



PART-TIME WORK AND THE WORKERS' AGE AND SEX

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Abstract

The goal of the paper is to present spatial diversity in the use of flexible forms of employment with special emphasis on part-time work among women and men aged 50+ in the European Union. Demographic changes, including the ageing of the EU population, show the necessity of rationally utilizing available labour resources. Because the level of occupational activity is declining with age, while the share of people aged 50+ in the population is growing, the possibility of doing part-time work that allows reconciliation between occupational life and non-occupational life seems important. This form of employment can also constitute an important transitional stage between occupational activity and retirement. The analyses presented in the paper are based on data from Eurostat and include the years between 2003 and 2017. The conducted studies show significant differences in the utilization of part-time work in EU countries especially when age and gender are taken into consideration.

PRACA W NIEPEŁNYM WYMIARZE GODZIN A WIEK I PŁEĆ PRACOWNIKÓW

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Słowa kluczowe: praca w niepełnym wymiarze godzin, starsi pracownicy, Unia Europejska, zatrudnienie.

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie przestrzennego zróżnicowania stosowania elastycznych form zatrudnienia w Unii Europejskiej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem pracy w niepełnym wymiarze godzin wśród kobiet i mężczyzn w wieku 50+. Zmiany demograficzne, w tym starzenie się społeczeństwa w UE, wskazują na konieczność racjonalnego wykorzystywania dostępnych zasobów pracy. Biorąc pod uwagę, że wraz z wiekiem poziom aktywności zawodowej maleje, podczas gdy udział osób w wieku 50+ w populacji wzrasta, istotna wydaje się możliwość, jaką daje praca w niepełnym wymiarze godzin, co pozwala na łączenie życia zawodowego z pozazawodowym. Taka forma zatrudnienia może również stanowić ważny etap przejściowy między aktywnością zawodową oraz emeryturą. Analizy przedstawione w artykule opierają się na danych pochodzących z Eurostatu i obejmują lata 2003-2017. Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań wykazały znaczne zróżnicowanie wykorzystania pracy w niepełnym wymiarze godzin w krajach UE, szczególnie z uwzględnieniem wieku i płci.

Introduction

Labour is characterised by complexity, multidimensionality and specificity that result, among others, from the conditions it is determined by. Its heterogeneous nature is prejudged by the socio-demographic characteristics of workers, including their age, gender, education, skills or health condition (Skórska *et al.*, 2018, p. 120). Age is one of the key factors affecting the way in which individuals and their potential are perceived in the labour market. Consequently, it can influence an increase or decrease of employment chances, an improvement of qualifications or a promotion.

Considering the progressing process of population ageing and lifespan extension due to the simultaneous improvement of the health condition of the older generation, an increasingly greater emphasis has been put on the issues of increasing and expanding the period of professional activity, including the period of employment. The determination of the limit of workers' "mature" or "older" age remains a disputable issue.

On the basis of a literature review (*Employment in Europe...*, 2007, p. 1, Stypińska, 2015, p. 143-165, Urbaniak, 2011), analyses of the results of conducted research, and taking into consideration the comparative character of analyses, the paper adopts the age limit of older people in the labour market to be 50-64. However, the adopted age limit has a conventional nature because the old age limit was determined not only by belonging to a specific age group. Being over 50 does not automatically affect the change in the attitude towards the performance of work; however, older people are often discriminated against in the labour market.

Considering the above reasons, it seems important to present the changes occurring in the sphere of employment of the population aged 50+ while using flexible employment forms. Part-time work can become a transition stage between full-time employment and retirement. It allows the avoidance

of early deactivation that brings a lot of negative socio-economic results both in the individual dimension and for the entire society. Low pension benefits make work an important, often necessary supplement of income for older people. Furthermore, for many older people it constitutes one of the few opportunities for the establishment of relationships with other people while motivating them to care about health as well as physical and psychological well-being, while giving meaning to their life (Skórska, 2018, p. 302, 303).

