

# Getting out or switching to part-time: Gender disparities in the impacts of corporate restructuring

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**Abstract.** Whereas the literature on gender disparities in cases of large-scale corporate restructuring focuses on discrimination in top-down processes, this article analyses why employee self-selection continues to yield gender inequalities. Based on the case study of an airline company and using mixed methods, the results indicate that men are more likely to accept voluntary redundancy and less likely to switch to subsidized part-time work. While women work part-time mostly to improve their work-life balance, men appear to be more sensitive to financial incentives and more prepared to retrain in a secondary activity. These findings suggest that restructuring amplifies women's existing labour market vulnerabilities, even under voluntary redundancy plans.

**Keywords:** corporate restructuring, subsidized part-time, voluntary redundancy, lay-offs, gender inequalities, turnover.

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## 1. Introduction

Large-scale corporate restructuring has become more frequent in most Member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>1</sup> since the 1980s (Silva et al. 2019). Traditionally, restructuring plans were implemented in manufacturing in the wake of sector-specific negative shocks, technological obsolescence or business cycle downturns. By the 2000s, corporate restructuring was being undertaken for “competitive” reasons linked

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<sup>1</sup> For France, see data from the Statistics Department of the French Ministry of Employment at <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/donnees/les-dispositifs-publics-daccompagnement-des-restructurations>, accessed 3 March 2022.

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to intensified global competition and the demands of shareholders for greater profitability, and affected both manual workers and managers (Foster et al. 2019). As a result of this development, a major stream of research aimed at analysing the forms, causes and consequences of restructuring for both corporations and employees has gradually emerged (Halford and Savage 1995; Kalleberg 2011; Williams, Muller and Kilanski 2012; Kalev 2014). Most of the studies have focused on the ex post impact of restructuring, either on the likelihood that displaced employees will find other employment or on the “survivors” who remain in the company. A more limited number of studies have analysed age- and race-based inequalities in the selection of workers for downsizing, while only a small subset has focused on the gender issue. Lastly, only a few papers have considered voluntary employee turnover, defined as the situation in which employees have the choice to leave or not (Regts and Molleman 2013).

Our article contributes to this literature by analysing within-company gender inequalities in restructuring plans that are based on self-selection rather than a top-down selection process. Our case study of a major European airline is interesting because it allowed us to examine men and women working in the exact same job, at the same company and at the same time, and having to choose whether or not leave the company in exchange for financial compensation. The fact that the airline’s restructuring plan had two activity reduction schemes – a voluntary redundancy plan with a fixed staff reduction target and a subsidized part-time plan – enabled us to examine whether the outcomes for men and women were different at the extensive margin (measured by the probability that they would choose to exit the company through the voluntary redundancy plan) and at the intensive margin (measured by the probability of a switch to subsidized part-time work), and whether those choices reproduced the gendered choices usually observed in the literature on part-time work and work interruptions. A recent paper on the COVID-19 crisis suggests that outcomes at the two margins, intensive and extensive, may differ between men and women (Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020).

Using the airline’s exhaustive human resource files, we examined the characteristics of employees enrolled in the two different forms of activity reduction plan. Moreover, a series of qualitative interviews with crew members enabled us to examine the motivations and reactions of men and women in relation to the restructuring plan and thus to interpret the differences observed. Our aim was to test whether a theoretically gender-neutral restructuring process had gender-differentiated effects, potentially counteracting the gender equality policy that the company was implementing at the same time.

We thus tested two hypotheses. First, we tested whether activity reduction plans based on self-selection could attenuate or eliminate the gender differences in the effect of restructuring by allowing women to decide about their employment. Previous studies have shown that, since women are over-represented in administrative support positions and in precarious jobs, their employment is more vulnerable to budget cuts (Williams, Muller and Kilanski 2012). Other studies have pointed out that even when labour market characteristics are accounted for, women and minorities are more likely to be displaced due to outright discrimination (Couch and Fairlie 2010; Wilson and

McBrier 2005). Lastly, Jolkonen et al. (2018) show that women's chances of re-employment are lower than men's and that women are more likely to leave the labour force when displaced. In this context, a voluntary redundancy plan might offer women the possibility to avoid the higher risk of displacement and lower chance of re-employment. We tested this by evaluating to what extent a worker's gender explained the probability that they would choose to exit the company through the voluntary redundancy plan. We find that men were more likely to opt for voluntary redundancy than women. The motives for self-selecting into the voluntary redundancy plan (outside pre-retirement) differ by gender. While men were more likely to start a business, women chose to decrease their participation in the labour force for family reasons.

Our second hypothesis was that a subsidized part-time plan might reduce gender inequality in the choice of part-time work. Across all industries, women are disproportionately likely to work part-time (about four times more likely both in France and on average in the European Union, according to the 2020 Labour Force Survey).<sup>2</sup> A study on major corporate restructuring in France in the 1980s (Maruani 1996) showed that, within the same company, men were more likely to experience a forced placement on a publicly subsidized *temporary* part-time working scheme, while women were more likely to switch to *permanent* part-time work. Consequently, women were structurally underemployed and suffered a wage drop that was not compensated by public subsidies, while men experienced a temporary drop in working time that was financially compensated.

In this article, we test whether men were more likely than women to choose a part-time scheme when it was subsidized and whether such a scheme helped narrow the gender gap. We then use our qualitative data to understand the gender-differentiated motivations behind the choice of part-time work. We find that, while women were more likely than men to opt for the subsidized part-time plan, the gender gap in this type of part-time work was also the smallest. This suggests that men may be more sensitive to financial incentives when choosing their working-time regime, while women's decisions to work part-time are more often driven by family constraints,<sup>3</sup> confirming the well-established findings in the literature on work-life balance (Goldin 2021; Beham et al. 2019).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We provide a literature review in section 2 and examine the institutional context in section 3. The data and methodology are described in section 4 and the effects of the two forms of activity reduction plan are analysed in section 5. We discuss our findings and set out our conclusions in section 6.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, "Gender gap in part-time employment", EUROSTAT database, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr\\_ln210/default/table](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_ln210/default/table), accessed 3 March 2022.

<sup>3</sup> In the European Union in 2018, 36 per cent of men who worked part-time reported that they did so because they had not found a full-time job, versus 23 per cent of women in part-time work; 29 per cent of women working part-time reported doing so in order to care for children or incapacitated adults, versus 6 per cent of men (European Commission, "Why do people work part-time?", EUROSTAT, 18 September 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20190918-1>).

