

# Statistics in focus

## POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 13/2002

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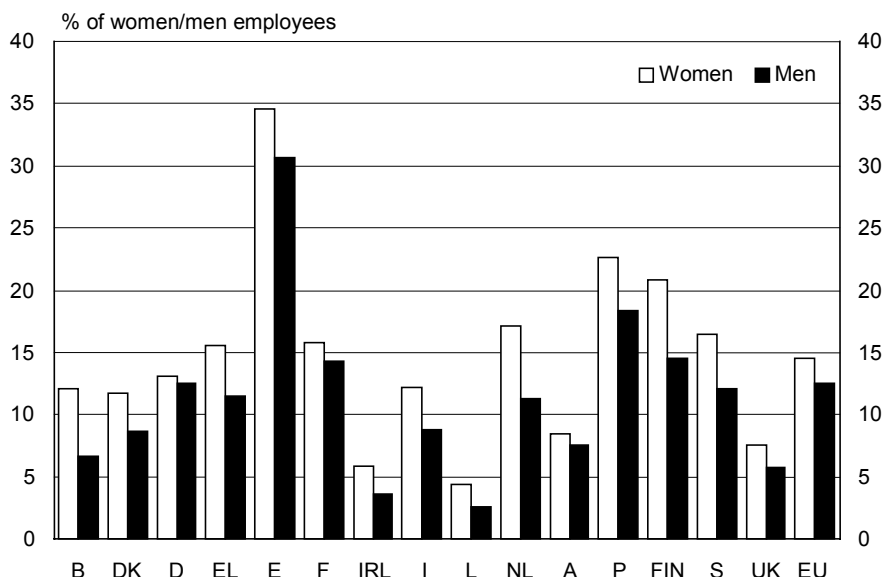
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# At the margins of the labour market? Women and men in temporary jobs in Europe

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Throughout the European Union, women are more likely than men to be employed in temporary jobs – ie those with a fixed-term contract of employment. In 2000, almost 15% of women employees as against nearly 13% of men worked in temporary jobs (Fig. 1, where as throughout the analysis, the figures relate to those aged 15 to 64). Nevertheless, the proportion of men in such jobs has tended to increase in recent years by slightly more than that of women. At the same time, temporary jobs cannot necessarily be regarded as inferior to permanent ones. A significant number of those employed under a fixed-term contract do so out of choice rather than involuntarily, while for a larger number, the contract involves a period of training or apprenticeship. Indeed, over half of temporary workers in the Union are under 30 years of age. Moreover, fixed-term contracts seem to be an important route out of unemployment for many people, though equally many in such jobs seem particularly vulnerable to spells of unemployment.

**Fig. 1 Share of women and men employees with fixed-term contracts, 2000**



## More women than men work in temporary jobs

In all Member States in the Union, without exception, the proportion of employees with temporary contracts is higher for women than for men, even though the relative numbers involved vary markedly between countries. As is well known, temporary working is particularly important in Spain, where around a third of women and men were employed on fixed-term contracts in 2000, though it is also relatively significant (around 15-20%) in Portugal and Finland. In contrast, the proportion was under 8% in Ireland, Luxembourg and the UK. These differences partly reflect the nature of the employment contract in different countries and, in particular, the strength of employment protection legislation, which in some countries gives employers an incentive to hire workers on temporary rather than permanent contracts.

The difference in the proportion between men and women was especially wide in Finland (around 6 percentage points), as it was in Belgium and the Netherlands. In all three countries, well over half of all temporary workers were women (59% in Finland and Belgium, just over 53% in the Netherlands). In four other Member States, moreover, the difference was around 4 percentage points.

In most Member States, the relative number of workers in temporary jobs increased between 1992 and 2000. In Spain and Ireland, however, it declined significantly, in both cases, by more for women than for men, especially in the former, where the proportion of men in such jobs remained much the same while that of women fell by almost 5 percentage points. The relative number also fell in Denmark, though by much less and by similar amounts for women and men. In four countries, Belgium, Greece, Portugal and Sweden, the difference in the proportion of women and men in temporary jobs widened over the period, whereas in France and the Netherlands, as well as Spain and Ireland, the difference narrowed.

