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# **WISHING TO WORK MORE ? PREFERENCES, CONSTRAINTS, AND HOURS WORKED**

Naomi Cohen, Nicolas Ghio, and Mattis Gilbert

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**SCIENCES PO ECONOMICS DISCUSSION PAPER**

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No. 2025-14

# Wishing to Work More?

## Preferences, Constraints, and Hours Worked

Naomi Cohen\*, Nicolas Ghio<sup>†</sup>, Mattis Gilbert<sup>‡</sup>

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PRELIMINARY VERSION

### Abstract

Using data from the French Labor Force Survey, we show that 21.2% of workers experience an hours gap, meaning they work fewer hours than they would prefer at their current wage. This stands in sharp contrast to recent evidence from Germany, where most workers report being overworked. In France, hours gaps are concentrated among low-income part-time workers and remain stable over time. We argue that cross-country differences in labor market institutions — including minimum wage policies, working-time regulations, and unemployment insurance — are central to shaping both realized hours and the distribution of hours gaps. While hours gaps appear inefficient in standard labor supply models, they may reflect constrained-efficient outcomes in the presence of frictions. Understanding the mechanisms that generate hours gaps is crucial for evaluating the welfare effects of hours-based policy interventions.

**Keywords:** Working Hours, Desired Working Hours, Hours Mismatch.

**JEL Classification:** J22, E24

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# 1 Introduction

A central question in modern macroeconomics is how to measure and interpret the optimal supply of labor. A growing body of work has examined the distribution of hours worked, the degree to which workers are constrained in their choices, and the implications for welfare. This research is part of a broader debate on cross-country differences in working time, most notably the sharp divergence between the United States and Western Europe, where average hours have declined substantially over recent decades.

In this paper, we replicate the recent analysis of Jarosch et al. (2025) for Germany using microdata from the French Labor Force Survey (2003–2019). Jarosch et al. (2025) show that more than two-thirds of German full-time workers report wanting to work fewer hours, pointing to overwork as the dominant source of mismatch. By contrast, we find the mirror image in France: the vast majority of French workers are either satisfied with their hours (around 70%) or would like to work more (21.2%), while only a small fraction (2.6%) wish to work less. This divergence is remarkably stable over time, even though aggregate hours worked in Germany and France have evolved in similar ways over the past decades.

This stark contrast raises broader questions about the determinants of equilibrium labor supply and demand. Institutions appear central. France features higher labor costs, stricter employment protection, and strong regulation of working time—notably the 35-hour legal workweek introduced in 1998 and tight rules on overtime. Germany, by contrast, has historically had more flexible employment structures, only introduced a national minimum wage in 2015, and maintains a much higher share of part-time jobs (nearly 30% compared to 16% in France). These institutional asymmetries not only shape observed hours but also workers’ ability to adjust their schedules to match their preferences.

Our contributions go beyond documenting this French–German contrast. First, we show that in France dissatisfaction is overwhelmingly concentrated among part-time workers at the bottom of the income distribution, who both work and earn less than the average, and are therefore the most vulnerable from a welfare perspective. Unlike Jarosch et al. (2025), who treat part-time work as a secondary margin, we place it at the center of our analysis. Second, we use the panel dimension of the French Labor Force Survey to examine the persistence of underemployment, showing that while some mismatches are short-lived, a substantial share of workers remain durably constrained in their hours. Third, we go beyond descriptive evidence by assessing feasibility: survey questions on work schedules and job search behavior reveal that underworked workers overwhelmingly declare themselves available to supply more hours, but few actively search for alternative jobs—suggesting that demand-side constraints and institutional rigidities, rather than individual passivity,

are the key drivers.

These contributions matter for both welfare analysis and policy. From a welfare perspective, dissatisfaction is most pronounced among low-income households, for whom labor income is the main or sole source of consumption. Aligning their actual hours with their preferences would yield substantial income gains, raising both individual welfare and aggregate output. From a policy perspective, our findings caution against uniform prescriptions. Whereas Jarosch et al. (2025) evaluate the gains from reducing hours in Germany, our evidence suggests that a shorter workweek in France would likely exacerbate mismatches. Conversely, policies that expand opportunities for part-time workers to increase hours could have first-order distributional and macroeconomic effects.

Taken together, our results underscore that the interpretation of hours mismatches is context-specific. They highlight the importance of understanding the institutional and demand-side mechanisms behind gaps between actual and desired hours before drawing welfare or policy conclusions. In this sense, our analysis complements recent work such as Gethin and Saez (2025) and Carry (2022), which stress the central role of hours regulations in shaping labor supply outcomes across advanced economies.

## Litterature review

This paper relates closely to Jarosch et al. (2025), who conduct a similar analysis for Germany. A more extensive literature review can be found in their paper, and only a few specific elements that are particularly relevant to our setting are highlighted in the following section.

**Cross-country labor supply patterns** The patterns we document fit into the broader debate on differences in hours worked between the United States and Europe, and more generally the literature emphasizing sharp transatlantic contrasts in labor supply behavior (e.g., Prescott (2004); Alesina and Angeletos (2005)). Bick et al. (2018) show that Europeans work on average 14% fewer hours than Americans, with one quarter to one half of this gap attributable to differences in weeks worked and educational composition. Lower hours per person relative to the US are driven by shorter workweeks in Scandinavia and Western Europe, but by lower employment rates in Eastern and Southern Europe. Recent work from Gethin and Saez (2025) looks at data from labor surveys from more than 160 countries and decompose differences in hours worked between countries, highlighting that share of informal sector, labor taxation and working hours regulations contribute greatly to the decrease in hours worked in high-income countries. We contribute to this

discussion by showing that in France workers would, on average, prefer to supply more hours. Differences in hours gaps may account for part of the cross-country variation in hours worked. Identifying the constraints that generate these distinct equilibria would help rationalize why countries diverge in their working time.

**Hours wedges** Our paper also relates to the literature on the mismatch between actual and desired hours. We highlight the importance of cross-country heterogeneity both in hours worked and in the nature of mismatches. Jarosch et al. (2025) show that German workers are predominantly overworked, while Lachowska et al. (2023) find that US workers are instead underworked. Relatedly, Labanca and Pozzoli (2022) provide evidence of constraints stemming from production’s technology, pushing workers away from their optimal labor supply. In France, we find that workers are generally underworked, with the phenomenon concentrated among low-earning individuals who rely most heavily on labor income for consumption. This raises the question of how to rationalize the persistence of such wedges and whether the resulting equilibrium should be considered inefficient.

