



2024, 13 (3), 1725-1752 | Research Article

## Part-Time Paradox: The Rise of Female Part-Time Employment and Its Impacts on Germany's Labor Market

Zeynep Özmen Bol<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Despite an employment rate of 76.6% for women in Germany, significant issues persist with regard to the labour market situation of women in the country. These include the prevalence of part-time work, the under-representation of women in senior management positions and the existence of pay gaps. This article employs data from the German Statistical Office spanning the period from 2000 to 2022 to examine the growth in part-time employment among women and its ramifications. The paper demonstrates that part-time work is a prevalent phenomenon in female-dominated sectors such as health and education. This is driven by a combination of economic conditions, the necessity to reconcile work and family life, and legal regulations. This situation consequently results in women facing lower remuneration and constrained career prospects. The necessity to balance work and family responsibilities represents a significant challenge for women, impeding their career development and negatively impacting their job performance and workplace commitment. These dynamics serve to perpetuate gender inequalities in the labour market, thereby preventing women from realising their full potential at work. This article makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on the relationship between part-time work and gender inequalities in the German labour market by providing a detailed analysis of this complex relationship. The article offers valuable insights into the potential of legal regulations, such as the Temporary Part-Time Work Act enacted in 2019, to alleviate the adverse effects of part-time work on women. The research is distinctive in its comprehensive examination of the socio-economic dynamics of part-time work, its legal framework, and its impact on gender equality, based on an extensive data analysis conducted over an extended period. By offering a detailed and nuanced understanding of these issues, the study draws attention to the ongoing challenges women face in the labour market and suggests potential policy interventions to promote gender equality. This article emphasises the necessity for targeted measures to facilitate women's career progression and offset the adverse consequences of part-time employment, thereby contributing to a more equitable labour market.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Part-Time Employment, Labour Market, Career Development, Socio-Economic Dynamics

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2024, 13 (3), 1725-1752 | Araştırma Makalesi

## Yarı Zamanlı Paradoks: Kadınların Yarı Zamanlı İstihdamındaki Artışı ve Bunun Almanya'nın İşgücü Piyasası Üzerindeki Etkileri

Zeynep Özmen Bol<sup>1</sup>

### Öz

Almanya'da kadınlar %76,6'lık bir istihdam oranına rağmen, yarı zamanlı çalışma, üst düzey yönetimde yetersiz temsil ve ücret farkları gibi önemli sorunlar devam etmektedir. Bu makale, 2000-2022 yılları arasındaki Alman İstatistik Ofisi verilerini kullanarak, kadınlar arasında yarı zamanlı çalışmanın artışı ve bunun sonuçlarını incelemektedir. Makale, ekonomik koşullar, iş ve aile yaşamını uzlaştırma ihtiyacı ve yasal düzenlemeler nedeniyle sağlık ve eğitim gibi kadınların yoğun olduğu sektörlerde yarı zamanlı çalışmanın yaygın olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durum, kadınların daha düşük ücretlerle ve sınırlı kariyer fırsatlarıyla karşılaşmasına neden olmaktadır. İş ve aile sorumluluklarını dengeleme gerekliliği, kadınların kariyer gelişimini engelleyerek iş performanslarını ve işyerine bağlılıklarını olumsuz etkilemektedir. Bu dinamikler, işgücü piyasasında cinsiyet eşitsizliklerinin devam etmesine katkıda bulunmakta ve kadınların işyerinde tam potansiyellerini gerçekleştirmelerini engellemektedir. Bu makalenin literatüre katkısı, Almanya işgücü piyasasında yarı zamanlı çalışma ve cinsiyet eşitsizlikleri arasındaki karmaşık ilişkinin detaylı bir analizini sunmasıdır. 2019'da yürürlüğe giren Geçici Yarı Zamanlı Çalışma Yasası gibi yasal düzenlemelerin, yarı zamanlı çalışmanın kadınlar üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini nasıl hafifletebileceğine dair değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır. Araştırmanın özgünlüğü, uzun bir dönemi kapsayan geniş veri analizi ve yarı zamanlı çalışmanın sosyo-ekonomik dinamikleri, yasal çerçevesi ve cinsiyet eşitliği üzerindeki etkisinin kapsamlı bir incelemesinde yatmaktadır. Bu meselelerin ayrıntılı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını sağlayarak, kadınların işgücü piyasasında karşılaştıkları devam eden zorlukları vurgulamakta ve cinsiyet eşitliğini teşvik etmek için potansiyel politika müdahaleleri önermektedir. Bu makale, kadınların kariyer ilerlemesini desteklemek ve yarı zamanlı çalışmanın olumsuz etkilerini hafifletmek için hedeflenmiş önlemlere duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamakta ve böylece daha adil bir işgücü piyasasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği, Part-Time Çalışma, İşgücü Piyasası, Kariyer Gelişimi, Sosyo-Ekonomik Dinamikler

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## Introduction

In the period following the global economic crisis of 2008, the German labour market has demonstrated consistent and robust growth. A significant factor contributing to this growth has been the increasing participation of women in the labour market, particularly in part-time employment. By 2020, 47% of employed women will work part-time, compared to only 11.5% of men (STATISTA, 2023, p. 6). Holst and Bringmann (2016, p. 16) have demonstrated that labour market reforms in Germany, including the Hartz concepts and family policies such as parental leave and childcare provision, have led to an increase in part-time employment rates. Furthermore, economic shifts, such as the transition from manufacturing to service-oriented sectors, have been linked to an increase in flexible employment options, including part-time work (Lott & Bünger, 2023, p. 4; Eichhorst & Tobsch, 2015, p. 87).

The transition towards part-time work has been pivotal in enhancing employment prospects; however, it also necessitates a comprehensive assessment of job quality, career advancement and its contribution to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. Effinger (2009, p. 82) emphasises these complexities by drawing attention to the contrast in types of employment between men and women. There is a notable degree of gender segregation in the labour market, with horizontal segregation evident in occupations that are stereotypically dominated by one gender, and vertical segregation observed in the lack of women in managerial positions, as documented by Bosch and Lehndorff (2001, p. 213). Furthermore, part-time employment may unintentionally serve to reinforce traditional gender norms and contribute to the widening of the pay gap, as suggested by Kümmerling (2018, p. 12). Sectors with a high concentration of female workers, such as retail and care, often lack full-time roles and substantial career progression. Furthermore, these sectors are perceived as low status and offer limited financial growth, which serves to entrench gendered economic inequalities (Hausmann et al., 2016, p. 219; Koebe et al., 2020, p. 5).

In light of the aforementioned findings and in alignment with the primary objective of this study, three principal research questions have been formulated to gain insight into the expansion of part-time employment in Germany and its ramifications for gender equality, economic structure, and social security systems. (i) What are the key factors that have driven the growth of part-time employment among women in Germany? This question will assist in elucidating the role of economic, social, and legal changes in the growth of part-time work, particularly among women. An investigation into the interrelationship between the proliferation of part-time employment, labour market dynamics, family policies and trends will facilitate the identification of the underlying causes of this employment pattern. (ii) What are the implications of part-time work for gender equality and labour market dynamics? This question seeks to examine the influence of part-time work on women's career advancement, remuneration equality and labour market involvement in greater detail. (iii) What is the impact of part-time work on women's social security and pension rights? This question permits an evaluation of the long-term consequences of part-time work and its prospective influence on women's social security entitlements, particularly in regard to lifetime earnings and pension security.

