Trends and experience in Dutch flexible work and flexicurity policies

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1. Introduction

The flexibilisation of work and of working life have been issues high on the agenda of the Dutch public debate for at least fifteen years. Mostly, they have been regarded as positive developments, specifically from the viewpoint of their potential for enhancing the employment of the Dutch labour force and for promoting the emancipation and economic self-sufficiency of women. Dutch governments have recognized, however, that for taking full profit of such benefits flexibilisation has to be regulated. Which means, not in the least, that flexible workers have to have an adequate social protection. In line with this thinking, policies have been guided by the aspiration of combining flexibility and security. Or to achieve adequate *flexicurity* as the combination of goals has come to be known.

In this chapter I will present and discuss critically Dutch flexicurity policies of recent years, which have mainly been taken in the fields of part-time work, social security, labour law, and work-care combination.

To put matters into perspective I will start with presenting figures about developments in the extent and distribution of flexible work and of part-time work. In main lines it will show that in the Netherlands the degree of flexible work is rather modest, while the degree of part-time work is very high. Thirdly, I will discuss the development in Dutch government's flexicurity policies, and describe the aims and content of recent measures. Since collective labour agreements between social partners are an important part of workers' flexicurity I should also discuss developments in this field separately, but space restrictions do not allow this. I will finish with a critical evaluation of the most important measures, and draw some conclusions.

2. Trends in Dutch flexible work and part-time work

Labour flexibility can take on various forms at different levels of organization (see Wilthagens and Seifert's contribution in this issue), but Dutch national figures available on the subject are limited to a distinction between full-time permanent jobs, part-time permanent jobs, and non-permanent or »flex«-jobs. The latter basically comprise all forms of work with no permanent labour contract, no contractual definition of working time and/or the number of working hours, or with varying working time and hours (Fouarge *et al.* 1998). Examples of flex-jobs are: temporary work, temp agency work, stand-by contracts, homework (often at piecework wages), and freelance work (no labour contract). In the Netherlands part-time work is usually not regarded as flex-work since for many people their part-time job is as permanent and secure as another one's full-time job. Table 1 shows the level of full-time, part-time, and flex-jobs from 1990 till 2002.[1]

	1990	1994	1998	2000	2002
Full-time, permanent	75	70	66	65	63
Part-time, permanent	17	22	28	28	31
Flex-work	7	8	6	7	7

Table 1 Employed workers by type of job (% of total employment)

(Source: Calculations on OSA Employees Panel (OSA = Organisation for Strategic Labour Market Research, Tilburg University) (part-time = 32 hours per week or less)

In this period, the Netherlands witnessed an explosion of the total number of jobs (»the Dutch miracle«). For instance, between 1994 and 1999, about 850.000 new jobs were created, an increase of 16 per cent. The »miracle« shows a flexibilisation trend, since two-thirds of the increase came from part-time work (50 per cent) and flex-work (17 per cent) (SCP 2000). The large proportion of part-time jobs is directly related to the fact that the 1990s also witnessed a steep increase in the labour

1 The difference between »part-time«, »permanent« and »flex-work« cannot be interpreted as a strict distinction between non-precarious and precarious jobs. Especially smaller part-time jobs will be highly insufficient towards guaranteeing income security, while some flex-workers have strong labour market positions and a high income (as e.g. some free lancers).

market participation of Dutch women. In this period, the participation rate of men dropped from around 90 per cent to 83 per cent, while participation by women grew from about one third to more than two-thirds (Visser 1999).

Table 1 shows a drop in fulltime, permanent jobs, and a clear increase in part-time work, but the proportion of flex-work remains at a relatively low level of about seven per cent. It is suggested in the literature that this stabilization of flex-work is the result of shortages on the labour market, which increased rapidly in the end of the 1990s as a result of the »Dutch jobs miracle«[2], giving workers a stronger position in their preference for more secure jobs. Flex-work tends to be a specific characteristic of those workers who traditionally have an unfavourable labour market position (women, less educated, ethnic minorities, young people), which connects it closely with marginal labour (Fouarge *et al.* 1998;Veenman/Dagevos 1999).

