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CHANGING TIMES

Working time in Ireland 1983-2000

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Introduction

Time counts. For many people, Ireland's economic boom means working longer hours under greater pressure than ever before. Affluence apparently makes us count time as well as money. And industrial relations disputes increasingly involve questions of working time: bus drivers and train drivers, for example, have based their recent claims on the argument that they can only get a decent wage by working unacceptably long hours.

But are we really all working longer hours? And what is a 'normal' working week? To answer questions such as these, the Employment Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin is participating in a European wide study by the Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions on *Employment Options for the Future*. The study researches how long people work - and more importantly, how long would *like* to work, both now and in the future.

The first ERC contribution to the study was a report on working time and public policy in Ireland.¹ Part of that report used data from the CSO's Labour Force Survey and the new National Quarterly Household Survey to examine trends in working time in Ireland over the last 15 years. This report for **Labour Market Observatory** presents our findings.

We all work longer now?

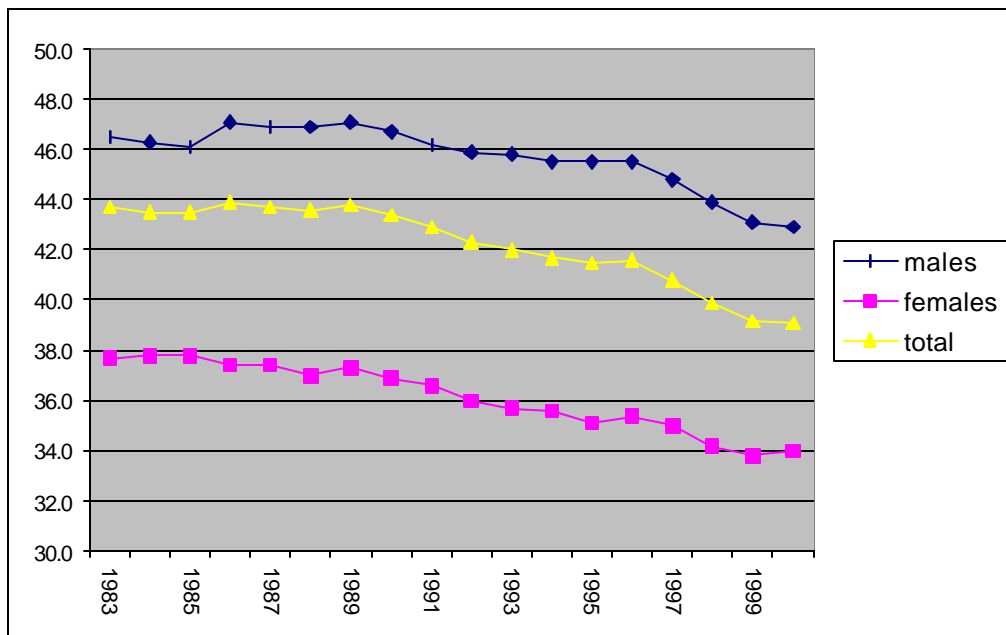
There are two mutually contradictory 'common-sense' views on working time. One is that there is a long-term and almost inevitable trend towards **shorter** working hours. From this optimistic perspective, shorter working hours, like a rising standard of living or technological advance, are integral to 'progress' and as such built into Western societies (if not to the whole world). By contrast, pessimistic views focus on more recent phenomena, especially on what appears to be lengthening working hours in the USA (Schor, 1991). Indeed, Hochschild has argued that the very success of 'empowerment' in the workplace has now many Americans prefer their workplace to their homes, where activities are routinised and if possible even out-sourced (Hochschild, 1997).

Average working time is falling

Taken overall, the Irish evidence supports the optimistic perspective. As Chart 1 shows, average weekly working time has fallen noticeably since 1983 (the first year for which there is data on working time). In less than 20 years, average weekly working hours have fallen from about 44 hours to about 38 hours.

