

## **The Flexibilisation of the Spanish Labour Market**

Its meaning and consequences for inequality from a life-course perspective

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this Working Paper is to analyse how flexibility has been fomented institutionally in Spain and to study its consequences for inequality from a life-course perspective. The peculiarity of the Spanish case lies in the proportion of fixed-term contracts. The greatest difference between these contracts and permanent contracts is not the job to be done, or even its temporary or permanent nature, but rather the lower layoff cost. The way that the Welfare State has introduced flexibilisation has achieved a balance of risks between the generations, so that there cannot be said to be clear winners or losers. The data indicate that the effects of flexibilisation on the main changes in the labour market and in demography are much more modest than what the hypotheses predict. Similarly, flexibilisation has not evened out the risks among the different social classes and educational levels, although it has not provoked an increase in inequality, either.

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## INTRODUCTION : THE MANY MEANINGS OF FLEXIBILITY

Job flexibility is a polysemic concept. Blossfeld *et al* (2005) have made a list of some of its meanings. Flexibility can be a) *numerical flexibility*, using fixed-term contracts or using layoffs, b) *functional flexibility*, if the employees are multipurpose and adjust their jobs to the company's changing needs, c) *salary flexibility*, when the salaries are adjusted, d) *time flexibility*, when the hours and work schedules vary, and, finally e) another type of flexibility that occurs when companies *outsource* the work, hiring the services of other companies do some jobs, or subcontract self-employed people. Edgell (2006: chapter 8), in turn, distinguishes four kinds of non-standard paid work. These are *contract* flexibility (self-employed people), *spatial* flexibility (homeworking), *time* flexibility (temporary work), and *total* flexibility (paid informal work), to which he adds part-time work, a kind of underemployment.

The literature in sociology has emphasized the increase in job flexibility in recent decades (Esping-Andersen and Regini 2000; Cazes and Nesporova 2003; Blossfeld *et al*, forthcoming). Flexibility is not, however, a new phenomenon. We can consider, for example, farm work, predominant in Spain during a good part of the 20th century. The typical mid-20th century farmer worked in conditions of contract flexibility (the majority had no contract). He was well aware of what functional flexibility was, having to carry out a wide range of tasks, and he was also familiar with salary flexibility, as he depended on the harvest. Farmers were time-flexible, because many of them worked only at certain times of the year. Even outsourcing was a habitual practice for large landowners, who hired self-employed people to do concrete jobs. If, along with the farmers, we count domestic servants,<sup>1</sup> the occupation that has included the most women throughout the history of jobs, we can agree that flexibility has been the general rule in the labour market.

From this perspective, the evolution of employment in western countries has tended toward job rigidity. The reason for the new interest in highlighting flexibilisation is that a short time period, from the postwar period of World War II to the seventies, has been taken as the reference. During those years, highly regulated and collectively negotiated labour markets predominated, as well as

societies based on the male-breadwinner model in which men were assured of steady employment and a salary that was sufficient to maintain a family.

Thus, according to the sociologists, we are experiencing a return to job flexibility. The particular nature of what we could call the *second flexibilisation* would lie in the increase in competitiveness based on the new technologies and on globalisation. Castells (1996:294-297) states that information technology and global competition restructure companies and decisively transform employment. Work becomes individualized, management becomes decentralized, and markets become personalized. This translates into the transformation of job contracts. Part-time contracts, fixed-term contracts, self-employment, and outsourcing become widespread. In the mid-nineties, the author concluded that “the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, well-defined occupational jobs, and a professional career model that lasted throughout the life course is slowly but surely eroding” (Castells, 1996:297).

Blossfeld *et al* (2005) specify the relationship between globalisation, uncertainty, and flexibility. According to these authors, globalisation is characterized by a transnationalization of markets, an increase in competition, networks that exchange and disseminate information by means of the new technologies, and the growing importance of markets, with changes that are increasingly unpredictable, resulting in the actors being increasingly unable to manage these changes. These factors increase structural uncertainty and force companies to constantly adjust to the flux of the market. The result is that the companies pass the uncertainty on to their employees. This re-accommodation of risks is asymmetrical (Breen 1997), because the employers can apply flexibility, while workers have no choice but to accept it.

The objective of this working paper is to analyse how flexibility has been institutionally fomented in Spain, and its consequences for inequality from a life-course perspective. The working paper is divided into two main sections. The first section refers to the meaning of flexibility in Spain. Once the kinds of flexibility that exist, according to labour market analysts, have been described, the nature of the peculiarity of Spanish flexibilisation will be explained.

The second main section is devoted to analysing the effects of flexibilisation on inequality. The majority of the data provided come from the Spanish Labour Force Survey (LFS). This section is made up of several subsections. The first is devoted to a description of the hypotheses. The second studies the effects of flexibilisation from an intergenerational perspective. The third subsection discusses the consequences of flexibilisation within each life phase (early, mid- and late careers). The fourth subsection will determine the extent to which flexibilisation has caused variation in the effects of the traditional sources of inequality, such as social class, educational level, and gender. Finally, the most recent political measures regarding flexibility will be described, and new challenges marked to prevent inequality from growing.

### WHAT DOES FLEXIBILITY MEAN IN SPAIN?

At the beginning of the working paper, the most common concrete forms of flexibility were indicated, from layoffs to informal work, through schedule flexibility, outsourcing, and homeworking. It is very hard to know about the impact some of them may have, due to the lack of data. However, it is possible to quantify the most important forms and compare them internationally to discover why the Spanish case is peculiar. Table 1 reflects these indicators for several countries in 2006.

Table 1 Labour Market Flexibility rates in 2006

	Unemployment rate	Temporary rate	Part-time rate	Involuntary part-time rate	Self-employment rate (2007)
Austria	4.7	9.0	21.8	10.4	6.5
Belgium	8.2	8.7	22.2	14.3	8.8
Czech Rep.	7.1	8.7	5.0	14.2	12.0
Denmark	3.9	8.9	23.6		4.5
Estonia	5.9	2.7	7.8		5.1
France	9.5	13.5	17.2	28.3	5.6
Germany	9.8	14.5	25.8	19.2	6.1
Greece	8.9	10.7	5.7	28.9	21.0
Italy	6.8	13.1	13.3	27.0	17.3
Ireland	4.4	3.4	16.8		11.1
Netherlands	3.9	16.6	46.2	4.5	8.7
Poland	13.8	27.3	9.8	16.8	15.0
Portugal	7.7	20.6	11.3	23.2	17.8
Romania	7.3	1.8	9.7		19.4
<b>Spain</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>11.0</b>
Sweden	7.1	17.3	25.1	15.9	6.3
Turkey	8.4	13.3	7.9		21.5
UK	5.3	5.8	25.5	7.5	10.2

Source: Unemployment, temporary and part-time rates: Eurostat (2008: Chapter 5); involuntary part-time rate: OECD database, available online at <http://stats.oecd.org/wbos> (4 July 2008); self-employment rate: Eurostat: Population and Social Conditions Data, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2007, available online: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu> (4 July 2008).

