it is not easy to estimate the influence of the business cycle compared to more long-term structural changes (see Persson 1997: 264).

Temporary employment is more precarious than permanent employment due to its associated uncertainty, and in general, persons who are temporarily employed would prefer to find permanent positions. An important aspect is therefore to what degree a temporary job can act as a springboard to a permanent position in the labour market. Is there a fair possibility of going from temporary to permanent or does segmentation of the labour market mean that those who are temporarily employed are stuck in their

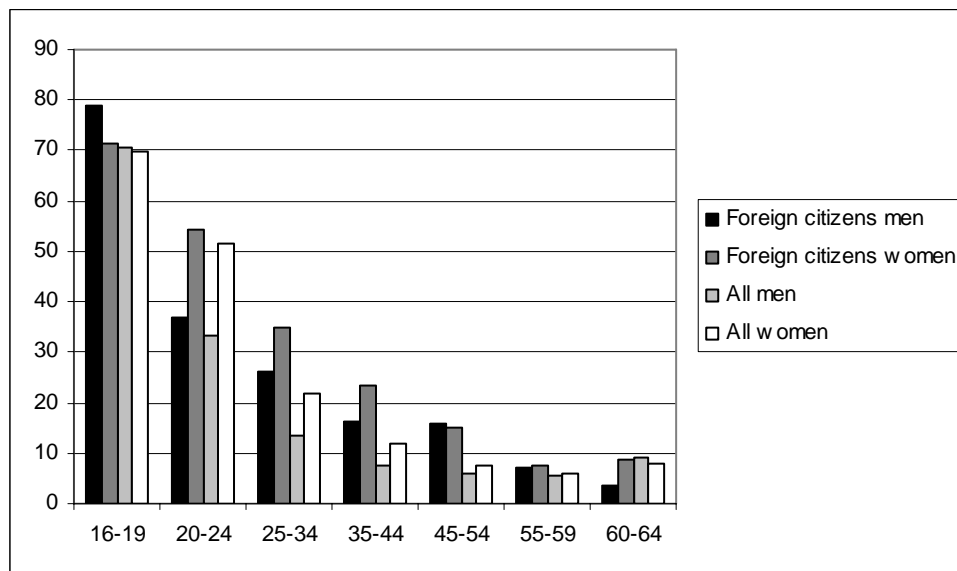
segment? (See Fuller, this volume, for more discussion of employment mobility.) The share of involuntary temporary employees in Sweden has decreased, but it is still higher for women than for men. In 2007, 61 per cent of female and 52 per cent of male temporary employees stated that they could not find a permanent job, compared to the EU average of 61 per cent and 59 per cent respectively (ages 15–64) (Eurostat 2007).¹² Even if there has been a decrease in the proportion of temporary employees, the figure remains high in Sweden, as does the figure for the proportion of people with a temporary employment contract because they cannot find a permanent position. This indicates that temporary employment might be more of a dead-end street than a stepping stone for many temporary employees.

No integrated theoretical model can explain the existence of temporary employment, but the share of temporary employment in a certain country seems to be related to the labour market regime. In a moderately regulated labour market, like Sweden, one can expect a relatively high share of temporary employment. The existence of a prescribed normative typical employment means that there is a need for regulation of atypical employment forms, but unlike a strictly regulated labour market more possibilities for temporary contracts are open (Persson 1997: 255–6). One hypothesis is that temporary employment can be used by employers to get information about an employee's qualifications before offering a permanent contract. In a deregulated labour market where it is easy for employers to let go of employees there would be less need for this.

According to the assumption that employers screen groups in the labour market with little or no experience, we could expect that groups like young people and migrants are

more likely to be temporarily employed than other groups. In Figure 12.2 we do find that temporary employment is the norm among teenagers, both women and men (the incidence between 70 and 80 per cent).¹³ High proportions of 20–24 year olds are also temporarily employed, especially women (for a discussion of the Canadian case, see Vosko and Clark, this volume). The most common forms of temporary employment in the workforce as a whole — leave replacement and employment by the hour — are also the most frequent among the two youngest age groups, but also found here is the less-common form of trial period of employment (Persson 1997: 265; Walette 2004: 256). However, we can also expect that many in these age groups are looking for temporary jobs to combine with their studies. So the high share of young people among temporary employees can be an effect of both demand and supply.

