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# Part-time work and gender inequality in Europe: a comparative analysis of satisfaction with work–life balance

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## ABSTRACT



Part-time work is an increasingly common strategy for handling work and family – but is it an effective strategy everywhere and for everyone? To answer this question, we examine satisfaction with work–life balance (SWLB) of workers in 22 European countries. Our results show that part-time workers have higher SWLB than full-time workers; the more so, the fewer hours they put in. Yet, we find an important gender difference: women in marginal part-time work are more satisfied than men in a similar situation, and conversely men in full-time work have higher SWLB than women working full-time. Further, the societal context plays an important role: substantial part-time work is more conducive to SWLB in more gender-egalitarian countries than in countries with low gender equality. Hence, a supportive gender climate and institutional support may entice workers to reduce working hours moderately, which results in markedly increased levels of SWLB.

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**KEYWORDS** Work–life balance; part-time work; gender inequality; Europe

## Introduction

In many European countries, reduced working hours have become a common strategy for employees to manage their work and family responsibilities and to reach a satisfying level of balance between the different life spheres (Bielenski *et al.* 2002; Gornick and Heron 2006; Lyonette 2015). The expansion of part-time work can be a positive development if it reflects a genuine choice of people balancing

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between work and other life pursuits, or if it increases employment opportunities for those previously excluded from the labor market, such as mothers or older workers. But part-time work can also be involuntary because no full-time job is available or it is the only available option because of the difficulty of reconciling a 'standard' job with one's family responsibilities (e.g. Gash 2008; Wielers *et al.* 2013; Baierl and Kapella 2014; Lyonette 2015).

Although the overall proportion of part-time workers has steadily increased in almost all parts of Europe in the last decades, part-time employment is a highly gendered phenomenon. It is mainly women who reduce their working hours after childbirth in order to balance work and caring responsibilities. In 2016, 31% of female employees worked part-time in the European Union as compared to 8% of men (Eurostat 2018a). Further, the prevalence of part-time work differs significantly across European countries. Part-time is most common in countries where social policies and/or norms regarding the role of men and women in a society strongly support reduced working hours (especially among females), such as The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, and the UK. Despite strong policy support for work–family reconciliation and less traditional gender norms in the Nordic countries, part-time work is also widespread in Norway and Sweden. Part-time work is less common in the Mediterranean and the Eastern European countries, where policy support for work–family balance is lower and part-time work is not widely offered by employers (Baierl and Kapella 2014; Fahlén 2014).

Part-time workers report less work–family conflict and greater satisfaction with their work–family balance (Sandor 2011; Beham *et al.* 2012; Roeters and Craig 2014; Oishi *et al.* 2015). Although it is evident that shorter work time can provide greater flexibility to accommodate competing work and life demands, the question arises whether part-time work is a viable path to a satisfying work–life balance in every European society and for everyone. Individuals hold different norms and attitudes, just as societies differ in institutional arrangements and the normative climate they provide. Given the gendered nature of part-time work in Europe, it might well be possible that employees' gender and the gender norms of their social context shape the pathway between part-time work and a satisfying work–life balance. The crucial role of gender has long been recognized in research examining antecedents and consequences of part-time employment (e.g. Rosenfeld and Birkelund 1995; Blossfeld and Hakim 1997; Gash 2008; Webber

and Williams 2008; Beham *et al.* 2012; Gash *et al.* 2012; Wielers *et al.* 2013; Lyonette 2015). Still, there is only limited empirical evidence on how gender and gender inequality at the societal level influences the relationship between part-time employment and the work–family interface. The few existing findings on gender differences are not clear-cut. Whereas Beham *et al.* (2012) reported no significant gender difference in the link between part-time work and satisfaction with work–family balance, Sandor (2011) concluded that women working part-time were more satisfied with their work–life balance but the gender gap decreased as hours of employment increased. Further, research has shown that societal gender norms, heightened expectations in some institutional contexts, and governmental support for work–family reconciliation influence employees’ work–life experiences and shape the work–family interface (Fahlén 2014; Ruppanner and Huffman 2014; Ruppanner and Maume 2016; Hagqvist *et al.* 2017). Nevertheless, an empirical examination of how societal gender climate shapes the relationship between reduced working hours and work–life balance across different countries is still missing.

To address this gap in the literature, the present study investigates whether gender at the individual level and gender equality at the societal level alter the relationship between part-time work and satisfaction with work–life balance (SWLB). By analyzing probability samples of the working populations in 22 European countries, we extend previous research on part-time employment in several ways. Firstly, other studies were limited to fewer countries and non-representative samples (Beham *et al.* 2012). Secondly, we acknowledge the varied nature of part-time arrangements by distinguishing between marginal and substantial part-time employment. Part-time employment is not a homogeneous phenomenon but it differs in nature and in outcomes (e.g. Blossfeld and Hakim 1997; Bielenski *et al.* 2002; Beham *et al.* 2012; Roeters and Craig 2014). Thirdly, we will provide more conclusive results on gender differences in part-time employment and SWLB by not only examining differences between men and women, but by also analyzing how these differences are shaped by national-level gender inequality. Finally, our study contributes to the growing body of cross-national comparative research on the work–family interface which aims to put employees’ work–life experiences into context, thereby acknowledging that the interface is shaped by its societal context (Ollier-Malaterre *et al.* 2013; Ruppanner and Huffman 2014; Ruppanner and Maume 2016).