Note:

Self-employment rate: 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2007. Temporary rate: percentage of total number of employees. Germany and France: provisional. Part-time rate: Ireland, 2004. Involuntary part-time rate: share of involuntary part-timers as a percentage of part-time employment.

Spain does not stand out too much compared to the other countries regarding the rate of unemployment, self-employment, or part-time employment. However, the proportion of part-time workers who would like to have a different kind of contract does stand out, even though Spain is not one of the countries with the highest rates of part-time workers. The peculiarity of Spain is the proportion of fixed-term contracts. In 2006, 34 per cent of the salaried workers had fixed-term contracts, a figure that is much higher than in the rest of the countries. In effect, temporariness has been the chosen way to introduce flexibility into Spain.

Before explaining the cause of this peculiarity and presenting its origins, we ought to know what temporariness really involves in Spain. Labour market analysts distinguish among several kinds of temporary jobs which go from causal, seasonal, or agency work, to self-employment or freelance work, as well as full-time temporaries who in fact do a permanent job (Atkinson *et al.*, 1996; Purcell, 2000). In Spain, this last situation predominates. The majority of fixed-term contracts are filled by workers who do permanent jobs. So why do employers use these contracts and not permanent ones for these jobs? The key issue is that it costs less to lay off a temporary worker than it does to lay off a permanent worker. Most permanent contracts have a layoff cost of 45 days per year of service, with a limit of 42 monthly salaries. Some types of fixed-term contract have no layoff costs. The ones that do only extend to 8 days per year of work.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the greatest difference between having a permanent contract and not having one is the compensation in case of layoff. Workers with permanent contracts accumulate, year by year, a potential amount of money that the employer must pay if they are laid off. This amount is noticeably smaller if it is a temporary worker who is laid off. This is the main reason for the high proportion of workers with fixed-term contracts in Spain: flexibility focuses on them. This also explains why the most flexible European labour market, the United Kingdom labour market, does not stand out for contracts or types of employment that characterize flexibility, such as fixed-term or part-time contracts, or self-employment. In contrast to Spain, in countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States, flexibility is built into the permanent contracts themselves. It is interesting to underline this because, according to the OECD indicators, the Spanish labour market is considered to be one of the least flexible ones. However, if we look beyond the formal criteria used by the OECD, the impact of flexible forms of employment is very high, as in the case of fixed-term contracts which translate into very low layoff costs.<sup>3</sup>

What is the root of this kind of flexibility and how is it applied institutionally? The origin of this flexibility goes back to the Workers' Statute approved in 1980, with the newborn democracy. There was a strict causality in this Statute that linked fixed-term contracts to the temporary nature of the job for which the worker was hired. However, it left the door open for the government to use these contracts to foment employment, independently of whether the job was temporary or not.

Between the end of the seventies and the mid-eighties, Spain underwent a severe economic crisis. In the mid-eighties, the unemployment rate reached 21 per cent. In this context, the socialist government approved a labour market reform in 1984. The star measure was the introduction of fixed-term contracts to foment employment. There were two key points in these contracts. The first was that they could be applied to permanent jobs, breaking the causality between fixed-term contracts and temporary jobs. The second point was that they could only be applied to people who got a new job. That is, they could be applied, above all, to young people in transition from the educational system to the work world, and to unemployed people who found new jobs. Once the temporary period for which the workers were hired was over, the employer could let them go with no compensation.

Polavieja (2003a, 2003b, 2006) has explained this peculiarity of the Spanish case. This author argues that the high rate of fixed term contracts is due to the combination of economic and institutional factors. The introduction of these contracts occurred in a very rigid labour market, at a moment of economic crisis and just when the cohorts born in the sixties, cohorts that were more numerous and better trained than the previous ones, reached the age of entry to the labour market. In this context, employers were more reluctant to make long-term commitments. They preferred to use fixed-term contracts, with no layoff costs, rather than permanent contracts. On the other hand, temporary workers (generationally much more highly qualified) were a protective barrier for the permanent (less qualified) workers, especially during the crises. Because they are less expensive to lay off, the temporary workers would be the first to go (last hired, first fired). According to Polavieja, these factors did not coincide in any of the other western countries. Beyond this critical juncture, fixed term contracts allow the employer to extract more work from the worker, because the possibility of going from temporary to permanent is an incentive for the worker.

The successive labour reforms of 1994, 1997, 2001, and 2006 tried to foment the use of permanent contracts. They tried to reinforce the new causality between fixed-term contracts and temporary jobs, they introduced different tax incentives for using permanent contracts, the layoff cost was reduced for some kinds of permanent contracts, and mandatory compensation was introduced for some fixed-term contracts. The result up to now has been a moderate decrease in the rate of fixed-term contracts (from 34.9% in 1995, to 30.1% in 2008).<sup>4</sup>

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF FLEXIBILISATION**

### **Hypotheses**

According to the sociological literature, flexibility has ambivalent consequences. Most of the analyses focus on the negative aspects. Many studies highlight the fact that flexible jobs mean economic insecurity and uncertainty about the future, as well as very few chances for promotion. They tend to be filled by people with

low qualifications, they de-motivate the worker, and they involve a higher incidence of psychosocial and health problems (Gallie *et al.*, 1998; O'Reilley and Fagan, 1998). Other authors have remarked that certain kinds of contracts, such as part-time and fixed-term ones, are highly feminized, contributing to perpetuate gender inequality (Purcell, 2000; Dooley and Prause, 2004). At the same time, economists who criticize flexibilisation stress the negative consequences for productivity that derive from the high turnover that goes with fixed-term contracts.

On the contrary, other sociologists have underlined positive aspects. Beck (1992) and Castells (2001:290) highlight the greater chance to make employment compatible with family life. Castells also highlights the increase in income that flexibility can mean for professionals, by permitting them to combine their regular full- or part-time job with consulting jobs. On the other hand, from the liberal doctrine, it has been argued that a flexible job market foments the creation of employment and decreases unemployment.