## 2. Literature review

There is a sizeable body of literature on gender inequality in the labour market, and the extensive contributions relating to part-time work are an important source for understanding the switch to reduced working time and the different reasons it is chosen by men and women. At the same time, the literature on restructuring (examining, for instance, the processes of employee selection and displacement, and the long-term outcomes for victims and survivors) is also useful for understanding employees' positions. However, only a limited number of studies focus on gender.<sup>4</sup> Articulating these two strands of the literature allows us to formulate hypotheses on the differentiated gendered effects of a restructuring plan based on self-selection and to contribute to the understanding of gender inequalities in the labour market.

Gender variation in the number of hours worked is a major focus of the literature on gender inequalities in the labour market. A large body of research shows that women are more likely to work part-time voluntarily, mostly for family reasons (Gerstel and Clawson 2014; Gauchat, Kelly and Wallace 2012; Kjeldstad and Nymoen 2012; Pech, Klainot-Hess and Norris 2021). Moreover, Kjeldstad and Nymoen (2012) recently showed how, in the case of Norway, voluntary short part-time work was significantly less gendered than voluntary long part-time work. Yet women are not only more represented among those working part-time voluntarily; recent research by Pech, Klainot-Hess and Norris (2021) shows that they are also much more likely than men to work involuntarily in part-time positions owing to occupational segregation and care work. This suggests that it is important to take into account both the type of part-time work and workers' characteristics when endeavouring to enhance understanding of gender differences in the switch to part-time work.

The literature on restructuring explores inequalities in the risk of job displacement and considers both outright and indirect discrimination in the labour market. Most papers find that minorities experience higher displacement rates during downsizing and mass lay-offs than other workers (Helwig 2004; Weber Handwerker and Mason 2012; Fairlie and Kletzer 1996). The gender dimension has not been explored as much as age and education, but Kalev (2014) does highlight the role of both race and gender in displacement for management positions. She argues that standardized procedures (where lay-off rules are predicated on hierarchical level or tenure instead of individualized evaluations) reduce management diversity, since women tend to perform better on average in face-to-face relations. Moreover, restructuring processes can weaken the gender equality policies developed by large firms during periods of growth (Woodall, Edwards and Welchman 1997).

Another strand of the literature has focused on how displaced workers have experienced and been affected by restructuring plans. Sociological research has documented the subjective experience of workers facing displacement (Gabriel,

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the main OECD report on mass lay-offs and corporate restructuring to date does not once mention gender as a variable of interest that may influence workers' subsequent employability (Silva et al. 2019).

Gray and Goregaokar 2013) and the role of women in collective mobilization, although female manufacturing workers historically tend to be marginalized by major trade unions (Clarke 2011). Dealing with the impact of restructuring plans on displaced workers, the economics literature measures displaced workers' chances of finding a new job (Brandily, Hémet and Malgouyres 2022; Lachowska, Mas and Woodbury 2020; Halla, Schmieder and Weber 2020). Certain categories of employees are found to face long-term unemployment after mass lay-offs. This is particularly the case for older, low-skilled and firm- or industry-specific workers (Lippmann 2008; Huttunen, Salvanes and Møen 2011; Oesch and Baumann 2015).

However, the impact of gender remains unclear because it depends on the workers' level of educational attainment and on the period considered after their displacement. For example, men appear to be more likely to be displaced than women, but women lose more in terms of career stability and income in the long run (Kuhn 2002) and are more likely to leave the labour market and enter domestic work (Jolkkonen et al. 2018; Snorradóttir et al. 2015; Foster et al. 2019; Paulsen et al. 2005). Regarding non-displaced workers, the literature has shown that certain types of restructuring (mergers, acquisitions and spin-offs) create new opportunities for qualified women in management, although women may never access top positions (Halford and Savage 1995; Woodall, Edwards and Welchman 1997; Pochic and Guillaume 2009). Halford and Savage (1995) showed that, in the banking sector and local government, certain forms of restructuring appeared to be undermining traditional forms of managerial masculinity and allowing some scope for women to move into senior positions.

Our article contributes to this literature by exploring a different organizational context. We focus on "voluntary" restructuring, defined as a downsizing plan with a fixed staff reduction target, where workers can voluntarily choose to exit the company in exchange for financial compensation. While an institutional context of this kind reduces the role of outright discrimination, it generates a gendered self-selection effect among employees. Some of the results in the literature on restructuring are likely to be relevant in the case of voluntary departures. If women are less connected to and supported by unions, they may be less aware of restructuring plans and the associated financial opportunities and benefits. Moreover, the literature has shown that job loss affects women as much as or even more than men and that they have poorer prospects for a quick return to work. This suggests that they are less likely to leave voluntarily, especially since they tend to be more risk-averse than men. On the contrary, the literature on gender inequalities in the labour market shows that women are more likely than men to interrupt their work for family reasons. Taken together, these elements lead us to posit the following hypothesis:

- *(H1) Women are less likely than men to opt for a reduction in activity at the extensive margin via the voluntary departure plan: in other words, they are less likely than men to leave the company, but if they decide to do so, it will be for family reasons.*

Our second hypothesis relates to the other part of the restructuring plan that we studied: subsidized part-time work. Women are over-represented in part-time work in most European countries, both in chosen part-time (especially for family reasons) and in underemployment (that is, people working part-time because

they cannot find a full-time job; Kamerāde and Richardson 2018). Moreover, research has shown that during restructuring, women are more often assigned to part-time work on a permanent basis, while men's assignment to part-time work tends to be short-term (Maruani 1996). Lastly, the literature has shown that women are more willing to reduce their working hours to keep their jobs (Calavrezo et al. 2020). Building on this literature, it might be expected that women would be more likely than men to take up a subsidized part-time scheme, were one to be offered. This is because women may take the opportunity to use subsidized part-time work for family activities (the main reason women switch to part-time work) without suffering too large a financial penalty. Results from the literature suggest that women may prefer to reduce their activity at the intensive margin, that is, to take subsidized part-time work, rather than leave the company. Our second hypothesis is therefore as follows:

- (*H2*) *Women are more likely to opt for subsidized part-time work than for the exit plan; women's preference for reducing their activity at the intensive margin will increase the gender gap in part-time work.*

### 3. Institutional context

In the 2000s, the major European airlines faced competitive restructuring as a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis and mounting competition from Gulf-based and low-cost airlines. In 2011, the company we studied announced the implementation of a major three-year (2012–14) restructuring plan to restore the company's profitability and improve its overall productivity by 20 per cent by 2015. The restructuring plan involved an *employment protection plan* (a legal requirement in France since 2003 for companies with 50 or more employees that plan to lay off ten or more employees within a 30-day period for economic reasons) stipulating a set of measures designed to limit the number of redundancies and to promote the redeployment of dismissed employees within the company or on the labour market.