¹ The full report will be available shortly from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Shankill, Co. Dublin. <http://www.eurofound.ie>

Chart 1 Average working hours 1983-2000



Source: 1983-1997, Labour Force Survey using 'Principal Economic Status'; 1998 onwards, National Quarterly Household Survey using PES definition.

These long-term trends are partly caused by structural changes in employment. Thus the number of farmers has declined, and farmers usually report far longer working hours than any other occupation (average 62.9 hours in 1983 and 59.5 in 1997). For men the continuing exodus from full-time work in agriculture is one of the main reasons for the fall in average working hours.

Chart 1 also shows that working time has fallen for both women and men in the period. Indeed, for both sexes the fall has been particularly fast in the late 1990s as the Irish economy achieved full employment. This is surprising, because one might expect that the results would be different for women and men. It could be expected that **men's** hours would fall because of successful wage bargaining, but that women's would increase as they gained access to more 'normal' men's jobs with longer hours.

The shorter full-time working week

One cause of this change has been that many people in full-time jobs now have shorter working weeks than 20 years ago. Table 1 brings out this change by focusing only on those working regular hours in full-time employment (defined as 30 or more hours per week). Between 1983 and 2000 the number of men in this 'full-time' employment rose from 692,800 to 749,700. Within this group there has been a clear shift towards a shorter working week. In 1983 over 80% of the men who worked full-time worked over 40 hours per week; this has now fallen to just under 50%. The most important change has been the growing proportion of men who work between 35 and 40 hours per week. For women the overall numbers are smaller, and there are of course many more women who work part-time. Nonetheless amongst women who

work full-time, there is a similar shift towards a working week of less than 40 hours. For many people therefore, the 'normal' working week has been getting shorter.²

Table 1 Time structure of full-time employment, 1983-2000
(time bands as % of all working over 30 hours per week)

	men		women	
	1983	2000	1983	2000
30-34	2.4	2.3	7.6	7.2
35-39	10.8	38.2	24.0	56.8
40-44	52.7	31.7	57.0	26.3
45-	34.1	27.8	11.4	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	692.8	749.7	284.3	421.1

Source: As for Chart 1.

Table 1 also shows that women in full-time employment work shorter hours than men. As a proportion of the women in full-time jobs, women working over 45 hours comprised about 11% in 1983 and 10% in 1997. Here too however the proportion of women working between 40 and 44 hours has fallen substantially, and the proportion working less than 40 hours has risen.

More part-time workers - men as well as women

1.3.3 The changing time structure of employment

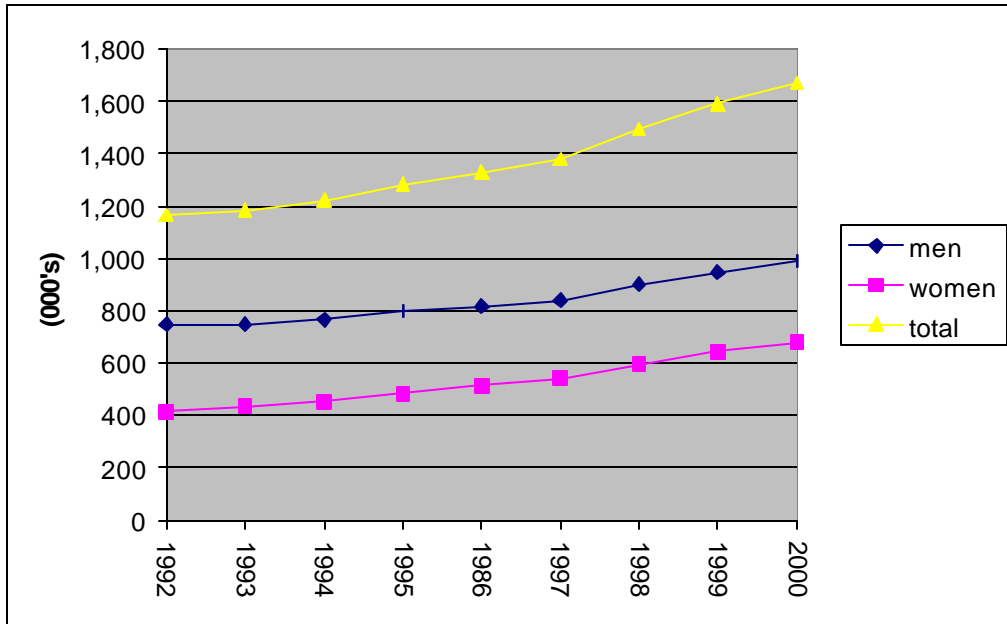
One cause of the fall in average working hours has been the growth in part-time employment. This has occurred amongst both men and women, but particularly the latter. Defining 'part-time' as those who worked for less than 30 hours per work, in 1983 only 14.1% of women worked part-time, by 2000 this had risen to 26.2%. For men there is also a small but significant increase even when using the 'principal economic status' definition of employment: part-timers rose from 2.6% to 4.2% of those men in employment.³