**Hours worked and institutions** An influential explanation for cross-country differences in hours worked emphasizes the role of insurance—broadly defined to include unemployment insurance, social insurance, and related institutional protections—in shaping labor supply incentives. Bick et al. (2018) and Boppart et al. (2024) examine how insurance influences the distribution of hours worked. Bick et al. (2018) show that while usual weekly hours cluster strongly around 40, a substantial share of total hours is supplied by individuals working more than 50 hours. Boppart et al. (2024) find that systematic differences in actual hours worked across high- and low-wage workers are minimal in the US, suggesting that institutional factors, rather than wage heterogeneity, play a central role in shaping hours outcomes.

**Hours regulation** While European countries offer similar levels of insurance relative to the US, other factors likely explain cross-country differences. Jarosch et al. (2025) show that the UK resembles Germany in hours patterns, whereas the US stands out with a much larger share of workers wishing to increase hours. In France, by contrast, the majority of workers are satisfied, with the second largest group desiring more hours. This divergence points to the potential importance of hours regulation in shaping observed mismatches. In their analysis, Jarosch et al. (2025) focus on the potential for a four-day workweek reform in Germany, motivated by their finding of widespread overwork. By contrast, our results, showing patterns opposite to those in Germany, underscore the relevance of differences in national regulations. In the French case, a substantial literature has examined the labor

market effects of the 35-hour workweek and minimum working-time requirements, which disproportionately affect the lower tail of the hours distribution. Estevão and Sá (2008) compare firms differentially affected by the 35-hour reform (due to firm-size thresholds) and find heterogeneous welfare effects across worker groups. More recently, Carry (2022) studies the introduction of a minimum 24-hour workweek in France in 2014, which applied to around 15% of jobs. She finds heterogeneous impacts: while total hours worked rose by about 1% due to positive general equilibrium effects, hours became more concentrated among fewer workers, and unemployment increased by 2%.

## 2 Comparison with Germany

We rely on the French Labor Force Survey, the *Enquête Emploi en Continu* (EEC), a standardized labor survey harmonized with the EU Labour Force Survey and its US counterpart (Current Population Survey). The data cover the period 2003–2019 and are collected quarterly.

More than providing longitudinal information on the labor market, the EEC is designed as a rotating panel survey of dwellings. The sampling unit is the dwelling rather than the individual, and a stratified random sample of dwellings is drawn at the outset. All individuals residing in the selected dwellings are included in the survey. Each sampled dwelling remains in the survey for six consecutive quarters, and households are interviewed once per quarter during this period. The rotation scheme is organized so that, in every quarter, one-sixth of the sample is renewed: a cohort of dwellings completes its sixth and final interview, while a new cohort enters for its first interview. This generates a balanced panel structure with six overlapping rotation groups at any point in time. Because the panel follows dwellings rather than individuals, those who move out of a sampled dwelling exit the survey, while new residents moving into that dwelling are included for the remaining time the dwelling stays in sample. This design ensures both representativeness of the cross-section, thanks to the continuous renewal of the sample, and the availability of short longitudinal panels, since individuals can be observed for up to six consecutive quarters provided they remain in the same dwelling.

Our dataset contains individual-level information on wages, hours worked, job search activity, and job characteristics, including occupation, industry, and contract type, as well as demographic characteristics such as gender, marital status, presence of children, and partner status. The EEC’s panel structure provides granular information on individual labor supply evolutions as well as labor transitions, making it especially well-suited to analyze short-run hours mismatches and job search behavior.

## 2.1 Sample

The data comprises 6.1 million observations corresponding to 1.3 million distinct individuals. Because of individuals moving in and out of dwellings during the survey window, 49% of respondents are observed for the full six-quarter duration. Furthermore, we restrict the sample to respondents between 18 and 65 years old which are employed according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of employment<sup>1</sup>. We focus on salaried workers outside of the agricultural sector who report more than 8 hours of work per week (1st percentile). Importantly, earnings are only recorded in the respondent’s first interview and again in the dwelling’s final surveyed quarter. Knowing this, we keep observations (quarters) when the respondents have to report wage information, which represents 47% of individuals in the sample. Our final sample comprises 708k observations for 480k individuals. Table A.1 shows the break down of the selection process for the 2003-2019 sample, while Table A.2 shows the equivalent for 2019 alone. We trim the distributions of usual weekly hours at 99th percentile, desired weekly hours at the 1st and 99th percentiles. Besides, we compute hourly wage as the ratio of monthly income and hours which we trim at the legal minimum wage and the 99th percentile. The corrected monthly income are reconstructed from these hourly wage and working hours.

Table 1 reports summary statistics for our analysis sample, as well as for the subsample following Jarosch et al. (2025) specification - only full-time workers - to allow for direct comparison. Our overall sample appears relatively comparable to the one in Jarosch et al. (2025). Several institutional features are directly reflected in the data. In France, a larger share of workers are civil servants (around 30% compared to less than 10% in Germany) and permanent contracts are the dominant form of employment. In Germany, vocational training plays a central role, whereas in France the split is between lower education (high school or less) and higher education (BAC+3 or more). Family composition also differs: German workers are more often married and live more frequently with children. Gender differences are reflected in employment status: part-time work is more prevalent in Germany, consistent with the well-documented role of female part-time employment, while it is less frequent in France. Wage patterns also reveal contrasts: French workers earn higher hourly wages on average, partly reflecting the binding minimum wage, while monthly income is lower in Germany due to shorter working hours. Altogether, these descriptive differences mirror institutional features of the two labor markets: stronger

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<sup>1</sup>This definition includes individuals aged 15 or older who have performed at least one hour of paid work during the reference week or were temporarily absent from work due to reasons such as vacation, illness, or maternity leave, within specified limits.

public sector employment and wage floors in France versus vocational tracks and flexible employment in Germany.