The study is structured in such a way as to systematically uncover the layers of this complex issue. The first section analyses the development of part-time work in Germany in its historical and socio-economic dimensions, and sheds light on its place in the literature. The second chapter sets out the theoretical framework and methodology of the study, thus consolidating the foundation of the research. The third chapter discusses how part-time work can be understood from a gender perspective, highlighting its importance in the context of gender equality. Chapter 4 discusses the impact of mini-jobs and such employment on the labour market as a whole, and examines the underlying causes and consequences of their growth. Chapter 5 aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the gender implications of part-time work through sectoral and occupational analyses. Chapter 6 highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated gender inequalities in Germany's labor market, as women faced greater challenges in regaining employment, increased childcare responsibilities, and heightened risks due to their overrepresentation in low-paid, temporary jobs, despite programs like Kurzarbeit offering some relief. The seventh chapter discusses the impact of the Temporary Part-Time Work Act and looks at the possible negative aspects of part-time work. The eighth chapter assesses the significance of the findings of the study in terms of policy making, social implications and future research, with the aim of expanding the knowledge base through these analyses. The conclusion outlines the limitations of the study and suggests possible avenues for future research. By combining macroeconomic perspectives with individual employment experiences, this comprehensive review aims to shed light on the intricacies of part-time employment and to create a more equitable dialogue in the labour market.

## **1. Background**

In 1999, The Economist referred to Germany as the “Sick Man of the Euro” (The Economist, 1999). While many European countries faced high unemployment rates in the 1990s due to the mid-1970s oil crisis, Germany was slow to react to the worsening labor market conditions, having delayed necessary reforms in labor market policies for a long time (Eichhorst & Marx, 2009, p. 78). Additionally, Germany struggled with significant challenges such as the financial burden of reunifying East and West Germany and an underdeveloped service sector (Walwei, 2014).

Between 1991 and 2003, Germany's GDP growth rate was only 1.8%, which was half the growth rate of the United Kingdom. This contributed to a decline in employment and an increase in unemployment (Jacobi & Kluve, 2007, p. 45). In response to these challenges, then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder initiated a comprehensive labor market reform in Germany in 2001. These reforms, known as the Hartz Reforms, were defined by four laws aimed at strengthening job search activities, providing incentives for the unemployed to accept jobs, and increasing labor force participation, especially for women and older workers. Accompanying measures included shortening the eligibility period for unemployment benefits, abolishing early retirement options, and reducing employers' social security contributions. These reforms had a transformative impact on the functioning of the German labor market (Bellmann et al., 2014, p. 7).

Notably, despite the severe economic downturn during the 2008-2009 financial crisis, the labor market remained relatively resilient, a fact partially attributed to the success of these reforms. Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman (2009) referred to this phenomenon as

the "German job miracle" in his New York Times column, sparking widespread debate on the resilience of Germany's labor market.

The "Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act" introduced in 2001, along with the phased implementation of the Hartz reforms between 2003 and 2005, enabled the German economy to create jobs for 2.5 million people, mostly in part-time, fixed-term, or temporary (outsourced) contracts from 2005 onward. Furthermore, since 2008, more than half of the increase in female employment has come from part-time positions (İlieva & Wrohlich, 2022, pp. 17-19; Weinkopf, 2014, p. 192). Research conducted by the Sachverständigenrat (2019) also shows that the growing prevalence of part-time employment, particularly among women, has significantly contributed to overall employment growth since the economic recovery began in 2010. Statistical data from the Federal Statistical Office (STATISTA, 2023, p. 21) indicates that the number of part-time positions subject to social security contributions has increased by 21% over the past decade, signaling a structural shift toward more flexible forms of employment. The literature suggests that this shift reflects not only a response to economic conditions but also deeper social transformations, as individuals seek more flexible work-life configurations (STATISTA, 2023, p. 22).

Furthermore, the increase in part-time work in Germany can be attributed to the ageing population and associated demographic changes. As Duell and Vetter (2020, pp. 25-26) observe, the German labour market has demonstrated notable flexibility, with rising employment rates attributed to the expansion of part-time work, particularly among women and older workers. This transformation is in accordance with broader European trends, wherein part-time employment has become a pivotal element of labour market recuperation and flexibility (EUROSTAT, 2020, p. 47).

The growth in part-time employment in Germany has also been influenced by policy initiatives designed to reduce long-term unemployment and integrate refugees and asylum seekers into the labour market as part of broader active labour market programmes (Kraft & Drossel, 2019, p. 40). The phenomenon of migration has exerted a significant influence on the configuration of the labour market, thereby contributing to the diversification and accessibility of part-time employment opportunities. This process has been perceived as a strategy to expand the availability of part-time employment opportunities, with the aim of increasing the participation of different labour groups in the labour market.

As a consequence of these trends, part-time employment has become a double-edged sword in the German labour market. Consequently, it has facilitated the reconciliation of work and family life, as well as the integration of diverse groups of workers into the labour market.

Conversely, concerns have been raised regarding the quality of employment, pay equity and long-term career development, particularly for women. In her study, Lehndorff (2012) highlights that part-time work is often associated with lower wages and constrained career advancement, particularly for women. She emphasises that this situation poses a significant risk to women's economic security.

Furthermore, the effect of this phenomenon on the social security system has constituted a significant area of investigation. O'Reilly et al. (2015, p. 776) demonstrate that social

security entitlements for women engaged in part-time employment have a detrimental impact on their lifetime earnings and pension security, when compared to those in full-time roles. Eichhorst and Marx (2011, p. 75) observed that the 2008 economic crisis led to an increase in employment opportunities for women, although these were predominantly limited to low-paid, part-time roles lacking social security benefits.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned long-standing employment issues, Chancellor Merkel implemented three significant policy reforms over the course of her four terms in office, although these were only enacted in her final two terms. These are (1) the law on the equal participation of women and men in management positions, (2) the law on the transparency of pay structures and (3) the law on the further development of part-time work. In terms of their scope and impact, all three laws indicate progress towards gender equality in the German labour market. However, they have been weakened due to political pressure (Ahrens & Scheele, 2022, p.168). It is notable that none of the three laws in question fully encompasses the target groups. Indeed, each leaves gaps that companies are able to exploit in order to minimise the impact of the laws on gender equality (Mushaben, 2022, p.25).

The available evidence indicates that women work fewer hours per week, fewer years, have lower incomes and are more likely to be at risk of poverty, particularly if they are single parents (Rubery et al., 2018, p. 515). Research by Bothfeld and Rouault (2014, p. 65) suggests that part-time work may contribute to cumulative disadvantage over a woman's career, leading to lower lifetime earnings and reduced pension entitlements. However, comprehensive studies tracing these long-term consequences, especially in the context of the evolving German labour market, are scarce (Maier, 2017, p. 82).

This study aims to address this gap, not only by shedding light on the current state of women's part-time employment, but also by providing a comprehensive understanding of the changing labour and gender landscape in Germany. Based on national labour force data from 2000 to 2022, this study seeks to answer the question of whether part-time work is a choice or a necessity for women.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study offers a comprehensive assessment of the available data, with the objective of analysing the rise of part-time employment among women in Germany. In lieu of undertaking primary quantitative analysis, this research critically evaluates and synthesises information from established sources with a view to gaining insight into the nuances of labour market developments.

This analysis is based on comprehensive labour market data provided by the Federal Employment Agency and the Federal Statistical Office. These institutions provide a plethora of information pertaining to employment trends, demographic shifts, and economic indicators. By analysing these datasets, the study examines the growth of part-time employment and its implications for labour and gender dynamics.