Figure 12.2 Temporary employees as a proportion of all employees, in different age groups, by citizenship and sex, 16–64 years, Sweden, 2002 (%)



Source: LFS (Statistics Sweden 2007).

Figure 12.2 shows that it is more likely for foreign citizens to be employed on a temporary basis than for native Swedes. Foreign citizens have a more precarious

position in the labour market and the difference between the groups increased during the 1990s (Persson 1997: 268; Walette 2004: 255–60). The data are consistent with the hypotheses that temporary employment is widespread among vulnerable members of the labour force (such as young people and migrants) and is used broadly as a cost saving strategy, independent of either screening or individual preferences (Walette 2004).

In almost all age groups, women are more likely than men to be temporarily employed. The difference is related to the gender-segregated labour market and to different rights to be on leave. The most common form of temporary employment for women is replacement of an employee who is absent because of parental leave, study or sickness. Parental leave is still mostly used by women, which leads to the recurrent need for stand-ins who are employed temporarily in female-dominated sectors and occupations (Persson 1997: 259–61; Håkansson 2001; Walette 2004: 251–4). Employment by the hour is the second most common form of temporary employment among Swedish women (Persson 1997: 264–5; Walette 2004: 257). Other familiar forms of temporary employment include employment that is inherently of a limited duration (project work) — a form that is frequently found, for example, in construction and research. This and trial period of employment are the most common types of temporary employment among men (Persson 1997: 265; Walette 2004: 257).

Besides the already mentioned reasons for temporary employment, factors like variation in the demand of the products or services offered by a firm or the public sector can make temporary job contracts an attractive solution to meet the employers' flexibility

needs. This means that we can expect that the share of temporary employment will vary between different sectors and different trades.

The highest proportions of temporary employees are found in personal and cultural services, with agriculture, forest and fishing ranking second (Statistics Sweden 2007). In both industry groups, the proportion of employees who are temporarily employed is higher for women than for men. Interestingly enough, we also find large shares of temporarily employed men in the health and care sector and in education and research. The smallest proportion of temporary employees is found in manufacturing (see also Persson 1997: 269–71). To be employed by the hour is more common for female blue-collar workers than for male, and it is frequently in hotel and restaurants, in transport and retailing, but also among municipal employees (Nelander and Goding 2005). Earlier studies have shown that women seem to go from one temporary job to another, leading to a phenomenon called ‘permanent temporariness’ (*permanent tillfällighet*) (Gonäs 1991).

PRECARIOUS UNEMPLOYMENT

We argue that not only is there precarious employment, there is also precarious unemployment. Just as precarious employment is associated with non-standard employment, so too can precarious unemployment be seen as unemployment that is not standard unemployment. Standard unemployment, in Sweden as in many other countries, is usually full-time unemployment, and both the unemployment benefit system and the right to participate in labour market policy programs is usually based on

this conception of full-time unemployment. The measurement of unemployment also reflects this conceptualization, as only those with no employment activity are counted as unemployed in Sweden, as in most countries. The most precarious unemployed are those who, for different reasons, are completely excluded from the social security system and are not entitled to unemployment benefits or social allowance. One example is irregular migrant workers. The least precarious unemployed are the unemployed who have rights to unemployment benefit related to earlier earnings. As far as the part-time unemployed are concerned — the category that we discuss here — some are entitled to supplementary unemployment benefit, while others are not.¹⁴ This last group is of course in a more precarious situation, but unfortunately the statistics do not allow us to distinguish between the two.