### Temporary working is more prevalent among the young

Most employees on a fixed-term contract in the Union are under 30, partly reflecting the use of fixed-term contracts to cover periods of training or probation. In 2000, just under 54% of women in fixed-term jobs and almost 58% of men were under 30 (Fig. 2), over 2½ times the proportion in permanent jobs (those with no pre-defined duration) in this age group in both cases. It should be noted that the proportion of total women employees who are less than 30 is slightly higher than for men because employment rates of women tend to decline with age more than for men. The respective figures in 2000 for the EU were 26½% and 25%. Accordingly, the fact that the proportion of women in fixed-term jobs who were under 30 was less than for

men – the reverse of what would be expected – implies that women in temporary jobs are less likely to be under 30 and more likely to be 30 or over than in the case of men.

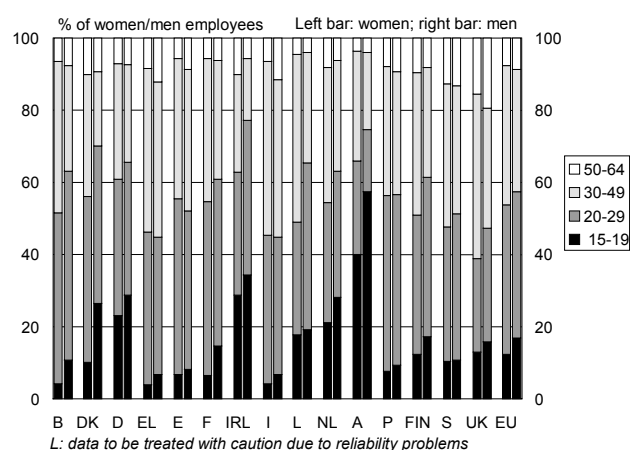
Only in Greece, Italy, the UK and, marginally, Sweden, were under half of employees on fixed-term contracts under 30. In Germany, 60% of women employed on such contracts and 66% of men were younger than this, as compared with well under 20% of those on permanent contracts.

Accordingly, some 48% of women employees under 20 and almost 56% of men were in temporary jobs in the EU in 2000, the figures varying from over 75% of women in this age group and some 85% of men in Germany, Spain and France to 30% of women and 18% of men in Ireland and only around 16% of both in the UK (Table 1). In all Member States, except Ireland and Italy, men in this age group were more likely to be employed on a fixed-term contract than women (marginally so in the UK), and in Italy, there was not much difference between the two.

In the 20-29 age group, the tendency is reversed in all Member States, except Germany, where the proportion of women and men in temporary jobs was much the same. Whereas the proportion of men in their 20s in temporary jobs exceeded 30% only in Spain and was under 20% in 9 countries, the figure for women was a third or more in 5 countries – France, Portugal, Finland and Sweden as well as Spain – and was under 20% only in Austria, Luxembourg, Ireland and the UK.

Among employees of 30 and over, the proportion of women who were in temporary jobs in 2000 exceeded that of men in all Member States, the gap being especially large in Belgium, the Netherlands and the three Nordic countries.