By means of secondary data analysis, the research interprets statistical information in a specific context in order to construct a narrative about the evolving landscape of employment in Germany. This approach allows for a detailed examination of the evolution of women's part-time employment, demonstrating how it has been shaped by broader socio-economic forces. The analysis synthesizes disparate data points, including

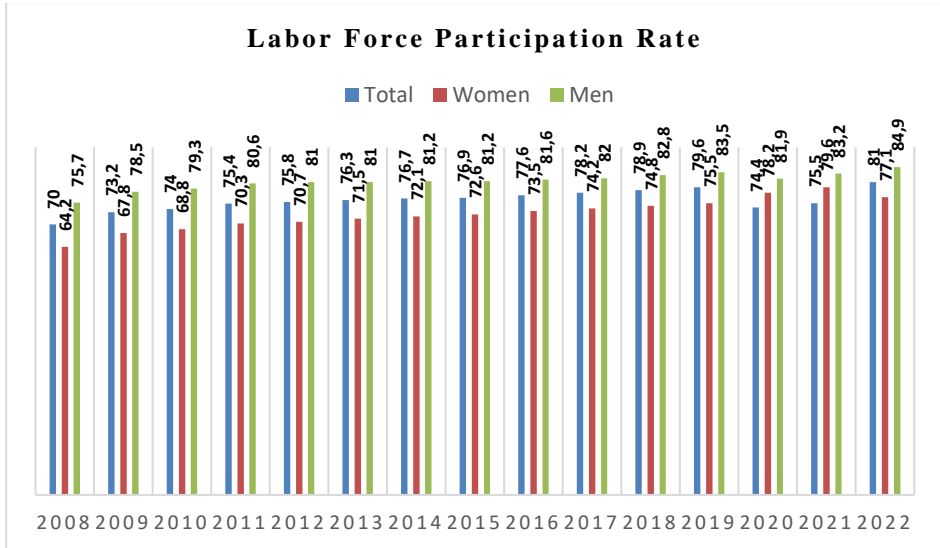
employment rates, gender distribution, and sectoral trends, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of labor market transformation.

This evaluative methodology is particularly well suited to the research objectives, as it provides a detailed examination of the available data, thereby revealing the underlying patterns and consequences of part-time work among women in Germany. The objective of this careful assessment is to provide insights into the complexity of the labour market by shedding light on the strategic role of part-time employment in economic and social contexts. By synthesising disparate data sources and elucidating their shared meanings, the research contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of the phenomenon of part-time work and its long-term implications for the labour market and gender equality.

### 3. Part-Time Employment and Gender Dynamics

With a population of 83.2 million, Germany has the fourth largest economy and industrial base in the world. The overwhelming majority of businesses in Germany are small and medium-sized enterprises, collectively employing 61% of the workforce (STATISTA, 2024). In 2022, the labour force comprising individuals aged between 15 and 65 will reach a total of 41.1 million people. The number of women in the labour force, excluding welfare recipients, is 19.3 million, while the number of men in the labour force is 21.8 million (STATISTA, 2023, p. 17).

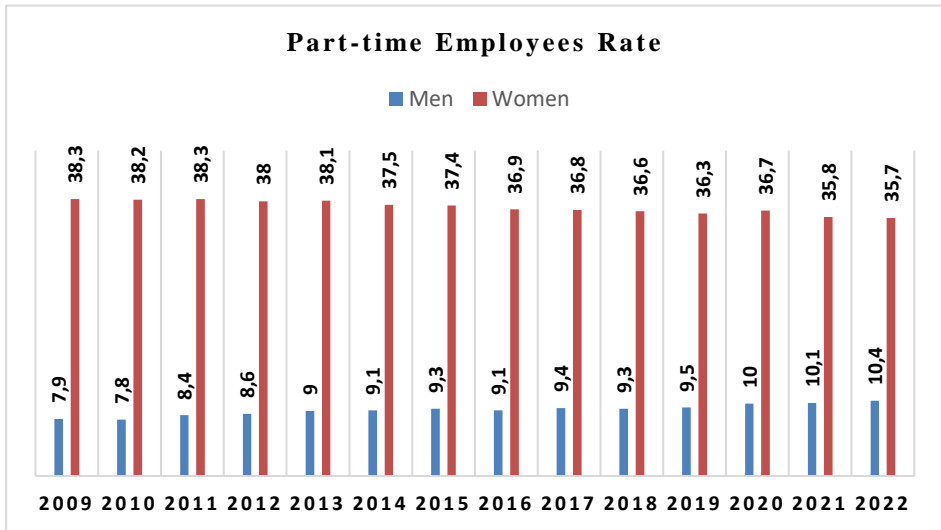
With the exception of 2016 and 2017, when refugees, predominantly male, entered the labour market, Germany has demonstrated a consistently positive trajectory in terms of female labour force participation over the past decade. In 2012, 71.7% of women aged 15-65 were engaged in employment or actively seeking work, compared with 75.3% in the present day. Over the same period, the male employment rate increased by a mere 1.2 percentage points, reaching 83.5% (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender in Germany (%) (2008-2022)**

Source: (STATISTA (c), 2024).

The observed increase in female employment is largely attributable to the prevalence of part-time work. In Germany, almost half of women are employed on a part-time basis, in comparison to only 15% of men (Figure 2). In accordance with the provisions of the 'Arbeitsförderungsgesetz', which was incorporated into German legislation in 1985, an employee who is engaged for a period of less than the standard weekly working time of a person occupying a similar position at the same place of work (20 hours or less per week) is deemed to be employed on a part-time basis (Jung, 2011, p.12).

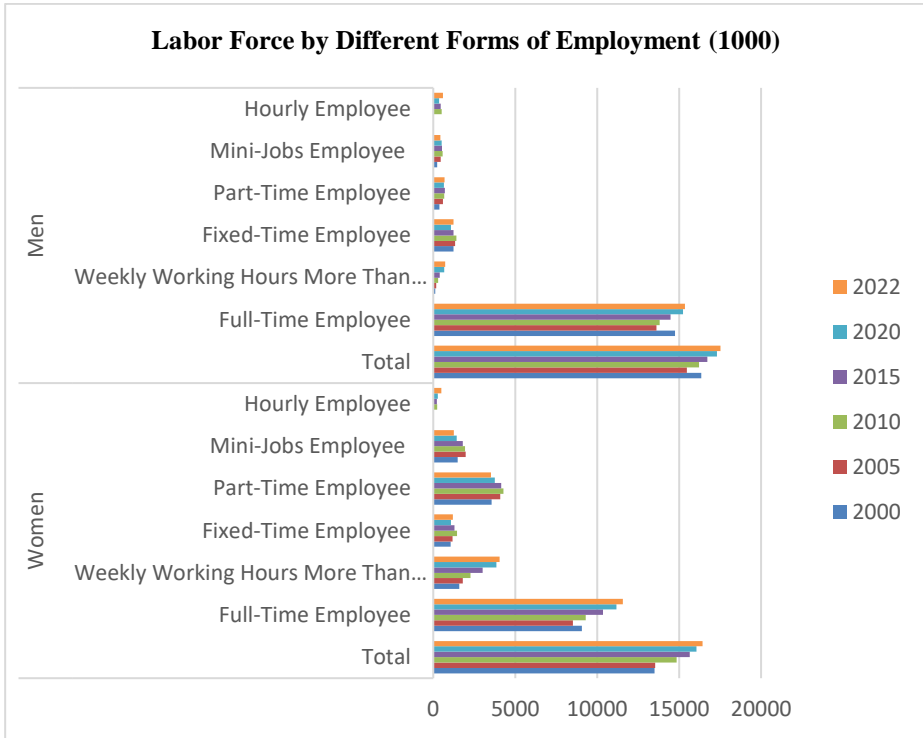


**Figure 2: Part-Time Employees Rate by Gender in Germany (%) (2009-2022)**

Source: (OECD, 2024).