As for part-time work, this is a typical feature of the Dutch labour market. Starting in the early 1980s, it has increased over the years, but it now seems to stabilize. Clearly, there is a sharp division between male and female workers, as table 2 shows. In total, over a third of the Dutch workers has a part-time job. This is the highest in Europe. Of men working part-time, the majority has a very small part-time job of between one to twelve hours, or a large part-time job of between 20 and 34 hours. The former group mainly consists of students, and the latter of male workers with a high educational level. The pattern for males has not changed over the last decade. Among women just over half of those who work part-time have a larger part-time job of between 20 and 34 hours a week. Among the others the medium sized and small part-time jobs are nearly evenly distributed (SZW 2000).

	1986*	1990*	1995*	1998	1999*	2000**	2002**
Men	13	15	17	18	17		
Women	55	59	68	68	67		
Total					37	33	35

Table 2 Part-time work in the Netherlands (% of employment in category)*

*(Source: * SZW (2000): less than 35 hours a week, permanent or temporary ** CBS (2003): less than 32 hours per week, permanent or temporary)*

Changes on the Dutch labour market, notably the increase of female participation, has had substantial consequences for Dutch households combining work and care.

2 Over the last two years the Dutch labour market has deteriorated rapidly: the unemployment rate was very low at 2.5 per cent in 2001, but at the moment it is close to six per cent, and it is expected to rise further.

Maybe this is best illustrated by table 3, which shows that in a period of nearly ten years time the proportions of single income and double income households reversed. At present about 60 per cent of Dutch households consist of partners who both have a job. The table also shows that a »one-and-a-half-income«-household is by far the most common type among the double income households. In such households the man has the full-time job, while the woman works part-time.

	1986	1998
One income form work	*53*	*34*
- man working	50	30
- woman working	3	4
Two incomes from work	*30*	*56*
- one-and-a- half income	17	37
man working fulltime	16	36
women working fulltime	1	1
- half-and-half income	1	4
- double income	11	14
No income from work (on benefit)	*17*	*10*
Total	*100*	*100*

Table 3 Household earnings types (% of all households)

(Source: SCP 2000c, De kunst van het combineren, p. 10)

If we compare the Netherlands with other European countries, the general conclusion is that the Dutch situation is more or less average or lagging behind with regard to various aspects of flex-work. Regarding part-time work, however, the Netherlands clearly takes the lead in Europe (EFILWC 2003; Andersen/Jensen 2002).

3. Dutch flexibility and security policies

The measures the Dutch government has implemented in recent years in order to regulate and stimulate the trends towards the flexibilisation of work have mainly

been taken in the policy fields of part-time work, social security, labour law and work-care combination.

3.1 Part-time work

From the end of the 1970s, the basic Dutch policy line has been to introduce equal treatment of part-time and full-time workers in social security, labour law, and collective labour agreements. Around 1980, government paid subsidies to employers and employees for innovating cases of part-time work. Dutch social partners have shown a favourable attitude towards part-time work. In the 1982 Agreement of Wassenaar between government and social partners, not only a policy of wage moderation was agreed, but social partners also promised to stimulate the redistribution of work, among other things by means of part-time work (plus a reduction in working time). In the mid-1980s, government subsidized employers' initiatives for introducing both part-time work and working time reduction in their firms on a larger scale. In the same period, working hours and wage level thresholds were removed from social insurances. In 1993, all part-time workers gained a right to the (proportional) legal minimum wage and holiday pay, and in 1994 occupational pension funds can no longer exclude part-time workers. Funds that apply wage limits have to convert part-time wages to full-time level. A part-time worker acquires pension rights in proportion to the number of hours worked. The Dutch public pension system is universal and pays a pension at the minimum wage for all over 65 years of age. In 1996, the equal treatment of part-time and fulltime workers was codified in the Civil Code and in labour law, implying that from then on part-timers have equal rights in collective labour agreements, regarding for example agreements on wage levels, wage supplements, reimbursement of expenses, bonuses, occupational social security schemes, and training facilities. In 2000, the Law on the Adjustment of Working Hours (*Wet Aanpassing Arbeidstijd, WAA*) came into force. It offers workers in organisations that employ at least ten workers the right to adjust their contractual working hours upward or downward. Employers can only deny an adjustment if »major organisational interests are negatively affected.«

3.2 Flex-work and social security

Contrary to the case of part-time workers, the social protection of flex-workers is more of a problem in the Netherlands, especially regarding the risks of unemployment and sickness because here work record requirements and the existence of a

labour contract – notable sources of legal and administrative complexity – are central elements in assessing benefit entitlement, level, and duration.