## Hypotheses development

### *Satisfaction with work–life balance*

Despite its popularity in business media and the popular press, the concept of work–life balance (WLB) has only recently received more attention by academic scholars and has been acknowledged as a unique construct and useful addition to the literature on the work–family interface (Wayne *et al.* 2016). Whereas early definitions framed WLB as an individual choice and a personal responsibility (thereby neglecting structural, cultural, and gendered constraints), more recent definitions understand WLB as a social construct that is shaped by both individual and contextual factors (Drobnič and Guillén 2011). Consistent with role balance theory, Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) defined WLB as ‘the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domain’ (458). Greenhaus and Allen (2011) defined WLB as when effectiveness in and satisfaction with work and family are consistent with one’s life priorities. Across the various definitions, WLB is conceived as a global evaluation of the interplay between work and private life (Carlson *et al.* 2009; Wayne *et al.* 2016).

Following recent suggestions to conceptually and empirically differentiate between effectiveness at and satisfaction with balancing work and private life (Grzywacz and Carlson 2007; Wayne *et al.* 2016), the present study focuses on employees SWLB. SWLB is a unitary and holistic construct (Valcour 2007). It has been negatively linked to a variety of job demands (including working hours, commuting time, job insecurity) and positively associated with job resources such as job control and social support at work (Valcour 2007; Abendroth and Den Dulk 2011; Beham and Drobnič 2010; McNamara *et al.* 2013).

Although part-time work has often been criticized for poor job quality in terms of lower status, job security and pay, fewer training and career opportunities, and for reproducing a gendered division of labor (e.g. Warren 2004, 2008; Lyonette *et al.* 2010), employees working reduced hours seem to experience less negative interference between work and family and higher levels of SWLB (Beham *et al.* 2012; Roeters and Craig 2014; Oishi *et al.* 2015). These findings are in line with the scarcity argument in role theory (Goode 1960), which argues that long working hours create conflict in employees, since individuals only have a finite amount of time which they can either devote to work or private matters (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Consequently, reducing working hours is a prominent

means (especially among young mothers) to free time for private and family matters and to reduce conflict and increase WLB (Lyonette 2015).

Nevertheless, part-time work may differ with respect to actual working hours and thus influence employees' opportunities to reach a satisfying level of reconciliation between work and non-work obligations differently. In line with previous research which distinguishes between substantial (long-hours) and marginal (short-hours) part-time work (Bielenski *et al.* 2002; Beham *et al.* 2012; Roeters and Craig 2014), we suggest that employees working a marginal part-time schedule of up to 20 hours/week are more satisfied with their WLB than workers who work a substantial part-time schedule between 21 and 34 hours/week. Consequently, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Part-time workers are more satisfied with their WLB than full-time employees. The difference is greater for marginal part-time workers than for substantial part-time workers.

### ***Part-time employment and gender***

Although gender roles are changing, women continue to be primarily responsible for childcare and housework (Treas and Drobnič 2010). Women (especially those with young children) are more likely to reduce their working hours in order to be better able to manage their multiple responsibilities at home and at the workplace, even at the expense of poorer working conditions and limited career prospects (Webber and Williams 2008; Beham *et al.* 2012; Gash *et al.* 2012; Wielers *et al.* 2013; Lyonette 2015). Men, on the other hand, more frequently work part-time while in education and training or because they are not able to find full-time employment (Baierl and Kapella 2014). According to the 2010 European Union Labor Force Survey, these were the most common reasons for part-time employment among men in the European countries examined in this study. The most frequently reported reasons for women to work part-time were childcare and other family or personal reasons accounting for 43% in total, as opposed to 16% for men (Eurostat 2018b). These gender differences in motivation for being in part-time employment may influence men and women's opportunities for WLB differently. Whereas women seem to more frequently opt for reduced working hours to increase their opportunities for reaching a satisfying level of WLB, this seems to be less the case for men and consequently may not result in comparable levels of SWLB among men.

Even though more women reduce their working hours for family reasons, the empirical evidence on whether part-time working women

experience less conflict and higher levels of SWLB than men is not clear-cut. Whereas Sandor (2011) reported women working a marginal part-time schedule to report higher levels of SWLB than men, a study among service sector employees in five Western European countries did not yield any gender differences in SWLB for both marginal and substantial part-time workers (Beham *et al.* 2012). To gain additional insights into these relationships, we provide a more powerful test of gender differences in the relationship between part-time work and SWLB, using a sample that is not restricted to the service sector and includes countries from all of Europe. Despite growing expectations on men to become more involved in household and care-giving tasks (Fahlén 2014), women are still the primary caregivers and consequently face more difficulties than men in living up to the ideal worker norm of long working hours and minimal accommodations for private life. A reduction of working hours is thus a more viable option for women, especially when a substantial reduction in working hours is necessary to meet non-work obligations. In normative terms, working a marginal part-time schedule may comply more with the female caregiver role and less with the male breadwinner role. Consequently, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Female part-time workers are more satisfied with their WLB than male part-time workers. We expect the gender difference to be greater for marginal part-time work than for substantial part-time work.