Fig. 2 Distribution of temporary employees by age group and by sex, 2000



**Table 1: Proportion of men and women employees in temporary jobs by age group, 1992 and 2000**

*% of women/men employees in each age group*

1992	15-19		20-29		30-49		50-64		15-64	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>B</b>	27.3	45.8	12.5	6.6	4.7	1.4	4.2	0.8	7.6	3.1
<b>DK</b>	27.2	30.4	22.6	17.6	6.6	4.6	6.1	4.1	12.1	9.9
<b>D</b>	65.7	70.4	13.0	15.5	7.0	5.1	5.9	3.5	11.2	10.1
<b>EL</b>	19.9	32.0	14.6	17.1	7.1	7.2	11.6	8.4	10.2	10.3
<b>E</b>	83.6	86.3	58.5	56.8	25.3	20.1	17.9	13.2	39.2	30.8
<b>F</b>	68.4	75.0	23.3	18.1	7.3	4.5	4.2	2.4	12.2	9.1
<b>IRL</b>	30.4	24.1	11.6	9.2	10.2	4.0	8.8	3.6	11.8	6.6
<b>I</b>	23.4	22.0	13.0	9.3	7.0	4.2	7.2	4.6	9.7	6.2
<b>L</b>	17.4	20.0	3.0	3.7	3.8	1.2	1.9	0.7	3.9	2.3
<b>NL</b>	29.4	33.6	13.1	11.7	12.5	2.7	12.2	3.0	13.9	6.7
<b>A</b>	36.3	42.9	7.4	6.1	3.4	2.4	1.7	1.5	6.4	5.7
<b>P</b>	33.3	27.8	23.2	17.7	7.0	5.3	1.8	3.5	12.7	9.7
<b>FIN</b>	63.4	54.5	43.7	26.8	15.1	9.9	5.7	4.9	19.5	13.4
<b>S</b>	60.2	53.1	32.0	21.1	9.9	8.4	5.6	4.5	14.8	11.0
<b>UK</b>	13.1	13.1	6.7	5.5	6.5	3.0	5.0	3.5	6.7	4.4
<b>EU</b>	41.0	45.6	17.7	16.6	8.3	5.7	6.1	4.5	12.2	9.9
<b>2000</b>										
<b>B</b>	46.7	50.6	22.6	15.2	8.3	3.3	6.3	3.0	12.1	6.6
<b>DK</b>	17.3	35.0	24.4	18.0	8.0	3.7	5.6	3.5	11.7	8.7
<b>D</b>	77.7	84.1	24.6	25.5	7.5	6.1	4.7	4.3	13.1	12.5
<b>EL</b>	39.7	44.6	23.5	19.3	12.0	9.0	11.7	6.8	15.6	11.5
<b>E</b>	83.0	86.6	54.4	53.2	25.4	23.3	14.9	13.4	34.6	30.7
<b>F</b>	78.0	86.2	33.5	30.0	10.8	8.2	5.1	4.9	15.8	14.3
<b>IRL</b>	29.8	18.6	5.8	4.8	3.4	1.3	4.9	1.5	5.9	3.6
<b>I</b>	35.7	34.9	20.9	16.5	9.7	6.5	5.6	5.4	12.2	8.8
<b>L</b>	(55.6)	(35.7)	5.3	6.0	3.5	1.3	1.2	0.6	4.4	2.7
<b>NL</b>	44.7	45.9	22.4	18.2	12.2	6.7	9.7	3.5	17.1	11.3
<b>A</b>	63.7	76.1	8.9	6.4	4.5	2.9	2.2	1.7	8.4	7.6
<b>P</b>	52.5	40.3	36.9	29.7	15.5	12.8	12.4	9.6	22.7	18.4
<b>FIN</b>	59.9	64.8	44.5	29.4	15.6	8.2	8.0	5.6	20.9	14.5
<b>S</b>	61.8	64.4	33.6	23.9	13.1	8.5	7.3	6.0	16.5	12.1
<b>UK</b>	15.7	15.8	9.3	8.1	6.7	3.7	5.7	5.3	7.6	5.7
<b>EU</b>	48.0	55.5	26.0	23.6	10.2	7.7	6.3	5.7	14.5	12.5

Note: 1992 data for A, FIN and S are for 1995; EU values for 1992 include 1995 data for these countries.

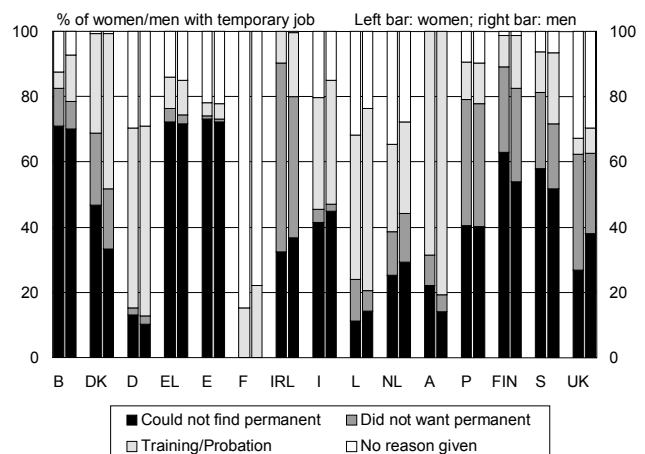
While the relative number of temporary workers increased for both women and men in all age groups over the 1990s, the biggest rise occurred among those under 30, the proportion of those employed on a fixed-term contract increasing by over 7 percentage points for women under 20 and 10 percentage points for men in this age group between 1992 and 2000, and by nearly 9 points for women aged 20 to 29 and 7 points for men.