Apart from these consequences, some research adopts a life course perspective. This responds to the way flexibility has been combined in intergenerational terms (early careers, mid careers and late careers). It also focuses on how flexibilisation has affected the traditional variables of inequality, such as social class, education, and gender. The following paragraphs summarize the main hypotheses, which are very useful from this perspective.

Blossfeld *et al.* (2005, forthcoming), Blossfeld, Mills and Berbaridi (2006), Blossfeld and Hofmeister (2006), Blossfeld, Buchholz and Hofäcker (2006), have formulated hypotheses about the consequences of flexibility (derived from globalisation) from the life course perspective. With respect to young people, they argue that the increase in job insecurity and uncertainty affects the formation of couples (it is delayed and cohabitation increases) and fertility (people have fewer children and they have them later). Other hypotheses regarding the likelihood of being employed could be added. On one hand, young people, being the workers who are most affected by flexibility, are likely to have more chances to find a job. On the other hand, because they are the ones who receive the least compensation if they are laid off, they can be expected to be the first to be laid off in periods of crisis. To summarize, young people are at the most risk from economic cycles.

Regarding men's mid-careers, they present the hypothesis that flexibilisation has translated into patchwork careers: careers that are unstable, fragmented, and contingent. With respect to women's mid-careers, they point out that flexibility may have facilitated women's access to the world of work. On one hand, flexible contracts, like part-time contracts, facilitate women's return to the labour market after they have raised their children. On the other hand, the introduction of new technologies into the production process, one of the distinctive features of globalisation, also makes it easier to make at-home and out-of-home work compatible, by homeworking, for example.

Finally, the authors relate the evolution of men's late careers to globalisation more than to flexibility. They hypothesize that older people will exit the labour

market earlier because they have a harder time adapting to technological changes, because the number of qualified service jobs, more appropriate for young people, is increasing, and because they have a socially accepted alternative role to employment: being retired. The lower layoff costs derived from the flexibilisation of labour markets contribute to this early retirement.

Sociologists have also come up with hypotheses about the effects of flexibilisation on the most important variables of inequality, such as social class, educational level, and gender. From the writings of Beck (1992) and Castells (2001), the idea that flexibility has extended so much that it affects all levels can be deduced. Nevertheless, there are nuances. Beck and Giddens stress that insecurity increases for everyone. In this sense, class society would have turned into risk society, or, expressed differently, where before there were structural factors (such as education, gender, or social class) that conditioned individuals' biographies to a large extent, now individuals "have no choice but to choose" (Giddens 1994, p. 175). The most radical interpretation of this reasoning leads to the idea that the more flexible the market becomes, the less important social class and education are.

Other authors hold the opposite view. Breen (1997) warns us that the re-commodification of risks derived from flexibility is concentrated above all on the people who traditionally have a weak position in the labour market, so social classes are very important. Goldthorpe (2000) supports this vision by pointing out that jobs based on service relations (the best positions in the occupational structure) are more protected against job risks in this period of flexibilisation. From this reasoning, it can be deduced that the gap between the social classes and between the different educational levels has increased.

Regarding gender inequality, we also find contrasting views. Authors like Purcell (2000) have highlighted the feminization of job flexibility, because women are at a greater risk of being hired part-time or temporarily, so that the gap between the genders will have increased. In contrast, the fact the women's educational levels are higher than men's leads to the idea that women are better protected against job risks.

### **The intergenerational effects of flexibilisation**

The way that flexibilisation was introduced into Spain was the result of an adjustment of risks among the generations. As was explained earlier, flexibility was applied at the high point of an economic crisis. At that moment, several interrelated phenomena were taking place. On one hand, the markets were becoming increasingly globalised and, specifically, Spain was entering international institutions such as the EU. On the other hand, companies were beginning to undertake profound restructuring instigated by the increase in international competition derived from globalisation.

We need to refer to the educational inequality between the generations in order to understand the logic of the 1984 labour reform, the origin of flexibility. This reform made employment flexible above all for people just entering the job

market, leaving the situation of those who were already settled relatively intact. The people who were just entering were much better qualified and more prepared for globalisation than those who had begun to work in previous decades. The rationality the employers applied in order to deal with uncertainty and to be more competitive was to adjust the staff, laying off the older workers with obsolete qualifications and, if they hired new workers, betting on young people who were much more qualified.

The 1984 Labour Reform has been interpreted as an implicit intergenerational pact to protect older workers (Garrido 1996a, 1996b). Society had prepared young people better for globalisation. In exchange, they had to put up with flexibility. They were the winners in educational terms, and the losers in terms of contract insecurity. On the other hand, the older people were the losers in educational terms and the winners in terms of employment protection legislation. This is why some authors have written that flexibility in Spain is a flexibility that is “at the margins,” applied to the new people entering the labour market (Toharia and Malo, 2000).

Institutional support for older people was specified in two aspects. On one hand, in protection against the fixed-term contracts that have been mentioned (the Trojan horse of flexibility), which could only be applied to people who found a new job (mainly, young people). This translated into the need for employers to pay higher compensations to the older workers they laid off. Protection of older people’s quality of life was also based on a “pull strategy” founded on generous early retirement schemes. As will be seen later, many people abandoned the labour market in the eighties and nineties. In this sense, Spain made a great effort to facilitate the transition from a workforce with obsolete qualifications in a globalised economy to another workforce that was more qualified and prepared to compete internationally. The pull strategy applied in Spain can be summarized as unemployment benefits, disability pensions, and generous retirement schemes.

In this way, the Welfare State devoted resources to young people by means of a universal, cost-free education. In exchange, flexibility has devolved upon them. The resources devoted to older people have been substantial. On one hand, labour legislation has favored them and, on the other hand, the pull strategy has entailed the transfer of a large quantity of money. It should be stressed that the social expense devoted to these areas has necessarily resulted in a failure to attend to other areas (Garrido, 1993). Above all, this has affected the area of public childcare services, an area where Spain is very far behind other countries.

As we shall see in the following sections, this fact has had a certain impact on the postponement of family formation. Young people live with the protected generations, who transfer resources and services to them. In Spain, it is not common for unemancipated young people to contribute to family expenses. In this sense, the young people also end up enjoying some of the resources that the Welfare State transfers to the elderly, even if indirectly, through redistribution within the families.

