

Flexible Labour and Household Strategies in Post-communist Bulgaria: Inter-generational and Gender Dimensions

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Abstract

In the context of the transforming Bulgarian society flexibilisation of labour is a highly disputed but little researched category. Social policy analysts interpret it as a feature of the advanced market economies and a desired destination of the country’s economic transition. Social research, however, tends to conceptualise part-time and fixed-term jobs in negative terms as ‘under-employment’.

Within households flexible labour is a widespread strategy for survival. Informal work, additional jobs, home-produced goods and services are typical characteristics of flexibilisation under the conditions of the post-communist economic restructuring. Statistical evidence shows that flexible work is not typical only for married women combining paid work with family responsibilities. In the form of de-standardised work contracts it is more common among men. Age also makes a difference, the youngest and the oldest age cohorts of the work force being the most flexible workers.

This paper addresses the problem of inter-generational and gender relations within the households in Bulgaria with regard to labour strategies on the basis of analysis of statistical data, policy documents and research results and is part of a bigger comparative study* of flexibilisation in a European context.

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The context in which flexibility of work is to be identified in Bulgaria is the profound social transformation from a centrally planned to a market regulated economy. In a way, the reforms are leading to a flexibilisation of all former social structural patterns and especially those in the field of work. Thus during the one party regime work patterns were highly standardised, strictly regulated, full-time, permanent and secure. Self-employment, free-lancing, home-working, fixed term contracts and other 'non-standard' jobs and careers were very limited in number for the four decades of communist rule. There were no real labour markets, as the state allocated school and university graduates to places in the state owned companies where they could stay till retirement. Proclaimed to be the basic human right, the right to work was also an obligation to work and could only be exercised as a full time occupation. Changing jobs between workplaces was strongly discouraged as undesired 'fluidity' of the labour force while combining jobs was sanctioned as a lack of full devotion to the goal of 'work self-realisation' of the personality.

In the 1990s the social reforms toward liberalisation of the economy and of social life in general resulted in less formal regulation, less control, more insecurity and greater diversity of work. The developing market economy provided a wider scope of opportunities to work in different sectors of the economy: state, privatised, newly founded private, foreign implants, mixed. They offered varying conditions of work with varying arrangements of working time and place. Seen at first as a solution to the inefficiency of labour in the centrally planned economy, mass unemployment persisted during the decade of transition, staying at two-digit levels. The sudden collapse of the system of full employment and life-long jobs under the conditions of a fifty-percent drop in economic output for the first five years of reforms created segmented and fractured labour markets. The wide-scale de-structuring of the formal regulators in economy, politics, education, health care and other social spheres forced individuals and households to invent flexible strategies to adapt to the new situation.

This paper starts with an overview of the flexibility debate in Bulgaria and then proceeds with examination of the available statistical data on the trends toward flexible labour. Several types of flexible work are discussed in more detail: working part-time, self-employment, employment under a 'civil' contract or other atypical type of contract and working without a contract. The influence of factors such as age and gender, as well as education level, rural/urban area and economic sectors is examined. The paper ends with a discussion of the shifts in inter-generational and gender relations within households with regard to work strategies.

The Flexibility Debate

In the context of the transforming Bulgarian society flexibilisation of labour is a widely acknowledged but little researched category. Economists and social policy analysts interpret it as a feature of the advanced market economies and a desired destination of the country's economic transition. Sociological research, however, tends to conceptualise part-time and fixed-term jobs in negative terms as 'under-employment', while informal

work and home production are seen as a backward tendency toward naturalisation of the economy.

Flexibilisation as an effective policy tool

The term flexibility appears in the titles of only three articles in Bulgarian literature, all published in *Problems of Labour*, the journal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Two of them, un-authored compilation from Western literature, (MLSP, 1996 and 1997) present EU policies toward a greater flexibility in the labour market. The third one (Atanasova, 1998) also discusses foreign models, this time of flexible management strategies inside the company, building upon the concept of 'internal labour market' (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Atkinson and Meager, 1986). What all three publications have in common is the perception of flexibility of work as the most advanced mechanism for enhancing employment and improving compatibility under the pressure of globalisation.