Spain, this means that, 25% of all women employees

### Significant numbers work in temporary jobs because they cannot find permanent ones

Over a third of women in 8 of the 14 Member States for which data are available (there are no data for France) who worked in jobs with fixed-term contracts in 2000 and over a third of men in 10 Member States stated that they were so employed because they could not find a permanent job (Fig 3). In 3 countries – Belgium, Spain and Greece – the proportion was over 70% for both sexes, and in another two – Finland and Sweden – around 60% for women and over 50% for men. In

**Fig. 3 Reasons for being in a temporary job, 2000**



B, UK: no data on "probation period"; F: no data on "could not/did not want permanent job".

and 22% of men were working in temporary jobs involuntarily, while the same was the case for over 10% of women employees in Greece and Finland and almost 10% in Sweden (Table 2).

In all Member States, apart from the UK, there was a larger proportion of women employees in this position than men, despite the fact that in many of these countries the relative number of men in temporary jobs reporting that they could not find a permanent one was greater than for women (ie this fact was outweighed by the larger overall proportion of women in temporary jobs).

Similarly, in most Member States – all apart from Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal – proportionately more women than men were in temporary jobs out of choice, while the reverse was the case in respect of those where a fixed-term contract was linked to a period of training. The difference between men and women in this latter respect was particularly large in Denmark and Austria, where the apprenticeship system is especially important and where a substantial proportion of both women and men reported being on fixed-term training contracts. On the other hand, though there was only a small difference in Germany, where the relative number of apprentices and of those on temporary training contracts is also large. There is no evidence, however, that the number of women apprentices in Germany relative to men is higher than in the other two countries. (Indeed, whereas the proportion of women in vocational education and training who were in apprenticeships was much the same as for men in Denmark in 1998, in both Germany

**Table 2: Proportion of women and men employees in a temporary job involuntarily, 2000**

	% of all women/men employees	
	Women	Men
<b>B</b>	8.6	4.6
<b>DK</b>	5.5	2.9
<b>D</b>	1.7	1.3
<b>EL</b>	11.3	8.2
<b>E</b>	25.3	22.2
<b>F</b>	:	:
<b>IRL</b>	1.9	1.3
<b>I</b>	5.1	3.9
<b>L</b>	0.5	0.4
<b>NL</b>	4.3	3.3
<b>A</b>	1.9	1.1
<b>P</b>	9.2	7.4
<b>FIN</b>	13.1	7.8
<b>S</b>	9.6	6.3
<b>UK</b>	2.0	2.2

Note: No data available for France on "could not find permanent job"

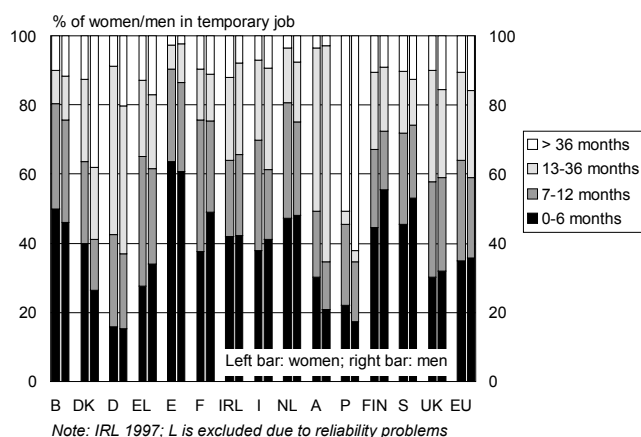
and Austria, it was significantly less).