### *Societal gender equality*

Countries vary in regard to gender norms and the relative position of men and women in politics, education, and the labor market (Fahlén 2014; UN 2015). Societal beliefs and norms about the appropriate roles for men and women influence men's and women's employment options and shape their opportunities to achieve WLB (Pfau-Effinger 2012; Lyness and Judiesch 2014; Uunk 2015). In more gender-equal countries, traditional gender roles are less emphasized and both men and women are equally encouraged to engage in work and family roles. In countries low on gender equality, the traditional male breadwinner, female carer social model prevails (McDaniel 2008).

Gender norms and institutional context are interconnected (Fahlén 2014). Gender norms are shaped by institutions, such as the family, labor market, and the welfare state. But the welfare state also constitutes gender relations and responds to existing gender norms (Gregory and Milner 2009; Mandel 2009). These interrelations are particularly evident

in Europe. The Nordic countries are characterized by the least traditional gender norms, high levels of gender equality, and extensive statutory support for work–family reconciliation. Both social policies and societal norms encourage a more equal division of caring and working responsibilities in these countries. This is also reflected in the part-time employment rates in the Nordic countries. Although women reduce their working hours to a larger extent than men (and they mainly do so for family and personal reasons), male part-time rates are above the EU average in these countries (Drange and Egeland 2014; Eurostat 2018a).

More traditional gender norms and lower levels of gender equality can be found in the Eastern European countries, where the state provision for childcare is low and part-time employment is not very common. In former socialist countries, part-time employment was rare and not considered a female phenomenon (Drobnič 1997). In the post-transition period, part-time employment is infrequent, most families need a full-time wage, and there is no established gender ideology whereby women are expected to work part-time instead of full-time. Consequently, part-time employment among both sexes is well below the EU average in these countries (Eurostat 2018a). Furthermore, and in contrast to the Nordic countries, part-time work is less often a deliberate choice to increase work–family balance but rather the result of unfavorable labor market conditions and a lack of full-time employment opportunities (Sandor 2011; Baierl and Kapella 2014; Eurostat 2018b). To some extent, this parallels the situation in the Mediterranean countries, especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis starting in 2008. We observed slightly higher part-time employment rates in the Mediterranean countries, mainly due to larger proportions of female part-time workers. However, the shortage of full-time jobs accounts for a considerable share of part-time employment among men and women in these countries (Eurostat 2018a, b). Furthermore, women’s reduction of working hours is less a deliberate choice for personal reasons (as in the Nordic countries) but rather a necessity to compensate for a lack of statutory support for work–life balance. Despite some recent changes, the family continues to be the main caregiver in the sub-protective welfare state regime of the Mediterranean countries (Kovacheva *et al.* 2011).

There is a relatively strong governmental support for women to reduce their working hours for family responsibilities in many Western European countries such as Austria, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK despite less traditional gender roles (Fahlén 2014; Pollmann-Schult 2016). In these countries, a modified male breadwinner model is promoted and shorter part-time working hours (<20 hours per week),



especially among mothers, are more common than in the Nordic countries where longer part-time hours are most frequent (Kovachva, *et al.* 2011; Fahlén 2012; Pollmann-Schult 2016; Eurostat 2018c). Among these societies, the Netherlands assume a unique position as highly gender-egalitarian society (see Gender Inequality Index (GII) in Table 1) with the highest part-time employment rates for both men and women in Europe (Eurostat 2018a).

Gender norms and the institutional context do not only shape employment opportunities but also shape people's expectation regarding WLB and these expectations may influence their levels of satisfaction with WLB (Fahlén 2014; Ruppanner and Maume 2016). In high gender equality and more family-supportive contexts, individuals may be more sensitive to work-life interference and have higher expectations for WLB. However, if these expectations are not met, greater disappointment may occur. In a study of working hours and work-to-family conflict among workers in 32 countries, Ruppanner and Maume (2016) found support

**Table 1.** Overview of sample composition and descriptives.

	<i>N</i>	% Women	% PTmarg	% PTsub	Mean SWLB	GII <sup>a</sup>	% of children (0–2 years) in formal childcare <sup>b</sup>	Involuntary PT <sup>c</sup>
Austria	722	49.6	8.6	12.9	6.82	0.13	9.0	11.0
Belgium	658	50.9	14.0	19.8	6.78	0.11	35.0	11.3
Bulgaria	590	59.0	3.4	5.3	6.34	0.23	7.0	51.4
Cyprus	222	50.0	9.9	5.9	7.25	0.14	25.0	33.0
Czech Republic	627	46.3	4.3	2.4	5.62	0.14	3.0	20.8
Denmark	688	48.1	5.5	18.0	7.24	0.07	77.0	15.4
Estonia	692	57.7	5.3	5.6	6.14	0.19	21.0	22.1
Finland	635	51.8	4.1	10.9	6.89	0.08	28.0	23.0
France	676	54.9	7.7	14.3	6.40	0.11	42.0	30.1
Germany	1204	44.8	12.3	14.9	6.13	0.09	20.0	20.4
Greece	463	55.7	7.1	13.8	6.19	0.16	8.0	53.5
Hungary	559	51.3	4.3	4.8	6.04	0.27	9.0	33.8
Ireland	689	58.1	19.7	20.9	6.42	0.17	29.0	29.6
Lithuania	264	61.0	12.9	6.4	6.86	0.17	14.0	38.3
Netherlands	660	51.8	15.0	32.4	6.87	0.05	50.0	6.9
Norway	829	44.6	6.9	12.3	6.75	0.08	48.0	5.9
Poland	480	43.5	6.5	6.5	6.75	0.16	2.0	19.5
Portugal	581	54.2	10.2	5.3	6.04	0.14	37.0	28.8
Spain	655	46.9	6.7	10.7	6.32	0.11	37.0	50.8
Sweden	657	52.7	6.4	19.3	6.36	0.05	51.0	33.4
Switzerland	634	41.6	9.5	15.8	6.89	0.07	26.0	6.8
UK	912	55.8	17.0	16.7	6.34	0.21	34.0	15.1