Labour market studies in Bulgaria generally evaluate flexible labour as an advantage of the late modern market economies. It is a policy recommendation of supra-national bodies as the EU, OECD, World Bank and a solution to the problem of high rates of general unemployment, women's unemployment, youth unemployment, and long-term unemployment. Thus Beleva et al (1996: 92-93) insist that the strategy for encouraging employment in Bulgaria should be the use of flexible forms of labour. The latter are defined as part-time work and home working. According to the authors the diversity of forms of employment widens the opportunities for choice and is especially suitable for women - mothers of young children, women who still study. Keremidchieva (1998) uses the term 'flexible workers', that is workers who are constantly moving between employment and unemployment. She also advocates part-time work as a form of solidarity toward the unemployed and considers that flexibility of labour is the only effective strategy for the labour market policy in Bulgaria, which will increase the adaptability of the companies and their employees.

In studies of human resources management the flexible firm is heralded as an effective resolution of problems in company efficiency. The flexible business organisation is the undisputed advantage in self-employment as it increases its adaptability to the quickly changing economic situation in modern societies and especially in developing post-communist societies. Todorova et al (1997) see flexibilisation as a way to raise innovation and labour productivity, particularly under conditions of economic restructuring. The authors do not provide empirical data either from advanced economies or from Bulgaria for their recommendation. Their thesis is simple: flexibilisation of work is a global trend, including the economies in transition.

Shopov (1997) argues that the flexible business organisation, which is brought to life by the modern technological development, requires a balanced usage of the opportunities of the internal and external labour market. It is unjustifiably underrated in Bulgaria. While Genova (1998) is concerned more with the flexibility of the motivation strategy of company's management, Varbanova (1997:43) mentions flexibility in association with the organisation of labour inside the company. She perceives the flexible working time

and the work in the home as mechanisms to raise the quality of work. These have advantages both for the company and for the employees. They are particularly suited for parents of small children, the disabled, those still in education, and older people.

A common feature of these publications discussing flexibility from the perspective of human resources management is their optimistic vision of flexibility and lack of supporting empirical data from the economy or the broader social context in post-communist Bulgaria. The goal of accession to the European Union makes flexibilisation of the labour market and the business management a policy imperative for Bulgaria. In this discussion there is no mention of any specifics in the forms of flexible work when post-communist economic and social realities are taken into consideration.

One form of flexible labour - self-employment - has been particularly welcomed in Bulgarian social science literature. Widely accepted by Bulgarian sociologists (Todorova et al, 1997; Manolov, 1995; Rakadzijska, 1998) is Shumpeter's (1934) definition of the entrepreneur that ascertains flexibility as one of its essential characteristics. Here flexibility is associated with innovation, new combinations of organisational elements, a creative response to market dynamics. In the same way, Stoilova (1999) sees the specificity of self-employment in the lack of outside regulation, a greater degree of autonomy in the work, and direct economic dependence upon the results. She argues that in Bulgaria there is a process of formation of a personality type with greater flexibility, adaptability and mobility. The flexible personality type includes a sense for the empty market niches, inclination to risk and readiness to adapt your economic activity to the changing requirements of the clients. Dimitrov (1997: 148) also underlines the role of flexibility in the 'dynamic motivational structure' of entrepreneurs in Bulgaria.

Flexible labour as inferior employment

When employment trends in Bulgaria in the 1990s are studied on the basis of statistical data or survey research, then flexible labour is used interchangeably with terms, such as 'inferior employment' and 'underemployment' (Dimitrova, 1995), 'insecure jobs' (Vladimirov et al, 1998). This plethora of terms however not only reflects a kind of uncertainty but also contains a critical (or at least a more balanced) vision of the processes under way in post-communist labour markets. Both the general description and the concrete analyses of labour market trends in the country offer negative interpretations of current situation.