It should be pointed out that this great intergenerational imbalance that job flexibilisation has given rise to in Spain has not produced social fissures for the following reasons. First of all, because the people protected have been the parents of the people who have entered the labour market from the 1980s onward. Given the layoff risk for their parents, it is logical to think that the young people did not criticize the fact that flexibilisation was concentrated on them alone. In second place, if the majority of the people with fixed-term contracts become permanent, it is rational for the young people not to mind putting up with all the flexibility during one period of their job life, if afterward they will enjoy a security that they would not have obtained any other way. Thirdly, the delay in family formation is not a source of anguish to young people, who take advantage of the resources and services of the older people with whom they live and who enjoy a lot of freedom, even if they are not emancipated.

### **The consequences of flexibility from a life course perspective**

#### ***Young people***

The most visible direct consequence of flexibilisation in Spain has been the increase in fixed-term contracts, particularly among young people. Table 2 summarizes a series of job and family indicators of Spanish youth between 1984 and 2008. It shows that the rate of fixed-term contracts in the entire salaried population has risen from 17.8 per cent in 1987 to 30.1 per cent in the first trimester of 2008. Before 1987, the LFS did not gather information on this kind of contract, although it can be assumed that the rate was very low before 1984. Fixed-term contracts increased with dizzying speed starting with the 1984 reform. At the beginning of the nineties, the rate had already reached 30 per cent. The successive labour market reforms have not managed to clearly reduce this rate. Only the last reform, in 2006, seems to have had any effect, although it is still early to evaluate its efficacy.

The rate of fixed-term contracts among young salaried workers 16 to 19 years of age is noticeably higher. In the mid-nineties, over 60% of these young, salaried workers had these contracts. The figure is over 50 per cent in the first quarter of 2008. Other indicators confirm the hypothesis that entry into the labour market in Spain occurs, above all, through temporary contracts. From the beginning of the nineties until 2004 (the last year for which figures are available), around 85 per cent of non-student workers who had been full-time students the previous year had a fixed-term contract. The rates of people who finished studying approximately two years before oscillate between 70 and 80 per cent starting in the nineties, although the percentage has diminished in recent years. The rate is between 55 and 40 per cent for people who finished studying approximately seven years earlier, with a tendency to diminish in recent years.

These last three pieces of data show the high impact of temporary contracts on young people, but they also show that, as their job careers progress, this kind of contract is usually abandoned. Martínez Pastor, Bernardi and Garrido (2006)

have followed, longitudinally, the proportion of fixed-term contracts for nine five-year birth cohorts. Their trajectory shows that they follow a very similar pattern for leaving these contracts. The majority abandon them to become permanent workers. Nevertheless, between 10 and 15 per cent of the individuals of all the cohorts have fixed-term contracts at ages distant from job insertion.

One possible consequence of the high rate of fixed-term contracts among young people is their higher sensitivity to economic cycles. It seems credible to think that, in periods of crisis, young people will be the first to be laid off because the layoff costs are lower. Data show that young people's rate of unemployment has been very high during the two crises (over 34%). This fact goes along with the findings from other research that show that temporary workers are more likely to suffer unemployment, compared to permanent workers (Polavieja, 2003).

Another possible consequence of flexibilisation is the delay in family formation. Young people are said to postpone family formation because they suffer greater contract insecurity, above all in welfare regimes that have promoted the insider/outsider dynamic, as Spain has. Other hypotheses also predict an increase in cohabitation for young people, to the detriment of marriage, due to their inability to take on solid, long-term commitments. Table 2 offers data on this. The tendencies are very clear. The proportion of young people between the ages of 20 and 29 who have ever been married has decreased very noticeably. The mean age at first marriage has increased by five years between 1984 and 2006. The total fertility rate has dropped from 1.7 children per woman in 1984, to 1.4 in 2006. In turn, the proportion of single women between 20 and 29 years of age who cohabit has increased with dizzying speed in only one decade. In 2008, almost a fifth of the single women between the ages of 20 and 29 lived with a partner.

Even though this first glance at the data agrees with the hypothesis about the effects of flexibilisation on family formation, there are other facts that cast doubt on both phenomena. First of all, the drop and delay in the marriage rate have a long history. The mean age at first marriage began its unstoppable ascent in 1980. The largest drop in the total fertility rate took place before flexibilisation. In 1976, the rate was 2.8 children per woman, and in 1983, it was 1.8. On the other hand, the increase in cohabitation began a decade and a half after the boom in fixed-term contracts. The decisive factor would be to find out if people with fixed-term contracts are less likely to form a family than those with permanent contracts, to what extent this is so, and the weight of this factor in the general delay in family formation.

Regarding marriage and fertility rates, researchers have found a moderately lower likelihood to marry and have children among young people with fixed-term contracts as compared to those with permanent contracts (González and Jurado-Guerrero, 2006, 2007; Baizán, 2007; Martínez Pastor 2007, 2008a). Nevertheless, the fact that the decrease in family formation over the last three decades has been common for all young people, independently of their job situation, is much more relevant. In 2005, there were 28 per cent fewer married

men between 20 and 29 years of age than in 1977. The difference would have been 25 points if it were not for temporariness, so contract flexibilisation alone is not the key factor for explaining the change in family formation. There are other factors, and certain ones stand out, such as the housing market, which determines family formation to a large extent (Jurado Guerrero, 2003), the incorporation of women into the labour market and their higher levels of qualification, and the configuration of the Welfare State, which has no public nursery school services for the majority of children between 0 and 3 years of age.

On the other hand, it has been shown that, in Spain, the boom in cohabitation is related to highly educated groups of young people and to more innovative ways of thinking, in contrast to other countries such as Italy or the United States (Billari *et al*, 2002). It is plausible to think that, in Spain, the boom in cohabitation has a lot to do with the change in values. To sum it up, other events can explain the delay in family formation better.

In any case, the relation between flexibilisation and family formation is indirect and would be related in turn to other factors. One of these would be the combination of the high price of housing with the difficulty a person has getting a mortgage if he or she has a fixed-term contract. The unequal distribution of resources among generations explained earlier is another mechanism that indirectly relates job flexibilisation to the decline in family formation. The explanation lies in the nearly inexistent support for bringing up children from public childcare in a dual-earner society, due to the fact that the Welfare State's resources are oriented towards other collectivities, such as students and the older generations (retired pensioners).