The Dutch civil code legislation contains detailed rules for which types of labour relation can be regarded as legal contracts. In practice, these rules prove to be difficult to apply with regard to home workers, freelancers, and on call-workers (Vriend/Korpel 1990). Specific problems in these cases are that it may be difficult to assess whether there exists or existed a »relation of authority« between employer and employee, and whether employees earn(ed.) at least 40 per cent of the minimum wage on a monthly basis, which are two necessary features of legal labour contracts. Additionally, in the case of unemployment insurance, there are major problems with gathering the necessary data on flex-workers' work records, and thus with assessing entitlements. Data problems also exist with respect to assessing for how many hours a week someone became unemployed (minimum of five) and with assessing the average wage lost in order to calculate the proper benefit level (especially if people had piecework wages). These types of difficulties multiply in cases where people combine benefits and work over a certain period, if they change regularly from type of labour contract, if they combine two or more jobs at the same time, and the like. When Vriend and Korpel (1990) submitted a number of fictitious cases of flex-workers' claims to a sample of administrators of unemployment and sickness benefit for independent decision, the decisions differed widely. Only in 13 per cent of the unemployment benefit cases and in twelve per cent of the sickness benefit cases were decisions unanimous. Moreover, Baenen and Bosch (1997) found serious indications of non-take-up of rights by flex-workers of about ten per cent on average among (partly) unemployed and sick flex-workers, due to lack of knowledge among employers and employees, rule complexity and ambiguity, administrative complexity, and errors. Substantial non-take-up of unemployment benefit and sick pay were also found by Klein and Hesselink *et al.* (1998) in their study among more than a thousand flex-workers. In addition, Baenen and Bosch (1997) found that employers tend to shift their labour and protection risks to flex-workers. A clear example of this is that flex-work is used as a means of reducing the sick pay risk for employers, who increasingly hired agency and other temporary workers after the privatization of sickness benefit (these flex-workers receive benefits from the national sickness benefit fund instead of sick pay from their employer). Flex-work can also be used as a means of avoiding rigid legal lay-off rules and of extending the duration of »on proof« work in case of new employees. So, serious flaws in the sickness and unemployment protection of flex-workers do actually exist: among about a third, there is either no coverage or non-take-up of rights.

Although the government in 1997, in its paper *Working on Security*, acknowledged that the flexibilization of work engenders new forms of labour contracts and work-

ing styles, and that sickness and unemployment schemes have to be modernized to meet the needs of flex-workers, no concrete measures in social security have actually been taken to improve the situation. Flexicurity is not a concept that has been heard of in the field of social security protection lately.

3.3 Flex-work and labour law

While the government has been slow to take measures to improve social security legislation for flex-workers, it has been rather energetic in changing labour law to the ends of improving (work) security for flex-workers and increasing flexibility for both employers and employees. In 1998, the Law on the Allocation of Workers by Intermediaries (*WAADI*), abolishing rigid rules for temp work agencies, was introduced, followed in 1999 by the Flexibility and Security Act (*Flex-Wet*), regulating flex contracts, dismissal procedures, probationary periods, and the like.

In the Explanatory Memorandum of *Flex Wet* government states that factors both on the supply-side and demand-side of labour have led to a growing diversity in labour hours, locations, contracts and the like. There is increasing international competition, shorter production cycles, fast technological developments, but also a changing character and behaviour of the labour force and related preferences for part-time and flex-work. New regulations are needed in order to find a new balance between flexibility and security. Therefore, *Flex Wet* combines measures that increase labour flexibility, as well as measures that improve the security of flex-workers. Flexibility measures regard: 1) Fixed-term contracts: after three consecutive contracts or when the total length of consecutive contracts totals three years or more, the employee is entitled to a permanent labour contract (this used to apply to fixed-term contracts that has been extended only once); 2) Notice period: the notice period is reduced from six months to in principle one month and four months at the maximum; 3) Terminating labour contracts: the Public Employment Service (PES) dismissal notification procedure is shortened and employees are no longer required to file a pro forma notice of objection to the Regional Director of the PES in the event of dismissal on economic or financial grounds in order to substantiate a claim for employment benefit. The security measures regard: 1) Presumption of labour contract: if working for three months for at least twenty hours a week, a labour contract is presumed by law; 2) Minimum salary: a minimum entitlement to three hours' pay for on-call workers each time they are called in to work; 3) Temp agency work: a worker's contract with a TWA is considered a regular, permanent employment contract; only in the first 26 weeks the agency and the agency worker are allowed a certain degree of freedom with respect to starting and ending the employment relationship. However, it is possible to deviate from this rule by col-