The changes are also interwoven with changes in the absolute size of the workforce. Chart 2 shows the dramatic increase in employment in Ireland over the 1990s.

² One possible explanation is that more people who work long hours are working **variable** hours and are thus excluded from these calculations. In fact if all those working 'variable hours' and for whom hours are 'not stated' are included in the over 40 hours per week group, its relative weight still declines.

³ Figures for both years based on 'principal economic status'. Using the ILO employment definition increases the number of part-timers.

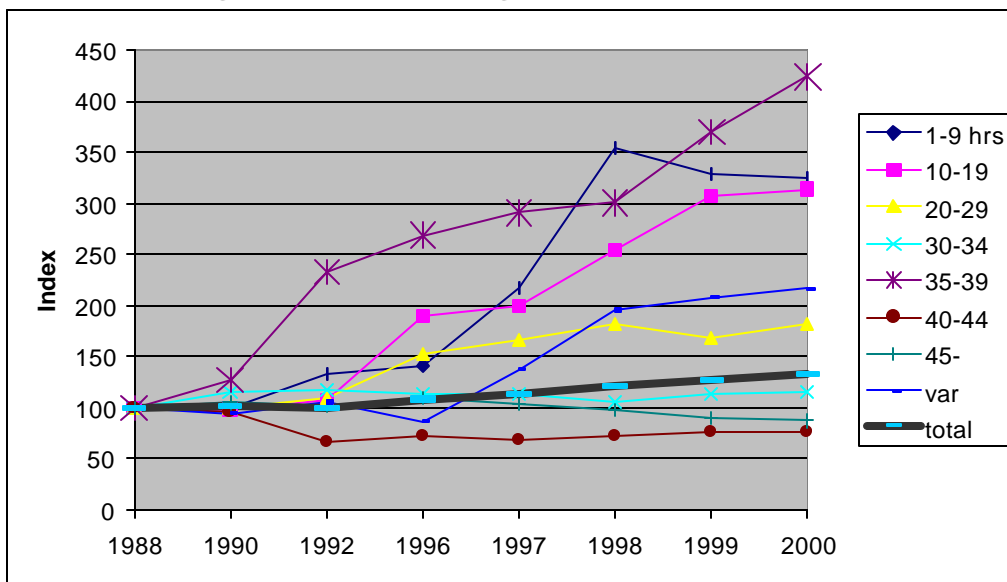
Chart 2: Employment 1988-2000 (ILO basis)



Source: Labour Force Survey 1992-1997; National Quarterly Household Survey 1998-2000.