Considering this, the issue of employment, including the growth of participation of older people in the labour market, has been taken into consideration in many strategic documents both on the national and international level (*Europa 2020...*, 2010, p. 5, *Program Solidarność pokoleń...*, 2014, *Rządowy program...*, 2014). They focus on the issues of equality of all people before the law and the need for protection against discrimination on any grounds, including age (Council Directive 2000/78/EC...). Despite many actions implemented in this sphere, many problems remain unsolved both on the employers' and co-workers' side (stereotypes, ageism), as well as in the view of the older people themselves (outdated qualifications, unwillingness to change profession).

Materials and research methods

The goal of the paper is to present the diversity of part-time employment of people aged 50-64 in the European Union states, considering their gender. The following research questions have been formulated in the paper:

– is part-time work an alternative for full-time work for workers aged 50+?
Or is it a stage of transition to retirement?

– how much does gender diversify the share of workers employed part-time among the people aged 50+?

– what is the trend and dynamics of changes in this sphere in the European Union member states?

– what are the main reasons for taking part-time work?

Analyses of the literature and comparative methods were used in the conducted research. Empirical analysis was based on data from Eurostat including the years 2003–2017. The analysis comprises all 28 countries of the European Union (United Kingdom included).

Analysis and interpretation of results

For the labour market, demographic changes occurring in the European Union states represent firstly the decline in the working-age population, and secondly, the growth of the population of the so-called immobile age within this group. The level of occupational activity is decreasing with age and consequently,

the employment rate in this age group is considerably below the mean value for the population. Furthermore, activity and employment rates achieved in Poland are lower than the average rates for the European Union member states. This means that intensification of the problems related to occupational activity of the immobile age population constitutes a vital challenge to Poland.

Part-time work is one of the methods of occupational activation and maintenance of employment of older people who cannot or do not want to work full time due to several reasons. The basic regulations in this sphere are specified in the directive on part-time work (Directive 1997/81/EC...), whereas in Poland the issues related to this type of employment form are regulated by the Labour Code.

Considering the workers' age, it must be noted that part-time employment is more popular among older people (aged 50-64, especially people aged over 65) than among middle-aged people (between 25-49). This phenomenon is observed in the majority of analysed countries, but not in all of them. In Poland, the rate of people aged 65, working part-time, is over eight times higher than the middle-aged population. This is reflected in the data presented in Figure 1. However, it must be noted that the share of people aged 25-49 in the population of part-time workers in 2017 was not higher than 5%, whereas in the EU-28 it was higher by over 12 percentage points.