lective agreement between employers and employees' unions. This is what actually happened. In the Foundation of Labour, social partners agreed on a covenant for the 1999–2003 period to apply the principle that the strength of the relation between temp agency and temp worker should depend on the duration of the period someone works for the same agency. The covenant contains quite complicated rules, but for the standard case they imply that a temp worker gets a permanent labour contract with the temp agency if she/he has been working consecutively with that agency for at least a year and a half.

It is explicitly noted that *Flex Wet* is not concerned with social security legislation as such. As for social security protection of flex-workers the idea is that *Flex-Wet* defines important rules about the legal status of various flexible work contracts, which in itself helps to clarify what types of flex-work are covered by social insurance.

3.4 Work and care

It was only in 1992 that the redistribution of unpaid work (care) between men and women was taken as the main point for government's emancipation policy. And in 1994 government adopted a so-called »combination scenario« as its point of departure for future policies in the field of the reconciliation of work and care. This scenario, focusing on the division of tasks among the partners of a household with children, describes a situation in which each of the partners works for 30 to 35 hours a week (and gain economic self-sufficiency and independence from that) and carry out care task for 20 to 25 hours a week. At present this situation is clearly not reached yet, but government aims at achieving it by the year 2010. In 1997 government gives a new twist to the debate by stating that the choice for work and/or care is strictly personal, which means that men and women should be left free to choose and that the task of government can only be to set the conditions to facilitate the various choices people make (SZW 1997). In the course of the 1990s concrete measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and care have been taken. Government has stimulated childcare facilities, and it recently introduced a broader framework Act on Work and Care, which combines several existing and new measures.

Childcare

The Netherlands has been relatively late in introducing and stimulating public childcare facilities and at present there is still a lack of it. It is still disputed whether the preference of Dutch women to take care of their own children is a cause or a con-

sequence of inadequate childcare facilities (Knijn 1998). However, government stimulated public child-care facilities in the early 1990s by providing subsidies to municipalities, who are responsible for creating public childcare places. This stimulation measure has increased the number of day care places from about 20.000 in 1989 to about 100.000, but there still is a need for much more (Keuzenkamp *et al.* 2000). After-school care for older children is even more limited available: less than one per cent of children are using this kind of care (den Dulk *et al.* 1999). In 1995 government also introduced a tax deduction for parents and employers who make use of or create childcare places, and recently government started to allocate another stimulus subsidy to Dutch municipalities in order to increase the number of available day care places to 160.000. Finally, in 1999 government has expanded a scheme subsidizing child care for single parents in case they search for a job, have started working or follow an education to improve their labour market position. Parents get a subsidy of 90 per cent to 100 per cent of childcare costs, provided that their income does not exceed 130 per cent of the minimum wage.

Work and Care Act

The Work and Care Act (*Algemene Wet Arbeid en Zorg*) incorporates a number of existing and new measures. In the preamble to the proposal government clearly states that the reconciliation of work and care is a shared responsibility of government, social partners, and individuals. With this statement it justifies that much of the existing and proposed measures do not aim to enforce, but to facilitate matters. As a consequence, much room is left for employers and employees.

The existing measures that are incorporated by the new act are mostly introduced in the 1990s and include an unpaid, part-time leave arrangement for parents of young children, a limited career break scheme, and an act on adapting working hours by employees.

The parental leave was only firstly established in 1991, and it now offers both parents the right to a period of six months unpaid, part-time leave, which can be taken until the children reach the age of eight. Take-up of parental leave is rather low and differs strongly by economic sector and sex. In the sector of government and education, where wage is paid during leave, somewhat more than half of the women entitled to it really take the leave. Among men this is somewhat less than half. The scheme's ineffectiveness is even greater among the workers in other sectors, where the wage in most cases is not retained during leave. Here only 30 per cent of the women take the leave, and seven per cent of the men. All in all about 75 per cent of all those who are entitled to the scheme do not use it. A survey showed that the main reason for non-take-up is that people are not able or do not want to bear the financial consequences of having no pay during the leave. A second reason

is the lack of sufficient and qualitative child (day) care, and there is a strong belief that taking up the leave would affect one's career negatively (Grootscholte *et al.* 2000).