The airline, which had a policy not to recruit new crew members between 2009 and 2015, took various other measures as well; for example, it halted growth investment, changed cabin crew working conditions, froze wages and reduced the number of back-office staff. More importantly, the restructuring plan also included a cabin and flight crew workforce reduction target, the first since the company's privatization in the early 2000s. Pilot overstaffing was estimated at 350 full-time jobs and cabin crew overstaffing at 700 full-time jobs. Thanks to collective bargaining and powerful trade unions (two thirds of the company's cabin crew staff and over 80 per cent of its pilots were unionized), there were no forced departures. In line with the literature (Bryson, Barth and Dale-Olsen 2013), trade unions played a moderating role by negotiating shorter working hours as an alternative to lay-offs; they also agreed to "a minimum of 200 departures", along with other specific measures to be implemented in 2014, to reach that goal.

The workforce reduction objective was to be achieved through two mechanisms: a voluntary redundancy plan aimed at incentivizing voluntary departures (extensive margin) and a subsidized part-time plan to reduce

working time (intensive margin). Moreover, in line with the 2003 legal framework, the voluntary redundancy plan included several support measures (access to training programmes and assistance from a placement firm, among others) and two main financial compensation measures: severance pay and an extra financial incentive of €10,000–15,000 for setting up a business or for taking a period of leave on personal grounds. The subsidized part-time plan consisted of a flexible schedule (organized on a monthly basis and reversible) and financial incentives. Up to 30 per cent of earnings lost in the switch to part-time work were compensated by the employer. Lastly, workers were also encouraged to take unpaid leave, although the data made available showed that the number of days of leave did not increase while the restructuring plan was implemented.

There were very few eligibility criteria for the voluntary redundancy plan, which was open to all crew members on permanent contracts. A tenure criterion applied only in the event of an excessive number of applicants. By 2015, the plan had led to a workforce reduction of 270 flight crew members and 470 cabin crew members.

During the study period, the company also developed a gender equality policy that was implemented between 2002 and 2014.

#### 4. Data and methodology

We used a unique panel data set that compiled all available information from the human resources department of the large European airline concerned. The data were procured under a confidential research agreement drawn up in line with privacy protection laws and provided monthly information for the period 1998–2015<sup>5</sup> on around 30,000 crew members,<sup>6</sup> including both flight attendants and pilots. Although the restructuring started in 2013, we used data from 1998 onwards in order to obtain an overview of the workers' careers up to the time of the restructuring. The data set contains information on the workers' socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, number of children), job characteristics (tenure, entry and exit dates, reason for exit) and working conditions (full-/ part-time, hierarchical level, long-/short-haul flights, gross wages, number of flight hours).

We modified the data in several ways to deal with missing values. First, we included only workers employed by the company for at least one year between 1998 and 2015. Second, we excluded seasonal workers (short-term contracts are common during the summer) and workers who had left the company at the end of an internship or probationary period. This shrank the sample by 22 per cent. We then kept all observations with no missing values on employment type, hierarchical level, flight distance or entry/exit date. Missing occurrences represented only 5 per cent of the total sample.

The final sample was composed of slightly fewer than 25,000 workers observed monthly between 1998 and 2015, for a total of over 3,000,000 worker-month

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, no data are available after 2015.

<sup>6</sup> We are not authorized to disclose the exact number of workers.

observations. On average, 80 per cent of the workers were cabin crew, including flight attendants and managers, and 20 per cent were flight crew, including captains and co-pilots. Table 1 reports some descriptive statistics by year and crew type. Several observations can be highlighted here. First, both cabin and flight crews show an ageing effect resulting from the company non-recruitment policy that began in 2009. Second, the share of women among cabin crew is large and stable, while among flight crew it is small but rising. Third, we observe a significant decline in the share of full-time workers, among both cabin and flight crew members. Finally, there is a very large wage gap between cabin and flight crew members, with pilots being paid over four times as much as flight attendants.

The first important variable is the reason for exiting the company. This variable, which is of course available only for workers who left the company during the study period, can take the following values: death, retirement, end of contract, lay-off, resignation or voluntary redundancy plan. Using these values, we constructed three different indicators: the probability of leaving the company for any reason, the probability of leaving excluding retirement and the probability

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics (1998–2015)**

	1998		2009		2015	
	CC	FC	CC	FC	CC	FC
Age (years)	33.17	40.73	37.95	43.37	42.81	46.63
% of women	67.42	3.06	66.39	6.17	66.39	7.17
Tenure (years)	8.44	11.39	11.81	13.30	16.56	16.87
<i>Cabin crew</i>						
Flight attendant (%)	79.94	0	74.54	0	74.86	0
Cabin manager (%)	14.55	0	18.18	0	17.12	0
Chief cabin manager (%)	3.49	0	5.12	0	6.04	0
Director (%)	2.05	0	2.17	0	2.01	0
<i>Flight crew</i>						
Co-pilot (%)	0	58.60	0	53.30	0	54.29
Captain (%)	0	42.27	0	46.89	0	46.15
Full-time (%)	74.84	91.19	58.09	81.10	54.21	78.28
Part-time (%)	25.33	8.84	42.06	19.06	46.33	21.88
Working time 50% (%)	5.15	0.28	11.09	0.51	11.52	0.50
Working time 66–92% (%)	20.22	8.57	31.05	18.43	33.69	17.86
Long-haul flights (%)	65.07	47.11	75.93	58.96	77.05	60.97
Short-haul flights (%)	35.76	54.25	25.00	41.74	22.99	39.40
Monthly gross wage (euros)			3 055	13 252	3 388	14 837
Entry rate (%)	8.27	4.32	0.40	3.61	0	0
Exit rate (%)	0.01	0	1.06	3.37	1.50	2.39

Notes: CC = cabin crew (including flight attendants and managers); FC = flight crew (including captains and co-pilots). Entry/exit rates were measured as the percentage of all employees entering/exiting in a given year. Monthly gross wages were only available for the period 2004–15.

Source: Data from company human resources files (1998–2015).

of leaving the company under the voluntary redundancy plan. All three took a value of zero for workers who were still working at the company in December 2015. We then looked at how each indicator changed with the implementation of the voluntary redundancy plan across crew types and genders.

To better understand the determinants of the probability of leaving the company under the voluntary redundancy plan, we estimated a series of multi-variate linear probability models. More precisely, we ran ordinary least squares regressions in which the outcome was the indicator for taking the voluntary redundancy plan regressed against a list of socio-demographic and employment characteristics. This model allows us to understand which factors are more strongly associated with the probability of choosing the voluntary redundancy plan and to what extent the employee's gender plays a role. The control variables we used were the employee's age, number of children, tenure, hierarchical level, proportion of career in full-time work, proportion of career on long-haul flights, monthly flight hours and log of salary.