Table 2 Employment and family formation indicators for young people

Year	Rate of fixed term contracts (ftc) Overall population	Rate ftc (young people 16-29)	Rate ftc (full-students in previous year, workers non-students in the year of survey)	Rate ftc (2 years after educational enrolment)	Rate ftc (7 years after educational enrolment)	Unemp. rate young people (16-29)		Young People ever married (20-29)		Mean age at first marriage		Total fertility rate	Singles cohabiting (females 20-29)
						men	women	men	women	men	women		
1984						34.9	40.0	30.5	48.8	26.9	24.7	1.7	
1985						36.6	42.7	28.7	47.3	27.0	24.8	1.6	
1986						34.5	42.0	27.6	45.4	27.1	24.9	1.6	
1987	17.8	32.2	47.4	48.1	54.6	30.7	42.3	26.7	44.2	27.2	25.0	1.5	
1988	22.9	41.5	67.8	58.5	53.4	27.2	42.2	25.1	42.5	27.4	25.1	1.5	
1989	26.7	48.4	73.1	66.9	55.0	22.9	38.3	23.6	40.9	27.6	25.3	1.4	
1990	30.2	54.2	79.4	70.7	56.8	21.1	35.6	22.5	39.7	27.9	25.6	1.4	
1991	32.2	57.7	81.3	75.1	55.8	21.0	34.6	21.4	38.1	28.1	26.0	1.3	
1992	33.5	60.4	84.1	77.7	54.7	24.6	36.3	20.6	36.9	28.4	26.2	1.3	
1993	32.3	59.6	83.2	78.0	52.4	32.8	41.8	19.5	35.5	28.7	26.6	1.3	
1994	33.8	61.2	85.9	78.1	49.4	33.7	44.4	18.3	34.0	28.9	26.9	1.2	
1995	34.9	63.4	87.8	78.2	47.3	30.8	43.5	16.9	31.5	29.2	27.1	1.2	
1996	33.8	61.8	85.1	80.4	45.3	30.0	42.0	15.3	29.3	29.5	27.4	1.2	
1997	33.5	60.7	84.5	79.0	44.5	27.0	39.4	14.7	27.6	29.7	27.6	1.2	
1998	33.0	59.3	85.8	77.3	42.1	23.4	36.8	13.9	26.0	29.9	27.8	1.2	
1999	32.9	57.9	86.7	72.1	43.6	18.7	31.5	13.1	25.1	30.0	28.0	1.2	3.1
2000	32.3	55.4	86.2	65.0	42.3	16.3	27.5	12.3	24.1	30.1	28.1	1.2	4.0
2001	32.2	54.6	86.4	64.0		13.2	21.5	12.5	23.4	30.4	28.4	1.2	5.2
2002	31.8	53.1	85.3	65.4		14.4	22.6	12.5	23.8	30.6	28.6	1.3	6.6
2003	31.8	52.8	84.7	66.3		14.8	22.1	13.0	24.1	30.9	28.9	1.3	7.5

Table 2 continued

	Rate of fixed term contracts (ftc) Overall Population	Rate ftc (young people 16-29)	Rate ftc (full-students in previous year, workers non-students in the year of survey)	Rate ftc (2 years after educational enrolment)	Unemp. rate young people (16-29)		Young People ever married (20-29)		Mean age at first marriage		Total fertility rate	Singles cohabiting (females 20-29)
					men	women	men	women	men	women		
2004	32.5	53.2	86.2	64.3	14.2	20.5	13.5	24.5	31.2	29.2	1.3	9.3
2005	33.3	54.9		68.0	12.6	17.9	11.7	23.0	31.5	29.4	1.3	13.0
2006	34.0	54.8			11.1	16.7	11.3	22.8	31.8	29.6	1.4	15.8
2007	31.7	51.7			11.0	15.7	11.5	23.7				17.3
2008	30.1	51.1			14.3	17.1	11.6	23.5				18.7

Sources: LFS and Basic Demographic Indicators (National Statistics Institute)

### *Mid- and late careers*

How has flexibilisation affected mid and late careers? Up to now, we have gone over the way the institutional design of flexibilisation has favored workers with typical mid-career ages. If they are laid off, they receive a much higher compensation than young workers would. This fact should translate into a much lower unemployment rate. Graph 1 represents, among other rates, the unemployment rate for men from 30 to 49 years of age between 1976 and 2008, showing that, in effect, their unemployment rate is noticeably lower than the rate for young people. Even so, the periods of crisis have also made themselves felt in men's mid careers. The highest rate of unemployment was reached in 1994, at 14.3 per cent. At any rate, with this percentage of unemployed people, which was 6 per cent in the first trimester of 2008, and the low job turnover among the people settled in the market, patchwork careers, unstable careers, and fragmented careers cannot be said to be the rule in Spain.

There are two mechanisms that have made the situation of unemployed workers in Spain less rough than what the figures might make us think. The first mechanism, common to mid- and late careers, is assistance from the welfare state. One of these kinds of aid is generous unemployment provisions, especially during the economic crises. The other mechanism, in this case shared by all the generations, is the family. According to LFS data, the proportion of households that claim to receive no income either from the labour market or from the Welfare State does not go over 2.5 per cent in the most difficult periods of the economic crises. During the crises of the eighties and the nineties, more than two thirds of the people who were unemployed lived with another person who was employed, and about 90 per cent lived with someone with a job or someone who had an income.

There is no doubt that the most relevant change in the mid-careers has been the incorporation of women into the world of employment. As can be seen in Graph 1, the employment rate for women between 30 and 49 years of age (calculated using the total population in this age group, not only women who were active) was 27 per cent in 1976. In 2008, the rate is 67 per cent and it is certain to continue increasing over the next years, as the youngest cohorts become older and enter the typical mid-career ages. In the first trimester of 2008, the employment rate for women born between 1976 and 1980 reached 80.8 per cent.

The development of women's job careers has its roots more in the drastic change in training than in aspects related to flexibility. Neither part-time work nor other forms of flexibility such as tele-work explain this impressive change. The majority of women in their mid-careers work full-time (78 per cent in 2008), while tele-work is not very common yet.

While women traditionally had lower educational levels than men, the most recent cohorts surpass their male contemporaries. In effect, 36 per cent of the women born between 1936 and 1940 had no education (compared to 26 per cent of the men). Only two out of every ten went beyond primary school, compared to three out of ten men. The situation for the women born between 1976 and 1980 is quite different. Nine out of ten women have gone through secondary school,

and three out of ten are university graduates, a proportion that is higher than the proportion for men. This has given women the chance to compete with men for positions at the highest levels, as well as to occupy positions in public administration, so that many women enjoy high job security.