The career break measure offers a leave-taker allowance of about 400 euro gross a month. At the same time it aims at stimulating the labour market participation of excluded groups, since the act provides the allowance only if the vacant place is re-occupied by either an unemployed or disabled person, or by a female worker who re-enters the labour market after having cared for children for many years. An evaluation after the first year of the act (Van der Aa *et al.* 2000) led to a major disappointment. A very small number of only 217 workers had made use of the allowance, while government had expected some 56.000 users within the first five years. As reasons for the very low take-up the evaluators mention the unwillingness or inability of workers to accept the financial loss (the allowance is usually much smaller than the wage forgone), the negative attitude of the average employer towards longer term leave of workers, and the difficulties in finding replacing workers.

In 1993 the social partners united in the Foundation of Labour recommended their members to meet employees' requests to adapt working hours, unless this could not be reasonably expected of the employer on grounds of conflicting business interests. This recommendation was increasingly adopted in collective labour agreements, and finally resulted in the 2000 Law on the Adjustment of Working Hours. It introduces the right for every individual employee, who is employed for more than one year with the same employer, to change every two years the agreed number of weekly working hours, either downwards or upwards. A request can only be refused if it conflicts with important organizational interests, which has to be proven objectively by the employer. Few workers, however, take their employer to court if they feel their request is rejected unjustified.

The Work and Care Act also added new measures, like the legal formalization of maternity and emergency leave (which both were granted in practice by collective labour agreements), a short-term care leave and a leave savings plan.

The short-term care leave offers workers a legal right to leave work maximally ten days per twelve months, with a 70 per cent wage pay. Claims have to be awarded, however, on the clause that the leave would not conflict with important interests of the employer. Initially, government proposed a longer leave, but social partners in the Foundation of Labour were strongly divided on the subject.

To stimulate educational and »refresh« leave, or sabbatical leave, fiscal measures are being prepared on grounds of which workers can save maximally ten percent of their current wage to cover the financial consequences of a future leave of maximally twelve months. No taxes are levied on the savings, until they are used to compensate the income during the leave. The leave has to be agreed upon with the

employer, and cannot be used for early retirement (government aims at stimulating the labour participation of older employees).

In the pre-amble to the Work and Care Act government promises to look further into the possibilities of long term care leave and paid parental leave. At present these issues are part of a debate on modernising work and care measures once again, by means of a life cycle approach (*levensloopregeling*). This debate is on combining several present work-life balance schemes into an overarching framework of fiscal and welfare regulations regarding the coverage and financing of life cycle related needs. A central idea of the approach is to create a fiscally supported, sort of personal savings account for every worker from which she/he can draw benefit rights when taking leave (for care or education), or early retirement. However, the *levensloopregeling* will not give workers a right to any leave (each case will have to be negotiated with the employer). Problematic seems to be also that young people will not have time enough to save any serious entitlements when they will need leaves most, that is, once they are getting children.

4. Evaluation and discussion

Part-time work is high in the Netherlands. Government and social partners have stimulated it actively during the last two decades. It is popular among the working population, especially among Dutch women, and among employers who pursue a flexible production of goods and services. On the whole, the position of Dutch part-time workers, who make up about a third of all workers, is not marginal. On the basis of the principle of equal treatment, Dutch governments have systematically abolished differential treatment of part-time and full-time workers regarding wages, labour contracts, working conditions, taxes, and social protection entitlements. Typically (possibly as a result), compared to those in other European countries, Dutch part-time workers, male and female, show a high degree of contentment with the contracts they have. Of course, in the Netherlands part-time work also has its critics (see Plantenga 1997; Koopmans/Stavenuiter 1999), who point at the lesser quality of part-time jobs (lower career opportunities, more irregular working hours, duller and dirtier work), low pay, and low status. It has been suggested that part-time work functions as a new divide between labour market insiders (full-time working males, with high-quality jobs) and outsiders (part-time working women, with low-quality jobs). For certain types of part-time work, this may be true, especially regarding (flex-)jobs done by less skilled and educated people, but on average Dutch part-time work cannot be regarded as »a-typical« or marginalized work. Dutch part-time work policies seem to have been successful, in the sense that

they opened up the labour market for many Dutch women. However, the Law on the Adjustment of Working Hours (*Wet Aanpassing Arbeidstijd, WAA*), offering workers the legal right to adjust their contractual working hours upwards or downwards, does not seem to be successful yet. Since its introduction in 2000, it has not resulted in workers changing less in function, or of employer, when changing their working hours (Fouarge/Baaijens 2003).