	Full-time & Part-time		Full-time only	
	2019	Pooled	2019	Pooled
male	0.49	0.49	0.55	0.56
married	0.43	0.46	0.42	0.45
child $\leq$ 18	0.47	0.48	0.47	0.47
civil servant	0.30	0.29	0.29	0.29
part-time	0.18	0.18	0.00	0.00
white-collar	0.62	0.61	0.63	0.62
permanent contract	0.68	0.68	0.69	0.70
$\leq$ High-school degree	0.58	0.61	0.57	0.60
$\geq$ BAC+3	0.25	0.22	0.26	0.23
hourly wage	12.56	12.28	12.64	12.33
monthly wage	2,026	1,971	2,183	2,130
N.obs	44,681	316,039	36,807	257,830
N.indiv	44,119	226,900	36,334	186,320

**Table 1:** Summary Statistics: French EEC

## 2.2 Desired Hours in the EEC

Since 2003, the French Labor Survey has asked the following question: *Would you like to work more for a corresponding increase in your income?*<sup>1</sup>. Respondents who answer affirmatively are then asked to report the number of hours they would ideally like to work. Conversely, those who respond “No” are presented with the inverse question: *Would you rather like to work less for a corresponding decrease in your income?*<sup>2</sup>. A positive response triggers a follow-up about their preferred number of hours.

While Jarosch et al. (2025) rely on a direct elicitation of desired hours through the question *“If you could choose your own working hours, taking into account that your income would change according to the number of hours: How many hours would you want to work?”*,

<sup>1</sup>In French: *Est-ce que vous souhaiteriez travailler un nombre d’heures plus important, avec une hausse de revenu correspondante ?*

<sup>2</sup>In French: *Est-ce que vous souhaiteriez au contraire travailler un nombre d’heures moins important, avec une baisse de revenu correspondante ?*

the French Labor Force Survey employs a two-step structure. Respondents are first asked whether they would like to work more or less for a corresponding change in income, and only then are they asked to report their preferred number of hours in the chosen direction. Since respondents who wish to work more are not subsequently asked whether they would like to work less (and vice versa), the structure does not permit symmetric elicitation of preferences, but it has the advantage of ruling out internally inconsistent responses across directions.

As in Jarosch et al. (2025), we are concerned with two related issues: first, which wage-hours schedule respondents have in mind when answering the question, and second, whether that schedule is economically feasible. We return to both points below.

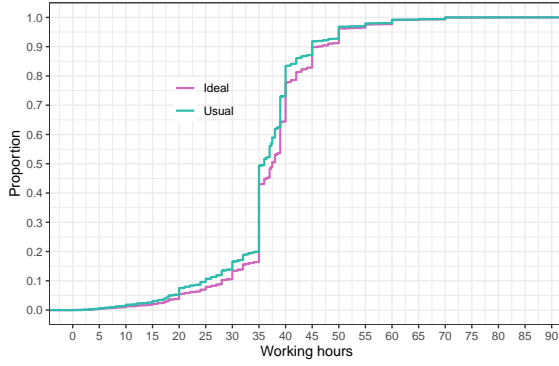
### 2.3 Hours Worked and Desired Hours

We begin by analyzing a single cross-section before turning to aggregate trends over time. To facilitate closer comparison with Jarosch et al. (2025) and to avoid distortions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we focus primarily on the year 2019.

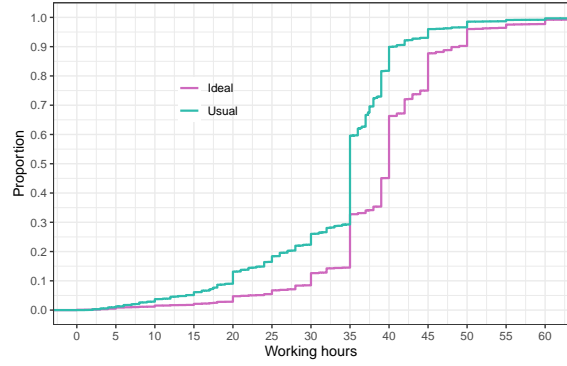
We measure hours worked using the “usual hours” variable, which, as in the SOEP, records respondents’ average weekly working time, including overtime. Figure 1a plots the distribution of usual hours (cyan) and desired hours (purple) for our sample of employed individuals, while Figure 1b restricts the sample to workers who report being unsatisfied with their hours.

Whereas Jarosch et al. (2025) report a mean of 42.7 usual hours and 37.5 desired hours for full-time workers in Germany, we find the opposite pattern in France: mean usual hours are 36.6, while mean desired hours are 37.8. Interestingly, the distributions of desired hours are relatively close across the two countries. However, the gap between actual and desired hours in France is much smaller than in Germany, indicating that French workers are, on average and across the distribution, closer to their preferred hours. Apart from this reversal in the sign of the gap, the overall shapes of the distributions in the two countries are relatively consistent. The key distinction is that the French distribution is shifted downward: in Germany, desired hours fall below actual hours, whereas in France, workers on average would like to work more than they currently do.

Figures 1 and 2 make these contrasts clear. In Germany, the entire distribution of desired hours lies to the left of actual hours, with a mean gap of about  $-5$  hours, indicating that most workers would prefer to reduce their working time. In France, by contrast, usual and desired hours nearly coincide for the overall sample, with the small mismatch concentrated among workers who would like to increase their hours. Consequently, the German pattern points to constraints on reducing hours, consistent with rigid full-time norms, whereas



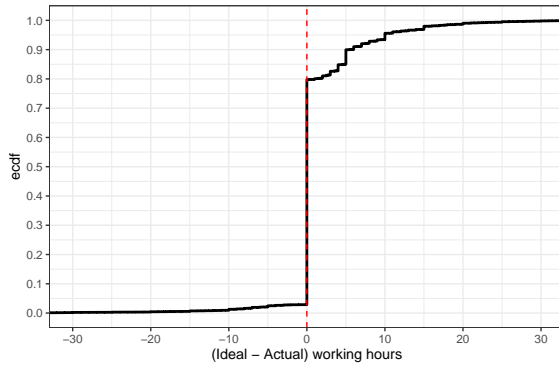
(a) Whole sample



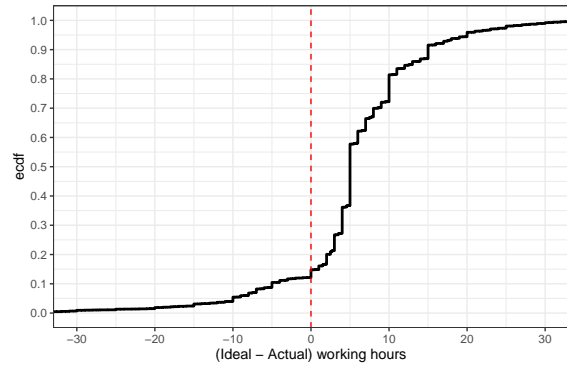
(b) Unsatisfied with hours

**Figure 1:** ECDF usual and ideal weekly hours

the French pattern highlights constraints on increasing hours, particularly in jobs below the standard contractual threshold of 35 hours.