In Germany, two distinct categories of part-time work exist. These are classified as either 'normal part-time work' or 'marginal part-time work', also referred to as 'mini-jobs' (Bispinck & Schulten, 2011, p. 23; Keller & Seifert, 2013, p. 462). The economic crisis of 2008 saw a rise in part-time work and mini-jobs, which resulted in a reduction in average working hours and further exacerbated gender inequalities in the labour market (Figure 3). The increase of 2.8 million women in part-time work between 2008 and 2022 (OECD, 2024), in comparison to the unchanged number of women in full-time work, serves to further illustrate the unequal structure of the labour market.

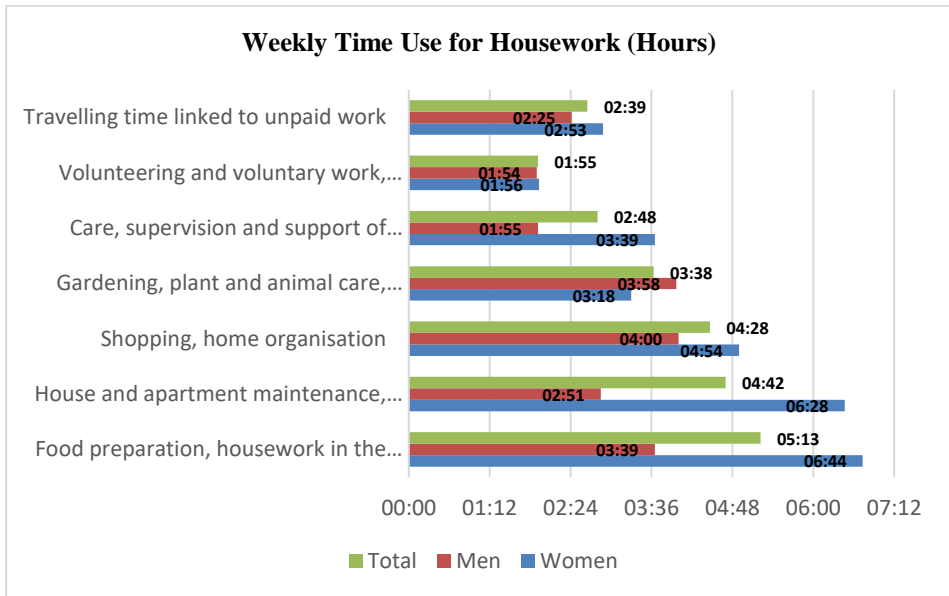




**Figure 3: Labour Force Ratio in Germany by Different Forms of Employment and Gender (1000) (2000-2022)**

Source: (STATISTA (d), 2024).

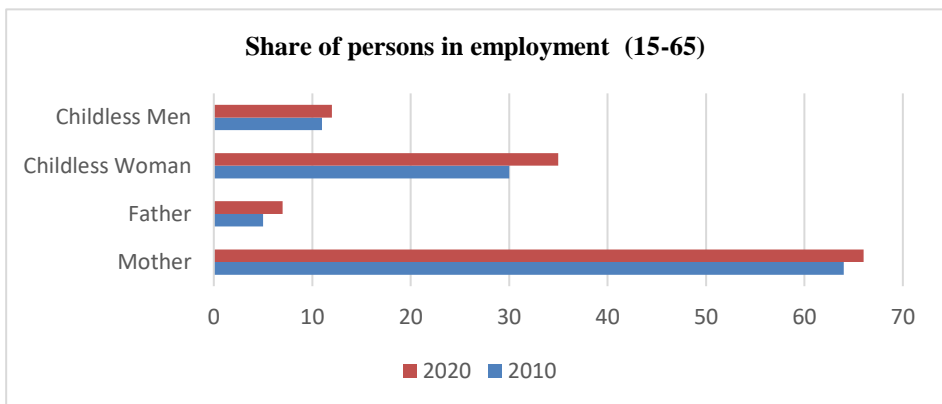
The German government's reports on gender equality elucidate the gender-based disparities in vocational training, career trajectories, and working conditions (Ahrens & Scheele, 2022, p. 162). In particular, the Second Gender Equality Report, published in 2017, indicates that women dedicate a significantly greater proportion of their time to care work than men (BMFSFJ, 2017, p. 11). The prevalence of gender-based care discrimination is estimated to be 52.4%. This equates to an average of 87 minutes more per day spent by women on unpaid care work than by men. The mean duration of unpaid care work performed by men is 2 hours and 46 minutes per day, whereas the mean duration for women is 4 hours and 13 minutes (Figure 4). The most evident consequence of this is the discrepancy in the prevalence of full-time work between men and women (Yollu-Tok & Garzón, 2019, p. 764).



**Figure 4: Time Use of Women and Men in Germany (Hours) (2022)**

Source: (STATISTA (e), 2024).

The challenge of balancing work and childcare is particularly acute for parents with young children. In Germany, 66% of working mothers are employed on a part-time basis, whereas only 7% of fathers are engaged in part-time work (Figure 5). Furthermore, the proportion of mothers with young children working part-time in Germany is notably higher than in other Member States of the European Union (EU-27). In 2020, 69.3% of working women with at least one child under the age of 12 worked part-time, compared to an EU average of only 33.9%. Nevertheless, fathers in a comparable situation in Germany were employed on a part-time basis at a rate of 7.6%, which is in close proximity to the EU average of 5.6% (STATISTA (f), 2024).

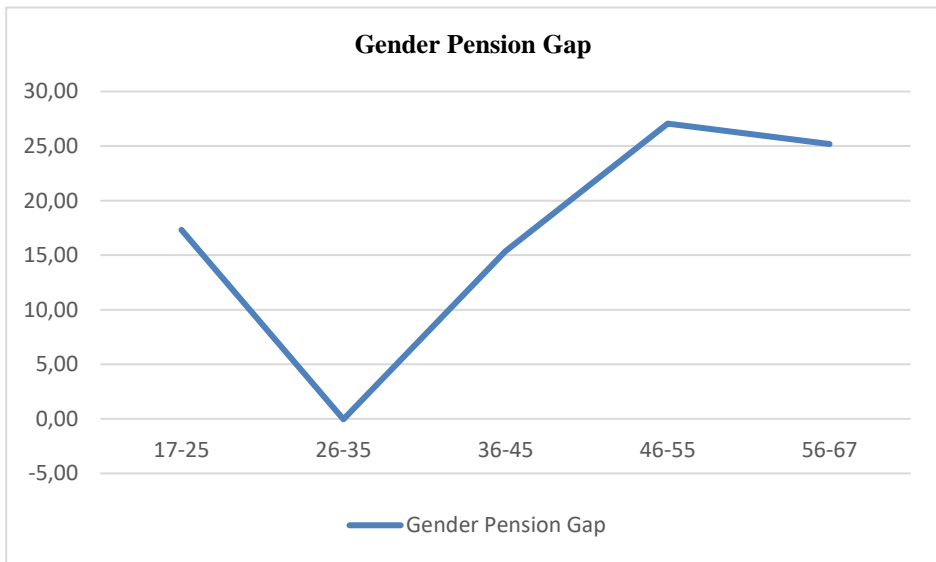


**Figure 5: Share of Persons Aged 15 and Under 65 in Employment (%)**

Source: (STATISTA (f), 2024).