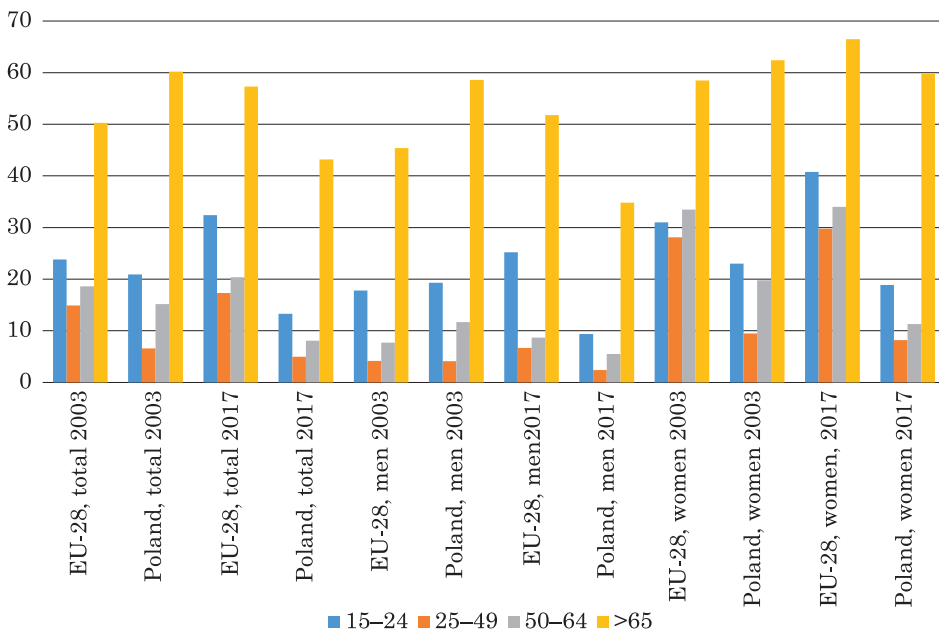


Fig. 1. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment, by gender and age [%] in 2003 and 2017

Source: own case study on the basis of data from Eurostat (2018).

Analysis of data taking gender as well as age into consideration shows that women aged over 65 constitute the highest rate of people employed part time in the total working population (almost 60%). This is mainly the consequence of the retirement age limit for women, however, their share observed in the 25-49 age group is the lowest (8.2%) which is shown in Figure 1. Within the working male population aged 50-64, the share of men employed part-time in the EU-28 in 2017 did not exceed 9% and it was higher in comparison with 2003 by only 1.2 percentage points. On the other hand, in the case of women, it was almost nine times higher, even though the dynamics of changes remained equally small.

Perceiving women's and men's roles in social and professional life in a traditional way, as well as prevailing stereotypes often cause approaching women as workers of "poorer" quality. Qualities attributed to them, including excessive emotionality, indecision or little availability contribute to their worse position in labour market in comparison with men. Furthermore, the barriers in the access to institutional childcare and the lack of a division of family responsibilities make women who try to reconcile professional and family duties, take advantage of part-time work more often than their partners. In 2017, in the entire EU, nearly 32% of women, in comparison to only 9% of men worked part-time. In Poland this difference is much smaller, as the rate of women working part-time reached 9.7% when compared to 3.7% of men, which on the one hand can be a result of a relatively inflexible labour market and on the other hand, the economic situation of many families who cannot afford to abandon full-time work or reconcile it with better childcare or care for other dependents.

Taking the age criterion into consideration in the conducted analyses confirms great diversity in the utilisation of flexible employment options observed in the EU states. In 2017, the difference in the case of women reached 76.5 percentage point, whereas in the case of men 19.5 percentage points. The smallest values persisting in the entire research period both with respect to men and women were reported in Bulgaria (2.3% and 2.8% respectively in 2017) which can prove a lack of knowledge about flexible forms of employment or a lack of relevant regulation in this sphere. In Germany, the rate of women working part-time in 2017 was higher than 51% while the dynamics of change were negligible. The Netherlands is a country with the highest level of utilization of this form of employment among women – in 2017 it was close to 80% whereas in the analysed period, a small decline of this value occurred as presented in Table 1. Portugal and Croatia belong to the countries that reported the greatest decline in the share of women aged 50-64 working part-time (by over 10 percentage points), whereas the largest growth was observed in Italy (12.7 percentage points) and in Austria (11.4 percentage points). In the case of men, the changes were considerably smaller; the largest decline was reported in Poland (6.4 percentage points), whereas the greatest growth was in Luxembourg (5.5 percentage points) and in Austria (4.4 percentage points). It is presented in Table 1.