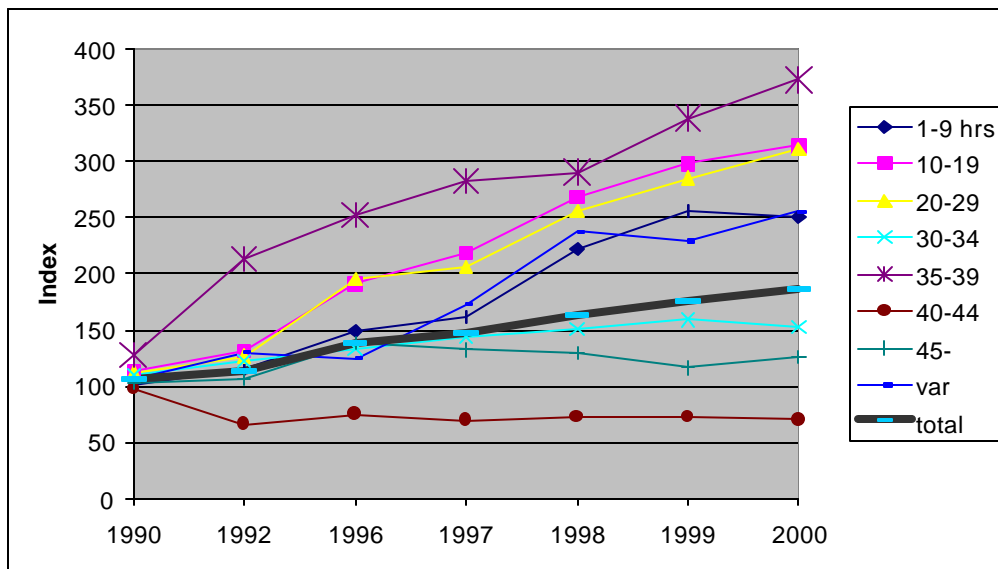
Charts 3a and 3b show the relative growth rates of the different types of employment. Comparing the two charts shows the differences in the growth of men's and women's employment. Amongst men (Chart 3a) the fastest growth has been in those working between 35 and 39 hours per week - the short full-time jobs discussed above. The same also applies for women, but here it is much clearer that part-time work has been growing faster than overall employment. Although it is certainly true that in absolute terms over the 1990s the gain in employment has been greatest amongst full-time jobs, it has to be stressed that part-time jobs are also growing faster than overall employment.

Chart 3a Relative growth rates in working hours: men 1983-2000



Source: 1988-1997 Labour Force Survey; 1998 onwards, National Quarterly Household Survey.
Principal Economic Status definition

Chart 3b Relative growth rates in working hours: women 1983-2000



Source: As for Chart 3a.

More variable hours - especially for full timers

Increasing numbers of men and women have no fixed working hours. In 1988 9% of all those at work reported that they worked 'variable hours', but by the year 2000 the figure had reached 13%. There are however important differences between the genders. First of all, men are more likely to work variable hours than are women (17% of all men as opposed to 6% of all women)⁴. Secondly, for men whether or not they work part-time makes effectively no difference: 17% of all full-time male workers report working variable hours, almost exactly the same as for part-time male workers. By contrast, women part-timers are noticeably more likely to work variable hours than women full-timers (9% as opposed to 5%). The result is that the vast majority (74%) of the 203,000 people who have no fixed working hours are men who hold full-time jobs.

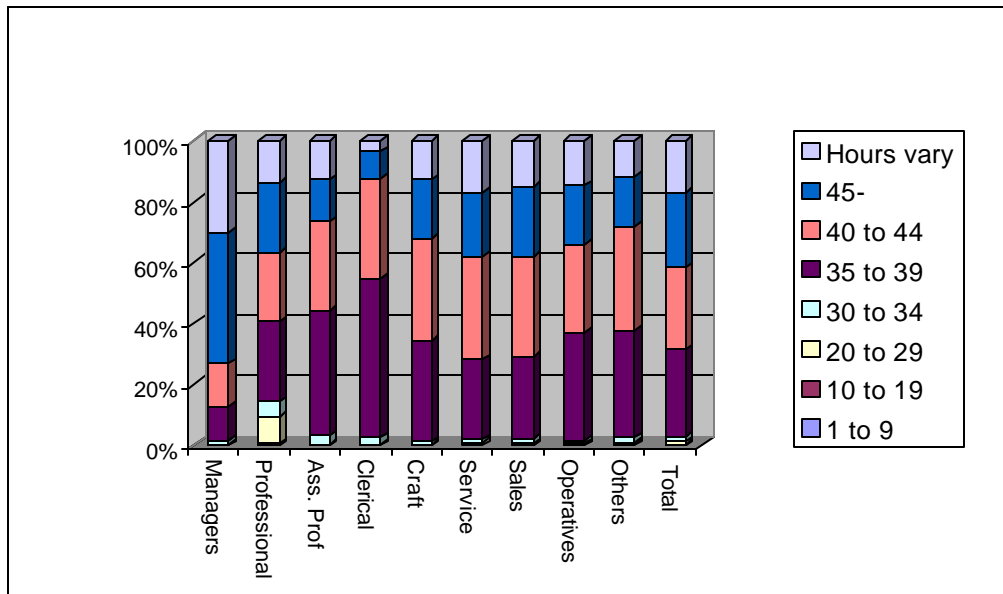
Who works when?