Part-time unemployment

Part-time unemployment presupposes part-time employment. We define part-time unemployed as persons who work part-time but would like to work more hours — a broad definition that includes both those who want to retain part-time status, but with more hours, and those who want a full-time job.¹⁵

From a historical perspective, part-time employment in Sweden developed as a result of an interaction between demand and supply, institutional changes and gender. When more and more women entered the labour market in the 1960s and 1970s, part-time employment was desired, as there was very little public child care and the parental leave was short. Both a supply and demand for part-time employment were present. Part-time

employment is often seen as non-standard and atypical. However, that is a perspective shaped by a male norm. For women, part-time employment has been and is rather standard and typical. In Sweden most people working part-time, work long part-time, that is, 20–34 hours, and the part-time employed usually have the same rights and the same wages and salaries as full-time employed. Most of the improvements concerning employment conditions for part-time workers in Sweden were already achieved in collective bargaining before the EU Directive from 1997, which was incorporated into Swedish law in 2001 (Eklund 2004; Jonsson 2004).

Women's part-time work in Sweden increased from the 1960s to the early 1990s, when slightly more than 40 per cent of all female employees worked part-time. Between 1990 and 2004, however, women's part-time work declined from 40 per cent to 34 per cent. The data are not altogether comparable, but according to recent LFS data the share was 36 per cent in 2007 (Statistics Sweden 2007).¹⁶ This last figure can be compared to the EU average of 31 per cent (15–64 years) (Eurostat 2007).

The possibility for the part-time unemployed to receive the supplementary unemployment benefit has existed since the 1950s, but the regulation has been changed several times since then. A basic principle has been that the workers entitled to this benefit are those who become part-time unemployed after previously having been full-time employed. Since the 1970s there have been discussions concerning to what degree this system might be misused by both the employees and the employers. In the recession of the 1990s, new restrictions were introduced as a result of the growing costs of unemployment benefits, and part-time unemployed persons who applied for

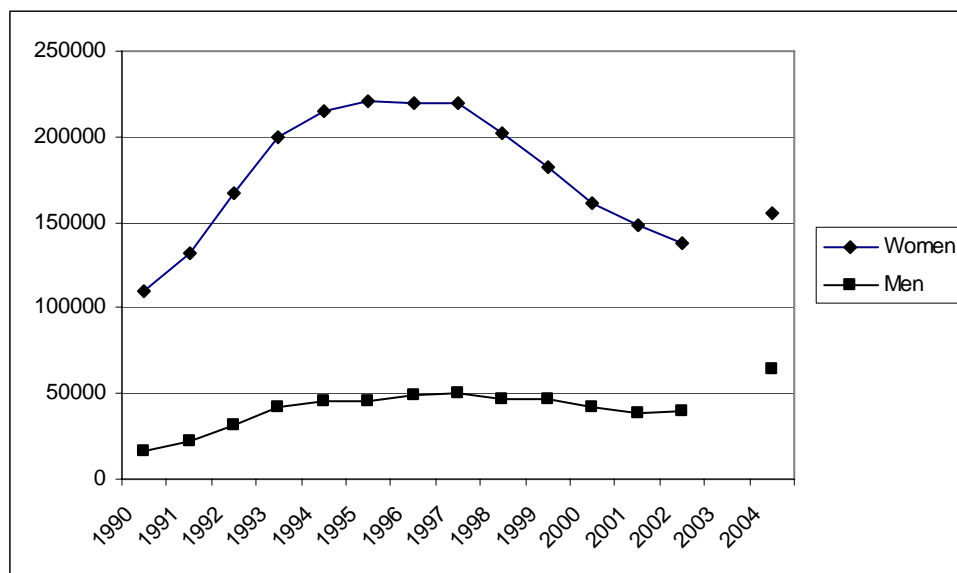
supplementary benefits were obliged to obtain a certificate from the employer proving that no full-time positions could be offered. The aim was to put pressure not only on the employees to more actively seek other jobs but also on the employers to consider the possibilities for reorganizing the work in order to create more full-time positions (Eklund 2004; Pettersson 2005). The Conservative Government that came into office in Sweden in October 2006 has introduced new rules for part-time unemployment benefits, which aim to 'reduce overuse and reduce the risk of people becoming permanently locked into part-time work'. The number of benefit days that can be used in cases of part-time unemployment has been reduced from 300 to 75 (Ministry of Finance 2007).