(a) Whole sample



(b) Unsatisfied with hours

**Figure 2:** ECDF hours gap (ideal - usual hours)

*Notes:* Hours gap computed as ideal weekly hours - usual weekly hours.

The French distribution of usual hours (Figure 1) also reveals strong institutional features. Around 30% of employed individuals report working exactly 35 hours per week — the statutory workweek — and 20% work fewer than 35 hours. In Germany, by contrast, the distribution is shifted to the right: only 20% of workers report fewer than 40 hours, while 24% are concentrated at exactly 40 hours. In France, 53% of workers fall between 35 and 40 hours, whereas in Germany nearly half of full-time workers report working more than 40 hours, compared with 27% in France.

Turning to desired hours, the French distribution is noticeably shifted to the right of actual hours, with the majority of individuals reporting a desire to work more than they currently do, a strike difference with Germany. This points to underwork rather than overwork.

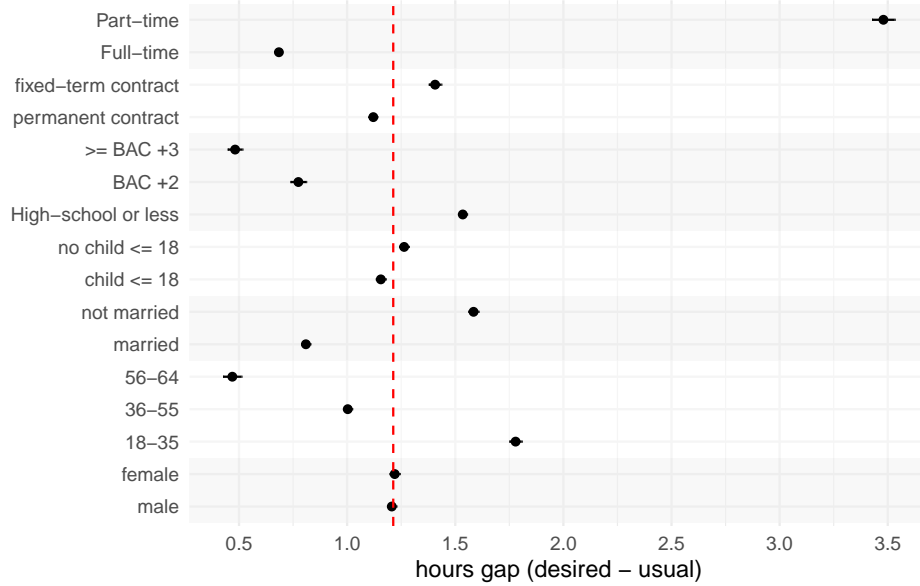
To formalize this, we construct the individual-level “hours gap” between desired and usual hours and plot its cross-sectional distribution for the whole sample (Figure 2a), and for the subset of dissatisfied individuals (Figure 2b). While Jarosch et al. (2025) find that more than two-thirds of German workers report wanting to work fewer hours — thus being classified as overworked — the reverse holds in France. In our sample, 20.8% of individuals report a desire to work more, while only 2.6% wish to work fewer hours. In France, most of the workers are satisfied, as demonstrated by the mean and median hours gap which are zero, compared with  $-4.0$  (median) and  $-5.16$  (mean) hours in Germany. We return below to potential determinants of these cross-country differences, describing heterogeneity in dissatisfaction among some key subsamples.

### 2.3.1 Heterogeneity across Demographics Groups

In sharp contrast to Jarosch et al. (2025), we find that underwork is widespread in France and not concentrated among specific demographic groups. Figure 3 plots group-level averages for the hours gap across a range of observable characteristics. In all cases, the mean (and median) gap is strictly positive, indicating that the desire to work more hours is pervasive.

The patterns across demographic groups differ sharply between Germany and France. In Germany, Jarosch et al. (2025) show that middle-aged workers are the most overworked, while college-educated, white-collar, and salaried workers report larger negative gaps than vocationally trained, blue-collar, or non-salaried workers. Married individuals are also more overworked than the unmarried, whereas the presence of children in the household makes little difference. In France, by contrast, the dominant pattern is one of underwork rather than overwork, with nearly all subgroups reporting positive gaps. Part-time workers in particular stand out as strongly underworked, with gaps exceeding three hours on average, while full-time workers are much closer to zero. The underwork pattern is also more pronounced among younger workers, women, and the unmarried. Education shows the reverse of the German pattern: higher-educated individuals (BAC+3 or more) report larger positive gaps than those with lower education. Similarly, permanent contract holders are closer to their desired hours than fixed-term workers. Taken together, these contrasts suggest that in Germany, overwork is concentrated among higher-status groups working in standard full-time jobs, whereas in France, underwork is concentrated among lower-status and part-time workers facing constraints on extending their hours. No gender differences can be highlighted in our sample, compared to Germany, as discussed earlier. Finally, as in Germany, we find little evidence of the presence of children. Similarly, we

find that non-married individuals express a higher wish of working more, almost twice as much as married individuals.



**Figure 3:** Average hours gap by demographic groups

Means of hours gap (desired - usual) for different demographic groups. Standard errors clustered at the individual level

In Appendix, we provide additional descriptive evidence related to the demographics of underwork. We can see that individuals with more precarious contracts, such as temporary agency contracts, apprenticeships, or short-term contracts, comprise the highest proportion of dissatisfied individuals wishing to work more, approximately twice as much as those with more permanent contracts (Figure A.2). Furthermore, a higher proportion of individuals wishing to work more in the service industry, including hotels, retail, and other service types (Figure A.3). This observation aligns with the contract type findings, as this industry is also notably associated with more precarious contracts.