The second important variable studied in this article is the kind of part-time regime that workers chose. This variable (which is specified for workers in part-time work in a given month) took three different values: regular part-time, parental time and subsidized part-time. We also used the percentage of workers in any category of part-time work in a given month. We then looked at how the distribution of the different types of part-time work changed when the option of subsidized part-time work became available.

To supplement the quantitative analysis, we conducted in-depth interviews with 55 cabin crew and pilots who were working on permanent contracts at the time that the voluntary redundancy plan was being implemented. This qualitative method allowed us to address three limitations of our quantitative data. It brought to light individual perceptions of the global restructuring plan and its main measures (whether or not individuals had chosen to take part in the voluntary restructuring plan), thus helping us to understand how the organizational context may have been differently perceived by male and female employees. It also allowed us to consider not only position and resources within the company, but also various dimensions of family resources outside the company (including the presence of a spouse, the spouse's profession, total household income and housing conditions) that might have affected individual decisions to exit the company or reduce working hours. Lastly, the in-depth interviews provided a life-course perspective that was longer than the period covered by the personnel files and furthered understanding of how the voluntary redundancy plan was likely to impact individual labour trajectories and their interaction with personal life.

We selected individuals working for the same airline so that we could compare employees subject to exactly the same working conditions in the light of the quantitative results. In accordance with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al. 2014; Wu, Wyant and Fraser 2016), the respondents were asked to give their oral consent to participate in the survey before the interview began. Contact was made through mutual acquaintances and then through a snowball effect, and the interviews were conducted by white, middle-aged male and female interviewers.

Each interview covered information on organizational and individual factors that might have contributed to the decision to accept voluntary redundancy or reduce working time: education and career path (before joining and within the company), working conditions (including hours worked, income, relations with colleagues and trade unions) and the interviewee's perception of the restructuring plan and its various measures (whether or not they availed themselves of it). We also included specific questions on family resources (presence of a partner, profession of the partner, total household income, housing conditions, activities outside work and experience of work–family balance). All interviews were then anonymized, fully transcribed and analysed thematically.

The composition of the final sample varied by gender (31 men, 24 women), profession (31 cabin crew, 24 pilots), age (from 32 to 56) and family type (single/partner, with/without children). Five of the 55 respondents took the voluntary redundancy plan and left the company in 2015 (9 per cent), which means that this group was over-represented in our qualitative sample. The qualitative sample is not representative of all cabin crew and pilots, but it did give us insights into the social and gender mechanisms that led to the decision to accept voluntary redundancy. The 50 others either took subsidized part-time work or did not change their work schedules. They all expressed their perceptions of the restructuring plan.

## 5. Effects of the two forms of activity reduction plan

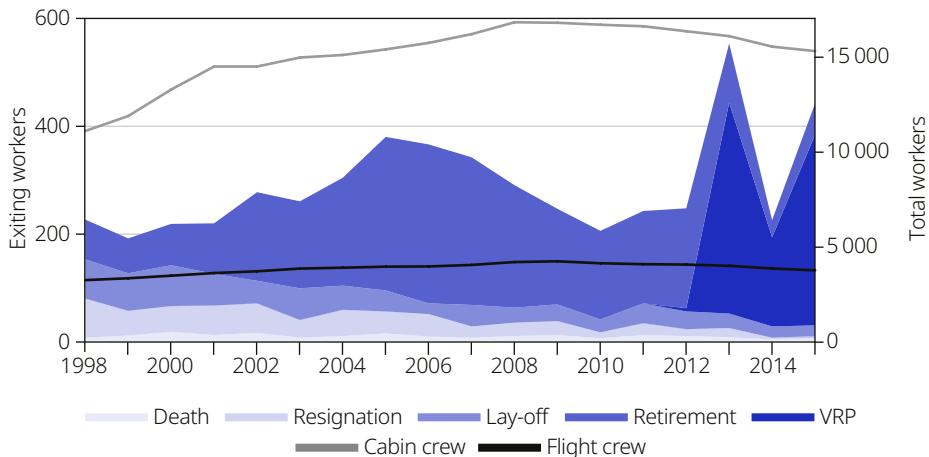
### 5.1. Men more likely to volunteer for redundancy

This section looks at how men and women responded to incentives to volunteer for redundancy. Figure 1 shows the changes in the number of pilots and flight attendants during the study period. The number of employees increased from 1998 to 2001, with a sharp upturn in the number of cabin crew. From 2002 to 2008, the stock of cabin crew continued to grow but more slowly. The company's workforce peaked in 2008, when the trend was inverted and became negative. This occurred even before the voluntary redundancy plan was implemented, as at that time the company had already stopped recruiting permanent staff (Lambert and Remillon 2020). However, the decline in the number of employees was more pronounced at the end of the period as a result of the plan.

The reasons for departure also changed over the study period. At the beginning of the period, three reasons were cited with about equal frequency: resignation, lay-off and retirement. In the first half of the 2000s, retirement became the top reason for leaving the company. From 2013 onward, exits via the voluntary redundancy plan replaced retirement as the top reason for departure, while the probability of exiting the company increased sharply, as can be seen in table 2. The voluntary redundancy plan was thus effective in reducing the workforce.

Regarding gender differences, it is striking that both before and after the introduction of the voluntary redundancy plan, the monthly probability of leaving the company (for all reasons) was higher for men than for women (table 2), a gender gap that was wider among pilots than cabin crew and that seems to have been reinforced by the introduction of the voluntary redundancy plan,

**Figure 1. Number of cabin and flight crew and number of exits, by reason for leaving the company**



Notes: The area graph plots the number of exiting workers by reason for departure. It should be read with the left vertical axis. The two line graphs plot the number of crew members by type over time: cabin crew (grey) and flight crew (black). It should be read with the right vertical axis. VRP = Voluntary redundancy plan.

Source: Data from company human resources files (1998–2015).

**Table 2. Probability of leaving the company**

<b>Panel A: All reasons</b>	Cabin crew		Flight crew	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
2010–12	0.014	0.016	0.002	0.021
2013–15	0.025	0.031	0.012	0.033
Increase	× 1.8	× 1.9	× 6	× 1.6

<b>Panel B: Without retirement</b>	Cabin crew		Flight crew	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
2010–12	0.007	0.007	0.001	0.007
2013–15	0.023	0.027	0.011	0.026
Increase	× 3.3	× 3.9	× 11	× 3.7

Notes: Exit probabilities were computed for the periods 2010–12 and 2013–15. Panel A includes exits for all reasons; panel B excludes retirement, the most common reason for exit before the voluntary redundancy plan.