The gender pension gap is a manifestation of gender-based care discrimination and wage inequality and reflects the disparity in retirement incomes between men and women. Defined as the percentage difference in the average gross monthly pensions between genders, this gap serves to illustrate the economic consequences of lifelong earnings inequalities. As demonstrated by Flory et al. (2015, p. 126), a more pronounced pension gap implies a proportionately reduced gross pension for women in comparison to men. In their 2019 study, Niessen-Ruenzi and Schneider quantified the gender pension gap at 25.20%. This figure serves to illustrate the persistent financial disadvantage faced by women in retirement (see Figure 6).

The gender pension gap is a consequence of gender-based care discrimination and wage inequality. The gender pension gap is defined as the percentage difference between the average gross monthly pension of all women and the average gross monthly pension of all men (Flory et al., 2015, p. 128). The gender pension gap is defined as the percentage difference between the average gross monthly pension received by women and the average gross monthly pension received by men. A larger gender pension gap indicates a lower gross monthly pension received by women relative to men. As indicated by the study conducted by Ruenzi and Schneider (2019, p. 7), this ratio was 25.20% in 2019.



**Figure 6: Gender Pension Gap (%) (2019)**

**Source:** (Niessen-Ruenzi & Schneider, 2019, p.7).

As reported by the Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (IAB) in Nuremberg, the gender pension gap in Germany is 26% (Table 1). In the initial stages of their careers, up to the age of 35, the gross monthly pension projections for male and female employees are similar, with a minimal gap in the early stages of their careers. It can be reasonably assumed that if their wage growth follows a parallel path, similar pension outcomes will be expected. However, a divergence begins after the age of 35, when men tend to earn more and therefore contribute more to their pensions, resulting in larger pension funds (Barišić & Consiglio, 2020, p. 4). A significant contributing factor

to this shift is the formation of families at this stage of life, which often results in lower female labour force participation or a transition to part-time work following childbirth. This, in turn, establishes the foundations for the gender pay gap in this age group (Chhaochharia et al., 2019, p. 432). In particular, mothers of children aged 3 to 9 are most likely to be in part-time employment, due to the limited number of schooling hours and the difficulties in obtaining full-time schooling (Keller & Kahle, 2018, p. 56).

**Table 1: Gender Pension Gap (%)**

	Equal Weighted Gender Pension Discrimination (%)	Age-Weighted Gender-Based Pension Discrimination (%)
All Employees with IAB Employment Background	25,97	26,05
All Employees at IAB Including Peers	22,52	22,88
Mid-Career (25-49 Years) with IAB Employment Background	17,30	17,97
Mid Careers (25-49 Years) Including Precedent Values	16,71	17,26

**Source:** (Niessen-Ruenzi & Schneider, 2019, p.8).

The confluence of wage inequality and childcare shortages has led to a greater propensity for women to engage in part-time employment. In an economy facing challenges with regard to growth and labour shortages, this represents a significant missed opportunity. In a report published last year, the Department of Employment (STATISTA, 2023, p.8) identified the potential for an increase in the number of hours worked by women, but emphasised the necessity for improvements in overall conditions. Even in professions that are predominantly female, such as paramedicine, men receive a salary that is 40% higher. A study conducted in 2017 by the Berlin Institute for Economic Research revealed that women receive approximately 50% less in remuneration than their male counterparts over the course of their working lives (Wrohlich & Zucco, 2017, p. 430).

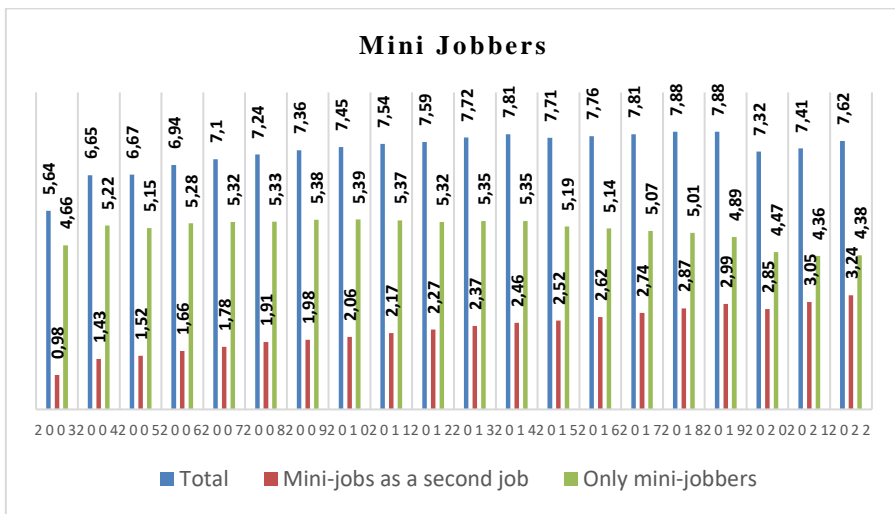
As indicated by national statistical data (STATISTA, 2024), approximately one in five women (19.2%) in Germany will be at risk of poverty in 2022, compared to 17.7% of men. Although the rates appear to be similar, the gender gap is particularly pronounced among the young and the old. In the 18-24 age group, 32.7% of women and 25.4% of men are at risk of poverty. For individuals aged 65 and above, the at-risk-of-poverty rate is 22.6% for women and 18.2% for men.

The disproportionate representation of women in part-time work reflects both existing social norms and structural inequalities in the labour market, thereby reinforcing gender inequality (Effinger, 2009, p. 82). Therefore, despite the flexibility advantages of part-time work, these roles are frequently associated with reduced hourly remuneration (Kümmerling, 2018, p.16) and a paucity of advancement opportunities, defined as 'occupational decline' (Bothfeld & Rouault, 2014, p.66). This results in a significant discrepancy in pension benefits between men and women, with women receiving, on average, only 53% of the average male pension (STATISTA, 2023, p. 8).

#### 4. Mini-Jobs and Their Impact on The Quality of Women's Employment

The concept of mini-jobs, a distinct category of 'marginal employment', emerged in the 1960s. Its purpose was twofold: firstly, to motivate housewives to engage in small-scale part-time work and secondly, to alleviate labour shortages in various sectors (Mansour, 2012, p.418). Notwithstanding the alterations in the labour market that have occurred in recent decades, the exclusion of these marginal jobs from social security has persisted to a considerable extent (Caliendo & Kritikos, 2010, p. 73). A substantial reform was initiated in 2003 with the implementation of the 'Hartz reforms' (Keller & Seifert, 2013, p. 462), which elevated the income threshold for insurance purposes from €325 to €400 and eliminated the limitation on working less than 15 hours per week. As of January 2024, the income threshold for mini-jobs has been increased to €538 per month (STATISTA, 2024). In Germany, mini-jobs are a popular choice among students due to their flexibility, allowing them to align their work hours with their educational commitments. Additionally, they serve as a crucial stepping stone for the long-term unemployed, facilitating their re-entry into the labour market (Bispinck & Schulten, 2011, p. 36; Keller & Seifert, 2013, p. 463).

It is not uncommon for individuals receiving social assistance to be engaged in marginal employment. Figure 7 illustrates that approximately one-third of insured individuals are employed in a private mini-job, with the overwhelming majority of these individuals being women. In 2022, there were 1,527 women and 1,208 men employed in a marginal employment situation as a second job. Furthermore, in the same year, 3,470,000 women and 1,898,000 men received benefits from a minijob, representing 3.47 million and 1.898 million beneficiaries, respectively. The reasons for this may vary. One potential explanation for this discrepancy is that women are frequently unable to assume employment subject to social security contributions due to family-related constraints, as access to childcare facilities is often limited. Another reason is that companies continue to prioritise hiring men as the primary earners subject to social security contributions (STATISTA, 2023, p. 8).