The situation with regard to flex-workers is clearly different. At present, they make up about ten per cent of all workers, and significantly, most of them would want to have normal jobs. As a group, flex-workers are paid comparatively less than people with normal labour contracts, their unemployment risk is higher, and the group consists of people with traditionally unfavourable labour market positions, such as women, ethnic minorities, and less educated people. In the Netherlands, marginal workers are found mostly among those with flex-jobs. There is a tendency among employers to (mis)use flex-work ass a means of avoiding costs and rigidities related to social insurance schemes and labour law. The Dutch government has regularly expressed its concern about the position of flex-workers, and it regards stimulating both flexibility of labour and social protection of flex-workers as important policy goals. So far, the first aspect of these »flexicurity« goals has been implemented in practice more strongly than the second. Remarkably, the Dutch government has so far been very reserved in taking practical measures to improve the social security protection of flex-workers who get ill or unemployed, while several studies have shown that there are major problems of non-coverage, (partial) non-take-up, and false rejection of claims.

Instead of improving the social rights of flex-workers, the government has tried to realise part of its flexicurity goals by adjusting labour law, mainly by means of the 1999 Flex Wet. Flexibility measures under this act shortened probationary periods and facilitated dismissal procedures. The act opened opportunities for flex-workers to gain normal (permanent) labour contracts.

Studies show that the situation of stand-by workers and of workers with a fixed-term contract has improved (Grijpstra *et al.* 1999; De Klaver *et al.* 2000). In 1999, after the introduction of the Flex Wet, nearly 27,000 stand-by contracts were replaced by temp work contracts, nearly 18,000 were changed into fixed-term contracts, and 48,000 were extended or made more permanent (positive effects), whereas only about 25,000 stand-by contracts were terminated (negative effect). As for fixed-term contracts, in 145,000 cases contracts were perpetuated, 72,000 turned into permanent contracts (positive), while 46,000 were terminated and 30.000 were temporarily terminated (negative). However, the studies express serious doubts whether the positive effects are attributable to the introduction of the Flex Wet only. They suggest that the strong economic upturn of the Dutch economy and the related shortages on the labour market have strongly improved the bargaining posi-

tion of employees. This situation may also be the reason why the new regulations have not yet led to serious disputes.

Furthermore, it was expected that the *Flex Wet* would improve the position of stand-by workers because of its rules on the presumption of a labour contract and the minimum salary per call. In practice it still remains to be seen whether any real improvement has occurred. The studies show that employers regard the rules as barriers to hiring flex personnel rather than as stimuli, and that they dislike the financial consequences. Furthermore, it is clear that employees are not inclined to pursue their rights in all cases in order to avoid conflicts with their employers. If the economic situation changes for the worse, the studies expect more controversy regarding stand-by contracts. More disputes are also expected in the case of fixed-term work than there has actually been in the first year of the Flex Wet. At present, employers are willing to apply all the »security« rules of the Flex Wet since they need all hands they can hire, but this will change if the economy takes a turn for the worse.

Finally, despite the measures taken the general idea is that in the Netherlands combining work and care by men and women is still seriously hindered by a lack of facilities. An international comparative study of work-family arrangements (Den Dulk *et al.* 1999) showed that the Dutch situation is typified by a combination of minimal public childcare and a few statutory (mostly unpaid and short) leaves. Critiques are that there are too few child care places, which are too costly for families on a lower income; that opening hours of crèches, shops and public services do not fit to working time; that too much (important parts of) leave arrangements are left to bargaining between social partners or between individual employers and employees; that too many leave schemes only provide unpaid leave leading to low take up; that there are too many, too complicated legal and occupational schemes etc. It is suggested that the high degree of part-time work in the Netherlands is the way in which Dutch workers cope with the lack of public care arrangements (Koopmans/Stavenuiter 1999, Den Dulk *et al.* 1999, SZW 1997). This puts into perspective the high degree of contentment among Dutch part-time workers as far as their working hours are concerned. It is not unlikely that, especially Dutch women, will increase their working hours in future, in case public care and leave arrangements will be improved.

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