**Table 2:** Regressions on demographic characteristics

	Pooled		2019	
	under-worked (1)	hours gap (2)	under-worked (3)	hours gap (4)
log(hourly wage)	-0.1424*** (0.0016)	-1.210*** (0.0201)	-0.1286*** (0.0055)	-0.9514*** (0.0757)
log(usual hours)	-0.2956*** (0.0022)	-5.846*** (0.0399)	-0.2814*** (0.0081)	-5.771*** (0.1487)
Female	-0.0647*** (0.0011)	-0.9109*** (0.0124)	-0.0464*** (0.0038)	-0.7409*** (0.0466)
18-35	0.0509*** (0.0013)	0.3730*** (0.0142)	0.0271*** (0.0047)	0.1211** (0.0549)
56-64	-0.0821*** (0.0015)	-0.6891*** (0.0191)	-0.0794*** (0.0051)	-0.6894*** (0.0658)
married	-0.0570*** (0.0011)	-0.4609*** (0.0125)	-0.0499*** (0.0038)	-0.3140*** (0.0460)
child $\leq$ 18	-0.0005 (0.0011)	-0.0352*** (0.0123)	0.0061 (0.0040)	0.0729 (0.0474)
$\geq$ BAC+3	-0.0140*** (0.0015)	-0.1605*** (0.0175)	-0.0083* (0.0050)	-0.2297*** (0.0613)
BAC+2	-0.0098*** (0.0015)	-0.2478*** (0.0162)	-0.0009 (0.0053)	-0.2126*** (0.0609)
fixed-term contract	0.0109*** (0.0011)	0.1205*** (0.0126)	0.0292*** (0.0041)	0.2547*** (0.0482)
Quarter FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	696,522	696,418	44,534	44,530

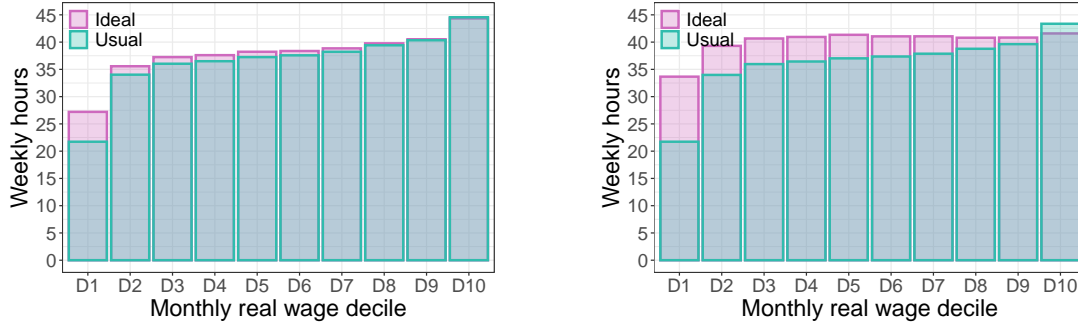
*Standard-errors clustered at the individual level. Signif. Codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1*

The regression results, displayed in Table 2, confirm the descriptive evidence and underscore the contrast between France and Germany. Whereas Jarosch et al. (2025) report positive and significant coefficients for log hourly wage and log usual hours, our estimates yield negative and significant coefficients. In France, the probability of being underworked and the size of the hours gap are strongly negatively related to wages and usual hours: higher earners and those working longer hours report smaller gaps. Younger

workers, and those on fixed-term contracts are significantly more underworked, while education plays only a modest role. The coefficients remain stable when focusing on 2019. In comparison, in Germany, higher wages and longer hours are associated with greater overwork, consistent with the descriptive finding that full-time, high-status workers are the most mismatched. In France, underwork appears to be concentrated among younger and lower-wage workers, typically in more precarious jobs, whereas in Germany, overwork is most pronounced among prime-age, higher-wage, and higher-status workers. These results are particularly interesting knowing that both countries share on average similar ideal number of hours, but very different situations regarding hours gap.

### 2.3.2 Heterogeneity across Income Groups

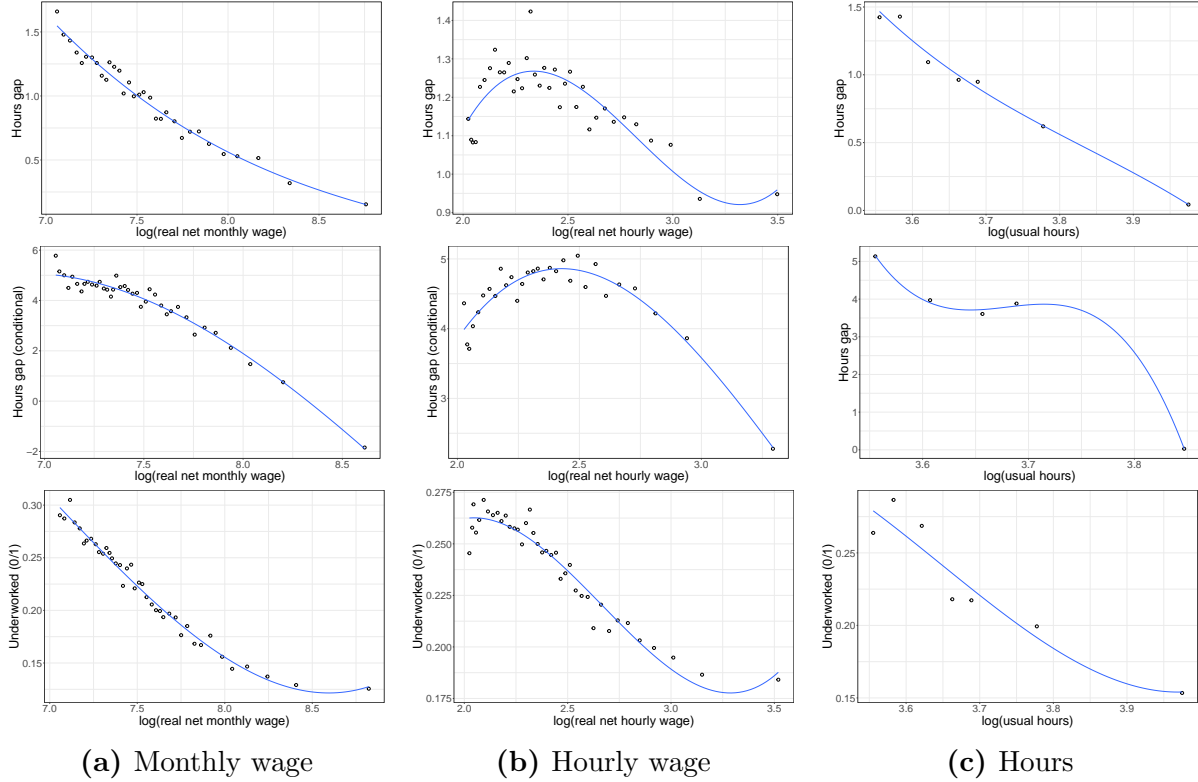
Beyond demographic factors, heterogeneity in dissatisfaction with ideal hours worked may also have important macroeconomic implications, particularly when it varies systematically across the income distribution.