Part-time workers aged 50-64 as percentage

Country	2003		2005		2007		2009	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
EU-28	7.5	33.1	7.8	33.3	8.0	33.8	8.3	33.7
Belgium	10.1	45.7	11.7	45.0	11.6	48.7	13.4	51.4
Bulgaria	2.3	3.7	2.2	3.6	1.4	3.3	2.4	3.6
Czech Republic	3.8	10.8	3.2	9.6	3.2	10.1	3.3	9.8
Denmark	6.5	28.9	7.4	30.4	8.9	34.1	9.9	36.6
Germany	6.3	46.6	7.1	48.3	8.6	50.0	8.6	49.4
Estonia	:	13.9	4.6	9.7	5.5	10.4	7.7	12.2
Ireland	6.6	44.7	:	:	8.1	42.0	10.8	43.5
Greece	1.7	8.0	1.6	9.9	2.2	10.8	2.3	10.1
Spain	1.5	17.5	2.9	24.0	2.9	22.4	3.2	21.2
France	7.4	32.4	6.6	31.0	6.4	31.4	7.0	31.3
Croatia	7.1	18.9	8.1	19.3	7.0	14.9	7.7	15.6
Italy	3.1	14.3	4.6	18.5	4.5	19.7	4.3	20.9
Cyprus	6.6	19.0	5.5	20.1	4.6	14.7	3.2	14.6
Latvia	:	19.4	7.6	10.9	5.5	8.5	7.8	9.4
Lithuania	7.5	13.2	8.0	11.1	10.2	13.1	8.3	11.3
Luxembourg	:	35.9	3.2	47.0	3.1	46.8	6.1	38.4
Hungary	4.3	8.8	4.7	7.7	4.7	8.2	5.8	10.0
Malta	:	27.6	4.9	23.1	3.7	29.7	5.8	33.4
Netherlands	21.2	80.4	21.6	81.5	22.5	80.1	22.4	80.8
Austria	5.2	35.9	7.2	41.2	7.6	41.7	8.3	44.5
Poland	11.7	18.1	10.4	18.9	9.1	17.7	8.5	16.8
Portugal	8.2	26.1	7.3	23.4	8.6	24.0	7.6	21.9
Romania	13.8	19.4	11.1	14.4	9.9	14.0	9.8	14.4
Slovenia	5.7	11.5	7.3	12.7	9.0	15.5	8.7	14.0
Slovakia	2.4	7.1	2.3	7.3	1.7	7.1	3.4	6.8
Finland	10.4	17.6	11.1	16.7	10.5	16.7	9.4	17.1
Sweden	10.4	33.9	12.3	37.6	12.5	39.7	12.7	39.2
United Kingdom	11.6	49.9	11.5	47.4	11.6	47.2	12.2	46.6

M – men, W – women.

Source: own case study on the basis of data from Eurostat (2018).

Table 1

of the total employment, by sex in 2003-2017 [%]