Notes: Abbreviations are as follows: PTmarg: marginal part-time work (<21 h/week); PTsub: substantial part-time work (21–35 h/week); GII: Gender Inequality Index (lower scores indicate more gender equality); SWLB: satisfaction with work-life balance (scale 0–10).

<sup>a</sup>United Nations (2010).

<sup>b</sup>Eurostat (2010).

<sup>c</sup>OECD (2010).

for their ‘heightened expectations’ argument. Workers reported a more work-to-family conflict in countries with shorter work hours due to unmet expectations for higher levels of WLB.

When aiming at a satisfying level of WLB, individuals respond to the institutional context and expectations as well as to demands and resources at the workplace (Fahlén 2014). For example, workers reported greater WLB in more expansive dual-earner and gender-egalitarian (the Nordic) countries than in countries with a more traditional division of labor such as the UK and Ireland, but also Germany and Austria (Grönlund and Öun 2010). Assuming that a reduction of working hours is a common response and means to achieve WLB, employees may respond with a stronger reduction of working hours in less gender-egalitarian and less work-family-supportive countries. In more egalitarian countries, where extensive support for work–life reconciliation is available, employees may have a preference for working longer working hours, hence substantial part-time arrangements. Research on working mothers in Europe has indeed shown that gender equality at the societal level mitigates the negative impact of children on women’s preference to reduce their working hours (Pollmann-Schult 2016). Further, a liberal gender ideology has been found to narrow the gap in happiness between wives working longer and shorter hours, thereby alleviating some disadvantages associated with working longer hours (Treas *et al.* 2011). Consequently, we assume that employees working a substantial part-time schedule are more satisfied with their WLB in high gender-egalitarian than in low gender-egalitarian countries. However, due to heightened expectations for WLB in countries high in gender equality, we expect the difference in SWLB between full-time and substantial part-time workers to be larger in these countries than in the less gender-egalitarian countries where expectations on work–family balance are also low. Consequently, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3: Substantial part-time workers are more satisfied with their WLB in more gender-egalitarian countries than in low gender-egalitarian countries. The gap in SWLB between substantial part-time work and full-time employment is larger in more gender-egalitarian countries.

## Data and method

### *Sample and procedure*

Data of the fifth round of the European Social Survey (ESS) were used for testing the study hypotheses. The ESS is a large scale, biennial cross-national survey conducted via face-to-face interviews in various European

countries. The 2010 data included a special module on work–life balance. Due to the small share of part-time workers in some country samples, we were not able to perform a meaningful comparison with the data from Croatia, Slovenia, and Slovakia. Consequently, we excluded these countries from our analysis. Further, we had to exclude Ukraine because country-level data on the provision of formal childcare was not available for this country. Country-level data, namely the GII, the provision of childcare for children aged 0–2 and involuntary part-time work were obtained from databases of the United Nations, Eurostat, and the OECD, respectively.

Our final sample comprises 14,097 employees working in various industries in 22 European countries. Country samples sizes range from  $N = 222$  in Cyprus to  $N = 1,204$  in Germany. Average age of respondents was 42.3 years and 52.9% had at least one child living in the same household. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of country samples sizes, shares of women and part-time workers in the sample, as well as the country means of the dependent variable SWLB. In addition, the share of children aged 0–2 years in formal childcare, the proportion of involuntary part-time employment, and the GII per country are presented.

## *Measures*

### *Dependent variable*

SWLB was measured with the single item ‘How satisfied are you with the balance between the time you spend on your paid work and the time you spend on other aspects of your life?’ The response scale ranged from 0 = extremely dissatisfied to 10 = extremely satisfied.

### *Independent variables*

Marginal part-time work (<21 hours/week) and substantial part-time work (21–35 hours/week) were dummy-coded, with 1 indicating that the employee works the respective part-time schedule. Full-time employment is the reference category in all multivariate models.

### *Moderators*

Gender is dummy-coded with 1 = female, 0 = male. The GII 2010 of the United Nations was used as the country-level indicator for gender (in)equality and included as a moderator variable in our models. The GII is a composite measure of objective indicators reflecting gender inequality in reproductive health, female empowerment, and labor force

participation (UN 2010). It replaces previous gender development and empowerment measures and reveals the extent to which the realization of a country's human development potential is confined by gender inequality. Unlike other gender equality indices (e.g. the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum) which only assess gender gaps, the GII also takes into account absolute achievements, thereby leading to more accurate country rankings (Gaye *et al.* 2010). Higher GII scores indicate more gender inequality at the country-level.