It is difficult to get full information concerning the number of part-time unemployed who are receiving supplementary unemployment benefit. The part-time unemployed who have registered at the employment offices and are included in the statistics presented by the National Labour Market Board are fewer than the part-time unemployed in the LFS. The number receiving supplementary unemployment benefits is even fewer, but no exact figures are available (Nyberg 2003).¹⁷

Figure 12.3 presents the trend for the number of part-time unemployed women and men between 1990 and 2004, though with a break in the time series for 2003,¹⁸ drawing on special calculations from the Swedish LFS made for a project examining part-time unemployment.¹⁹ The figure shows that the number of part-time unemployed women is much higher than the number of part-time unemployed men. It also shows that the number of part-time unemployed women increased significantly during the economic crisis in Sweden in the beginning of the 1990s, but when the economic situation

improved the number decreased. Although the overall number of part-time workers has decreased since 1990, the number of part-time unemployed remains higher at the beginning of the 2000s than in 1990.

Figure 12.3 Part-time unemployed, by sex, 16–64 years, Sweden, 1990–2004



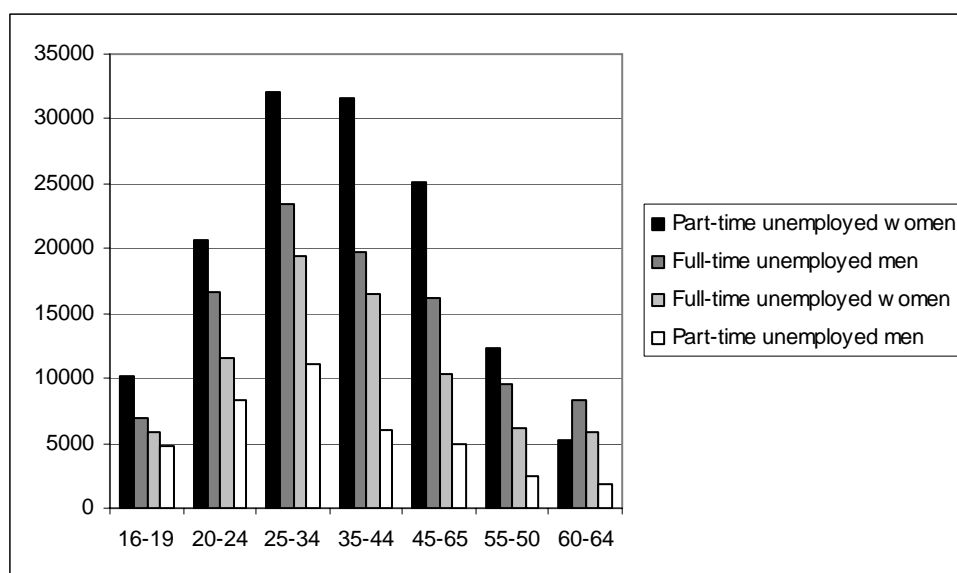
Source: Processed LFS data received from Statistics Sweden.

In order to allow a comparison with other EU countries it is necessary to use the category involuntary part-time work which is narrower than that of part-time unemployment. If we look at the share of the part-time employed who were involuntary part-time, we find that in 2007 26 per cent of all part-time employed women (age 16–64) and 26 per cent of all part-time employed men in Sweden were involuntary part-time, compared to the EU average of 20 per cent for women and 30 per cent for men (Eurostat 2007).