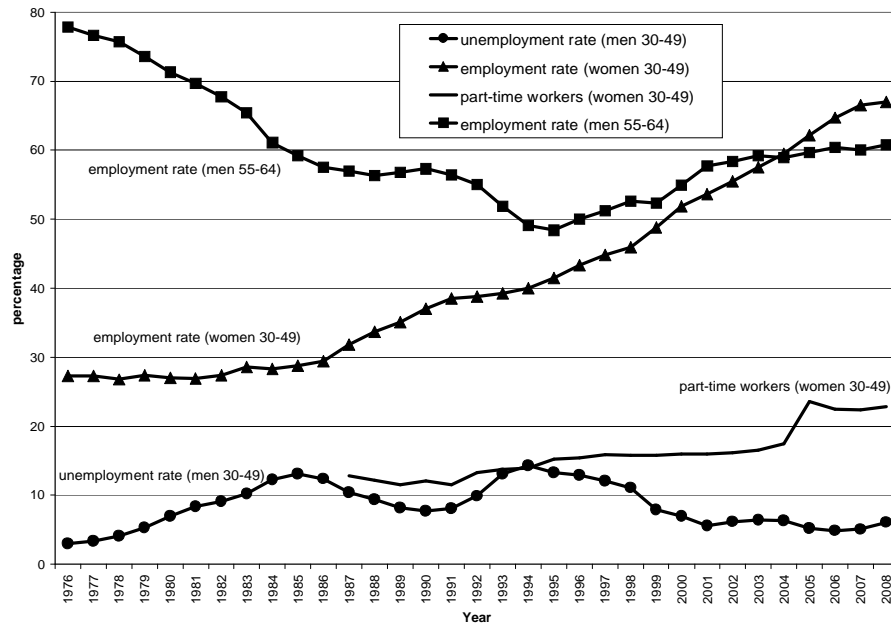


Figure 1 Mid and late career indicators.

Source: Authors' calculations based on the LFS (all quarters, from the third quarter of 1976 to the first quarter of 2008).

As we can see in the graph, late careers have also suffered serious convulsions over the last 30 years in Spain. In 1976, 78 per cent of the male workers between 55 and 64 years of age were working. The proportion in 1994 was 48 per cent. The sudden exit of many of these workers over the age of 55 since the mid-seventies is due to three interrelated factors. At that time, globalisation was already underway. This had a special impact in Spain, which was undergoing a political transition from the Franco dictatorship to democracy and was fully inserted in the global economy, with the well-known challenge to be competitive. The educational level of the older people was a great deal lower than that of young people. At the same time, Spain, along with the other western countries, was suffering an economic crisis that lasted until the mid-eighties. These events provoked the abrupt exit of older people from the job market. Meanwhile, the Spanish economy was modernizing itself.

So, were the older workers the losers in the flexibilisation process? As we explained above, they cannot be said to have come out losing. The Welfare State came to their aid with generous retirement pension schemes, unemployment insurance benefits, unemployment assistance benefits, and disability pensions. Thus, older people's incomes were only a little lower than if they had left their job careers at the mandatory ages. Older workers were influenced, in this way, by the increase in competition deriving from globalisation and, in turn, they influenced the institutional design of flexibilisation.

Finally, we should underline that, in recent years, a change in tendency has been observed. The employment rate for men between 55 and 64 years of age is increasing. In the first quarter of 2008 it reached 60.8 per cent. It is possible to predict that the rate will continue to increase for the following two reasons. The job structure has changed a lot in the last thirty years. A large part of the older workers who abandoned the world of work in the eighties and the nineties worked in agriculture and in industry. Today, agriculture takes up no more than 5 per cent of the workforce in Spain. In addition, the great industrial reconversions have already been carried out. The second fact that can lead to an increase in the rate of employment among older workers has to do with the drastic change in training. The cohorts that are now reaching their late careers are more qualified than those of the seventies and the eighties. Analyses show a negative relationship between educational level and the likelihood of leaving employment in late careers (Bernardi and Garrido, 2006).

### **The effect of flexibilisation on the traditional factors of inequality: social class, education, and gender**

In this section, we will analyse the question of whether the gap between social classes, educational levels, and sexes with respect to the labour market and family formation has increased, diminished or remained constant during the flexibilisation. In order to do this, we will summarize the findings of research that has studied this subject. The chapters referring to Spain in the Globalife and Flexcareer projects (Simó Noguera, Castro Martín and Soro-Bonmatí, 2005; Simó Noguera, Golsch and Soro Bonmatí, 2006; Simó Noguera, 2006, Bernardi and Garrido, 2006; Martínez Pastor, Bernardi and Garrido, forthcoming) deserve a special mention. Their results are summarized in Table 3.

We should remember that the hypotheses referring to the importance of social classes and educational levels are conflicting (see the section on the hypotheses). Some authors highlight the idea that flexibilisation has expanded the risks for everyone. From this idea, it can be deduced that social classes and educational levels have lost explanatory power and that the differences between categories have diminished, because they are all more prone to experience fixed-term contracts or episodes of unemployment, for example. On the contrary, other authors state that flexibilisation has increased the gap between the traditional forms of inequality, because it focuses on those who are in the weakest position in the labour market. What has happened in Spain?

The first column of Table 3 contains the phases of the life course studied (early careers, men's mid-careers, women's mid-careers, late careers). The second has the dependent variables analysed. The other three columns contain the independent variables (education, social classes, and gender). Each box indicates whether the relationship between the variables is positive (+) or negative (-), and whether the distances between the categories have increased (↑) or decreased (↓). For example, the relationship between working in an unskilled job in the early career and educational level is negative (-): the higher the level, the lower the likelihood of working at the worst jobs, although the difference between the levels when it comes to avoiding these jobs had diminished over time (↓). The relationships specified are found in the table. We will go over the most important tendencies. Before this, however, we must note that in some studies it has not been possible to apply the same analyses to different cohorts, so that there is no way to know if the gap between educational levels, social classes, and the sexes has increased or decreased over time.

The relationship between education and the dependent variables is what we would expect it to be. Regarding job insertion, the higher the education, the higher the likelihood of having a job and the lower the likelihood of having a fixed-term contract or of working at an unskilled job. In turn, the higher the education, the higher the likelihood of upward mobility in men's mid-careers. In addition, university graduates are less likely to leave employment in men's late careers. In general, the results show significant differences between educational levels, so they are still important in the new era of flexibilisation.