## How temporary is temporary?

In most Member States, those employed in temporary jobs were on fixed-term contracts of relatively short duration. In 2000, over a third of both women and men temporary workers in the Union were employed on contracts of less than 6 months, while another 29% of women and 23% were on contracts of 7 to 12 months (Fig. 4). Under 16% of men and only just over 10% of women in temporary jobs had contracts of over 3 years. A similar pattern is evident in most Member States, though over 60% of men and over 50% of women in Portugal were on contracts of over 3 years, whereas in Spain, over 85% of temporary workers of both sexes had contracts of under a year.

In most countries, men in temporary jobs were more likely to be on longer-term contracts than women, Spain, Finland and Luxembourg being the only countries where the reverse was the case in 2000. Correspondingly, in the majority of Member States, women were more likely to be on short-term contracts of less than a year.

**Fig. 4 Distribution of temporary work by duration and sex, 2000**

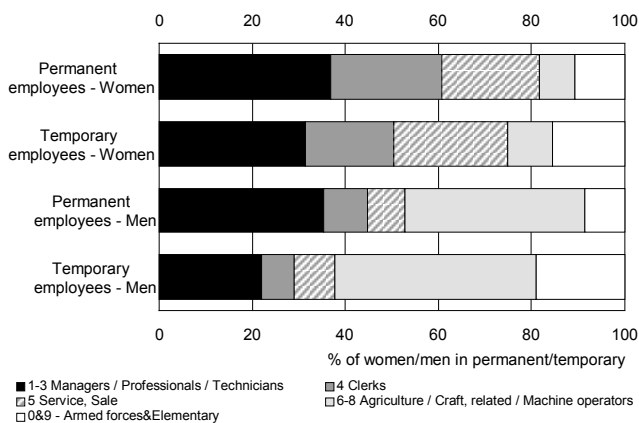


## Big difference across the EU in the types of job which are temporary

In general, both women and men temporary workers, but especially the latter, are more likely to be employed in manual jobs than those with permanent contracts of employment, particularly in less skilled, 'elementary' jobs, but also in skilled manual jobs (Fig. 5). In 2000, some 19% of men and 15% of women in the Union in temporary jobs were low skilled manual workers, over twice the proportion of those with permanent contracts in the case of men and 45% higher for women.

This might suggest that temporary workers are more

**Fig. 5 Distribution of temporary and permanent employees by occupation and sex in the EU, 2000**



likely to have relatively low education levels as compared with those in permanent jobs. In practice, however, this is by no means universally the case. Indeed, over the EU as a whole, the proportion of women employees under 30 in temporary jobs in 2000 was marginally higher for those with tertiary level education (university or equivalent) as for those with a lower level of educational attainment (Table 3). The same applies to women of 30 and over, some 10% of employees with tertiary level education being in jobs with fixed-term contracts as opposed to 9% of those with lower education. For men, however, the proportion of employees with tertiary level education in temporary jobs was slightly lower than for those with lower education levels at EU-level (6½% as against 7½% in

the case of those of 30 and over).

Nevertheless, the pattern varies considerably between Member States, especially in respect of those of 30 and over. In Greece, Spain and Portugal, in particular, both women and men employees are much more likely to be in temporary jobs if they have low levels of education than if they have a high level, which is also the case for women in Belgium and France. In the UK and to a lesser extent in Germany, the reverse is the case, the proportion of women and men employees with tertiary education in temporary jobs being higher than for those with lower qualifications. In the other countries, there was not much difference in the proportion for either women or men.

This suggests that jobs with fixed-term contracts are not necessarily inferior ones or that those who occupy them are in a more precarious position on the labour market. Many women and men, especially those with a high level of education, work in such jobs out of choice, perhaps because they carry better terms and conditions or fit better with their chosen career path. Nevertheless, in 7 of the 14 Member States for which data are available, half or more of both women and men with tertiary level education in temporary jobs in 2000 were so employed because they could not find a permanent one rather than from choice.

