

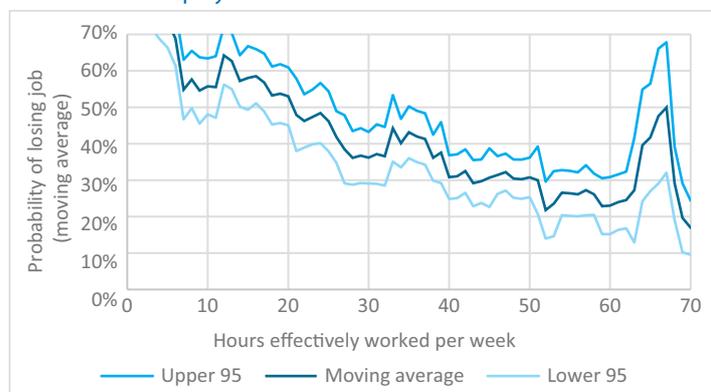
Part-time work during the COVID-19 pandemic

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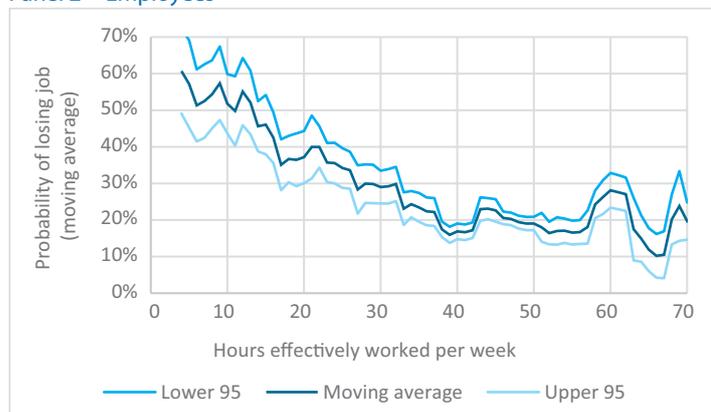
The COVID-19 pandemic has reaped lives and devastated livelihoods. Billions of people worldwide have been economically affected in some way—although the consequences have not been the same for all. Part-time work is often (but not always) associated with lower job security than full-time employment. If part-time workers are defined as those working less than 35 hours per week, then their situation did not change much: part-time workers comprised 18.4 per cent of employment in the first quarter of 2020, just before the pandemic hit, and by the end of 2020 this share had risen to 18.6 per cent¹—essentially no change.

However, when we consider employment transitions into the equation, part-time workers had a much higher chance of losing their jobs. Figure 1 shows the likelihood of losing one's job in the second quarter of 2020 as a function of hours worked in the first quarter of the same year.

FIGURE 1
Transitions out of employment (Mexico) from Q1 to Q2 2020
Panel 1—Self-employed



Panel 2—Employees



Source: Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE) microdata.

The figure refers to Mexico, but there are similar numbers for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Both the 'self-employed' and 'employees' groups were more likely to lose their jobs if they worked fewer hours. The slope shows that each additional hour worked increased one's chance of keeping their job by about 0.8 percentage points. When personal characteristics such as age, sex and education are controlled for, this falls to about 0.4.

So, how can it be that part-time workers were much more likely to lose their jobs, yet their share of total employment remained more or less constant? The reason is that a countervailing flow of workers transitioned from full- to part-time during the health crisis. Table 1 shows this transition matrix for Mexico (but similar numbers can be found for other countries). Eight per cent of all working-age adults (44 per cent of part-time workers) transitioned from part-time employment to unemployment, but this was more than compensated by 12 per cent of all working-age adults transitioning from full-time to part-time employment (26 per cent of full-time workers transitioned to part-time).

TABLE 1
Transition matrix, from Q1 to Q2 2020—Mexico

↓ Initial\Final →	Full time	Part-time	Not working	Total
Full time	23%	12%	10%	45%
Part-time	3%	7%	8%	18%
Not working	2%	3%	32%	37%
Total	28%	22%	50%	100%

Source: ENOE microdata.

Finally, these changes did not happen in a vacuum, oblivious to personal characteristics. Part-time work is traditionally the realm of the young, the poorly educated and women. Both flows of workers (part-time to unemployment and full-time to part-time) changed this scenario to some extent. Between the first and second quarters of 2020, the percentage of part-time youth workers fell from 21 per cent to 17 per cent, men increased from 43 per cent to 46 per cent, and those with higher education increased from 32 per cent to 37 per cent.

It remains to be seen how much of this change will be permanent. It may well be that part-time work will revert to its pre-COVID-19 profile, or that some changes will endure—as many expect of remote work, for example.

Note:

1. These figures are based on 39 household surveys with data for 2020. These surveys are biased towards countries in Europe and the Americas, where more up-to-date surveys are available.