Source: Data from company human resources files (2010–15).

at least for cabin crew, as men's probability of leaving increased more than women's after 2013.

This result is confirmed by our analysis of the profile of workers who opted for the voluntary redundancy plan (table 3). All else being equal, women were less likely than men to leave the company through the plan. Children also had a negative effect on the likelihood of voluntary departure, especially for women, and workers with more children were less likely to leave. However, the effect is not driven exclusively by women with children, since the coefficient of women

**Table 3. Probability of leaving the company under the voluntary redundancy plan**

	Cabin crew			Flight crew		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Women	-0.0003** (0.0001)	-0.0007*** (0.0001)	-0.0004*** (0.0002)	-0.0009*** (0.0003)	-0.0002 (0.0003)	0.0004 (0.0004)
Children		-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0002** (0.0001)		-0.0005*** (0.0001)	-0.0004*** (0.0001)
Women × children			-0.0002** (0.0001)			-0.0004 (0.0003)
<i>Cabin crew</i>						
Flight attendant	(reference category)					
Cabin manager		-0.0012*** (0.0002)	-0.0012*** (0.0002)			
Chief cabin manager		0.0012** (0.0005)	0.0011** (0.0005)			
Director		-0.0012 (0.0008)	-0.0012 (0.0008)			
<i>Flight crew</i>						
Co-pilot	(reference category)					
Captain					-0.0027*** (0.0005)	-0.0027*** (0.0005)
Tenure		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)		0.0004*** (0.0001)	0.0004*** (0.0001)
Age		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)		0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)
Constant	0.0014*** (0.0001)	-0.0075*** (0.0011)	-0.0074*** (0.0011)	0.0016*** (0.0001)	0.0154*** (0.0050)	0.0155*** (0.0050)
Observations	510 942	510 942	510 942	138 305	138 305	138 305
Other controls	x	x	x	x	x	x
Mean VRP	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0015	0.0015	0.0015

\*\* and \*\*\* indicate statistical significance at the 5 and 1 per cent levels, respectively.

Notes: Ordinary least squares regressions are estimated on a panel of worker-month observations for the period 2013–15. Other controls include proportion of career in full-time work, proportion of career on long-haul flights, monthly flight hours and log of salary.

Source: Data from company human resources files (2013–15).

in column 3 (representing the effect of childless women) is still negative and significant. The probability of leaving the company between 2013 and 2015 under the voluntary redundancy plan increased with age and tenure for both cabin crew and flight crew (the effect of tenure being even stronger for pilots than for flight attendants).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The effect of hierarchical level is more uncertain: among cabin crew, cabin managers were less likely than flight attendants to exit under the voluntary redundancy plan, whereas chief cabin managers were more likely to do so. Among pilots, the most senior (captains) were less likely to opt for the plan than co-pilots.

This combined effect of tenure and age shows that voluntary departure was largely akin to early retirement (see also the age and tenure distribution of departures under the voluntary redundancy plan in figure A1 in the appendix). In fact, early retirement was already an established part of the company's culture by the time the restructuring plan was introduced. In this sense, some late-career employees expected and even hoped for the type of option offered by the voluntary redundancy plan: ageing is particularly difficult in the air transportation sector, owing to the difficult working conditions (lengthy periods away from home, non-standard working schedules, jet lag) and desynchronization from ordinary social schedules.

More generally, in France, early retirement schemes have long been widely used by large companies in various sectors, especially in the 1980s. More recently, public early retirement schemes have been replaced by other types of measure as the general trend of reform moves towards a higher retirement age. Notably, lay-offs of workers who are close to retirement are often scheduled so that the workers can receive unemployment benefits (which are more generous for older unemployed people than for younger workers) until retirement (Baguelin and Remillon 2014). The decision to leave the company with the voluntary redundancy plan at an advanced age may be partly linked to the mechanism of pre-retirement and could explain why women opted for the plan less than men. At equal age, women are often further from retirement because of career breaks associated with maternity (Bonnet and Hourriez 2012) and they therefore have an interest in working longer to augment their pension benefits.

However, not all voluntary departures from the company are due to early retirement. Some younger employees, who were far from retirement, also opted for voluntary redundancy (see figure A1 in the appendix). Younger workers may have left for want of promotion opportunities or out of a desire to retrain for another type of employment.<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of the gender gap when opting for the voluntary redundancy plan may be linked to the fact that women are more risk-averse than men (Croson and Gneezy 2009) and to their lower chances of re-employment outside the company, as we saw in section 2.

The qualitative interviews provide a better understanding of the uses of the voluntary redundancy plan by men and women in mid-career. They showed that male cabin crew and pilots were more often engaged in a secondary activity (such as brokerage, real estate, banking or agriculture) during their non-working hours, whereas women generally spent their non-working hours on domestic work and family activities. Thus, men may be more prepared for possible re-employment, having accumulated more work experience, networks and money. Men who took the voluntary redundancy plan were already engaged in a professionalization process (in addition to their job in air transportation); they talked about immediate economic profitability.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, we were unable to explore this hypothesis further since we could not follow departing workers after they left the company.

Last year, I had no interest in leaving for a bonus that was no higher than the severance payment. So I didn't take it. But I applied for it for this year. And now I'm going to apply for training leave financed by the State.<sup>9</sup> I'm going to get a professional certificate in agriculture, and do my project on animal husbandry. (Didier,<sup>10</sup> 46, purser turned farmer, married, three children)<sup>11</sup>

I left in 2016. I created a small drone business. I trained as an operator and took all the exams. So, I have a small business as a drone operator. It's going to grow, there's work to be done! (Jacques, 56, long-haul chief cabin manager turned drone business owner, widower, no children)

In comparison, rather than aim for economic profitability, women opting for the voluntary redundancy plan always saw their new job as complementary to their family life. They planned to take a part-time job or a job situated somewhere between work and leisure.

With the arrival of our fourth child ... Let's say that it changes everything in terms of organization. So this voluntary redundancy plan offer was the chance to leave. And, in any case, even without a plan, I would have left the company.

[And did you have a project? How did it unfold?]