### Temporary jobs provide a route into employment but can also be a cul de sac

As well as being a major means for young people to get a foothold into the labour market, temporary jobs also

**Table 3: Proportion of men and women employees with different education attainment levels in temporary jobs by age group, 2000**

	% of women/men employees in each age group							
	Low and medium education				High education			
	15-29		30-64		15-29		30-64	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>B</b>	24.6	18.2	9.7	3.1	22.3	14.5	5.1	3.5
<b>DK</b>	24.4	23.8	6.9	4.1	12.8	6.9	7.4	2.4
<b>D</b>	34.8	38.7	6.1	5.2	25.2	22.1	9.0	6.3
<b>EL</b>	23.4	22.2	14.0	9.2	27.8	14.1	7.8	5.9
<b>E</b>	57.5	58.1	26.5	24.1	55.6	52.0	17.1	10.3
<b>F</b>	39.3	39.2	10.1	7.9	30.6	24.8	7.5	5.5
<b>IRL</b>	10.5	8.9	4.5	1.9	4.0	5.3	5.2	:
<b>I</b>	20.3	17.5	8.5	6.1	37.7	27.6	10.8	6.0
<b>L</b>	7.4	9.1	3.2	1.2	8	3	3	1
<b>NL</b>	26.4	23.9	11.7	5.8	19.7	13.4	11.4	5.7
<b>A</b>	18.5	22.6	3.9	2.5	20.1	9.0	4.9	3.2
<b>FIN</b>	34.9	30.4	15.5	11.9	59.8	36.5	7.1	7.9
<b>P</b>	50.1	37.4	13.5	7.8	40.3	22.2	12.7	6.9
<b>S</b>	38.7	27.1	11.4	7.3	33.1	28.0	10.1	8.4
<b>UK</b>	9.6	9.4	4.9	3.4	12.3	9.9	10.5	5.7
<b>EU</b>	28.9	29.7	9.1	7.5	29.7	23.4	9.9	6.3

Note: data for L should be treated with caution due to reliability problems

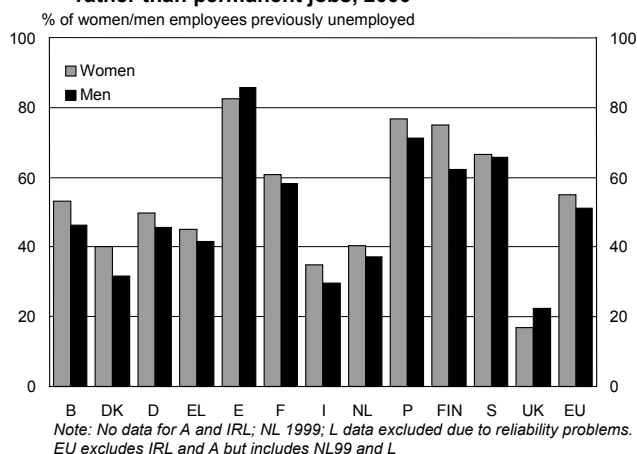
provide an important route out of unemployment for both men and women. In 2000, there were more women and men moving out of unemployment into work in the EU who took up a temporary job than who went into a permanent one (Fig. 6). Indeed, in Spain, Portugal and Finland, the great majority of women employees who had been unemployed the previous year (over 75%) were on a fixed-term contract, while in Sweden and France, the figure was over 60%. This was also the case for most of the men who had been unemployed in Spain and Portugal (over 70%) and in Finland, Sweden and France (around 60% or more). Only in the UK was the proportion of women employees who had been unemployed the year before and were now in a temporary job under 35% and the proportion of men under 30%.

Figure 6 also shows that, in most countries in the Union – all apart from Spain and the UK – women moving into employment after being unemployed were more likely than men to move into a temporary job. The difference was particularly pronounced in Finland (13 percentage points) and was also large in Belgium and Denmark (7 percentage points or more).

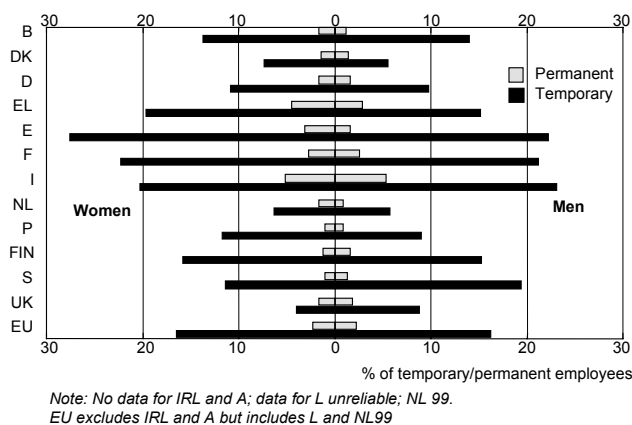
Although temporary jobs offer a route out of unemployment, it is also the case that many of those who occupy such jobs are particularly vulnerable to unemployment. In 2000, some 16% of both women and men employees in temporary jobs in the Union had been unemployed the year before – in Spain, France and Italy, over 20% – as compared with only around 2% of employees in permanent jobs (5% or less in Spain, France and Italy) (Fig. 7).