### Controls

We controlled for various individual-level work demands and resources, since their impact on SWLB has been shown in previous research (Beham *et al.* 2012). Overtime was calculated as the difference between actual and contracted working hours. Work and time pressure were assessed with a single item each on a 5-point Likert scale. Job control was measured with two items on an 11-point scale, ranging from 0 = I have no influence to 10 = I have full control. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.81. Co-worker support was measured with the single item on a 4-point scale.

Further we controlled for age groups (reference category is 60 years and older in all models), marital status (1 = married/cohabiting, 0 = single), parental status (1 = children, 0 = no children), professional status<sup>1</sup> (1 = professional, 0 = non-professional), and respondents' feeling about their income, ranging from 1 = finding it very difficult on present income to 4 = living comfortably on present income. Higher scores indicate higher economic well-being. At the country level, we included the percentage of children aged 0–2 years in formal childcare and the share of involuntary part-time workers in the year of data collection as control variables. Availability of childcare outside the home should allow parents to better cope with the competing time claims in family and work and more freely exert their preferences concerning the length of working time, thus increasing their SWLB. The notion of involuntary part-time work entails a constraint on workers' desired labor supply and can lead to dissatisfaction with part-time work arrangements and the perceived work-life balance.

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<sup>1</sup>ISCO 88 codes, supervisor status, and number of employees under supervision were used to assign participants to the EGP class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) which allows for comparative analyses between different employee categories. 'High and low controllers' were collapsed into a new category 'professionals'. The EGP classes 'routine non-manual', 'routine manual', 'skilled-manual', 'semi-unskilled manual', 'skilled manual', 'manual supervisor', and 'farm labor' were classified as 'non-professionals'. Self-employed and small employers were not included in our sample.

### Analytical strategy

To account for the nested structure of our data (14,097 employees nested in 22 countries), we make use of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for the dependent variable SWLB is rather low (ICC = 4%), meaning that the bulk of variance is located at the individual level. Nevertheless, HLM is recommended due to more correct estimations of standard errors (Gelman and Hill 2007). To enhance model estimation and the interpretation of results (especially the cross-level interaction terms), level-1 variables were country-mean centered and level-2 variables were grand-mean centered. To increase model fit, we included random slopes of level-1 covariates which varied significantly across countries (Heisig *et al.* 2017). This was the case for professional status, overtime, time pressure, co-worker support, and job control. However, due to space limitations, these slope variances are not displayed in the table (but are available upon request).

Further, we followed Bryan and Jenkins' (2016) recommendations to strengthen cross-level analysis by supplementing multilevel analysis with an alternative two-step regression analysis. This approach is particularly recommended in case of multilevel country data with large country samples and a rather small range of countries. In a first step, the effects of part-time work on SWLB were estimated separately for each country. In a second step, we regressed these part-time coefficients on GII. This corresponds to the cross-level interaction between marginal part-time work/substantial part-time work and GII, the effect that is of main concern in Hypothesis 3. Two-step regression allows a straightforward visualization of the cross-level interaction effect.

### Results

Table 2 reports unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, variance components, and deviances for the random slope models predicting SWLB.

In support of Hypothesis 1 (Model 1), both marginal part-time workers ( $b = .76$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and substantial part-time workers ( $b = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) reported significantly higher SWLB than full-time workers and the effect was stronger for marginal part-time workers. A separate analysis based on the sub-sample of part-time workers (analysis not presented but available upon request from the authors) confirmed that marginal part-time workers ( $b = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ) experience higher levels of SWLB

**Table 2.** Hierarchical random slope models – dependent variable = SWLB.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
<b>Level 1</b>						
PT marginal	0.76**	0.08	0.70**	0.08	0.71**	0.08
PT substantial	0.44**	0.07	0.41**	0.07	0.38**	0.06
Gender	-0.15**	0.03	-0.14**	0.03	-0.14**	0.03
Age < 30 years	-0.46**	0.08	-0.46**	0.08	-0.46**	0.08
Age 30–39 years	-0.46**	0.08	-0.47**	0.08	-0.48**	0.08
Age 40–49 years	-0.31**	0.08	-0.32**	0.08	-0.32V	0.08
Age 50–60 years	-0.21**	0.08	-0.22**	0.08	-0.22**	0.08
<i>Ref.: &gt; 60 years</i>						
Marital status	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.04
Parental status	-0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.04
Professional status	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.05
Economic well-being	0.35**	0.02	0.35**	0.02	0.35**	0.02
Overtime	-0.04**	0.00	-0.04**	0.00	-0.04**	0.00
Work pressure	-0.17**	0.02	-0.17**	0.02	-0.17**	0.02
Time pressure	-0.28**	0.03	-0.28**	0.03	-0.28**	0.03
Job control	0.08**	0.01	0.08**	0.01	0.08**	0.01
Co-worker support	0.30**	0.03	0.30**	0.03	0.30**	0.03
<b>Level 1 interactions</b>						
PTmarg × gender			0.33**	0.13	0.34**	0.13
PTsub × gender			0.17	0.12	0.17	0.11
<b>Level 2</b>						
GII					-1.17	1.88
Childcare (0–2)					0.01	0.01
Involuntary PT					0.00	0.01
<b>Cross-level interaction</b>						
PTmarg × GII					0.87	1.34
PTsub × GII					-2.52**	0.91
<i>Intercept</i>	6.48**	0.09	6.47**	0.09	6.48**	0.08
<i>Var (intercept)</i>	0.17**		0.17**		0.14**	
<i>Var (PTmarg slope)</i>	0.05		0.04		0.04	
<i>Var (PTsub slope)</i>	0.02		0.02		0.00	
<i>Deviance</i>	58,058.07		58,054.69		58,050.78	

Note:  $N = 14,097$ . Abbreviations are as follows: GII: Gender Inequality Index; PT: part-time work. Gender is coded 0 = male, 1 = female.