In some cases, the distances between the levels have increased, above all for the level of primary education or below. The worst effects of flexibilisation focus on these low educational levels, in a society which has undergone a great educational expansion. In other cases, the differences have diminished. The clearest example is in the likelihood of working at an unskilled job at the typical ages for job insertion. In this case, the decrease of inequality is negative, because these jobs are more and more common for people who have higher educational levels. Nevertheless, the risks cannot be said to have evened out. The differences between one level and another continue to be very high (Martínez Pastor and Bernardi, 2008). There are data that suggest that educational inflation explains the extension of some forms of job precariousness between the secondary and tertiary educational levels.

With respect to family formation, the relationship between educational levels and the likelihood of marrying or having children is negative, especially for women. Even so, the difference between the levels has decreased over time. The decrease in the distances between women at young ages is due to the fact that family formation has decreased noticeably for all women, independently of educational level. Among women with borderline ages for reproduction, the decrease in distances is due to female university graduates today being more prone to form families than their counterparts were several decades ago (Martínez Pastor, 2007).

The relationship between social class and dependent variables is also what we would expect. The higher the class, the lower the likelihood of having a fixed-term contract, of losing a job, and, among women, of leaving a job to raise children. The differences between the classes have increased for this last case alone. The differences regarding the likelihood of having a fixed-term contract in their early careers have also increased between the extremes. In general, social class cannot be said to have lost importance, but the gap between the classes cannot be said to have increased during flexibilisation, either, at least for the analyses carried out.

Gender differences have been studied in the early careers. The gap between sexes with regard to the likelihood of having a job decreases the younger the cohort is. In addition, women are less likely to work with fixed-term contracts or at unskilled jobs because they are more highly educated than men. The analyses show that, as far as work goes, women are increasingly similar to men and that inequality, where it persists, decreases the more recent the cohort is (Martínez Pastor, Bernardi and Garrido, forthcoming).

Before ending this section on the traditional factors of inequality, we should highlight the effects of the arrival of immigrants to Spain since the beginning of the new millennium. In 1998, there were 637,000 foreigners, 1.6 per cent of the population residing in Spain. On January 1, 2008, the number of foreigners had risen to 5,220,000, that is, 11.3 per cent of the population. According to recent analyses, being an immigrant has become a new and solid source of inequality in the Spanish labour market. Immigrants occupy the worst jobs, even with the same educational level and in the same activity sector as Spanish citizens (Bernardi and Garrido, 2008; Martínez Pastor and Bernardi, 2008).

In summary, the results do not confirm the hypothesis that insecurity has reached everyone and that social class and educational level have become less important. Nor can it be said that inequality has increased. Some results indicate that the differences between the extremes in the educational and social structures have increased, although these extremes represent a small part of the population. These results would confirm the studies on income inequality in Spain, which indicate a clear reduction in inequality during the eighties and a slight increase since the nineties due to the relative improvement at the highest levels, but not due to any worsening at the middle and lower levels (Goerlich and Mas, 2004; Salido, 2005). As for inequality between men and women, it has clearly decreased.

Table 3 Evolution of the relationship between education, social class, and gender (independent variables) with dependent variables referring to the labour market and family formation.

		Education	Social Classes	Gender (women)
Early Careers	Entry Occupation	+ (↑ slightly)		- (↓)
	Entry Fixed-term	- (↑ slightly)	- (↑ extremes, ↓ professionals and the others)	- (slightly) ↔
	Entry Unskilled	- (↓)		- (↓)
	Early Occupation	+ (↓)		- (↓)
	Early Fixed-term	- (↑ elementary or less)	- (↑ extremes)	- (↑ slightly)
	Early Unskilled	- (↓)		+ (slightly) (↓)
	1 <sup>st</sup> Partnership	- (women) n.s. (men)		
	Parenthood	- (men and women)		
Men's Mid Careers	Job to unemployment	- (LMEC 1955-74) n.s. (LMEC 1975-94)	- (↓ positive)	
	Unemployment to job	- (univ reservation wage)	- (reservation wage)	
	Upward mobility	+		
Women's Mid Careers	Job to unemployment		n.s.	
	Job to caregiving		- (↑)	
Late Careers	Exit from employment (men)	n.s. except for university: -	Self empl. agric, less likely to exit than urban self empl. Employees: lower level, more likely to exit. Except: unsk. work in service: less likely to exit.	

Source: Early careers from Martínez Pastor, Bernardi and Garrido (forthcoming) and from Simó Noguera, Castro Martín and Soro Bonmatí (2005). Men's mid-careers from Simó Noguera, Golsch and Soro Bonmatí (2006). Women's mid-careers from Simó Noguera (2006). Late careers from Bernardi and Garrido (2006).

Note:

+ indicates a positive relationship between the variables. - indicates a negative relationship. n.s. means it is not significant. ↑: the distance between the variables increases. ↓ the distance between the variables decreases.

### **Political programs and future development of inequality structures**

In this section, we will go over the most recent political measures related to flexibilisation in Spain, as well as the most important challenges for avoiding inequality. The most recent Labour Reform took place in 2006. Its main objective was to reduce the rate of fixed-term contracts. Before the Reform, there were no limits to stringing fixed-term contracts together. The 2006 Reform established a rule according to which any worker who, having signed two or more fixed-term contracts with the same company, accumulated a service period in the same job position over 24 months within a 30-month period, would acquire the condition of a permanent worker. This measure was accompanied by a series of economic bonuses. In addition, employers were allowed to convert fixed-term contracts into “permanent contracts for fomenting employment,” with a dismissal cost of 33 days per year, instead of the 45 days for normal permanent contracts. This was possible if the conversion was done before December 31, 2007. At the moment, the result of the reform has been a reduction in temporariness from 33.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2006 to 30.1 in the first quarter of 2008.

From the business world, emphasis is placed on the idea that the best way to reduce fixed-term contracts would be to lower the layoff costs for permanent workers. As we have commented, one of the main incentives of the 2006 Reform for employers to turn their temporary employees into permanent ones was the possibility of reducing layoff costs. It is still too early to analyse the effects of the Reform. In the next few years, the cost of laying off permanent workers may be reduced, causing temporary workers to drop. This case would produce the apparent paradox of flexibilisation in the job market at the same time as the rate of fixed contracts decreases. Permanent workers, the main part of the active population, would receive lower compensations in case of layoff.

