

Does regulation work for the *have-nots* in a flexible society? A Multilevel Analysis of the Poverty Risk associated with Temporary Work for Low Skilled Women in the European Union

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Abstract

In recent years, European labour markets have witnessed a proliferation of temporary employment. Temporary contracts are seen as a way to increase labour market flexibility and allow employers to circumvent the often strict hiring and firing regulations. However, temporary contracts are also associated with low wages and little security and often seen as ‘dead ends’ for employees. As to date, very little attention has been devoted to the impact of working with temporary contracts on income protection for different vulnerable groups in the labour market and on the role of regulation in this respect. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is twofold. First, we analyze the poverty risk associated with temporary work in the ‘flexible labour markets’ of European Union’s member states, for men and women with different educational levels. Second, we assess the role of different national labour regulations in reducing the poverty risk for these social groups. Using recent survey data (EU-SILC 2008), we apply a multilevel model to compare the ‘risk position’ of low skilled women *vis-à-vis* their higher skilled counterparts and evenly skilled men. It is hypothesized that the low skilled will be overrepresented in flexible working arrangements, that such arrangements will lead to a higher poverty risk and that especially low skilled *women* will be worse off than low skilled men thus pointing to a gendered dimension of non-standard work. Next to this, we expect to find differences between countries, irrespective of the different composition of the workforce or individual or household characteristics. As a consequence, we aim to identify good practices, i.e. countries where low skilled female *tempworkers* are sufficiently protected against poverty, and to identify the role of labour regulations in those countries: we expect countries with comprehensive regulations to perform better than those lacking such regulatory schemes. Finally, we shift our attention to the influential role of the European Union. Our findings are expected to shed new light on the combination of gender and risk in flexible labour markets and to initiate further research into the ‘how and why’ of cross-country differences.