Dimitrova (1995) has found that about 10% of the labour force is underemployed, being forced to work less hours or less days than normally. These are predominantly women and are concentrated in the private sector. This development has both economic and social reasons, which are embedded in the transition to a market economy. When she considers its consequences, they are all negative: de-qualification of people, disproportions in the labour market, higher competition among the unemployed, impetus for illegal, non-regulated employment. The non-standard forms of employment under post communism are often seen as negative tendencies leading to high social costs of the transition. Lukanova (1996: 38) argue that part-time employment, together with long-term unemployment, is among the causes for poverty. Underemployment and

development of a black labour market come as consequences of the high mass unemployment (Dimitrova, 1994). The end of life-long jobs causes stress not only among the unemployed but also among those still having jobs. Dimitrova's study (1994) established that a half of those employed feared that they might be dismissed. Four years later, about 60% of the respondents in Vladimirov's survey (1998) declared that they felt insecurity and fear for their workplace. The concern about the possible job loss was not influenced significantly by the dwelling place, education, age and gender; it was a widely shared attitude.

Another form of flexibility widely discussed in Bulgarian sociology is the development of the shadow economy (Chavdarova, 1996; Tilkidziev, 1998). Working off the records is not a completely new phenomenon - during socialism kinship economic exchanges of preserved fruits and vegetables, meat, etc. were a mass practice in the society of permanent deficit (Smollet, 1986, Creed, 1998). While this was expected to subside in the course of the transition to a market economy, the reality proved sociologists wrong.

Chavdarova (1996) argues that a process of informalisation of Bulgarian economy is under way in the 1990s, with the decline of the share of job pay in household incomes, the growth of irregular economic activity (which avoids monitoring and paying taxes) and the rise of the work in the black economy. Stanchev (1996:35) contends that the informal economy is a mass phenomenon in Bulgaria and is linked to the parallel functioning of different markets of labour, natural resources, capital and entrepreneurship. The role of parallel labour markets is significant - when workers cannot find jobs in the legal labour market they offer their labour for a lower pay in the non-regulated labour market to private employers. In the study of Vladimirov et al (1998:26) two thirds of the unemployed expressed readiness to work without a written labour contract and with no social security. One fifth (17%) of those employed were already working under such conditions. The authors argue that this is an indicator of an 'anomic consciousness'.

A 1996 survey of the Institute for Market Economy (UNDP, 1997:45) reveals the vast scale of this type of flexible labour. One third of the employed in the country work in the black or grey economy. Every tenth legally employed person receives additional remuneration from the employer that both sides conceal. Close to 80% of all employers hide parts of their income. The share of the officially registered as unemployed who have worked during the week preceding the survey, have been 13%. They have done this mostly without any written contract and for a limited period - up to a month. A particular form of the shadow economy is the so-called 'suit-case trade' - small-scale smuggling in which between a third and a quarter of all those employed in the private sector are involved (Todorov et al, 2000).

Home production is another form of this trend. The first most common indicator for the growth of home production is the decline of the share of market exchange in the structure of incomes and expenditures of the household. Many studies have pointed at the growth in the real volume and share of the income from the home economy in money and goods (See Stoyanova, 1996: 48). Vladimirov et al (1998: 100) examine the tendency of

'naturalisation' of incomes - a quarter of the respondents claim that all food stuffs in their household are produced by themselves. For a further quarter, more than a half of the edibles are home production.

Zheljzskova (1998) also finds a 'clear tendency toward de-marketization in the economic strategies of the households in Bulgaria in the significant growth of home economy and naturalisation of consumption. This, together with the high percentage of involvement in the second economy (through unregistered activities and parallel forms of labour) has proved to be the most successful way of poverty alleviation. Zheljzskova criticises state policies as encouraging this strategy of the households: the untaxed minimum income is 35 USD a month, most surely below the poverty line while the import of new cars has been freed from taxation despite the fact that it benefits a tiny layer of the population. In her survey only 0.4% of respondents have reported buying a new car in the past three years.