In March 2008, there were general elections in Spain. The concept of flexibilisation appeared on the programs of the two main parties, the Spanish Worker’s Socialist Party (PSOE, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*), the winner of the elections, and the Popular Party (PP, *Partido Popular*), the main opposition party. An analysis of the programs gives some clues about how the parties may manage flexibilisation in the future. Both parties talk about flexibilisation in positive terms, but only referring to two issues: compatibility between family life and work life, and prolonging active life. This last aspect strengthens the tendency described in the previous section regarding a return to retirement at a higher age. Both programs talk about flexibilising the exit from active life, in the sense of making it easier to delay it.

The flexibilising measures to make family and work life compatible hit one of the the clearest challenges for Spanish society squarely. The issue is time flexibility to the worker’s benefit. The programs’ proposals are all very general. The PSOE stresses the need to make all work schedules flexible, particularly the organisation of work time, in order to allow workers to fit their job schedules to family needs. The PP is more explicit and refers to promoting homeworking,

contracts with flexible schedules, and greater flexibility in maternity and paternity leave. Both parties propose economic incentives for the companies, even though they do not specify what these would be.

Finally, we should underline the most important source of inequality in relation to flexibilisation. This is the case of the immigrants. In the first section, we referred to one type of flexibility, total flexibility, that characterizes paid informal work. This kind of flexibility has become a strong element in Spain since the arrival of the immigrants. The most common occupation among foreign female workers is domestic work. Spanish women's development of job careers has made them unable to take care of the house and children full-time. Traditionally, Spanish women with very low educational levels took these hired housekeeper positions. Now there are not enough Spanish women for these jobs (the supply is going down and the demand is increasing), so immigrant women have found an employment niche with a high degree of flexibilisation. Many of these women do not have contracts, their schedules are flexible for the convenience of their employers, and they have no social security benefits, so that if they become unemployed they have no right to unemployment benefits or to a retirement pension in their old age. In addition, the majority of immigrant men work at unskilled jobs, with lower salaries and worse work conditions than Spanish natives. In this sense, the arrival of immigrants decreases inequality on the international level, because they receive incomes that are much higher than what they would earn in their countries of origin, and they send a large part of this income to their families. But on the national level, immigration has become a powerful source of inequality.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The origin of flexibilisation in Spain goes back to the 1984 Labour Reform with the introduction of "fixed-term contracts to foment employment," in a context of high unemployment. In reality, the difference between the fixed-term and permanent contracts is not based on the activity carried out, but on the lower layoff costs for temporary workers. This is the key aspect that differentiates temporary workers from permanent ones.

The Reform only allowed fixed-term contracts to be applied to people who got a new job, so that, in practice, they were meant for people entering the market for the first time, leaving the situation of those who were already settled intact. Can we talk about winners and losers with respect to flexibilisation from an intergenerational point of view? The institutional design of flexibilisation in Spain has involved a balancing game between young people and older people. The young people have benefitted from an education that is better fitted to face globalisation and be more competitive, while the older people, who did not have many educational opportunities, have benefitted from protection against the worst effects of flexibilisation.

Several hypotheses have been formulated about the consequences of flexibilisation from a life-course perspective. The analyses carried out shed some light on these issues. For young people, the most evident consequence has been that the majority of the entries into the job market are made with fixed-term contracts. Even so, the majority of the young people end up changing these contracts into permanent ones. The large difference between the layoff costs for temporary workers compared to those for permanent workers make young people much more sensitive to economic crises. Unemployment is reflected in them to a much greater degree. On the other hand, job flexibilisation alone explains, in the best case, a small part of the important family changes that have happened in Spain in the last three decades, such as the decrease and delay in the marriage and fertility rates, or the increase in cohabitation. There are other factors that are more closely related to this, such as women's access to employment and their drastic change in training, or the lack of childcare for children under the age of three. At any case, flexibilisation would have a clearer effect if it were combined with the high price of housing.

Regarding mid-careers, there is no evidence to indicate that men's mid careers have turned into patchwork careers. On the other hand, women's access to the job market is not related to flexibilisation either, while it is related to their education for the purpose of developing a job career. The coincidence between flexibilisation and globalisation has promoted the sudden retirement of many older workers. Nevertheless, thanks to the institutional support based on a pull-strategy, their income has hardly been reduced compared to what they would have earned if they had retired at the usual age.

The analyses carried out confirm the great importance of social class and education in the labour market. They do not confirm the hypothesis that the risks have evened out for everyone. Nor do they show flexibilisation to have increased the inequalities among the social classes and educational levels. All that can be observed is an increase of the difference between the extremes (between the managers and the rest, or between those with a primary school education and the rest) for some types of analysis. These are categories that contain very few individuals. No increase in inequality is observed between the highest and lowest categories that gather a significant part of the population. Regarding gender, we can highlight the fact that the expansion of flexibilisation in Spain has coincided with an important convergence of the genders. Once again, the effect of flexibilisation on this event is very modest. The convergence of the genders is due to a majority of women training for the purpose of having a job career.

Regarding the future developments of flexibilisation and its effects on inequality, we should point out that "total flexibility" is concentrated on the immigrants. If this tendency persists, as seems likely, we can foresee an increase in the inequality of incomes and job conditions on a national level.

<sup>1</sup> The proportion of domestic servants in the UK in 1901 was 30% (Grint, 2005: 316).

<sup>2</sup> Permanent contracts with incentives, introduced in the 1997 Labour Reform to foment permanent contract hiring, have a layoff cost of 33 days per year of work, with a maximum of 24 monthly payments. On the other hand, if a worker with a permanent contract is laid off due to objective or collective causes, the compensation is 20 days per year, with a maximum of 12 monthly payments. Fixed-term contracts for substitutions and training have no compensation for layoff once they expire.

<sup>3</sup> The OECD uses 18 indicators to measure job market flexibility. Three of them concern fixed-term contracts. These are 1) valid cases for use of fixed-term contracts, 2) maximum number of successive contracts, and 3) maximum accumulated duration. Considering only these three indicators, Spain appears to be a comparatively rigid country. Even though legislation is less flexible than in other countries, everyone knows that in Spain many employers change a worker's job from one contract to another, in order to be able to initiate another fixed-term contract, breaking the spirit of the law.

<sup>4</sup> Data from the four quarters of 1995 and from the first three quarters of 2007 of the Labour Force Survey.

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