Figure 12.4 shows both the number of part-time unemployed, defined, as above, as persons who are employed part-time but would like to work more hours, and the number of full-time unemployed, that is, those we usually call unemployed. The figure

shows the distribution by age and sex. It indicates the prominence of the group of part-time unemployed women. The number of part-time unemployed women in Sweden exceeds not only the number of full-time unemployed women but also the number of full-time unemployed men in every age group except for the oldest (Nyberg 2003, 2005). With respect to age, we can see that, in contrast to the case of temporary employment, part-time unemployment is most common in the age groups 25–44, while it is more unusual among the youngest and oldest groups in the labour market (see Figure 12.4).²⁰

Figure 12.4 Full-time and part-time unemployed in different age groups, by sex, 16–64 years, Sweden, 2002



Source: Processed LFS data received from Statistics Sweden and LFS (Statistics Sweden 2002).

The severity of part-time unemployment relates to the length of the unemployment period and the possibilities for moving from part-time unemployment to a full-time position or to a longer part-time. Part-time unemployed in Sweden are often unemployed for very long periods of time (Nyberg 2003). A study shows that as many as 41 per cent of those who were part-time unemployed and/or involuntary temporary

employed in 1999 were still so in 2002. This is a sign of the precarious situation many part-time unemployed find themselves in. There seems to be a difference between women and men. Men more often end up becoming full-time unemployed with access to unemployment benefit and labour market programs while women tend to keep on being part-time unemployed. More than 50 per cent of the part-time unemployed women in 1999 were still part-time unemployed in 2002. This suggests that part-time unemployment might be more of a dead-end for women than for men (Ottosson and Lundequist 2005: 16–19; Ottosson and Lundequist 2006). This is similar to the situation for temporary employment, where in the 1990s women who were temporarily employed had only half the chance of men to end up in a permanent job, given all other factors such as trade, age, education and ethnicity (Håkansson 2001).

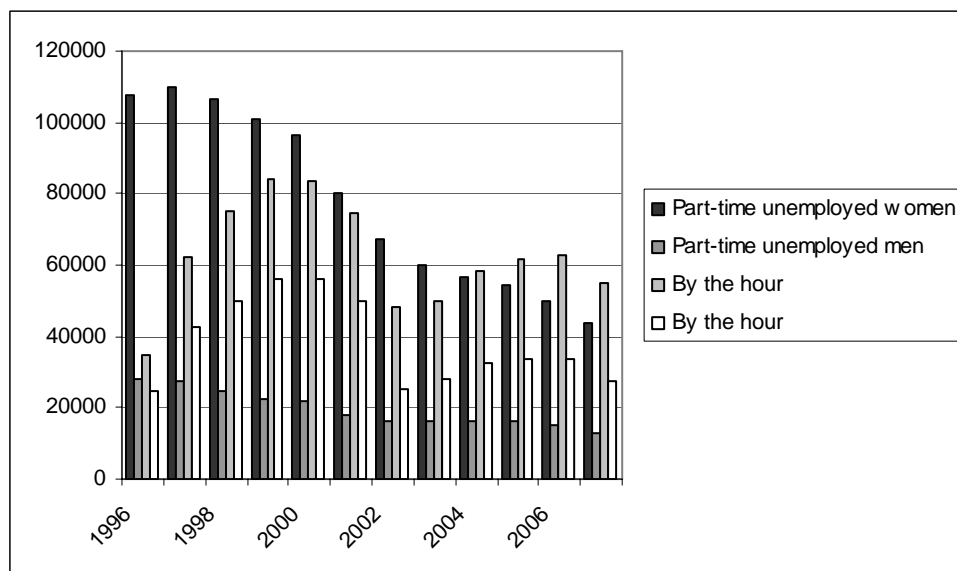
As in the case of temporary jobs, theories of fixed labour costs suggest that the employer's interest in offering part-time employment would depend on the type of job and category of labour in question. In Sweden today, as in many other countries, part-time employment is concentrated in certain sectors and trades, above all in service-sector jobs, often with almost around-the-clock service and unevenly distributed customer demand, in both the public and the private sectors. This means that in some parts of the labour market part-time employment is the dominant form of employment and a full-time position or longer part-time is hard to find for those who want one.