Instead of looking at trends, we can also ask how working time varies between different occupations and different sectors of the economy.

Chart 4a highlights how male managers and male clerical workers are two extremes in the organisation of working time. On the one hand managers, now comprising nearly a quarter (24%) of the full-time male workforce, work long hours: only 13% work less than 40 hours per week and 43% work over 45 hours per week. Managers are also most likely to have variable hours (30%). Given that so few managers report working less than 45 hours per week, it is reasonable to assume that those who work variable hours are also working long hours.

⁴ These and all subsequent figures in this paragraph from National Quarterly Household Survey 2nd quarter 1999, special tabulation by CSO.

Chart 4a Occupation and working time: full time men (2000)

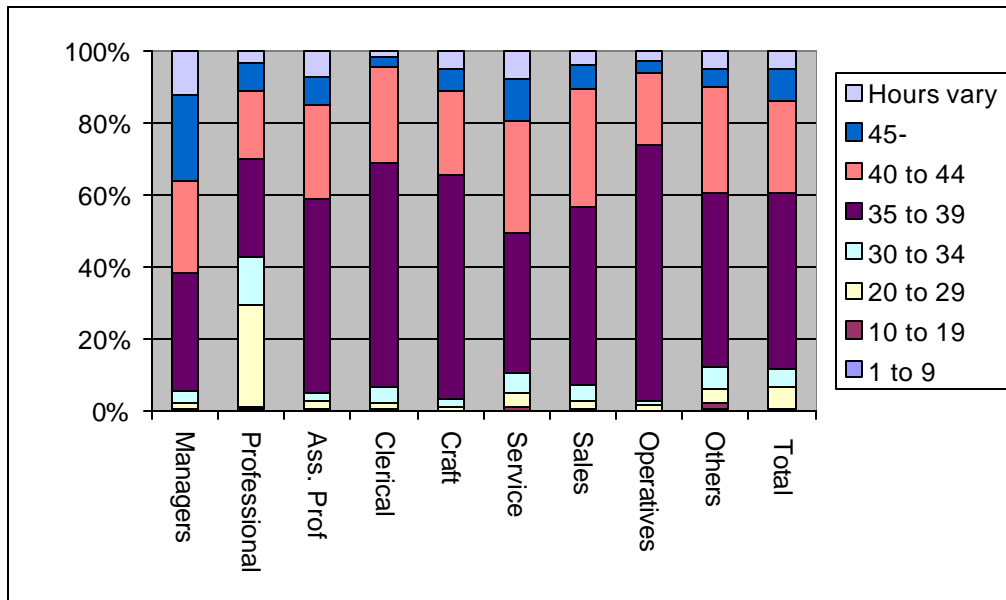


Source: National Quarterly Household Survey (from special CSO tabulation)

At the other extreme is the much smaller group of male clerical workers, comprising 5% of the (full-time) male workforce. Male full-time clerical workers tend to work very short hours (55% work less than 40 hours per week) and are unlikely to have very variable hours (only 4%). Most full-time men work in a rather similar way. The chart shows how in every group apart from managers the proportion with variable hours never exceeds 20%; in every group apart from managers at least 60% work less than 45 hours per week.

