

Fixed-term employment: a focus on working conditions

Growing flexibilisation of the European labour market has resulted in an increase in so-called atypical forms of employment, such as fixed-term employment, temporary or agency work, and marginal employment. These forms of employment are also referred to as precarious, as they are characterised by job insecurity, among other things. This article uses data from the BIBB/BAuA 2012 Employment Survey to investigate the working conditions and state of health of fixed-term full-time employees who are not employed via a temporary employment agency. These are compared with full-time employees who are employed on a permanent basis (excluding temporary workers).

Fixed-term employment in Germany

The report “Safety and health at work 2013” finds that approximately 9% of employed persons in Germany were engaged in fixed-term employment in 2013 according to results from the Federal Statistical Office. This corresponds to approx. 3.2 million employees and puts the fixed-term employment rate in Germany in the mid-range for Europe. Women and men are employed on a fixed-term basis at a similar frequency. Employees who have a fixed-term employment contract work in part-time employment more frequently than permanent employees. Among women, the difference in the rate of part-time employment is relatively small (fixed-term: 52%; permanent: 48%); for men, on the other hand, the difference is considerably larger (27% vs. 9%).

Characteristics of fixed-term full-time employment

With regard to the BIBB/BAuA 2012 Employment Survey, the fixed-term employment rate for persons in full-time employment is nearly 10%. More men than women are to be found in these employment relationships (percentage of men: 60%). Young employees (aged 15 to 29) are found especially frequently in fixed-term full-time employment (24%). On the other hand, people in the middle age (8%) and the over-50s (5%) are more rarely employed in this form of employment.

The economic sectors in which the majority of fixed-term full-time employees work are the “public service” (14%) and the services sector (11%). Fixed-term employees are found most rarely in the industrial and craft sectors (8% and 7%).

Furthermore, the results show that the majority of fixed-term full-time employees would like the position to be made permanent (73%). Only a minority (23%) of fixed-term employees estimate the risk as high or very high the risk that the employment contract will not be extended.

A look at the working conditions

Fixed-term and permanent full-time employees were asked about their physical and mental working conditions. Furthermore, the survey investigated changes in the stress or working pressure and also professional working requirements faced by the respondents within the last two years.

With respect to the frequency of physical working conditions, such as working while standing or forced postures, there are no major differences between fixed-term and permanent full-time employees.

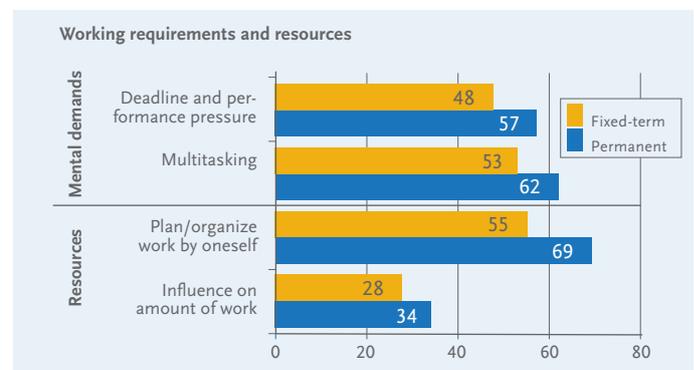


Fig. 1: Percentage of fixed-term full-time employees that frequently report these working conditions and resources compared to permanent full-time employees

Figure 1 shows selected mental demands and resources at work that are frequently reported by fixed-term and permanent full-time employees. With regard to mental demands at work, it is clear that people employed on a fixed-term basis report more rarely being frequently under deadline pressure and pressure to perform than permanent employees (48% vs. 57%). A similar pattern appears with regard to simultaneously performing various tasks – so-called multitasking.

The proportion of fixed-term employees that frequently report this is lower than the proportion of permanent employees (53% vs. 62%). Not every frequently occurring mental demand at work is perceived as stressful by every respondent. In the case of frequent multitasking, about 30% of respondents state that this is stressful for them – regardless of the fixed-term nature of the employment relationship. Slight differences are seen, however, in the case of frequent deadline pressure and pressure to perform: fixed-term full-time employees more rarely perceive this as stressful than permanent employees do (58% vs. 65%).