**Figure 4:** On the left: ideal and actual hours worked. On the right: ideal and actual hours worked, conditional on being unsatisfied.

Figures 4 plot actual and ideal working hours by monthly earnings decile. The two curves follow a broadly similar pattern: individuals at the bottom of the distribution both work fewer hours and report lower ideal hours than those further up. However, the size of the hours gap declines monotonically along the income distribution and turns negative at the top, as previously shown. The gap is particularly pronounced at the bottom: in the first decile, individuals wish to work almost 6 hours more on average than they currently do, and this figure exceeds 13 hours when restricting attention to dissatisfied workers only. By contrast, in the top decile, the average gap is negative, reflecting the coexistence of workers wanting both more and fewer hours. This pattern mirrors the German results, where average hours worked in the top decile reach 45.2, slightly above the German mean of 42.7 usual hours. Focusing solely on dissatisfied workers, the distribution largely converges to an ideal of around 40 hours per week, with the exception of the first two

deciles, where desired hours are lower, at roughly 33–37. Table A.3 complements these figures by reporting descriptive statistics by wage decile, including both the share of individuals wishing to work more and the corresponding hours gap.



(a) Monthly wage                      (b) Hourly wage                      (c) Hours  
**Figure 5:** Hours gap by monthly income, hourly wage and usual hours  
 2019 - Residualized

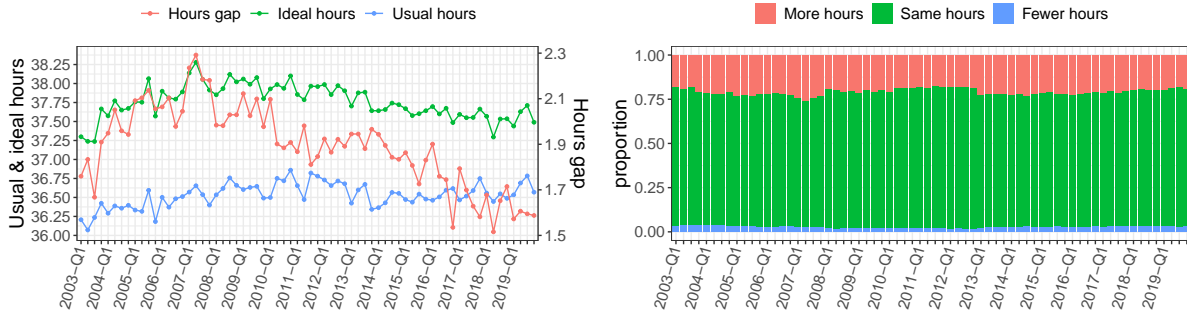
*Binscatter plot, controlling by using Cattaneo, Crump, Farrell and Feng (2024a). First row’s outcome is hours gap (weekly desired - usual hours), second row shows hours gap conditional on usual hours being different from usual hours, third row shows dummy variable for being underworked (wishing to work more hours).*

Figure 5 presents binscatter estimates of the relationship between the hours gap and income or hours, where each point corresponds to a quantile of the underlying distribution. The figure is organized in three rows: the top row shows the unconditional hours gap; the middle row focuses on the intensive margin (the size of the gap conditional on being dissatisfied); and the bottom row reports the extensive margin (the probability of being underworked). Panel (a) uses real net monthly income as the explanatory variable, panel (b) decomposes this into real hourly wages, and panel (c) into usual hours worked. The results mirror those obtained for Germany. The unconditional hours gap declines sharply with monthly income, indicating that higher earners are closer to their desired hours. When decomposed, the extensive margin falls with both hourly wages and hours

worked, suggesting that higher-paid and longer-hour workers are less likely to report dissatisfaction. At the intensive margin, the gap remains essentially flat with respect to hourly wages but decreases with usual hours worked. Taken together, these results confirm that the hours gap is decreasing in monthly income and usual hours, but largely unresponsive to differences in hourly pay. This pattern points to mismatches being driven primarily by hours worked (the intensive margin) rather than by wage levels. For robustness, the corresponding binscatters restricted to full-time workers are displayed in Appendix Figure A.1.

## 2.4 Desired and Usual Hours Over Time

As in Jarosch et al. (2025), we focus on 2019 to document the prevalence of underwork in France. Leveraging the longer time span of the French Labor Force Survey, we show that the patterns described above, and in particular the contrast with Germany, are remarkably stable over time. Panel 6a shows that ideal hours consistently exceed usual hours, while Panel 6b highlights that the majority of workers remain satisfied with their current schedule over time, with only a small minority wishing to work fewer hours. In Germany, by contrast, this last group represents the majority, underscoring the sharp divergence between the two countries. This confirms that these differences have persisted since the beginning of the 20th century and are not driven by short-term fluctuations.