2011		2013		2015		2017		Changes [p.p.]	
M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
8.8	33.9	9.0	34.3	8.8	34.1	8.7	33.9	1.2	0.8
14.8	53.1	13.7	51.6	14.2	50.4	14.2	49.8	4.1	4.1
2.3	2.9	2.0	3.7	2.2	2.9	2.3	2.8	0.0	-0.9
3.1	8.8	3.7	10.3	3.3	9.2	3.3	11.0	-0.5	0.2
8.9	33.1	7.9	29.5	8.9	28.1	9.2	29.8	2.7	0.9
8.8	50.1	9.1	51.6	9.1	51.3	9.0	51.3	2.7	4.7
6.1	15.3	6.3	13.9	7.5	10.4	8.1	12.3	3.5	-1.6
12.5	44.0	14.1	43.7	11.8	41.5	10.9	37.2	4.3	-7.5
3.5	10.3	4.4	11.1	4.7	11.7	4.4	11.8	2.7	3.8
3.6	20.5	4.5	21.1	4.6	21.6	4.4	20.8	2.9	3.3
8.3	31.9	7.9	32.7	8.6	32.5	8.9	32.4	1.5	0.0
8.9	13.5	7.6	11.3	6.1	8.4	5.0	7.3	-2.1	-11.6
5.0	22.5	6.6	24.4	6.4	26.4	6.3	27.0	3.2	12.7
5.8	14.9	9.6	17.8	11.5	18.4	8.9	17.1	2.3	-1.9
7.9	11.4	6.9	11.6	5.5	10.9	6.5	11.9	-1.1	-7.5
8.0	11.7	7.7	12.1	7.2	12.0	5.7	11.0	-1.8	-2.2
6.1	44.0	7.7	46.4	6.1	47.3	8.2	44.8	5.0	8.9
6.5	10.2	7.0	10.6	5.7	10.8	3.7	8.3	-0.6	-0.5
6.2	36.3	7.3	33.9	7.1	31.2	5.6	33.6	0.7	6.0
22.9	79.9	23.0	80.3	21.9	80.2	21.8	79.3	0.6	-1.1
8.5	44.6	9.2	47.1	9.1	47.0	9.7	47.2	4.5	11.3
7.1	14.9	6.5	13.3	6.0	11.6	5.3	11.4	-6.4	-6.7
11.4	22.2	12.1	19.2	9.7	16.4	7.5	15.6	-0.7	-10.5
11.4	15.5	10.3	15.1	10.6	14.4	8.3	10.3	-5.5	-9.1
7.8	14.4	7.4	13.5	7.6	12.5	7.9	13.2	2.2	1.7
3.4	7.1	3.8	7.5	5.0	8.2	5.3	8.4	2.9	1.3
10.9	17.4	10.5	16.8	9.5	14.3	9.3	15.0	-1.1	-2.6
12.1	38.2	11.4	34.5	11.3	33.8	10.5	31.8	0.1	-2.1
12.6	46.2	12.7	44.3	12.2	43.9	13.0	43.5	1.4	-6.4

Such significant diversity in the use of part-time work among people aged 50-64, especially women, results from the overlap of many factors that support remaining active in the labour market or early deactivation of this social group. Apart from determinants occurring in the broadly perceived material, infra-structural, social, legal and institutional environment; individual determinants, including personality features, having children, education level, qualifications, experience, attitudes towards work or non-wage sources of income perform a vital role.

Depending on the share of women in the population of part-time workers aged over 50, the EU can be divided into 4 groups:

- countries of the lowest share of women employed part-time in 2017 (less than 10%) – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia;
- countries with a mid-low level of employment (11-25%) – Estonia, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland;
- countries with a medium level of employment (26-45%) – Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy, Malta, Great Britain, Sweden;
- countries with a high rate of employment (over 45%) – the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Germany.