Raychev et al (2000:99) also speak about 'the naturalistic economy' and consider that the home production of food is the main buffer in this situation. In their survey, conducted for the World Bank in 1999, they found that half of the households in the country were leaving or had already left the market and did not exchange labour or capital with the rest of society. Thus, 45% relied mostly on home produced food, 50% of the respondents ate only potatoes produced in the home (by the respondents or by their parents), 35% ate only chicken meat which they (their parents) had produced, 46% themselves (their parents) produced all the fruits and vegetables which they consumed. The authors agree that this is a survival strategy but that it is not without price. It leads to a process of de-qualification of the employees, a form of de-capitalisation of the labour force. After the decapitalisation of the economy comes the decapitalisation of the labour force - the doctor grows potatoes instead of reading journals, the engineer paints his flat, the turner milks cows while waiting his factory to pay the salaries delayed for several months...

Bulgarian social science addresses the rise of flexibility of work in the course of social transformation with a diversity of terms and approaches. While these might reflect the different meanings and political judgements of the authors (See Felstead and Jewson, 1999), it is true that they have been concerned mostly with the policy implications of flexible labour, giving them either optimistic or pessimistic interpretations. Less attention has been paid to data collection, trend analysis, scrutiny of everyday practices, legal regulations, individual and group identities.

Official Statistics about Flexible Employment

Employment trends have been documented throughout Europe, both East and West, at least in the past five or ten years (See Eurostat publications). The development of flexible employment has also been highlighted although some of its forms - more than others. While flexibility of work has a very broad scope, official statistics record mainly part-time work, and some de-standardised arrangements such as self-employment, sub-contracting, fixed-term work and others. The Labour Force Survey, regularly conducted

in Bulgaria since 1993, provides data about flexibility in time (the changing amount of hours worked) and flexibility of conditions ('civil' contracts, self-employment, unpaid family work or work without a contract). This database lacks information about such important aspects of work flexibility as fixed-term contracts, which are widespread in Western economies, as well as about informal employment, the typical flexible work in post-communist Eastern Europe.

Flexibility in time

According to the Labour Law (1986) the normal longitude of a working week in Bulgaria is 40 hours, five working days. Only for specific categories of employees, working under conditions dangerous for their health, a shorter working week is the norm. The changes in the Labour Law in 1992 and in 2001 gave more freedom to the employers to reduce the working time or offer part-time jobs. Yet in December 2000 only 5.5% of the workforce in the country work less than the standard working time.

Table 1. Employed by usual weekly hours of work and sex %

Usual weekly hours	Total	Male	Female
1-9	0	0	0
10-19	0.3	0.4	0.2
20-29	1.1	0.7	1.5
30-39	4.1	3.1	5.2
40-49	81.3	79.5	83.3
50-59	3.3	4.2	2.2
60 and over	2.0	2.6	1.2
Unknown	8.0	9.4	6.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 85.

Data in Table 1 display the very low share of time flexibility in the country – over 80% of the work force are employed for 40-49 hours weekly. Women tend to work less than the usual hours a week – 7% of them do so, while only 4% of men. The reverse is the ratio men/women among those working more than the normal hours of work (6.8:3.4).

As shown in Table 2, time flexibility is greater in the private sector. It consists mostly of working over time (9%) rather than of working less time (6%). Within the public sector atypical number of working hours have only 6.5% and most of them are below the norm. As the share of employment in the private sector in Bulgarian economy has been rising throughout the 1990s, it might be expected that together with the development of the private sector, work flexibility would also grow.

Table 2. Employed by usual weekly hours of work and economic sectors

	%		
	Total	In public sector	In private sector
1-9	0.0	0.0	0.0
10-19	0.3	0.1	0.5
20-29	1.1	1.1	1.1
30-39	4.1	4.1	4.1
40-49	81.3	88.1	75.3
50-59	3.3	0.6	5.6
60 and over	2.0	0.6	3.2
Unknown	8.0	5.5	10.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 85.

Flexibility in conditions

The indicator 'employment status' in the Labour Force Survey gives us information about flexibility in terms of conditions. The categories 'self-employed' and 'unpaid family workers' are two types of flexible workers, so they deserve particular attention. Their overall share in the workforce in the country is 10.06%, that is every tenth legally employed person.