In terms of resources, it becomes obvious (Fig. 2) that fixed-term full-time employees report more rarely often being able to plan and organize their work by oneself than permanent employees (55% vs. 69%). Similarly, another difference is seen in the perceived influence on the amount of work. The proportion of fixed-term employees that often report this is lower than the proportion of permanent employees (28% vs. 34%). Figure 2 shows to what extent professional working requirements and stress or working pressure experienced by respondents have changed in the last two years.

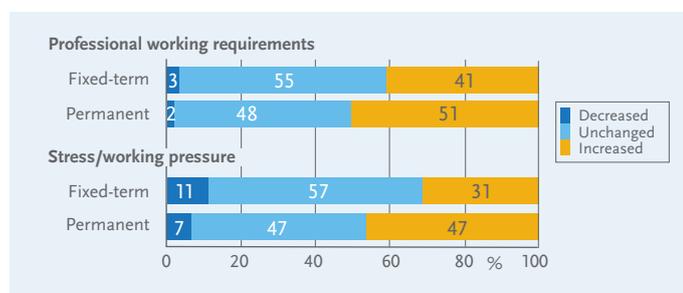


Fig. 2: Percentage of fixed-term full-time employees who report a change in professional working requirements and stress/working pressure in the last two years compared to permanent full-time employees

Regarding the level of professional requirements, an increase is reported more rarely by fixed-term full-time employees than by permanent full-time employees (41% vs. 51%). Thereby, an increase in the level of professional requirements is reported most frequently by fixed-term employees with longer employment relationships (11 years and more: 49%; 6-10 years: 50%; 2-5 years: 41%), whereas the length of the employment relationship makes no difference in this regard among permanent employees. A similar situation is given in the perceived working pressure: a smaller proportion of fixed-term full-time employees report an increase in stress at work with respect to the last two years compared to permanent full-time employees (31% vs. 47%). In both employment relationships, a rise in stress can be seen as the duration of the working relationship increases.

Consideration of health situation

The majority of fixed-term and permanent full-time employees are in a good state of health, according to the self-assessment, regardless of age (46% vs. 55%). People in both forms of employment were also asked about frequently occurring health disturbances in the last 12 months. Here it becomes obvious that the two forms do not differ from one another substantially with regard to psychovegetative and musculoskeletal complaints and are both on a comparable, relatively good level.

Summary

In summary, there is no significant difference between fixed-term and permanent full-time employees with regard to the frequency of physical working conditions. A few types of mental demand at work, especially work intensity, seemed to cause stress for permanent full-time employees more often and to a greater extent than for fixed-term employees. A similar picture emerges with respect to the perceived increase in professional requirements and working pressure in the last two years. Here, fixed-term employees do slightly better than permanent employees. Furthermore, longer employment relationships are associated with an increase in the level of requirements and working pressure. On the other hand, full-time employees with fixed-term employment contracts cannot benefit as frequently as permanent employees from work-related resources such as influence at work or decision latitude. Presumably, therefore, a greater number of years of service and a permanent employment relationship are associated with increasing responsibility at work, but also with an increase in scope of action. Regarding the state of health, there are no significant differences between fixed-term employees and permanent employees in full-time employment, even on an age-specific basis.

With respect to working conditions and the health of full-time employees with a fixed-term employment contract, it becomes evident that their position is not much worse than that of their colleagues employed on a permanent basis. In practice, it is advisable to create scope of action of fixed-term employees according to their qualifications and professional experience.

Would you like to find out more about this? More information about the topic of atypical employment you can find in the report "Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit 2013" [Safety and health at work 2013] (www.baua.de/suga, in German) or in the brochure "Arbeitswelt im Wandel, Ausgabe 2014" [Changing world of work, 2014 edition] (www.baua.de/dok/5046798, in German).

Source: www.baua.de/dok/6506816

Revised: January 2015

Federal Institute for Occupational
Safety and Health
Friedrich-Henkel-Weg 1-25
44149 Dortmund, Germany

Service telephone +49 231 9071-2071
Fax +49 231 9071-2070
info-zentrum@baua.bund.de
www.baua.de