I suppose that I was thinking about what I could do so that everything would be coherent, simpler to manage. And so I have a great passion, which is cooking. I have always loved to cook, I always saw my mother cooking, my grandmother cooking, I always loved it, and so I said to myself, "why not?" So I'm running a cooking workshop, giving classes. But it's really an activity that's complementary to my family life. I try to keep all the time for the family, the kids. (Maité, 40, long-haul flight attendant turned cooking teacher, married, four children, master's degree)

To obtain full financial compensation under the voluntary redundancy plan, employees had to have a career or business plan. The interviews revealed that while the men were already engaged in activities outside work or had clear ideas for career retraining, women often focused on activities based on domestic skills, traditionally associated with women (such as floristry or cooking). They turned to the domestic and leisure-type activities that they were used to doing (blogging, cooking and craftwork, among others) and engaged in the so-called "marketization of everyday activities" (Joudain and Naulin 2019). The interviews also revealed that women opting for the voluntary redundancy plan had already been working part-time for family reasons for several years and had a more distant relationship to employment.

There were no purser positions available and, working half-time, I had no chance. I couldn't switch to medium-haul because we were going to be moved to Nice.<sup>12</sup> The kids were sick of it too, they couldn't handle it. So I took the voluntary redundancy plan ... I left. So as soon as the plan was presented I worked on a project and I submitted my application. ... I had a real stroke of luck, a florist friend downstairs from me asked me for help for Mother's Day and I did a vocational certificate in floristry in 2013. And so it was in his shop that the idea germinated and took shape ...

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<sup>9</sup> Funding from the French FONGECIF (Fund for the management of individual training leave).

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms used for all interviewees.

<sup>11</sup> Interview excerpts are translated from French.

<sup>12</sup> The name of the city has been changed to maintain anonymity.

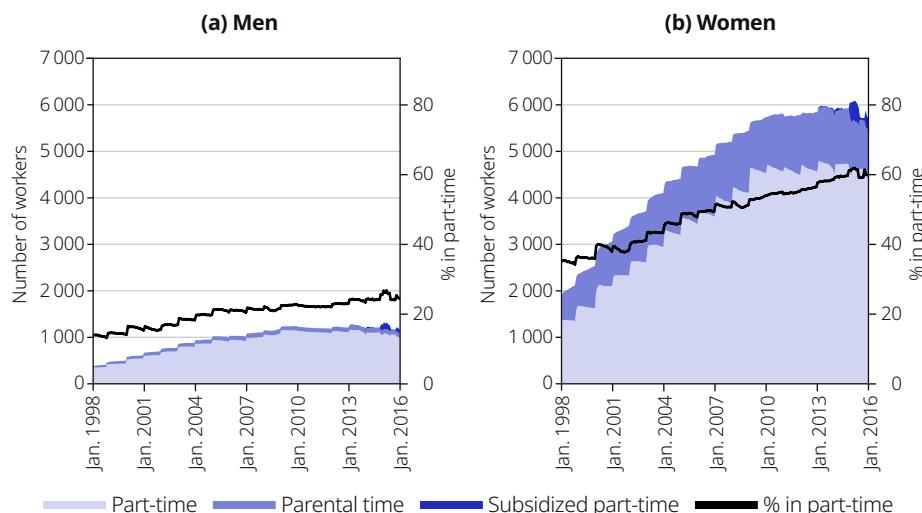
But, in fact, I had nothing going for me but my own determination. I had no experience with business, no experience with web marketing, no experience with web design; with flowers, or sales, or entrepreneurship. (Marie-Christine, medium- and long-haul flight attendant turned florist, 43, three children, married, bachelor's degree)

Marie-Christine formally submitted her retraining plans and obtained full compensation under the voluntary redundancy plan, but her activity never became profitable and she eventually stopped. As women who took the voluntary redundancy plan usually had a partner, they could rely on their resources to cope with the loss of income. The voluntary redundancy plan can thus be seen as an underemployment trap for women. It undermines the dual-breadwinner model that has become dominant in Europe, especially in France, in contrast with Germany and the United Kingdom, where the “one-and-a-half-earner” model has remained dominant (Blaskó, Papadimitriou and Manca 2020).

## 5.2. Subsidized part-time: More attractive for men than other forms of part-time work

This section investigates the role of the subsidized part-time plan in the switch from full-time to part-time schedules. For this part of the analysis, the sample was restricted to cabin crew members, as they were the only ones eligible for the plan. Figure 2 plots the changes in the number of cabin crew working part-time, by gender and type of part-time work, between 1998 and 2015. There was a clear increasing trend in the number and proportion of crew members working part-time over that period, with larger increases for women. By the end of 2015, up to 60 per cent of women were working part-time, but only 23 per cent of men.

**Figure 2. Number of workers in part-time positions, by gender (cabin crew)**



Notes: The graphs refer only to cabin crew members, by gender. The area graphs plot the number of workers in part-time by type of part-time work (left vertical axis). The black line graphs plot the percentage of workers in part-time work as a proportion of all cabin crew members (right vertical axis).

Source: Data from company human resources files (1998–2015).

The introduction of a new subsidized part-time option that should have been more attractive to workers than regular part-time work did not lead to a large increase in either the number or the proportion of part-time workers. In figure 2, we see that workers in the subsidized part-time plan (black area) represented a very small proportion of the total number of part-time workers. Remarkably, the company's goal of 30 per cent of hours worked under the subsidized part-time regime was very far from being reached in 2015. This suggests that the availability of a subsidized part-time plan was not a sufficient incentive to encourage workers to move to part-time work. One explanation may be that almost all workers with a propensity to choose part-time work had already done so, especially if they were women.

Another explanation for the low success rate of this measure is that the subsidized part-time plan was implemented at short notice, with little information available on its duration and conditions for eligibility. Many of the interviewees reported that they did not know when the plan would take effect or how to access it.

The problem, too, is that there's no internal communication in the company. Here, they were looking for volunteers again to deal with interseason overstaffing, for unpaid [leave] in November. So I said, "It's pointless for me to ask for November, they're going to say no." You know, when you're looking, they say no. They're making it up as they go along. They're all over the place! (Béatrice, 40, long-haul flight attendant, has a partner, no children)

This information was confirmed by the newsletter of the main union of flight attendants:

Management is distributing applications for the subsidized part-time regime one month at a time, depending on changes and different actors' decisions on the development of [competing companies], etc. ... In addition to the lack of longer-term information, this system, which stands in complete contradiction to the principles enshrined in the company statutes and agreements, eliminates any choice in the monthly period of unpaid leave, as the timing is too tight. This disastrous management approach has unfortunately dissuaded many cabin crew from choosing this working-time system, even though many had called for it.

Nonetheless, it is worth analysing the gender differences in the uptake of the subsidized part-time plan. Table 4 reports the percentage of crew members in part-time work by gender, before and after the plan's implementation. For comparison, we chose the year 2012 as the reference period, since the subsidized part-time plan started in mid-2013 and was extended in 2015. We also report the ratio of the respective percentages of women and men in part-time work.