Chart 4b shows that women managers are more likely than any other group of full-time women workers to work long hours and variable hours, but they are also less likely to work long hours than their male colleagues. Amongst women the other extreme group is the 14% of full-time women who are in professional occupations. The chart shows how these women work very short hours, with over 40% working at most only 34 hours per week. There are of course differences in the occupations carried out by women and men, so that for example only 14% of all full-time women workers are managers, as opposed to the 24% of all full-time male workers.

Chart 4b Occupation and working time: full-time women (2000)

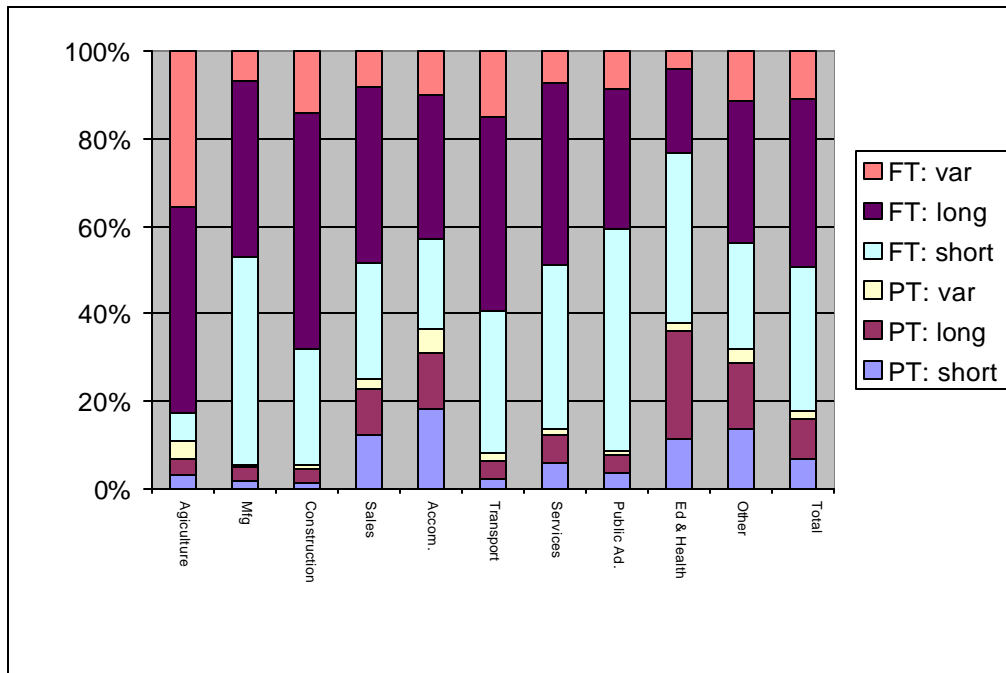


Source: As Chart 4a

Amongst part-time women workers (not shown in the charts) women in professional occupations are also remarkable for their relatively short hours, with 57% working less than 20 hours.

Finally, Chart 5 examines working time by sector. The chart divides workers into six groups: part-time workers with short hours (less than 20 per week), long hours (over 20 per week) and variable hours; full-timers with short hours (30 to 39 hours per week), long hours (over 40 per week) and variable hours. The chart shows how different sectors use very different working times. Thus in construction and transport nearly everyone works full-time and usually 'long' full-time hours. Manufacturing and public administration also have an almost entirely full-time workforce, but here shorter full-time hours are more common. Accommodation (i.e. hotels and catering) uses many part-time workers but also many full-time workers on long hours. Finally education and health use proportionately many part-timers with long hours and many full-timers with short hours. The European Foundation's *Options* survey shows that overall most full-timers would prefer to work shorter hours than they currently do, and most part-timers would prefer to work longer hours. Working hours in education and health are therefore probably closest of all sectors to people's wishes.