In Sweden part-time unemployment is more common in the public sector than in the private sector, for both women and men and also for migrants. In health and care work, especially elderly care, which is managed by the municipalities, we find a large share of

part-time employment and part-time unemployment. In the private sector the phenomenon is most frequent in the retail trade and in hotels and restaurants (Nyberg 2003, 2005; Ottosson and Lundequist 2005; Forssell and Jonsson 2005). Previous studies have shown that there is a connection between the predominance of part-time employment in certain sectors and a large share of part-time unemployment (see Forssell and Jonsson 2005). The gender division of the labour market as well as the effect of narrow local labour markets are other causes that need to be included in the explanation. In other words, both part-time employment and part-time unemployment are complex phenomena that demand multifaceted explanation models (Forssell and Jonsson 2005: 3–43; Ottosson and Lundequist 2005: 2–8; Kjeldstad and Nymoer 2004; Fevang *et al.* 2004).

Data have been collected since 1996 by the Swedish Public Employment Services on persons who are looking for more work — persons who are part-time employed and persons employed by the hour.²¹ Figure 12.5 shows that the number of persons employed by the hour has increased continuously since the mid-1990s, while the number of part-time unemployed has decreased.

Figure 12.5 Part-time unemployed and unemployed employed by the hour, by sex, 16–64 years, Sweden, 1996–2007



Source: Calculated from monthly statistics from Swedish Public Employment Service (2008).

This suggests that even if the decreasing number of part-time unemployed is a positive sign, the increase of employed by the hour is a more problematic development. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), which regularly monitors employment forms, found it especially alarming that for young women (ages 16–29), this extremely precarious form of employment has increased faster than other kinds of temporary employment since the mid-1990s (Nelander and Goding 2005).

LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

We have identified three main forms of precariousness in Sweden, defined by the interconnection between work and unemployment and the social security system. The most precarious are those who do not have any rights in relation to the social security system — mainly irregular migrants. A middle group consists of persons who are only

entitled to basic rights in the social security system because for different reasons they are not in the labour market. Finally, there is the least precarious category, composed of those who are entitled to the earnings-related social security allowances due to their participation in paid labour. However, some sub-groups within this category still suffer from precariousness. In Sweden, as in many other countries, standard social rights are based on full-time, permanent employment, which means that many employees fall short as they are employed on a part-time and/or temporary basis. Table 12.1 gives an overview of different forms of employment situations.

Table 12.1 about here

That young people, migrants and above all women generally run a higher risk than others to be included in these categories in Sweden can be explained by the interaction of different factors. Fixed labour costs, for example, play a certain role in explaining why we find many young people and migrants among temporary employees, but discrimination may also be a cause. The frequent use of part-time and temporary workers as a flexibility strategy in service jobs in both private and public sector is yet another factor that influences the risk of being either an involuntary temporary employee or a part-time unemployed person. However, it is also essential to recognize the importance of the Swedish welfare system, and especially the rights to be on leave. The regulations that allow parents to be on leave for several years lead to a demand for temporary substitutes, and the right to be on part-time leave leads to a demand for temporary part-timers who can fill in the gaps. So, in combination with part-time and temporary employment as a flexibility strategy for firms, the welfare system seems to

contribute to the predominance of part-time and temporary employment in certain sectors and job. Because the Swedish labour market is highly divided by gender and because it is still mainly women who make most use of the parental leave, women run a greater risk in female-dominated (service) jobs of being involuntary temporary employees and/or part-time unemployed.

It is obvious that precarious work is a phenomenon that exists in Sweden as well as in other countries. The degree of precariousness varies and the most vulnerable groups are also those who are the most difficult to get information about. More attention ought to be paid to these groups and alternative sources of data ought to be sought out. That the gendered character of precarious employment seems to be an outcome of a special interaction between the Swedish welfare system and the labour market regime is another issue that deserves a more thorough investigation.

NOTES

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¹ In a translation into Swedish of an investigation on precarious employment conducted by the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF n.d.) the term *otrygg anställning* (insecure employment) is used in the title. In the text the term *osäker* (uncertain, unsure) is also used.