(a) Usual hours, Ideal hours, and Hours gap over time

(b) Overwork and underwork over time

## 3 Further Evidence

While our data and analysis allow for a direct comparison between France and the findings of Jarosch et al. (2025) for Germany, our study also offers several distinctive contributions. First, in France, the most sizable dissatisfaction with hours arises from a negative gap: workers wishing to work more rather than fewer hours. Unlike Jarosch et al. (2025), which points to pressures for a shorter workweek in Germany, the French case highlights the situation of part-time workers, concentrated at the bottom of the distribution and facing the largest gaps. We therefore focus on part-time employment and show that it accounts for the bulk of underwork. To assess whether this pattern is driven by contract type, we restrict the sample to individuals with permanent contracts and find that dissatisfaction is not confined to precarious employment but also affects workers with stable CDIs. Finally, we evaluate the feasibility of adjusting hours through work schedule organization and job search activity, exploiting additional survey questions to document worker behavior and the constraints they face. These responses suggest that individuals are relatively consistent in reporting their situation.

Second, the panel dimension of the survey provides unique leverage to examine how dissatisfaction evolves over time. We take advantage of the six-quarter panel to track the persistence of underwork at the individual level and to identify the main drivers of transitions in satisfaction.

Finally, the richness of the survey allows us to go beyond constraints and persistence to consider behavioral mechanisms, such that we can investigate how preferences and subjective factors shape reported dissatisfaction, complementing the institutional and structural explanations emphasized in the previous sections.

### 3.1 Part-time

The previous sections have shown that underwork in France is primarily driven by the number of hours worked rather than by wage levels. A natural group to examine more closely are part-time workers, who represent about one-fifth of the French workforce. Among them, roughly one third report being underworked, with an average gap of about 10 hours between actual and desired hours. Taken together, part-time workers account for approximately one quarter of the cumulated national hours gap.

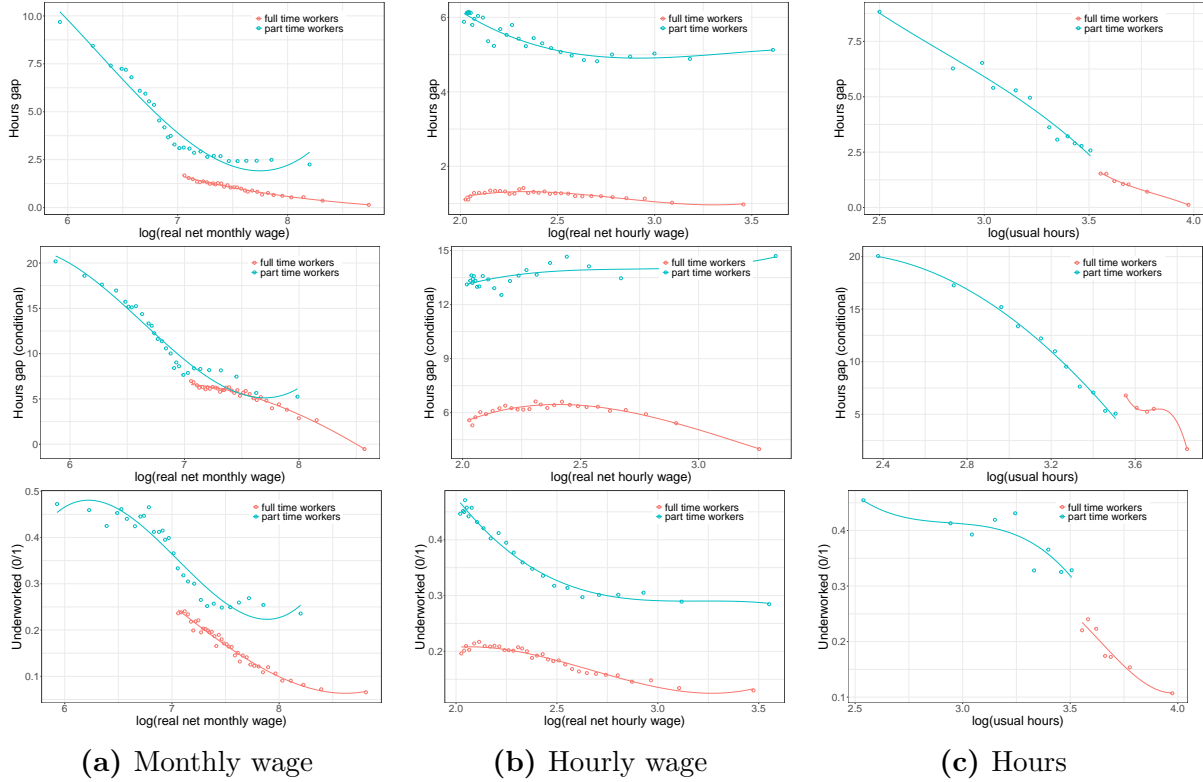
#### 3.1.1 The most sizable underworked

Whereas Jarosch et al. (2025) focus primarily on full-time workers and treat part-time workers as a secondary case, our results indicate that the French context calls for the

opposite emphasis. Since most French workers are underworked rather than overworked, and since the largest gaps appear at the bottom of the hours distribution, a dedicated analysis of part-time workers is essential.

Part-time workers are disproportionately concentrated at the bottom of the income distribution, have limited savings and assets, and spend a large share of their income on consumption. From a welfare perspective, they form a particularly vulnerable group. Moreover, the potential gains from relaxing hours constraints are likely to be greatest for them. Unlike in Germany, where the implications of a shorter workweek for part-time workers are less clear, in France part-time workers face substantial mismatches. The evidence is stark: in the bottom income decile, more than 40% of individuals wish to work more hours, and in the second decile the share remains above 30%.

Figure 7 decomposes the hours gap by monthly income, hourly wage, and usual hours, separately for part-time and full-time workers. Several patterns emerge. First, part-time workers consistently exhibit substantially larger gaps than full-time workers across all dimensions. The gradient with monthly income is especially steep: among part-time workers, the hours gap falls rapidly as income rises, while full-time workers display only small and relatively flat discrepancies. Second, when conditioning on dissatisfaction, the intensive margin gap is essentially flat with respect to hourly wages for full-time workers, but declines for part-time workers—indicating that dissatisfaction is tied more closely to hours worked than to pay rates. Third, usual hours strongly predict dissatisfaction: part-time workers with shorter schedules face the largest mismatches, but these shrink sharply as usual hours increase, converging toward the full-time pattern around 40 hours per week. At the extensive margin, part-time workers are also far more likely to report being underworked, especially at the bottom of the distribution, although this difference narrows at higher levels of income and hours. Taken together, the evidence shows that underwork in France is overwhelmingly a part-time phenomenon, driven by insufficient hours rather than by low wages, and that the mismatch largely disappears once workers reach a standard full-time schedule.