Chart 5 Types of working week by sector (men and women, 2000)



Source: As Chart 4a

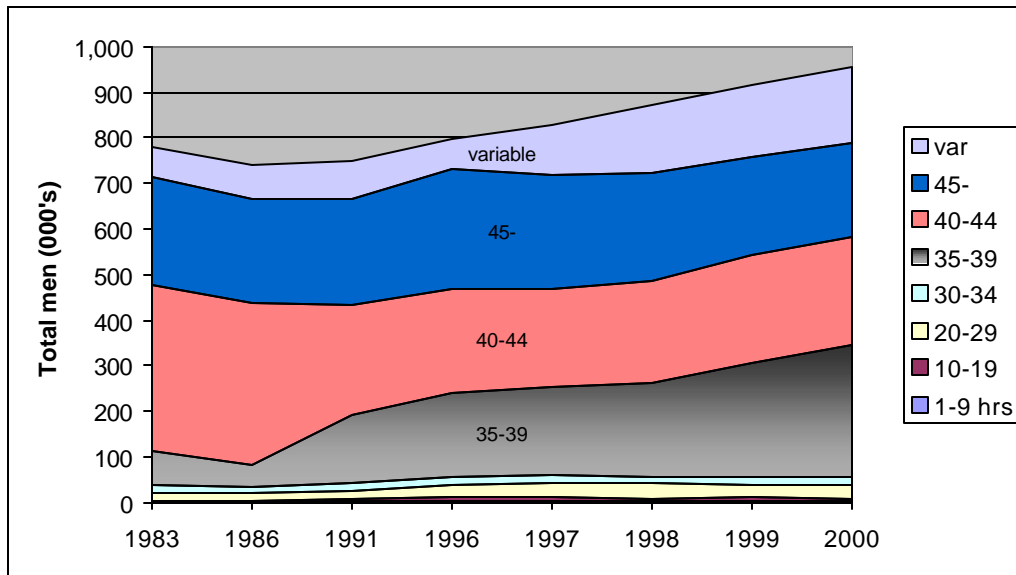
The end of the normal working week?

Today in Ireland there is a wider variety of working hours than ever before. While average hours for both men and women are falling, some people are still working long hours and an increasing number are working long and irregular hours. Many of these long hours workers are male managers. Male managers 'talk loudest' - because of their position in society, their experience shapes much discussion about how we are 'all' working longer, even though this is actually not the case at all.

The final set of charts show how working time has changed for men and women since 1983. They show how the bulk of the increase in extra jobs in the 1990s has come from full-time work lasting less than 40 hours per week. They also answer two basic questions about the time structure of employment:

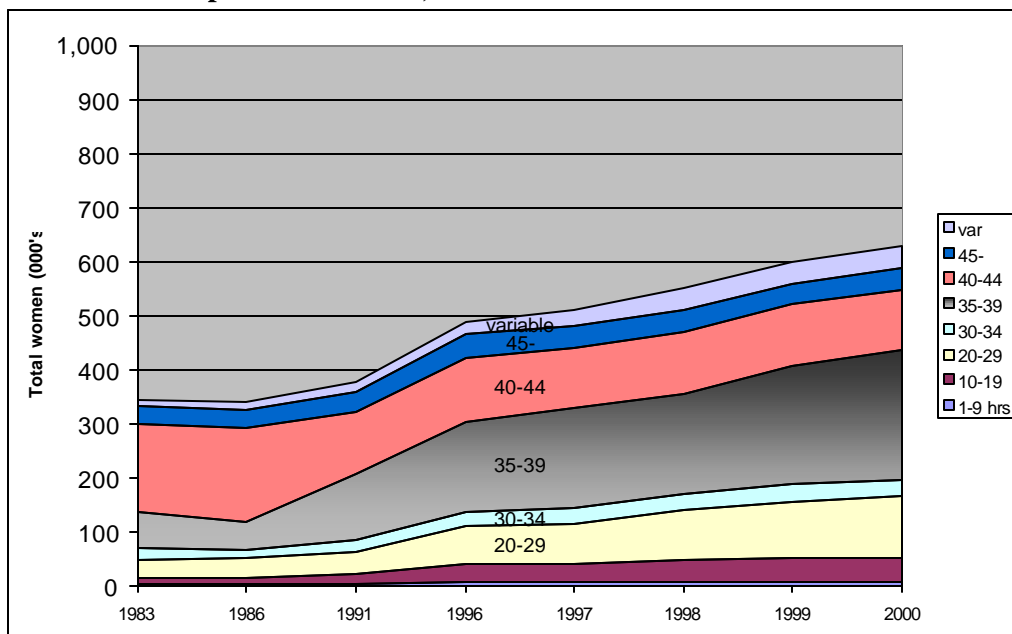
- Is there a growing **divergence** between individuals - is there a greater variety of working hours than before?
- Is there a growing **convergence** between women and men - are they becoming more similar in their working arrangements?