Table 3. Employed by sex and status in employment

	%						
	Employers	Self-employed	Employees in private enterprises	Employees in public enterprises	Unpaid family workers	Unknown	Total
Total	2.5	9.5	39.8	46.7	1.1	0.5	100.0
Men	3.5	11.8	40.3	43.1	0.7	0.6	100.0
Women	1.3	6.8	39.1	50.7	1.6	0.4	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 33.

These data suggest the existence of a gender bias the legal arrangements of work. Men are over-represented among the employers, the self-employed and the employees working in the private sector. On their part, women dominate among the categories of unpaid family workers and employees in state enterprises. Women tend to concentrate in the more secure and inflexible state sector.

The forms of work flexibility are also gender coloured: men concentrate among the form of self-employment, women among unpaid family workers. The self-employed in the transition countries are a very diverse group: some of them have a yearly overturn

of thousand of US dollars and substantial profits, others hardly make ends meet. In terms of time flexibility they also demonstrate diverse practices: working less than 20 hours a week, as well as working over 60 hours a week. The unpaid family workers are a more homogeneous category, underprivileged in their conditions of work and financial rewards.

Age also makes a difference in the groups with different employment status. Older age groups are over-represented among the categories of employers, the self-employed and the employees in public enterprises. Young people are clearly over-represented among the employees in the private sector. The shares of the employees in the state sector grow with age, reaching a peak in the 45-54-age group and drop sharply in the oldest group – 65 and over. The unpaid family workers come from the two youngest and two oldest age groups.

Table 4. Employed by sex, age and status in employment

	Employers	Self-employed	Employees in private enterprises	Employees in public enterprises	Unpaid family workers	Unknown
	%					
Total	2.5	9.5	39.8	46.7	1.1	0.5
15-24	0.7	7.5	65.2	23.5	2.8	0.3
25-34	1.8	8.2	47.8	40.5	1.3	0.4
35-44	3.2	9.4	36.6	49.3	0.9	0.6
45-54	2.7	9.1	32.2	54.9	0.6	0.5
55-64	2.9	15.6	28.9	51.0	1.2	0.4
65 and over	3.8	46.3	23.7	21.9	2.5	1.7
<i>Men</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>11.8</i>	<i>40.3</i>	<i>43.1</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>0.6</i>
15-24	1.1	8.9	61.8	24.9	2.8	0.4
25-34	2.0	10.3	47.3	38.6	1.2	0.5
35-44	4.9	11.9	37.7	44.4	0.4	0.7
45-54	4.1	11.6	33.8	49.8	0.2	0.5
55-64	3.4	15.9	31.0	48.9	0.5	0.4
65 and over	4.7	47.1	21.7	23.5	0.9	2.1
<i>Women</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>6.8</i>	<i>39.1</i>	<i>50.7</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>0.4</i>
15-24	0.2	5.8	69.0	22.0	2.8	0.2
25-34	1.5	5.5	48.5	42.8	1.5	0.2
35-44	1.5	6.9	35.6	54.0	1.5	0.5
45-54	1.3	6.7	30.6	59.9	1.1	0.5
55-64	1.7	14.8	23.4	56.4	3.2	0.5
65 and over	-	43.5	31.7	15.7	9.1	-

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 60.

The two flexible groups of workers show different patterns. The self-employed come from the older age groups while the unpaid family workers are from both the youngest (15-34) and the oldest (55 and over) age groups.

The patterns of age influence are different for the two genders. While there are close to 5% men over 64 years of age among the employers, there are no women from this age group in this status group. While women in general are under-represented among the employees in the private sector, women from the two youngest categories have higher shares than men. When men have the status of unpaid family workers, they are most often from the two youngest age groups. For women the pattern is significantly different. The highest shares of female unpaid workers are those from the two oldest age groups – 65 and over and 55-64.

Education is another factor influencing the flexibility in terms of conditions. In general, the higher the completed education, the greater the chances to get a secure job in the state sector or find oneself among the employers.