\* $p < .05$ .

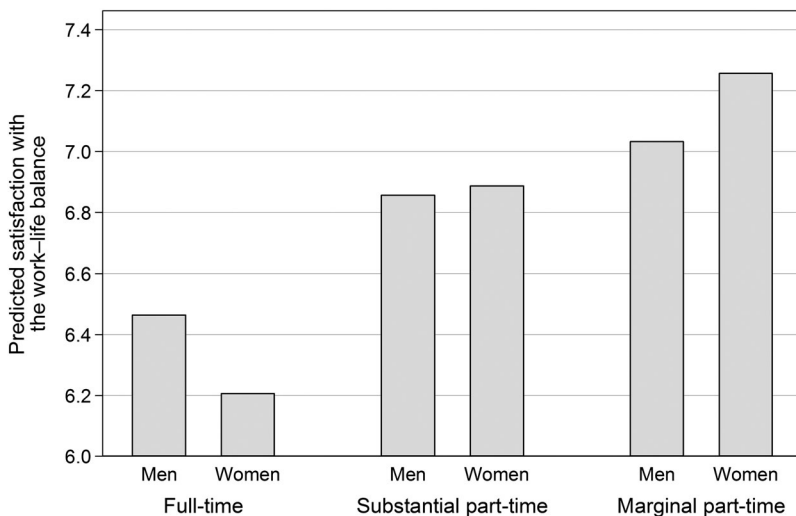
\*\* $p < .01$ .

than employees working a substantial part-time schedule. The negative regression coefficient for gender in all models indicates that women were less satisfied with their WLB than men. The negative, significant regression coefficients for all age groups suggest that all younger age groups reported lower SWLB than the group of employees older than 60 years. Whereas economic well-being and both job resources (job control and co-worker support) were positively related to SWLB, work demands were negatively related to SWLB.

In Hypothesis 2, we proposed that women working part-time would report more SWLB than men and that this difference would be greater for women working marginal part-time. Our analysis partially confirmed

this hypothesis. We found a significant interaction for marginal part-time work  $\times$  gender on SWLB ( $b = .33, p < .01$ ; Model 2). [Figure 1](#) shows that women working marginal part-time report more SWLB than men working marginal part-time. In line with predictions, the gender difference was larger for marginal part-time than for substantial part-time work. [Figure 1](#) also illustrates the non-significant interaction term for substantial part-time work. When working full-time, men are significantly more satisfied with their WLB than women. Hence, the significant SWLB advantage of men in our models is mainly driven by the lower levels of SWLB among full-time working women.

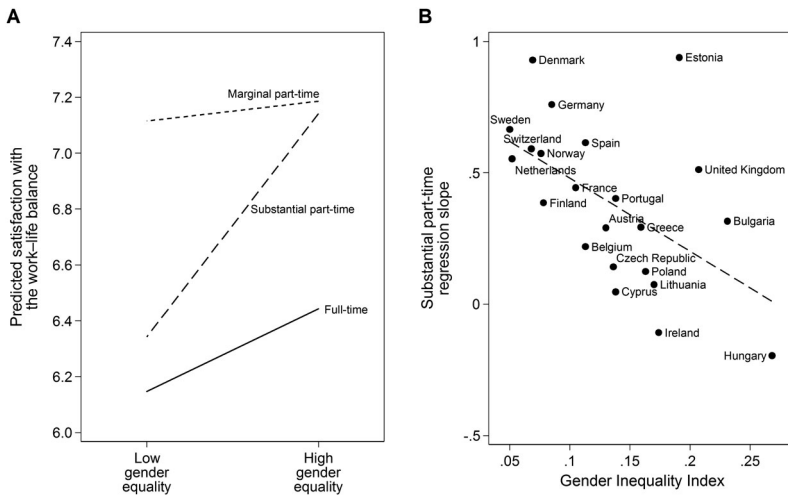
We conducted a number of robustness checks (not shown due to page limits but available upon request from the authors) to account for alternative explanations of our findings, such as (1) higher SWLB due to preparation for retirement or (2) lower SWLB because of being pushed out of the labor market due to gender discrimination. We estimated Model 2 including several interaction terms between age groups and both forms of part-time work and with alternating reference groups. Since no significant differences across age groups were detected, we concluded that the alternative explanation (1) does not apply to our sample. In a second step, we added three-way interactions for age groups, gender, and both forms of part-time work. Our analysis yielded significant interaction terms for marginal part-time work in the middle age groups (30–49



