

Social norms and preferences for part-time employment in Europe

Household decisions regarding working hours have significant implications for economic growth, fertility, and overall social welfare. Standard economic models assume that these decisions are based on household preferences—specifically, how much money they want to spend on consumption and how much leisure time they desire. However, both theoretical and empirical research suggests that social norms can also significantly influence household decisions. This may be because people care about their social status, or how they are perceived by others. Behaviors that deviate from established norms in a given society can lead to a loss of reputation.

In this project, we will examine the impact of social norms on preferences for part-time work, considering both the demand and supply sides of the labor market. The project will consist of three empirical studies, all conducted on a large sample of European countries. Each study will consider the gender dimension, as social norms regarding working hours often differ by gender.

In the first study, we will analyze the determinants of wage penalties associated with part-time work. Part-time employees often receive lower hourly wages than full-time workers. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is the stigmatization of part-time workers, who may be perceived as less committed to their jobs. To examine the significance of this effect, we will analyze whether part-time wage penalties within specific occupational groups are higher in countries where part-time work is less popular.

In the second study, we will assess the importance of prevailing employment patterns for preferences for part-time work. Information on preferences will be drawn from survey data, where employees declare their preferred number of working hours, regardless of their actual working hours. We will investigate how changes in involuntary part-time employment (e.g., caused by economic crises) affect preferences for part-time work among other individuals in the same socio-demographic group.

In the third study, we will examine whether preferences for part-time work in Central and Eastern European countries resemble the patterns observed in Western European countries when they were at a similar level of economic development. We will identify differences in working time preferences between post-communist countries and Western European countries for various demographic groups. The interpretation of these differences will take into account the knowledge of work norms during the centrally planned economy period, which may also have long-term effects.