Table 5. Employed by sex, education and status in employment

Educa- tional level	Employers	Self- employed	Employees in private enterprises	Employees in public enterprises	Unpaid family workers	Unknown	Total
Total	2.5	9.5	39.8	46.7	1.1	0.5	100.0
Tertiary type A and advanced	3.9	5.4	29.0	60.8	0.4	0.5	100.0
Tertiary type B	1.7	4.0	20.4	72.9	0.6	0.4	100.0
Upper secondary	2.6	8.2	45.4	42.3	1.0	0.5	100.0
Lower secondary	1.3	18.5	40.1	37.4	2.2	0.4	100.0
Primary or lower	1.3	25.6	33.0	35.6	4.1	0.4	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 70.

Employees with college, university or advanced education concentrate in the public sector. The groups with the lower educational levels are over represented among the unpaid family workers and the self-employed. Within the group of employees in the private sector, the biggest is the share of those with upper secondary education, the shares of employees with lower secondary and primary are somewhat smaller while those with higher education are considerably underrepresented. The two flexible

groups: the self-employed and the unpaid family workers tend to be with lower educational levels: primary or lower and lower secondary. Gender does not change the pattern of influence of workers' educational level.

Types of settlement also structure the opportunities for the type of work arrangements people enter in. Both employers and employees tend to live in urban areas while the rural dwellers are over-represented among the self-employed and the unpaid family workers. It seems that flexibility in Bulgarian context is greater in the rural areas of the country. The older age groups have higher shares among the self-employed in the rural areas than those in urban areas. The shares of the younger age groups among the unpaid family workers are higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. In all status groups the educational level of the urban dwellers is higher than that in the rural areas.

Table 6. Employed by urban/rural areas, age and status in employment

	Employers	Self-Employed	Employees in private enterprises	Employees in public enterprises	Unpaid family workers	Unknown	Total
Total	2.5	9.5	39.8	46.7	1.1	0.5	100.0
Urban	2.8	6.4	41.0	48.5	0.8	0.5	100.0
15-24	0.8	3.9	68.0	24.5	1.8	0.4	100.0
25-34	2.0	5.8	49.8	41.1	0.9	0.4	100.0
35-44	3.5	7.4	37.1	50.6	0.7	0.6	100.0
45-54	2.9	5.6	33.1	57.4	0.5	0.5	100.0
55-64	3.6	9.0	31.0	55.5	0.5	0.4	100.0
65 and over	5.0	27.9	35.0	28.4	2.5	1.3	100.0
Rural	1.5	19.6	35.5	40.6	2.3	0.5	100.0
15-24	0.3	17.2	55.9	20.9	5.6	-	100.0
25-34	1.0	16.2	41.3	38.4	2.5	0.5	100.0
35-44	1.9	16.5	34.7	44.3	2.0	0.6	100.0
45-54	1.9	21.1	29.1	46.2	1.2	0.5	100.0
55-64	1.2	31.3	23.8	40.0	3.0	0.6	100.0
65 and over	2.0	74.4	6.6	12.2	2.6	2.2	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 58.

Flexibility in terms of the type of contract with the enterprise

LFS does not present data whether the work contract is permanent or some kind of fixed-term. The categories that are used are 'labour contract', 'civil contract', 'other contract' and 'without a contract'. Flexible conditions might be expected in all types of

contract, even in labour contract, which might be fixed-term, seasonal and so on. Atypical are the conditions arranged with the ‘civil’ and ‘other’ types of contract. Flexibility in terms of the legal conditions is the highest among those working with no contract at all.

From this perspective, flexible workers are 13.4% of the workforce in Bulgaria. This share is with a third higher than that of the self-employed and more than twice higher than that of part-timers.