**Figure 1.** Gender differences in satisfaction with work–life balance. Predictions based on Model 2 of [Table 2](#).

years) and in favor of our female part-time workers, which is indicative of the opposite effect rather than a push-out effect due to gender discrimination, as alternative explanation (2) had posited.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that the differences in SWLB between full-time and part-time employees may also be at least partially explained by the level of gender equality at the country-level. Although the slope variances of our main predictors were non-significant in our models, we estimated the hypothesized cross-level interactions following recommendations of LaHuis and Ferguson (2009). They strongly recommend not using significant slope variance as a prerequisite for testing cross-level interactions but to test these interactions regardless of the slope variance. Consequently, in Model 3, country-level variables and the interaction terms  $GII \times$  part-time marginal/substantial were added. None of the country-level variables had a significant main effect on employees' SWLB. Nevertheless, our analysis revealed a significant interaction for substantial part-time  $\times$  GII on SWLB ( $b = -2.52, p < .01$ ), but not for marginal part-time work. Figure 2(A) depicts that substantial part-time workers are more satisfied with their WLB than full-time workers at high levels of national gender equality. At low levels of national gender equality, there is little difference in levels of satisfaction between employees working full-time and those working substantial part-time. But the gap is wider in more gender-egalitarian countries. At all levels of national gender equality, marginal part-



**Figure 2.** (A) Interaction plot of individual-level interaction with gender. Predictions based on Model 3 of Table 2. (B) Scatter plot for Gender Inequality Index and regression slope of marginal part-time work.



time workers are more satisfied with their WLB than full-time employees and substantial part-time workers, but the difference in SWLB between marginal and substantial part-time workers is smaller when a country is more gender-egalitarian.

To facilitate cross-national analysis and to visualize country differences, the two-step regression analysis approach recommended by Bryan and Jenkins (2016) was applied. The substantial part-time slope coefficients of the within-country OLS regressions with SWLB as the dependent variable are plotted in Figure 2(B). A positive slope for substantial part-time refers to higher WLB for respondents working a substantial part-time schedule. Gender, age, marital status, number of children, professional status, overtime, job demands and resources, and economic well-being were included as control variables in OLS regressions (analysis not presented but available upon request from the authors).

The graph confirms the pattern of our HLM analysis. Differences in SWLB between substantial part-time and full-time workers tend to be larger in the more gender-egalitarian countries (low GII index), such as the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, but also Switzerland and Germany. Countries with higher gender inequality are located at the lower end of the regression line, with even negative associations between substantial part-time work and SWLB in Hungary and Ireland. Two countries deviate from this overall pattern: in Estonia and to a smaller extent in the UK, working a substantial part-time schedule is strongly and positively related to SWLB despite a rather high GII Index (low gender equality).

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether worker's gender and societal gender equality alter the link between part-time employment and SWLB. We thereby extended comparative research on part-time work and SWLB to a larger array of European countries and accounted for the heterogeneity of part-time arrangements. In line with the scarcity argument (Goode 1960) and previous findings on part-time employment in the service sector in Western Europe (Beham *et al.* 2012), employees working marginal part-time were found reporting higher levels of SWLB than employees working a substantial part-time schedule. Despite the evidence of lower job quality and certain disadvantages of part-time jobs (e.g. Warren 2004; Lyonette *et al.* 2010), which may be even more prevalent in marginal part-time arrangements, our findings

suggest that a substantial reduction of working hours provides employees with better opportunities to juggle work and non-work responsibilities, leading to higher SWLB. Nevertheless, the relationship between marginal part-time work and SWLB turns out to differ between men and women. Whereas no gender differences in SWLB were found for substantial part-time, women seem to benefit more from marginal part-time work in terms of increased levels of SWLB than men. If full-time employment is considered, we find exactly the opposite relationship. Male full-time workers seem to be more satisfied with their WLB than female full-time workers. These findings are in line with traditional gender roles and family models, as well as gender differences in the motivation to work part-time. In traditional family models, men assume the role of the main breadwinner and women the role of the main caregiver. Consequently, women more frequently and often to a larger extent reduce their working hours for family and personal reasons, whereas men more often work part-time for education and training or due to the difficult labor market situation (Baierl and Kapella 2014; Eurostat 2018b). Hence, despite growing expectations of men to become more engaged in household tasks and care-giving in some European countries (Fahlén 2014), traditional gender roles and division of labor seem to prevail overall.

The results of our cross-level analysis support the need for considering the societal context when examining the work–family interface, since gender norms and social policies shape employees’ opportunities for WLB. As predicted, substantial part-time workers experienced more SWLB in countries with less gender inequality, where societal norms and policies encourage a more egalitarian division of labor between men and women. At the same time, the difference in levels of SWLB between substantial part-time and full-time workers was much larger in these countries than in the less gender-egalitarian countries. We attribute these findings at least partially to heightened expectations for WLB in the more gender-egalitarian countries. Extensive public discourse on gender equality and generous support for WLB in these countries may lead to heightened expectations for less time at work and more WLB among workers (Ruppanner and Maume 2016). If workers can match their expectations with a reduction in working hours, this may translate into increased levels of satisfaction.

We found that marginal part-time workers were more satisfied with their work–life balance than full-time workers and that this difference was similar across countries, regardless of how gender-equal they are.

However, marginal and substantial part-time workers are more alike in their satisfaction levels in more gender-egalitarian countries, as shown in [Figure 2\(A\)](#). This smaller gap may be explained by higher levels of statutory policies for work–life reconciliation in the more gender-egalitarian countries.