**Figure 7: Different Types of Mini-Jobs in Germany (Millions) (2003- 2022)**

Source: (STATISTA (a), 2024).

In general, mini-jobbers are not required to make social security contributions and are not liable for income tax on their earnings. It would appear that a significant proportion of those engaged in mini-jobs are not aware that this is an illusion. Discrimination on the part of employers is evidenced by the payment of lower wages, particularly in the service sector (Hohendanner & Stegmaier, 2012, p. 3). The exemption from taxes and social security contributions constitutes an important subsidy for mini-jobs (Bahmann, 2012, p. 38; Benkhoff & Hermet, 2008, p. 12; Voss-Dahm, 2009; Voss-Dahm & Weinkopf, 2012, p. 8; Winkel, 2005, p. 294).

Another situation is closely related to tax and social security regulations, which still favour the traditional German model of male-dominated earnings. This is characterised by a tax system based on income redistribution and a social security system in which the spouse who is not actively working benefits from the social protection of the other spouse (Consiglio & Göbler, 2021, p.2). Those engaged in mini-jobs are able to retain the tax benefits associated with joint income, while also maintaining coverage under their partner's health insurance at no additional cost. Should working hours and earnings exceed the permitted limit for mini-jobs, marginal tax rates may increase considerably (Cammarata, 2020, p. 8). This increase in the family's marginal tax rate when a woman begins working can act as a significant disincentive to increasing female participation in the labour market. (Statista, 2023, p. 9).

The male demographic of mini-job holders is more likely to be younger or older and to have a second main job, whereas the female demographic is predominantly middle-aged with children. A study conducted by the IAB revealed that nearly 50% of women with a secondary minijob earned less than €1,250 in their primary position, while 50% of men with an additional minijob received remuneration above €2,500 (STATISTA (a), 2024).

A further study has demonstrated that the assumption that mini-jobs represent a brief period of employment for women is erroneous. The mean duration of women's employment in minijobs is 79 months. Furthermore, the duration of engagement in minijobs is even longer for married women and those with dependent family members residing in their household. The average duration of employment in minijobs for married women is 85 months, while for women with family members requiring care at home, it is 99 months (Duell & Vetter, 2020, p. 32).

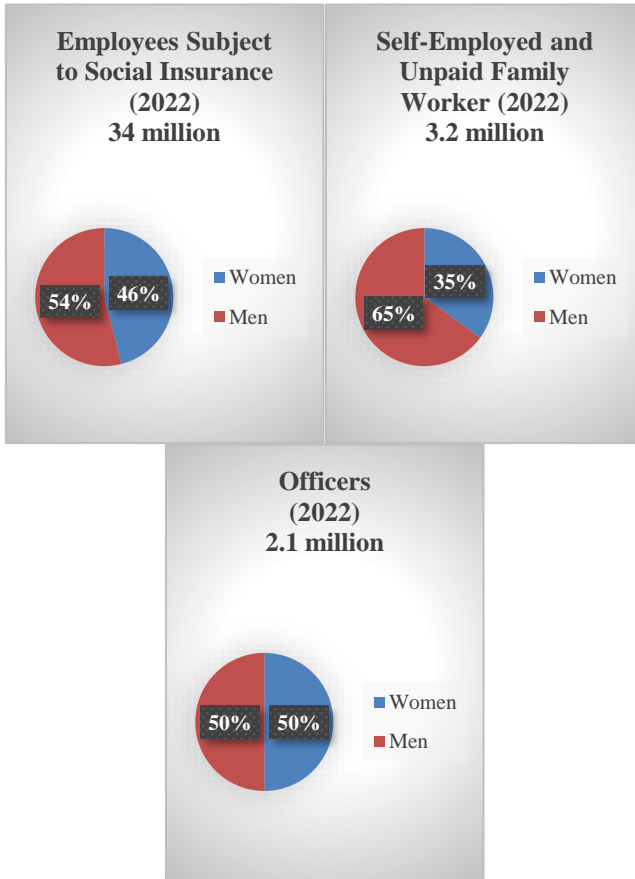
It is evident that minijobs do not serve as a mere "stepping stone" for women workers (Weinkopf, 2014, p. 192). Among women who have previously held a mini-job, only 14% are currently employed on a full-time basis, while 26% are engaged in an insured part-time position. Over 50% of individuals who previously held a minijob have since exited the labour market entirely (STATISTA, 2024). Mini-jobs constitute a significant obstacle to securing regular part-time or full-time employment. The exclusive pursuit of a mini-job is an effective means of perpetuating a state of economic dependency and powerlessness among women (Keller & Kahle, 2018, p. 56).

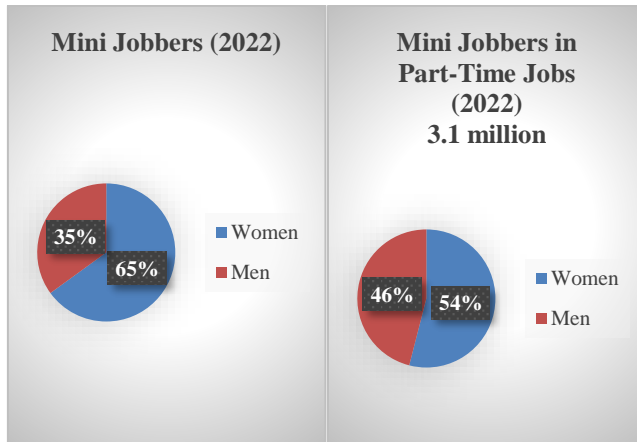
The dearth of childcare facilities represents a significant challenge to women's preference for minijobs. Nevertheless, the nationwide expansion of daycare facilities is estimated to necessitate an annual budget of €8.7 billion. The federal government has allocated a mere €2 billion for the years 2025 and 2026 (European Commission, 2024). Furthermore, the considerable discrepancies in childcare quality between eastern and western Germany must be addressed. This necessitates the implementation of consistent standards

throughout the country. This is the only means of ensuring equal living conditions and equitable educational opportunities (Weinkopf, 2014, p. 192). One of the most striking contrasts between the eastern and western regions of Germany is the availability of childcare facilities for children under the age of three. As indicated in the report published by the European Commission (2024), 3.7 million children are enrolled in daycare centres throughout Germany, with a total of 56,700 daycare centres currently in operation. In Germany, 33.6% of children under the age of three are enrolled in daycare centres. Of these facilities, 52.1% are located in eastern Germany and 30.3% in western Germany.

## 5. Sectoral Analysis of Part-Time Employment

The participation of women and men in employment subject to social security contributions varies according to the specific forms of employment in question (Samtleben et al., 2021, p. 783). A greater proportion of the self-employed and unpaid family workers are women than might be expected. Excluding those engaged in unpaid family work, the number of women in self-employment stands at 4.1 million. In 2022, women constituted 50% of the total number of civil servants, which exceeded two million. The following tables demonstrate that marginal employment, which is an atypical form of work, is predominantly occupied by women. It is evident that over half of marginal employees hold a second job, with over 50% of these employees being women (Figure 8).