Moreover, some 44% of women and 38% of men who were unemployed in the EU in 2000 reported the ending of a fixed-term contract as the reason for being out of work, the figure rising to around 70% for both Spain and Finland (Fig. 8). In other words, a significant proportion of workers in jobs with fixed-term contracts seem to be on the fringes of the labour market, moving into and out of temporary work on a regular basis, especially in Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Finland and Sweden.

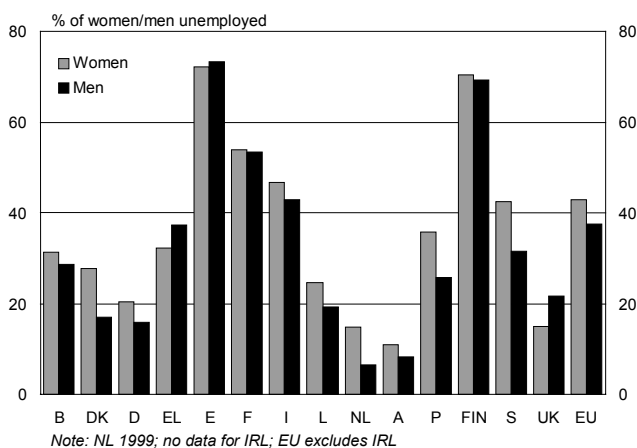
**Fig. 6 Proportion of women and men employees who were unemployed the previous year who are in temporary rather than permanent jobs, 2000**



**Fig. 7 Proportion of women and men in permanent and temporary jobs in 2000 who were unemployed the previous year**



**Fig. 8 Share of women and men unemployed because temporary contract came to an end, 2000**



## ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

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**Abbreviations:** : not available . not applicable 0 negligible – nil

The data used in the analysis are from the EU Labour Force Survey. Temporary jobs are defined as those where the termination of the job is determined by the date specified in a fixed-term contract, whether written or verbal, where an agreed assignment has been completed or where an employee being temporarily replaced returns. Those employed in temporary jobs include people in seasonal employment, those working for employment agencies if the duration of their job is fixed in terms of the period they contracted out to third parties and those with a contract specifically relating to a period of training or probation (in the sense that a new contract needs to be agreed if the person should continue to be employed after it comes to an end). Other jobs are considered to be permanent, in the sense that there is no pre-specified termination date, again whether written contract exists or not.

The section subdividing employees by occupation is based on the ISCO 88 classification at the 1-digit level. The occupational groups taken are: ISCO 1-3, Managers, Professionals and Technicians and associate professionals; ISCO 4, Clerks; ISCO 5, Service workers and shop and market sales workers; ISCO 6-9, Skilled agricultural and fishery workers, Craft and related trades workers and Plant and machinery operators and assemblers; and ISCO 9, Elementary workers. The armed forces, ISCO 0, which includes very few people are included in ISCO 9.

Data on education attainment levels are defined in terms of the International Standard Classification of Education 1997 (ISCED 97) and relate to the highest level of education achieved. 'Tertiary education' covers ISCED categories 5 and 6 and typically involves the successful completion of a university degree programme or equivalent. It includes education leading to post-graduate or advanced research qualifications.

The analysis of movements from unemployment into employment is based on answers in the survey to questions on the employment status of the person concerned one year before the survey. Note that these answers relate to a self-assessment of whether the person was employed, unemployed or inactive, which might differ from the international standard definition of these terms.

# Further information:

## ➤ Databases

NewCronos, Domain: LFS

To obtain information or to order publications, databases and special sets of data, please contact the **Data Shop** network:

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