

The Gendered Selection into Temporary Employment across European Countries: Does the Male Breadwinner Norm Matter?

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Abstract

Even if fixed-term employment (i.e. jobs with predetermined duration) seems to be on a rise, taking a closer look at various countries reveals that there is a strong variation in the incidences of temporary employment across countries. Various country-level and individual-level determinants of fixed-term employment have been identified in cross-country comparative studies. One characteristic that many researchers in various countries take for an important determinant of fixed-term employment is gender, which will be the focus of this cross-country comparative study.

Next to gender discriminatory behavior by the employer, it is often assumed that women compared to men *voluntarily* select more often into temporary employment because they expect future career interruptions due to family responsibilities (e.g. Booth, Francesconi, and Frank 2002). It is argued that the main reason for women to more often choose fixed-term jobs is the ascribed *flexibility* of such jobs “allowing them to control their work time, sample a variety of work experience, prepare for permanent employment, and positively combine work and family life” (Macassa et al. 2017: p. 1). Although there is evidence that fixed-term employment has negative effects on family life for women, the literature still holds on to the line of argumentation mentioned above. If the assumption that women are more likely to voluntarily choose fixed-term employment because of its *flexible* character was indeed true, we would expect on the one hand women to hold a temporary contract more often than men (*Hypothesis 1.a*). On the other hand, the previously mentioned *flexibility* should be one important mechanism, which explains this positive effect (*Hypothesis 1.b*).

This *flexible* nature is assumed to allow employees to more easily combine work and family responsibilities. However, this balancing act usually is expected more often from women than men. Thus, having to take care of children should be another mechanism, which explains the positive relationship between females and temporary employment. Therefore, we expect that because women compared to men more often take over child caring duties, they are more likely to be fixed-term employed (*Hypothesis 2*). However, not only an actual childcare taking duty but also expected responsibilities in the future might contribute to women’s selection into fixed-term employment. Hence, younger women who anticipate having a child to take care of soon, should also more often voluntarily choose to work in fixed-term jobs than men would. Thus, the positive main effect should be even stronger for women in childbearing age. In comparison, for women who are not able anymore to have children or have young children living with them, the difference between men and women

should decline. Thus, we expect that the positive effect for women to be fixed-term employed compared to men should be stronger for women in childbearing age than for older ones (*Hypothesis 3*).

These previous arguments apply more in countries, which are dominated by traditional gender norms. Such norms usually see men as responsible for mainly specializing on the labor market to provide financial resources (male-breadwinner) whilst women should specialize more on home production, i.e. child-care (female-homemaker). In egalitarian countries, those ascribed gender roles are shared more equally between men and women. Hence, in more traditional countries, women compared to men should be more willing to have a fixed-term job in order to fulfill both their care taking and working responsibilities, than in countries, in which this combination of tasks is not primarily expected from women. In this respect, the European comparative perspective promises new insights as the European countries are characterized by different levels of traditional and egalitarian gender norms. Thus, the last hypothesis refers to the cross-level interaction and assumes that the positive effect for women to be fixed-term employed compared to men is stronger in countries in which the male-breadwinner female homemaker social norm is more dominant (*Hypothesis 4*).

We will investigate these hypotheses using the EU-LFS 2010 microdata for around 30 countries, which provides all relevant variables. Precisely, we will use the 2010 ad-hoc module on work-life balance, which includes the important information on the flexible character of jobs. This is unique, as not many cross-national studies provide such data in addition to other valuable labor market measurements. The sample definition includes people aged 20 to 65, who were not in any education and training (including apprenticeship training) during the previous four weeks and who are currently employed. Self-employed are excluded because their type of contract is not defined. We will estimate logistic multilevel models, which allows us to separate country effects from individual effects on the likelihood of men and women holding a temporary contract. A two-step estimation procedure is conducted allowing the most flexible model specification for the main independent variable of interest as well as both the micro-level control variables (age/cohort, migration background, education, familial background and urbanity) and meso-variables such as economic sector. We will use the "Gender Empowerment Measure" (GEM) as a proxy for norms such as the male breadwinner female homemaker norm. The GEM was developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to capture gender inequality in economic and political power and is constructed using information such as the percentage of professional and technical workers who are female and income disparities between men and women. In addition, different control variables at the macro-level are tested for that may induce confounding bias (GDP, Employment Protection Legislation (EPL), Active Labor Market Policy (ALMP) and density of childcare facilities).

References

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