In 2012, female cabin crew were half as likely as their male counterparts to be in full-time work, twice as likely to be in standard part-time work and six times more likely to work under a parental time regime (a specific part-time regime for employees with children under the age of four). In 2015, 1.5 per cent of women chose subsidized part-time work compared with 1 per cent of men. This shows that women were indeed more likely than men to choose such an arrangement, despite their much higher propensity to work regular part-time: while in 2015 women were 2.1 times more likely than men to be in part-time work, women were only 1.5 times more likely than men to work under the subsidized part-time

**Table 4. Working time before and after the subsidized part-time plan, by gender**

Cabin crew	2012			2015		
	Women	Men	Ratio	Women	Men	Ratio
Full-time (%)	46.21	78.22	0.59	43.11	76.59	0.56
Part-time (%)	42.21	19.98	2.11	44.98	20.99	2.14
Subsidized part-time (%)	0	0	-	1.54	1.03	1.50
Parental time (%)	11.74	1.88	6.24	11.00	1.91	5.76

Notes: This table indicates the distribution of workers by working-time regime and gender in 2012 and 2015. The ratios should be read as follows: "Women are X times as likely to be in this time regime."

Source: Data from company human resources files (2012, 2015).

regime. The gender gap in the choice to work part-time was thus much smaller when part-time work was subsidized, suggesting that men's choices are more sensitive to financial incentives and flexibility in working hours.

There are several possible explanations as to why the subsidized part-time regime was proportionally more attractive for men than for women. First, it was flexible in that it was temporary and reversible at any time. Its impact on workers' careers was therefore limited. Given that, on average, men's working schedules are less dependent on domestic/family management and the school calendar, flexibility is more valuable for men than for women. Second, men may have been more likely to switch to part-time simply because they were more likely to be on a full-time regime beforehand. Third, men are more likely to have chosen to work part-time to allow for personal and leisure activities rather than for family constraints. The data show that when men worked part-time, they did so later in their careers and tended to be closer to full-time (83 per cent or 92 per cent of full-time; see figure A2 in the appendix). One human resources manager suggested in an interview that men opted for part-time because they wanted "a month off work dedicated to surfing". Monetary and flexibility incentives are more likely to be key deciding factors for leisure-driven choices (and hence, for men) than for the family-driven ones. Lastly, as men were more likely to do paid work outside their main job, they faced a smaller drop in income, in proportional terms.

The results also show that subsidized part-time could be a way for workers who had spent their careers in full-time positions to experience part-time work for the first time. Out of all subsidized part-time workers, 68 per cent had previously only ever worked full-time. The plan therefore managed to attract crew members who had never chosen to work part-time. Overall, while the company restructuring plan failed to substantially increase the number of crew members in part-time work, it persuaded some full-time workers, especially men, to switch to regular part-time work after a period of subsidized part-time work. Of the crew members who spent at least one month in subsidized part-time, 14 per cent switched to standard non-subsidized part-time work.

The interviews provide insights into the uses of part-time work and allow us to analyse how this varies by gender. Women applying for subsidized part-time were more likely to justify that choice for family reasons. They wanted to spend

more time with their children, either to supervise their schoolwork or to spend the summer holidays with them. More generally, they were trying to balance work and family commitments.

They [management] sent an email, "We're looking for volunteers for February." I went to the Careers department to see if I could actually have June off. He told me, "No, that's not possible. Your request is too restrictive." But I would really like to have June off because next year is *la première*,<sup>13</sup> so there's the exam. These are important years for my daughter! (Cécile, 50, long-haul flight attendant, married, one daughter aged 16)

The part-time programme allows you to handle the workload every month, better organize your personal life, it smooths out your cash flow. (Christelle, 40, long-haul flight attendant, married, two children)

Women rarely applied for part-time work in order to pursue a complementary activity, for leisure or for occupational training. When men chose to switch to part-time work, however, they reduced their working hours by small amounts (working an average of 92 per cent of full-time), either for leisure activities or to develop another paid activity. They rarely cited family reasons (except for some young male pilots who had just become fathers). When men worked alongside their main job as cabin crew members, they were self-employed in various types of activities (catering, brokerage, real estate, camping and coaching, among others). However, men's part-time work was still a temporary practice that stopped after a few months or years.

I always worked 100 per cent (full-time), except during the last voluntary redundancy plan where working time was split. It was something like 75 per cent (of full-time), I think, we had seven days' unpaid leave per month. That was good, it really freed up some time in my schedule. That was a really good experience for me. After that I asked for some more, because some of the days off were paid. But because I was too young, I didn't get them. (Franck, 32, medium-haul flight attendant, single, no children)

I work 80 per cent (of full-time), so 11 days (per month). And on the side, in the last two years, I've started working with a mortgage broker. I'm an agent, so I bill for my services. I'm super independent.

[And you weren't interested in the voluntary redundancy plan?]

No, I'm too scared of not having a job after. I don't have the guts for a total career change, and for now what I've set up suits me well. (Guillaume, 36, medium-haul flight attendant, has a partner, no children)

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The consequences of restructuring for corporations and employees have received increasing attention in the literature owing to the rise in the number of restructuring plans in various industries. In this article, we have contributed to the literature by analysing in-company gender inequalities in a restructuring plan in the air transport industry. The plan under consideration consisted of an activity reduction scheme comprising a voluntary redundancy plan (extensive

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<sup>13</sup> In France, *la première* is the second-last year of secondary school and ends with exams in June that prepare students for the *baccalauréat* examinations of the final year.

margin) and a subsidized part-time plan (intensive margin). Drawing on a mixed methods strategy, we used exhaustive human resource files and a set of in-depth interviews to test whether employees' choices and reasons for opting out varied by gender in relation to individual and organizational factors.

The results validated our first hypothesis and confirmed that women were less likely to opt out of the company through the voluntary redundancy plan. The reason for choosing the plan also differed by gender. While men chose to leave the company to start a new business, women who took the voluntary redundancy plan tended to leave the labour force permanently, especially if they had children and could rely on their spouse's resources to compensate for the loss of income. Large-scale restructuring plans can be seen as an underemployment trap for women, leading to an increase in the gender employment gap and undermining the dual-earner model.