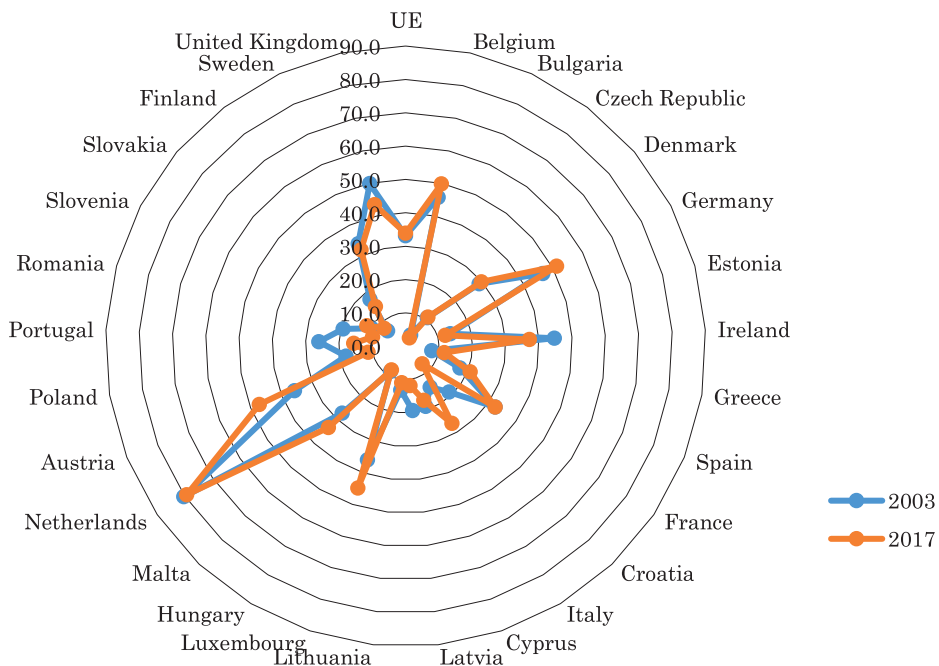


Fig. 2. Part-time employment of women aged 50-64 as a percentage of the total employment in 2003 and 2017 [%]

Source: own case study on the basis of data from Eurostat (2018).

However, it must be stated that the Netherlands is an exception, because the share of women employed as part-time workers exceed 79-80%, while in other countries from the last group it is about 50%. It is presented in Figure 2.

It can be assumed that allowing older people to work part-time will more and more affect the growth of employment in this age group. However, the reasons for taking part-time work are important. This is because part-time employment can be caused by economic and social determinants. The first can comprise the reasons observed in the demand side of the labour market. The lack of demand for full-time work can result from economic, technological, organisational and structural determinants. For the workers, this represents the inability to get full-time work even though they want and look for such employment. This forced part-time work can be interpreted as a form of *underemployment*. According to ILO, it concerns people who work part-time, but want and can work longer (*Resolution...*, 1998, p. 2). The situation is different in the case of social factors determining part-time work that result from labour preferences. People are interested in taking part-time work and they look for such employment in various periods of life. In the case of older workers, it can prove to be an interesting transition stage between full-time occupational activity and retirement.

Analysis of the available data shows a worrying growth of taking part-time work due to economic reasons which in practice means the lack of possibility to get employment with more satisfying conditions, see Figure 3. "Forced" part-

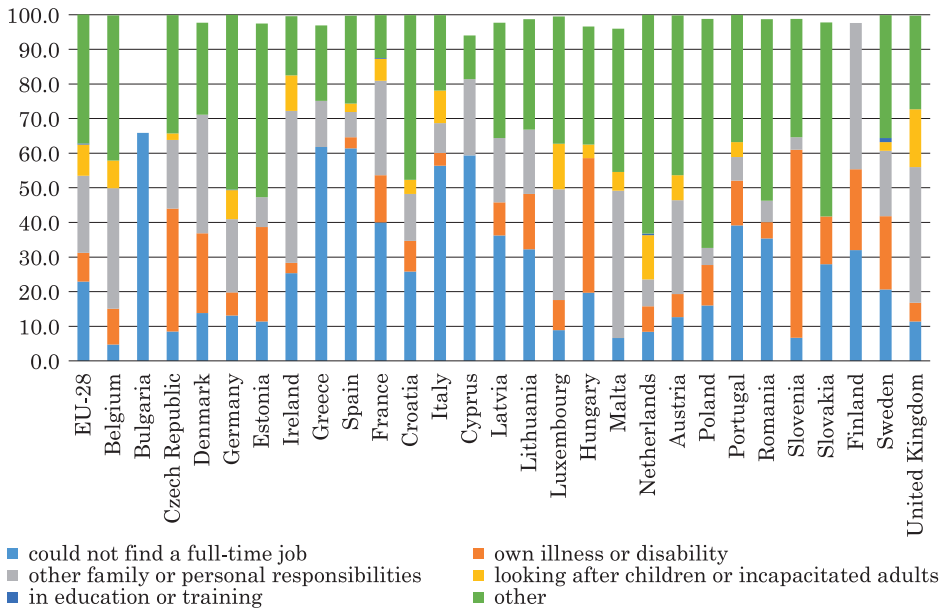


Fig. 3. Main reason for part-time employment among workers aged 50-64 in 2017 [%]
Source: own case study on the basis of data from Eurostat (2018).