Table 7. Employees by type of contract with enterprise and sex

	Total	Male	Female
			%
Labour contract	86.8	85.3	88.4
Civil contract	7.2	7.5	6.9
Other contract	1.1	1.2	0.9
Without contract	4.9	6.0	3.8
<i>In private enterprises</i>			
Labour contract	74.1	72.2	76.4
Civil contract	13.8	13.8	14.0
Other contract	2.2	2.2	1.4
Without contract	11.8	11.8	8.2
<i>In public enterprises</i>			
Labour contract	97.6	97.5	97.6
Civil contract	1.6	1.6	1.5
Other contract	0.4	0.3	0.5
Without contract	0.4	0.5	0.4

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 78.

Men are working without contract as well as in other atypical forms of contracts more often than women. The private sector is the generator of this type of working arrangements. It is interesting that there is practically no difference between men and women in the types of contract in the public sector. Jobs without contracts or with other types of contracts are almost lacking in the public sector. The private sector offers more jobs without contract to men than to women and more jobs with a labour contract to women than to men.

Besides gender, other factors that make a significant difference among the types of contracts people hold are age, educational level, rural/urban area, and economic sector.

With age the chance of getting a labour contract rises up to the age group of 45-54 and then drops, particularly in the oldest age group. The opposite is the pattern of working under civil, ‘other’ and no contract – the incidence is high in the youngest groups, declines with age and then rises again in the groups of 55-64 and over 65. Within the oldest age group half a working under labour contract, less than a third – under civil

contract and a fifth without a contract. When working in the private sector, the oldest workers do so most often without contracts, then on a civil contract and on the last place under a labour contract. The public sector recruits the oldest workers for jobs under civil contract ten times more often than the other age groups. In terms of legal types of contract, the two youngest and the two oldest age groups are the most flexible workers.

Table 8. Employees by type of contract and age

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over
Labour contract	75.1	84.3	88.4	90.9	86.9	51.6
Civil contract	12.5	8.2	6.9	5.3	6.5	27.8
Other contract	1.5	1.1	1.2	0.7	1.2	-
Without contract	10.9	6.4	3.5	3.1	5.4	20.6
<i>In private enterprises</i>						
Labour contract	67.6	73.1	76.1	78.1	70.1	27.4
Civil contract	16.1	13.9	14.1	12.3	13.8	35.7
Other contract	1.9	1.4	2.3	1.6	2.8	-
Without contract	14.4	11.5	7.6	8.0	13.3	36.9
<i>In public enterprises</i>						
Labour contract	95.8	97.5	97.5	98.4	96.4	77.8
Civil contract	2.4	1.6	1.6	1.1	2.5	19.2
Other contract	0.4	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.3	-
Without contract	1.3	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.9	3.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 80.

The chances to get a labour contract rise with the rise in the educational level. The opposite is true for the other three types of legal arrangements. While only five percent of the workforce works without a contract, a quarter of the group with the lowest education works without contract. It turns out that the highly educated are the least flexible workers. The more flexible workers from this point of view are the less educated groups.

Table 9. Employees by type of contract and education

	Total	Tertiary type	Upper secondary	Lower secondary	Primary or lower
Labour contract	86.8	94.4	86.1	79.2	64.6
Civil contract	7.2	3.6	8.5	8.4	9.1
Other contract	1.1	0.6	0.8	2.6	2.9
Without contract	4.9	1.4	4.6	9.9	23.4

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 82.

Agriculture is the sector offering the most flexible forms of working conditions in terms of legal types of contract, which recruit a quarter of all the employees in agriculture. The most common form of ‘flexible contracts’ is working without contract. In industry and services the most common form of ‘flexible contracts’ is the civil contract which, together with ‘other contract’ and ‘without a contract’, make up for slightly more than 10 percent of the workforce in those sectors.

Table 10. Employees by type of contract and economic sectors

	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Industry	Services	Unknown
Labour contract	75.5	88.5	86.5	87.0
Civil contract	5.3	6.5	7.8	10.2
Other contract	2.0	0.9	1.1	-
Without contract	17.2	4.0	4.6	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSI, Employment and unemployment, Vol. 4, 2000, p. 84.