The two-step regression analysis, which corroborated the findings from our HLM models, provided a visual interpretation of country differences. It revealed stronger relationships between substantial part-time work and SWLB in the more gender-egalitarian countries of Northern Europe and the Netherlands, but also in Switzerland and Germany. Family and personal responsibilities are the most common reasons for employees (and especially for women) in the Nordic countries to work part-time (Drange and Egeland 2014). The long-standing public discourse on gender equality, in combination with a welfare state regime that provides extensive statutory support for families and encourages a dual-earner model, leads to stronger preferences for longer part-time arrangements and heightened expectations for WLB (Nordenmark 2004; Corrigan and Konrad 2007; Fahlén 2014; Ruppner and Maume 2016). A substantial part-time schedule may thus be the preferred employment arrangement to combine paid and unpaid work in the Nordic countries, thereby resulting in high levels of SWLB. Similarly, in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany, substantial part-timers are significantly more satisfied with their WLB than full-time workers, although these countries differ from the Nordic countries in terms of family policies and the preference to reduce working hours. Germany and the Netherlands are characterized by a more traditional family model, whereas Switzerland has a more market-oriented family policy model (Boye 2011). Mothers in these three countries, for example, were found to have a higher preference for reducing their working hours than mothers in the Nordic countries (Pollmann-Schult 2016). Nevertheless, all three countries are very gender-egalitarian (with the Netherlands, together with Sweden, having the lowest GII Index), are economically affluent, and high-quality public childcare is either largely provided by the state (Netherlands, Germany) or can be purchased (Switzerland). Consequently, substantial part-time work in these countries seems to be a more deliberate and conscious choice, which translates into high levels of SWLB, comparable to those in the Nordic countries.

In contrast, some of the Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria are located at the lower end of the regression line ([Figure 2\(B\)](#)). Both countries are characterized by very traditional gender

norms, a clear gendered division of housework (Boye 2011), and the highest GII Index in our sample. Part-time work is less common, less desirable, and in many cases less affordable than in the economically more affluent countries (Sandor 2011; Baierl and Kapella 2014). Whereas in Bulgaria, substantial part-time work has a small positive impact on employees' SWLB, employees in substantial part-time jobs in Hungary have even lower SWLB than those working full-time. In the Czech Republic and Poland, working a substantial part-time schedule only has a very small positive impact on employee's levels of SWLB. However, our regression analysis by country revealed a significant positive effect of marginal part-time work on SWLB in all Eastern European countries. Our findings seem to reflect the lack of adequate childcare support in these countries, which makes it more difficult to combine a substantial part-time schedule with family responsibilities. Almost all post-Communist countries have experienced retrenchments of family policies (e.g. in public childcare) after the transition to a market economy (Boye 2011).

Interestingly, there are two cases of apparently similar pairs of countries in terms of levels of gender equality, welfare state, and social policies, but remarkable differences in SWLB among substantial part-time workers. These are the UK and Ireland, both representing the liberal, market-oriented welfare state, and the two Baltic States Estonia and Lithuania. Whereas both the UK and Ireland have lower gender equality than other Western European countries (which is reflected in the higher GII scores), substantial part-time work is positively associated with SWLB in the UK but negatively in Ireland. Country-specific regression analyses also revealed a positive effect of marginal part-time work on SWLB for both countries, but this link was particularly pronounced in the UK.

Likewise, the levels of SWLB between Estonian and Lithuanian workers in substantial part-time jobs differ remarkably, with much higher levels of SWLB in Estonia than in Lithuania. The Baltic States have not received much attention in work-family research and our knowledge on how employees in these states manage their work and family responsibilities is still limited. In both countries, part-time employment is significantly less prevalent than in Western and Northern Europe and full-time employment is preferred. However, Lithuania is the only Catholic country among the Baltic States, with people holding more traditional views on the family and the division of labor, while the majority of Estonians favor the dual-earner model (Michon 2010; Toots and Bachmann

2010). These differences in attitudes may partially account for the differences between the two countries in our analysis.

A similar explanation may apply for the divergent findings in the UK and Ireland. Whereas there is a lack of public childcare support in both countries, the negative association between substantial part-time work and SWLB in Ireland may be at least partially explained with very traditional gender roles resulting from Catholic familialism in Ireland (Payne and McGashin 2005; Russell *et al.* 2009; Lyonette 2015).

As a bottom line, our findings overall support the argument that gender norms and family policies shape men's and women's expectations regarding WLB and their abilities to achieve a satisfying level of balance between the different life domains. Nevertheless, some limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. The ESS is composed of cross-sectional national datasets. Such data can make causal conclusions difficult. Although findings are largely consistent with the assumed causal relationships in our theorizing, rival explanations for significant findings cannot be ruled out (Stone-Romero and Rosopa 2008). Further, our dependent variable SWLB was assessed with a single item. Although it is debatable whether a multi-item measure, such as the one of Valcour (2007), yields a more robust and reliable assessments of an individual's level of SWLB, future studies may want to include a multi-item measure in addition to the single-item variable to account for potential differences in mean scores. We controlled for involuntary part-time employment at the country level since an individual-level measure was not available in the dataset. However, future research may also want to account for involuntary part-time work at the individual level to better assess the gendered motivation for pursuing specific working time options over the life course.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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