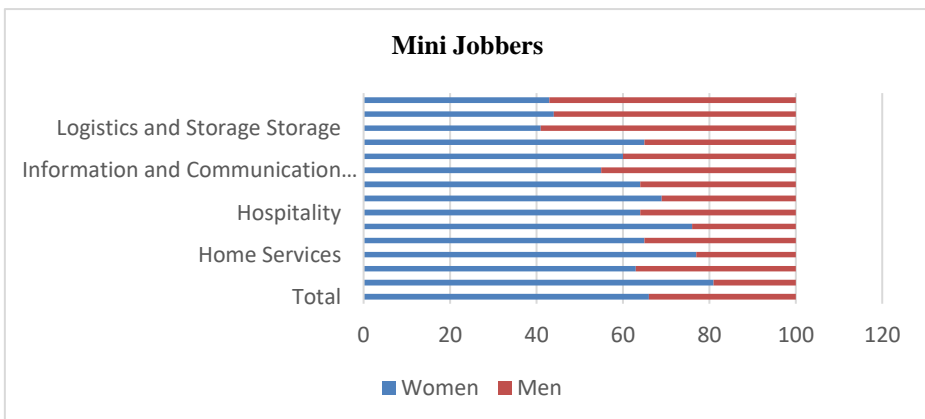




**Figure 8: Female and Male Employees in Germany by Different Employment Status (%) (2022)**

**Source:** (STATISTA, 2023, p.16).

The sectoral distribution of part-time employment in Germany exhibits a complex and nuanced picture, with notable discrepancies between sectors. As indicated by the Federal Statistical Office (STATISTA, 2023, p.16), sectors such as retail trade, health and education have witnessed the most substantial growth in part-time employment (Figure 9). These sectors, which have historically exhibited higher female employment rates, have been at the vanguard of the expansion of part-time employment opportunities. This phenomenon reflects broader trends towards service-oriented economic growth and the feminisation of certain occupations (Kalina & Weinkopf, 2013, p. 6). Eichhorst and Tobsch (2015, p. 82) posit that the prevalence of part-time work in these sectors is attributable to two factors: the flexible nature of service jobs, which often require variable working hours to meet consumer demand, and the growing need for work-life balance among the workforce, particularly among women.



**Figure 9: Rate of Mini Jobbers Subject to Social Security Contributions in Germany by Sector (%) (2022)**

**Source:** (STATISTA, 2023, p.9)



Nevertheless, the quality of part-time employment opportunities varies considerably across sectors, which in turn affects job security, benefits and working conditions. In the health and education sectors, for instance, part-time positions frequently entail relatively secure contracts and access to benefits that are analogous to those afforded to full-time employees. However, this stability is not a universal phenomenon across all sectors. In the retail and hospitality sectors, part-time employment is frequently associated with diminished job security, reduced benefits, and more erratic work schedules (Bächmann, 2022, p. 877). These discrepancies are not merely a reflection of sector-specific economic patterns and labour demand; they are also shaped by the legal frameworks that regulate employment in these sectors (Bosch & Lehndorff, 2001, p. 213). The number of male employees exhibits greater fluctuation than the number of female employees throughout the year, with a peak at the end of the summer and a low at the beginning of the year. Furthermore, this phenomenon should be contextualised within the broader framework of gender-specific occupational preferences. In occupations that do not entail seasonal work, the number of male employees exceeds that of female employees (Kalina & Weinkopf, 2013, p. 11).

The majority of those engaged in marginal employment are concentrated in the maintenance and repair of motor vehicles (688,000) and the tourism sector (547,000) (Figure 9). As is the case with part-time employment subject to social security contributions, the proportion of women in minor jobs is particularly high in the health and social work sectors, at 81%. Furthermore, the proportion of women in minor jobs is considerable in other services and in private households (77%). In the finance and insurance sector and in other services, approximately three-quarters of minijobbers are women (STATISTA, 2023, p. 12).

It is of paramount importance to gain insight into the distribution and nature of part-time employment across different sectors in order to effectively address the broader implications of this employment trend on the labour market. Although part-time work provides significant flexibility and opportunities for many employees, the inconsistency in job quality underscores the necessity for targeted policy interventions (Wrohlich & Zucco, 2017, p. 430). It is imperative that these interventions seek to guarantee that part-time work does not result in the formation of a two-tier labour market, wherein workers in specific sectors are unduly disadvantaged. The analysis of policy interventions and market adaptations to part-time work demonstrates the necessity for a nuanced approach that strikes a balance between the flexibility requirements of firms and the rights and protections of workers.

## 6. COVID-19 Pandemic and Women's Employment

The COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and the Russia-Ukraine war have exposed weaknesses in the German economy. As other countries, especially China, increasingly produce goods previously imported from Germany, and rising interest rates further hinder economic growth (Bellmann, Bellmann, & Hübler, 2023, p.6). Slowing global growth, declining industrial production, and consumers' struggles with rising inflation also negatively affected the German economy. In the first quarter of 2023, the economy contracted by 0.1%, and no growth was recorded in the second quarter. The unemployment rate stood at 5.4% in 2023 (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024).

However, the COVID-19 crisis did not significantly increase women's unemployment risk compared to men. According to Professor Panu Poutvaara (2021), although the unemployment rate rose slightly higher for women, more men lost their jobs, with 263,000 men dismissed compared to 229,000 women. This is attributed to women's greater ability to work remotely in Germany compared to other countries.

While women in Germany had more opportunities for remote work than men, those in the service sector, where the majority of women were employed before the pandemic, faced greater challenges in regaining pre-pandemic employment levels. In 2019, 85% of working women in Germany were employed in the service sector, and the sector's downturn during the crisis placed significant pressure on female employment (Bellmann, Bellmann, & Hübler, 2023, p.8).

The German government's short-time work program (Kurzarbeit) played a crucial role in preventing job losses during the COVID-19 crisis. This program allowed employers to reduce employees' work hours while paying 60% of their wages, and this amount could be increased for parents with childcare responsibilities (Profeta et al., 2021, p.26). However, programs like Kurzarbeit deepened gender inequalities due to the "she-cession" effect of the pandemic (Ara & Das, 2022, p.190). Women, who are more involved in childcare than men, benefited more from these programs, which in turn increased their lifelong poverty risk (Fuch-Schündeln et al., 2020, p.1650). Additionally, Kurzarbeit did not cover workers in low-paid and temporary "mini-jobs," in which approximately 28% of women in Germany were employed, leading to greater negative impacts on women during the pandemic (Cook & Grimshaw, 2020, p.220).

One of the most controversial measures during the pandemic was the prolonged closure of schools and childcare facilities. Although necessary to control the virus's spread, these measures negatively affected women's work conditions and career prospects (Hipp & Bünning, 2020, p.667). Since young children required more care from their mothers, women had to take on additional responsibilities at home. According to Kreyenfeld and Zinn (2021, p.120), during the first lockdown in Germany, while daycares and schools were closed, women spent 9.6 hours per day on household chores, compared to 5.3 hours for men. Before the pandemic, women spent 6.7 hours, and men 2.8 hours per day on housework. This shows that women sacrificed more than 8 hours a day for childcare, negatively affecting their productivity at work.

Single mothers, in particular, faced the greatest time demands and economic pressures during the pandemic. To alleviate the childcare responsibilities of single-parent households, the German government expanded the "Kinderkrankentage" (child sickness days) program, increasing the number of leave days from 10 to 20 during the pandemic and providing additional support (Profeta et al., 2021, p.28).