Chart 6a Hours per week: men, 1983-2000



Source: 1983-1997, Labour Force Survey; 1998-2000, National Quarterly Household Survey (from special CSO tabulation); all years using 'principal economic status' definition.

Chart 6b Hours per week: women, 1983-2000



Source: As for Chart 6a

For men there has been a clear shift to a more fragmented time structure. Chart 6a shows how in 1983 virtually all men worked in one of two time categories (40-44 hours and 45 hours and over). In the year 2000 by contrast men are equally likely to be working 35-40 hours or variable hours. In addition, more of them are likely to be working part-time. Amongst women the trend towards diversity is even greater. Chart 6b shows how in 1983 the vast majority of women worked between 40 and 44 hours per week. By contrast in 2000 the number working 35 to 40 hours has grown substantially. There has also been a massive increase in the number of women

working 20 to 29 hours per week while significant numbers work less than 20 hours per week.

For men and in particular for women it is now very difficult to define a 'normal' working week. For both women and men, working hours have become more diverse. Because the growth in diversity has been faster for women than for men, there is also a growing divergence between the genders. Whereas much labour market discussion sees women's labour force participation becoming closer to that of men, it would be more accurate now to see women as leading the way towards a greater fragmentation of the time structure of all those at work.

Technical note

This report is based on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the National Quarterly Household Survey (NQHS). The Labour Force Survey was an annual national sample survey carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). From September 1997 the CSO replaced this with the National Quarterly Household Survey. The results of the LFS were published annually by the CSO for each year of the survey. The results of the NQHS are published by the CSO on a rolling basis. The published NQHS is also available on the web at <http://www.cso.ie/publications/labour/labpub.html>. It should be noticed that regrettably the published results of the NQHS are much less detailed than those of the old LFS, although in many other ways the NQHS is an enormous improvement on the LFS.

From 1983 the LFS published results for 'hours usually worked' by 'Principal Economic Status' (PES). 'Principal Economic Status' is the result of a single question which asks respondents to define their employment situation. From 1988 the LFS also classified results by 'ILO' status. The International Labour Organisation classification counts everyone who has worked for at least one hour per week as 'in employment' and also differentiates between part-time and full-time employment on the basis of the respondent's own definition of the job. ILO status is more commonly used in international comparisons and most results from the NQHS are published in ILO form. ILO status will produce a rather larger workforce than PES definition and in particular the workforce will include more people who work very short hours. An ILO definition of the workforce will therefore tend to produce a shorter average working week than a definition based on PES.

For this report ILO status is used wherever possible. Table 1, Charts 3a and 3b, 6a and 6b use PES in order to analyse trends over as long a time period as possible. Here special tabulations were kindly provided by the CSO and the charts were derived from these. All other figures and charts are derived directly from published LFS or NQHS results.

Bibliography

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (1997). *The Time Bind*. NY: Henry Holt & Co., Metropolitan Books.
Schor, Juliet (1991). *The Overworked American: The unexpected decline of leisure*. NY: Basic Books.