When interpreting these data, we should take into consideration the fact that these forms of contracts are officially reported and the true share of a-typical arrangements might be higher. Also, they concern the first, dominant status while many respondents might have additional jobs about which the LFS has not asked and which might be expected to concentrate more in the flexible forms.

Conclusions

Flexibility of labour has attracted the attention of social sciences in Bulgaria in the 1990s. Whenever the term itself is used, it is usually done in theoretical publications with little concern for empirical data. Overwhelmingly it is interpreted in a positive way as an effective solution of the labour market problems in the course of transition and a powerful tool for competitive management of companies. Whenever survey data are analysed, the focus comes rather upon the negative consequences of flexibility, which is perceived as inferior employment, unprotected work in the shadow economy, a manifestation of the tendency toward de-marketisation of the economy and growth of home production.

Official statistics in Bulgaria naturally does not cover the informal (unrecorded) economy. Formal sources, however, miss a lot of other aspects of flexibility, as they do not include such important indicators as ‘length of contract’, ‘usual place of work’, ‘holding additional jobs’. In the Labour Force Survey, conducted by the National Statistical Institute in 2000, there are three indicators describing flexibility in terms of

time and conditions: 'usual weekly hours', 'employment status' and 'type of contract'. According to them the official labour market in the country is highly inflexible – less than 6% of the employed work part-time, less than 10% are self-employed, a little more than 10% have atypical work contracts or none at all. Not surprisingly the private sector is the real generator of flexibility. There is greater flexibility in the agricultural sector and in rural areas. With the restructuring of the economy, flexible forms of employment might grow with the growth of private sector and might decline with the further reduction of agricultural production.

Unlike the West, men are more often found among the flexible workers. They work over time, are self-employed, work on civil and other atypical contracts or without contract more often than women. Women dominate in only one, clearly underprivileged, group with flexible employment: the unpaid family workers. The youngest and the oldest age cohorts also seem prone to flexible work but in different forms. Those close to retirement age tend to be self-employed or working on civil contracts while young people are more often found among the unpaid family workers or workers without contract. The flexible workers, especially the unpaid family workers, the self-employed, and those working without contracts, come mostly from the lower educated groups. With the rise of the level of completed education rise the chances for finding a secure job in the state sector or among the employers.

Compared with advanced economies in the West, the official labour markets under post-communism are developing as very inflexible. For the female members of households with dependants this might result in withdrawing from the labour force – about 10% of Bulgarian women have done so. However, the low income from one salary does not make this desired option for many. While impoverishment pushes married women in the labour market, the contracting state care for children keeps them within the home. Under conditions when new private services are growing very slowly with inaccessibly high prices for the majority, the traditional kinship ties remain an important source of support for flexible household strategies. However, their scope is declining, as family arrangements are getting more and more diverse: single parenthood, cohabitation, remarriage are getting more common forms of household. In such a situation a widespread way out is the unofficial economy providing greater flexibility of work and hence, additional incomes for many women and men, both officially employed and unemployed.

Young people seem to be in a particularly difficult situation faced with work flexibility. Unwelcomed by the contracting official labour markets and supported traditionally by their parents young people delay the formation of independent households and prefer short-term or illegal work to settling down in the low paid unattractive jobs immediately available. Their waiting for better opportunities is encouraged by a social security policy privileging older workers and by the ideology of 'transition' promising a prosperous 'real' market economy in the future. On their part the oldest generation are also strongly affected by flexibilisation. While at present they rarely live in common households with the two younger generations, they are still trying to support the latter in various forms of flexible activities – as unpaid family workers or becoming self-employed, with home

production of fresh and preserved food and unpaid child care. The forced combining of different income-earning activities of the various household members, unaided by effective social policies, and given the high distrust to public institutions, result in a prevalent retreat into family centred survival strategies.

Official sources do not provide enough information about the ways in which the opportunities for flexible or standard employment are perceived and distributed within households. On the basis of official statistics it is difficult to say how the flexible working arrangements impinge upon the efforts of household members to combine work and family responsibilities. Further research should throw more light upon what types of households emerge from the various forms of intergenerational and gender division of paid and unpaid work inside and outside the home.

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