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, accelerating digitization processes in the German labor market and pushing traditional face-to-face work models in favor of home office and mobile work (Röttger & Weber, 2022). While Friedrich Merz, leader of Germany's main opposition party, claimed that many of the one million Ukrainians coming to Germany were "social tourists" seeking state benefits rather than refugees (Deutsche Bundesbank, 2024), the shortage of skilled labor had exceeded 630,000, becoming a barrier to economic growth (Bonin et al., 2021, p.20). Better utilizing the existing domestic labor force presents an opportunity to address the skilled labor

shortage. The government is called upon to create better framework conditions for full-time jobs, as many part-time workers, including many women and mothers, express a desire for full-time work. Achieving this goal requires changes to various regulations, including the tax system, childcare centers, and mini-jobs. There is still a need for policies that address the specific challenges women face in the labor market, including support for caregiving responsibilities and access to stable, well-paying jobs in growing sectors (Bellmann, Bellmann, & Hübler, 2023, p.12).

## 7. Temporary Part-Time Legislation and Its Effects

The German legislation pertaining to part-time work, introduced in 2001 and subsequently reinforced in 2019 through the introduction of the 'bridging part-time' regulation, is designed to facilitate a healthier work-life balance by enabling employees to transition between part-time and full-time roles (Plum, 2019, p.130). This legislation is particularly pertinent to larger organisations with a workforce exceeding 45 employees, with the objective of fostering greater flexibility within the labour market. The new regulation reinforces the entitlement of employees to resume their previous full-time working hours after a designated period (typically 1-5 years) of part-time work (BMAS, 2024). The legislation is designed to assist employees who wish to reconcile personal commitments, such as childcare or caring for a relative, with their professional responsibilities (IAW, 2023).

Despite the advantages of the legislation, its implementation in smaller companies presents certain difficulties. Furthermore, the fact that it is predominantly used by women has given rise to debates about gender equality and career progression (Ilieva & Wrohlich, 2022, p.18). Those with a critical perspective argue that while the legislation provides a framework for flexible working arrangements, it may not be sufficient to address the wider issue of the 'part-time trap' that many women face, particularly in smaller firms where the reach of the legislation is limited. Furthermore, existing part-time workers, particularly mothers, frequently encounter disadvantages, underscoring the necessity for more comprehensive policies to guarantee equal access to flexible working opportunities and to address underlying structural barriers in the labour market (Auth & Peukert, 2021, p. 179).

The difficulties encountered in the implementation of the law on temporary part-time work demonstrate that, despite representing a significant stride towards gender equality in the labour market, it does not fully address the gender norms and structural barriers inherent in the existing system (Plum, 2019, p. 130). Legislation should aim to improve the position of women in the labour market, while taking into account the impact of the current part-time work model on women.

## Conclusion

The future of the labor market and gender equality in Germany remains uncertain, particularly when considering the long-term effects of COVID-19 (Hermann & Kunze, 2024, p. 6). Despite Merkel being one of the most powerful women in the world and the presence of strong female leaders in Germany, women's roles in the corporate world are limited (Mushaben, 2022, p. 28). In German culture, the term "Frauenberufe" (women's jobs) refers to low-paid careers such as social services, nursing, and hairdressing (IWD, 2021). This reflects the persistence of traditional gender roles and economic inequalities.

According to Eurostat data, in 2023, 3.96 million people were employed in science and engineering in Germany, of which 1.36 million were women. This means that women accounted for 21.2% of the workforce in these fields. However, despite this significant number, the proportion of women in science and engineering has increased slowly, with only a one percentage point increase across Europe in the last decade (Eurostat, 2023). Similarly, the representation of women in top management positions in Germany has increased in recent years but remains below the desired level. According to research by the Allbright Foundation, as of March 2024, the proportion of female executives in Germany's 100 highest-turnover family companies was 12.6%, compared to 19% in DAX-listed companies (Allbright Stiftung, 2024, p. 8). Meanwhile, the proportion of women on the supervisory boards of the 40 largest companies in Germany's DAX index reached a historic high of 40.3% in 2024, surpassing the 40% threshold for the first time (Russell Reynolds Associates, 2024). Internationally, Germany ranks seventh, behind countries like France, Norway, and Italy.

Part-time work is particularly common among women in Germany. In 2023, while 31% of employees worked part-time, 50% of women and only 13% of men were employed in this way. Having children leads to a reduction in working hours, particularly for women. In 2023, 67% of mothers with children under 18 worked part-time, compared to only 9% of fathers. The reasons for part-time work also differ by gender. Women often work part-time due to childcare, while men are more likely to do so for educational purposes (STATISTA, 2024(g)). It is easy to understand how the time spent on care work or paid work affects the time available for the other. For example, if a woman in a partnership does significant unpaid care work in the household, she has little time left for paid work. Conversely, a full-time working father has less time for care work. Thus, reducing the burden of reproductive work is a key leverage point for developing and realizing women's employment potential.

It is also crucial for women to maintain their connection to the labor market to preserve their human capital. Women are often overqualified for the activities they perform, so improved time sovereignty can help them best utilize, maintain, and even expand their human capital in the labor market. Therefore, women need time to engage in paid work. Flexible part-time models that consider different preferences and reasons for part-time work are necessary, and this is possible even while offering good jobs with appropriate working hours. In addition to part-time options close to full-time status—such as a 30-hour week (Lott & Zucco, 2021, p.7)—recent discussions have focused on job-sharing programs and working hours models based on life stages.

The Brückenteilzeit regulation, which came into effect on January 1, 2019, allows employees to reduce their working hours for a certain period and then return to their previous working hours. However, since 94% of companies in Germany have fewer than 45 employees, the regulation's impact on promoting part-time work has been limited to a rate of 0.5% (Gürtzgen, 2024, p.18).

Another specific challenge is the division of labor within the household, which is often shaped by cultural values and tends to disadvantage women. For instance, when external care for a sick child is not available, which task takes priority? Since the introduction of parental allowance in 2007, the percentage of mothers opting to receive benefits for more than 10 months has exceeded 98%. Although the proportion of fathers taking parental

leave has more than doubled from 21.2% in 2008 to 43.7%, the average duration of benefit receipt for fathers is only 3.6 months (Hermann & Kunze, 2024, p.10). This indicates that most women continue to take advantage of parental allowance months, dedicate more time to care work, and allocate less time to paid work. Research shows that early involvement of men in childcare has a positive impact on their long-term commitment to the family (Samtleben et al., 2021, p.800). Redistributing care work could alleviate pressures in the labor market and organize work and task distribution based on individuals' actual skills and preferences, rather than gender, making both types of work more satisfying.

Women's disadvantaged position in the labor market and their risk of poverty stem from various factors, including their tendency to work in lower-paid jobs, frequently working part-time due to taking on a significant portion of care responsibilities, and having their career development hindered (Consiglio & Göbler 2021, p.4). Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach. Steps should be taken to ensure equal pay and promotion opportunities in the workplace, provide quality and accessible childcare services, improve parental leave regulations, and challenge gender role stereotypes. In particular, reforms in joint income taxation for married couples could enhance gender equality in the labor market. Moreover, abolishing tax and social security exemptions for marginal employment and increasing the partner quota within the parental leave scheme could further promote gender equality (Hermann & Kunze, 2024, p.9).

Although this study provides a comprehensive analysis by combining quantitative data with qualitative insights to offer a holistic view of the part-time employment landscape in Germany, one limitation is the lack of recent in-depth interviews and case studies. Nonetheless, based on the available data, achieving gender equality will require joint action by the government, businesses, trade unions, and civil society organizations. Effective economic and equality policies must recognize financial, time, and cultural factors as real challenges and address them in a targeted manner.

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