² Although the LFS in Sweden is far from unproblematic it is the main source for information about employment. In 2005 a new Swedish LFS was introduced to better harmonize with EU regulation (see Sundström 2005). This has implications for definitions and sometimes entails breaks in data series. For the implications for the measurements of unemployment see Johansson 2005.

³ This proves the need to distinguish between part-time work and part-time employment. Someone working part-time can in fact either be part-time employed or be full-time employed but temporarily on part-time leave.

⁴ In the Swedish LFS the underemployed are persons who are employed less than they wish and who would be able to work more (Statistics Sweden various years).

⁵ To distinguish the part-time unemployed among the underemployed in the LFS demands special calculations (see Nyberg 2003).

⁶ It is important to distinguish between the hours stipulated in the employment contract and actual hours worked. Many part-time employees may occasionally be offered more hours. With no guarantees this will still be a precarious situation.

⁷ We use the term 'irregular' instead of 'illegal' or 'paperless'. An irregular migrant is a person who in some aspect deviates from what is the rule for a non-citizen in a country; he or she breaks the rules for entrance and stays in a country (Khosravi 2006: 284–5).

⁸ To obtain this entitlement as a resident, one must reside permanently and be registered in the country.

⁹ There are actually also categories such as refugees, asylum seekers, who are registered residents but not permanent residents. They do not have the right to work, but do have some rights in relation to the social security system.

¹⁰ Around 17,000 persons have had temporary permits to stay, but these have now expired. It is assumed that most of these people are still in Sweden. Additionally around 17,000 persons are coming from different troubled parts of the world; some ask for asylum, others do not (Fastighetsanställdas förbund 2008: 32).

¹¹ In 2007, 23.2 per cent of all women 16–64 years were not in the labour force - most of them because they were studying (262,200), a big group because they were sick (230,500) and as a third category we find a smaller number of home-makers (55,100) (Statistics Sweden, LFS).

¹² The fact that the EU in 2007 included more countries than in 1995 has not been taken into account.

¹³ These data are not readily available from Statistics Sweden but demanded special calculations that were made for the year 2002.

¹⁴ 'Supplementary' refers to the fact that this unemployment benefit covers the hours between full-time work and involuntary part-time. This possibility only occurs in some EU countries as part-time employees primarily are not counted as unemployed (Forssell and Jonsson 2005).

¹⁵ Before 2005 the Swedish LFS only asked employees if they wanted to work more hours and all who stated that they worked less than they wanted due to 'labour market reasons' were counted as underemployed (see Nyberg 2003). More detailed questions concerning underemployment and involuntary part-time have since been added to the survey to harmonize it with Eurostat (see Forssell and Jonsson 2005).

¹⁶ Before 2005 the Swedish LFS defined part-time work as being 1–34 working hours a week. Since 2005 the respondents in the survey have reported if they consider themselves part-time employed. According to the Swedish LFS 36 per cent of all female employees worked part-time in 2007.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the concept of part-time unemployment and the situation in Europe see Forssell and Jonsson 2005.

¹⁸ 'Part-time unemployed' relates here to the category 'underemployed' in LFS excluding those who are full-time employed. For details concerning the method of calculation see Nyberg 2003.

¹⁹ This project, called the HELA-project, was initiated by the Swedish Government in 2002. During a four-year period five main authorities were to co-operate with the aim of developing ways of reducing the problem of part-time unemployment by stimulating both new research and practical knowledge.

²⁰ Data from Eurostat (2007) show that in 2007 the share of involuntary part-time employed in the part-time employed is highest for women in the age group of 15–24 years, 44 per cent, while the share for men is 33 per cent. In the age group 25–49 the relation is the reverse: 33 per cent for men and 26 for women.

²¹ Note that the part-time unemployed reported by the Swedish Public Employment service are a narrower group than in LFS as it only includes those who are registered as part-time employed actively looking for more work.