-time work in 2003 concerned over 18% of the EU-28 population aged 15-64 and in 2017 almost 27%. The most difficult situation was observed in Greece (70%), Cyprus (67.7%) and in Italy (62.5%). The smallest rate (less than 8%) was reported in 2017 in Estonia, Belgium and Holland, regardless of the age group. In Poland this issue concerns slightly more than 28% and in comparison with 2003 a decline by 12.6 percentage points was observed.

In the case of the population aged 50-64, the rate of people taking part-time work due to economic reasons in all countries was lower, while in Poland there was a growth from 13.5% in 2003 to 16% in 2017. It reached its smallest value in 2008, a little over 10%, which should be associated with a good economic situation. However, in successive years it grew almost twice under the influence of the economic crisis. Gender was not a determinant that could significantly diversify this situation. The largest growth of the rate of people who could not find full-time employment was reported in 2017 in Greece and Spain, where this rate exceeded 60%. It is still associated with an unfavourable economic situation in these states, and consequently with the situation in the labour market. The reverse situation occurred in Lithuania and Latvia where a decline in the rate of people taking part-time work because of economic reasons was observed, while their share remained at a relatively high level (over 30%). This reason for taking part-time work was least frequently indicated in 2017 in Belgium, Slovenia and Malta. In Poland this rate was 16%; whereas in 2003 it was 2.5 percentage points lower.

Other equally often indicated reasons for taking part-time work by people aged 50-64 include family or private responsibilities. This group mainly comprises women whose possibilities of continuation of occupational activity are limited by family responsibilities, especially the need to care for dependent family members. This resulted in the fact that they are often called the “sandwich generation”, i.e. the generation that cares about grandchildren on the one hand, and their parents on the other hand (Pierret, 2006, p. 3-9; Wassel & Cutle, 2016, p. 63-70; Wiemers & Bianchi, 2015, p. 127-176).

It must be noted that there was a large proportion of people who indicated “others” as the reason for taking part-time work in all EU states – see Figure 3. Maybe in this group there are people who approach part-time work as a transition stage towards retirement. However, there are no clear grounds for such a conclusion. Illness or disability did not constitute an important reason to take part-time work in the majority of EU countries. For example, in 2017 it represented only 3% of the inhabitants in Spain and Ireland aged 50-64. Slovenia and Hungary were the exceptions here (54% and 39% respectively).

Summing up, it must be stated that part-time work is more often undertaken for economic reasons than as a form of transition between full professional activity and retirement. However, it should be unsettling that education and training is the least-indicated reason for taking part-time work.

Conclusions

Demographic changes observed in all European Union member states affect many areas of social and economic life, including the labour market. The analysis of available data allowed the identification of key challenges facing national labour markets on the one hand, and on the other, the problems encountered by older people in those labour markets. They include, among others:

- a decline in the level of occupational activity with age (especially after being 65) and its significant diversification depending on gender in specific EU states;
- little interest and utilization of flexible forms of employment in many EU countries, for example part-time work;
- many examples of the underemployment phenomenon among workers aged 50-64;
- not approaching part-time work as a transition stage between full-time activity and retirement.

The change in the way mature workers are perceived, the growth of their economic activity and the utilization of flexible forms of employment can bring benefits both from the macro-economic and social perspective. This is because professional deactivation that is too early leads to material, health-related and psychological negative consequences. Part-time work can and should be approached as a transition stage between full-time employment and retirement. Unfortunately, in many countries it is more often taken due to economic reasons while leading to the growth of the underemployment phenomenon.

Due to the specific character of national labour markets, it is difficult to identify specific solutions that would lead to a situation in which non-typical forms of employment would affect an increase in the occupational activity of people aged over 50. However, it is important that functioning solutions and those that will be implemented in the future should not lead to a situation in which non-typical work options are or will be perceived as the employment of last chance for people of immobile working age while leading at the same time to labour market segmentation and its dual division into primary and secondary segments.

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