We also studied the deployment of a subsidized part-time scheme aimed at reducing the total number of hours worked (intensive margin). We considered whether the employees' decision to switch to subsidized part-time work varied by gender and analysed the impact of that choice at the individual level. The results validated our second hypothesis – that women are more likely to choose subsidized part-time work than men – given that a higher percentage of women chose that option. However, we also observed that the gender gap in subsidized part-time work was smaller than in the other non-subsidized forms of part-time work. This suggests that subsidized part-time work was the most attractive kind of part-time for men compared with other non-subsidized part-time possibilities and that men are more sensitive to financial incentives when choosing their working-time regime. The in-depth interviews enhanced our understanding of the gender mechanisms at stake by revealing the reasons why men and women chose subsidized part-time work. While the women in our study did so mainly to improve their work–family balance and meet their family needs, a reasoning which is in line with the literature on gender and part-time work (Crompton and Lyonette 2005; Goldin 2021), men chose that option for career and leisure purposes. Our results also indicate that the men in our study saw subsidized part-time work as temporary (which contributed to its acceptability) and planned to return to full-time work. In line with Kjeldstad and Nymoen (2012), our article has shown that when part-time is short-lived, the gender gap in part-time is smaller.

Overall, our article contributes to the extensive literature on part-time work and gender inequalities by providing new empirical evidence of the gendered uses and penalties of part-time work in a life-course perspective (Hirsch 2005; Lyonette 2015). It also enhances understanding of how organizational policies (such as subsidized part-time) may help reduce gender inequalities in the short run (by increasing the rate of part-time work among men) while at the same time fostering such inequalities in the long run (by increasing the strategic use of part-time work by men).

Our results have important implications for the management of gender equality and work–life balance policies. We have shown that, when restructuring is conducted on a voluntary basis, the employees' choices differ by gender.

Women seem to anticipate a lower probability of re-employment and avoid leaving the company by self-selecting less often. When opting out of the company, however, they retrain in activities with low economic profitability and in line with their domestic roles. These results call into question the gender distribution of the effects of measures implemented by either companies or governments to support business creation and support improving access to lifelong learning for women. Similarly, a subsidized part-time plan has the potential to narrow the gender gap in the choice of part-time work in the short run, since men seem to be proportionally more interested in this kind of part-time work than other non-subsidized arrangements. A similar observation is often made about men's propensity to opt for parental leave, with a much higher uptake found among fathers in countries where leave is well compensated (proportional to salary, as in Scandinavian countries) and a very low uptake in countries such as France, where compensation is low and fixed. This finding may inspire reform of parental leave with a view to distributing it more evenly between the two parents. That said, a subsidized part-time scheme is not enough to reduce the part-time gender gap in the long term.

Lastly, the ongoing economic context linked to the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that the number of restructuring plans – either in the form of top-down or self-selection processes – is likely to continue to increase and that such plans deserve further analysis (Alon et al. 2020). As women's jobs appear to be more vulnerable to economic downturns than those of men (Karamessini and Rubery 2014; Rubery and Rafferty 2013), there is an urgent need to improve our understanding of how to better distribute paid work.

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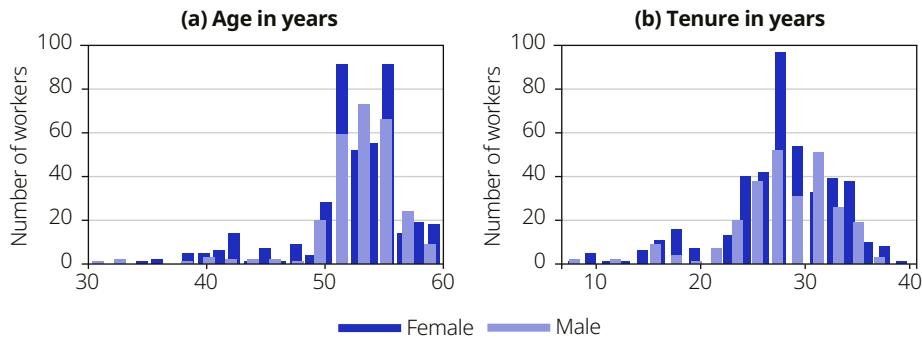
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## Appendix

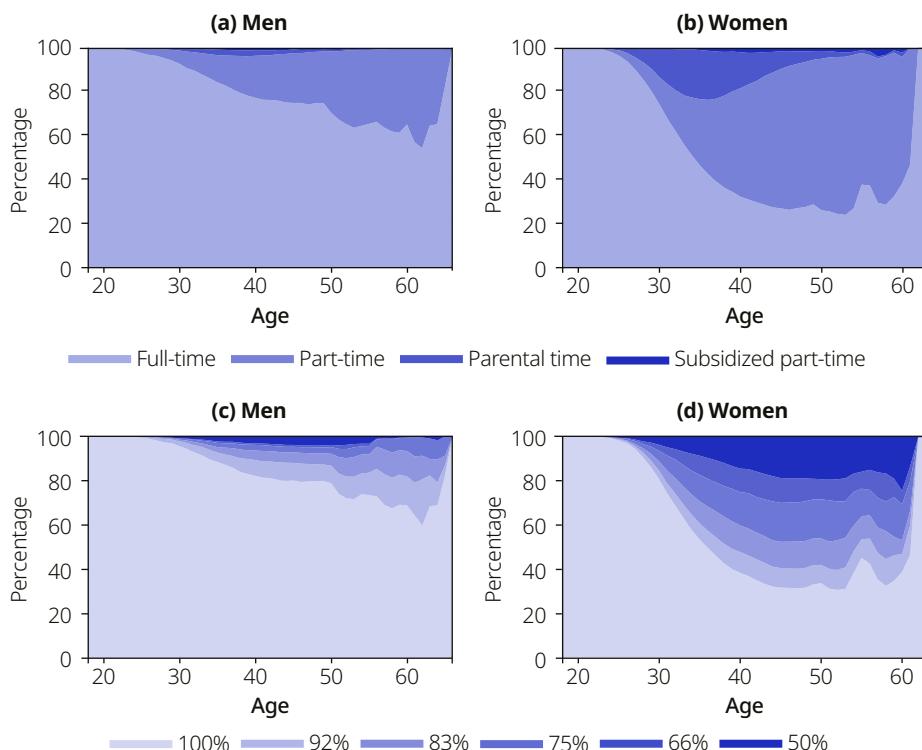
**Figure A1. Distribution of age and tenure at the time of the voluntary redundancy plan**



Notes: These graphs plot the age and tenure distribution of workers who opted for the voluntary redundancy plan. The sample consisted of 688 workers, including 423 women and 265 men.

Source: Data from company human resources files (2013–15).

**Figure A2. Percentage of cabin crew workers in part-time positions by age and gender**



Notes: The graphs refer only to cabin crew members, by gender. Area graphs plot the percentage of workers in part-time positions by type (panels (a) and (b)) and intensity (panels (c) and (d)) of part-time.

Source: Data from company human resources files (1998–2015).