**Figure 7:** Hours gap by monthly income, hourly wage and usual hours - Full time & part time workers - Residualized

*Binscatter plot, controlling by using Cattaneo et al. (2024). First row's outcome is hours gap (weekly desired - usual hours), second row shows hours gap conditional on usual hours being different from usual hours, third row shows dummy variable for being underworked (wishing to work more hours).*

### 3.1.2 Precarious contracts and feeling underemployed

A natural question is whether dissatisfaction is simply a byproduct of unstable or precarious jobs. If underwork were mainly the result of short-term contracts or transitions in and out of employment, one would not expect it to persist among individuals on permanent contracts (“contrat à durée indéterminée” – CDI).

To test this, we restrict the sample to CDI workers. Figures A.9 and A.8 confirm that the patterns documented above remain. Dissatisfaction continues to be most prevalent at the bottom of the income distribution, with the hours gap declining monotonically with income. Although magnitudes are somewhat smaller than in the baseline sample, the overall pattern is robust, showing that dissatisfaction is not confined to precarious employment but extends to workers with stable contracts.

### 3.1.3 Feasibility

In contrast to Jarosch et al. (2025), we directly assess the feasibility of working more hours using survey questions on job search behavior and work schedules. Feasibility in our framework has two dimensions: (i) whether workers are available and willing to supply their desired hours, and (ii) whether these hours can realistically be accommodated within their current job or would require a transition.

The evidence points squarely to demand-side constraints and insufficient income, rather than worker-side frictions or job disamenities, as the main drivers of underemployment in France. Among the 20% of respondents who wish to work more hours, fully 95% declare that they are available to do so, ruling out time or personal constraints.

We next compare work schedules across groups. On average, individuals who want more hours are only slightly less likely than others to have a standard five-day week, and over 60% of them do so (Figure A.4). Similarly, the majority of both groups report fixed schedules. Thus, differences in weekly structure cannot explain why dissatisfied workers are unable to take on more hours or an additional job.

The survey also asks dissatisfied workers how they would prefer to increase their hours. Strikingly, more than 70% state that they would like to do so within their current job (Figure A.6). This suggests that dissatisfaction is not primarily about the occupation–worker match, but about the mismatch between current and desired hours—and, more fundamentally, between current and desired income.

Post-2012 survey waves also report job search activity. Here again, dissatisfied workers stand out: about 12% of them report actively looking for another job, twice the rate observed among satisfied workers (Figure A.7). Nonetheless, the vast majority of dissatisfied workers do not search. Among those who do, income considerations dominate: nearly half of dissatisfied job seekers cite the desire to increase income as their main motivation, three times the share observed among satisfied workers, with “more hours” as the second most common reason (Figure A.5).

Our evidence that unmet preferences are not due to worker availability but to labor demand constraints is consistent with Carry (2022), who studies the 2014 minimum work-week reform. She finds that raising minimum hours per contract reduced firms’ reliance on short part-time jobs, reallocating hours across workers and increasing unemployment. This highlights the difficulty of reconciling workers’ preferences for more hours with the institutional and demand-side constraints that shape actual hours. Indeed, these findings indicate that dissatisfaction is not rooted in disliking one’s occupation, but in insufficient hours and the associated income shortfall. In this sense, underwork in France appears to be driven primarily by constraints on labor demand rather than supply-side frictions.

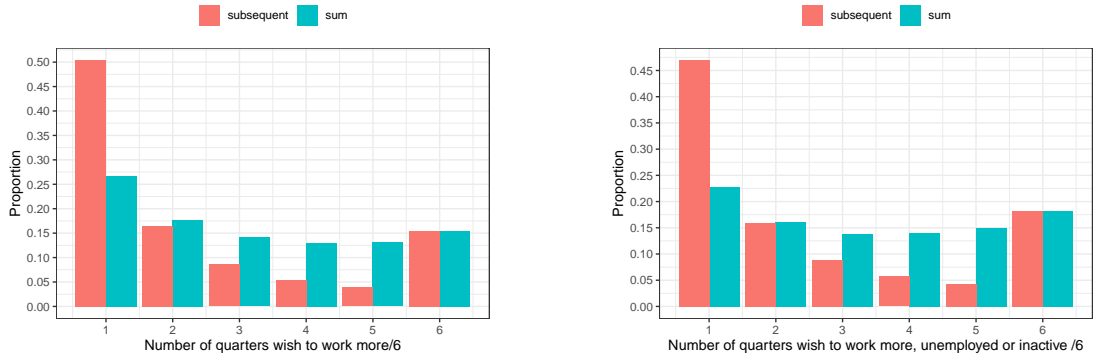
### 3.2 Individual persistence of underwork

If workers are dissatisfied only temporarily, their situation may reflect a transitory mismatch between workers and jobs, resolvable through renegotiation or mobility. By contrast, if dissatisfaction persists over time, it may signal that workers are trapped in positions systematically offering fewer hours than they desire. To explore this distinction, we focus on the subsample of individuals observed continuously over six quarters and examine the persistence of their reported dissatisfaction.



**Figure 8:** Number of quarters wanting to work more.

Figure 8 summarizes the distribution of dissatisfaction over the six-quarter observation window. Each bar corresponds to an income decile, and the stacked segments represent the number of quarters in which individuals report wanting to work more (or being unemployed). Two insights stand out. First, dissatisfaction is often transitory: in every decile, the largest group of individuals report wanting to work more for only one quarter, consistent with short-lived mismatches that may be resolved through job mobility or adjustments in work arrangements. Second, a non-negligible share of workers experience persistent underemployment. Roughly 20-25% of individuals declare wanting more hours in all six quarters, a figure that is relatively stable across the income distribution. The intermediate cases, workers dissatisfied for two to four quarters, make up the remainder, suggesting that for many, dissatisfaction is recurrent rather than purely episodic. Taken together, these findings indicate that while underwork is frequently temporary, a sizable minority remain durably constrained, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between short-lived and persistent mismatches when evaluating welfare implications.

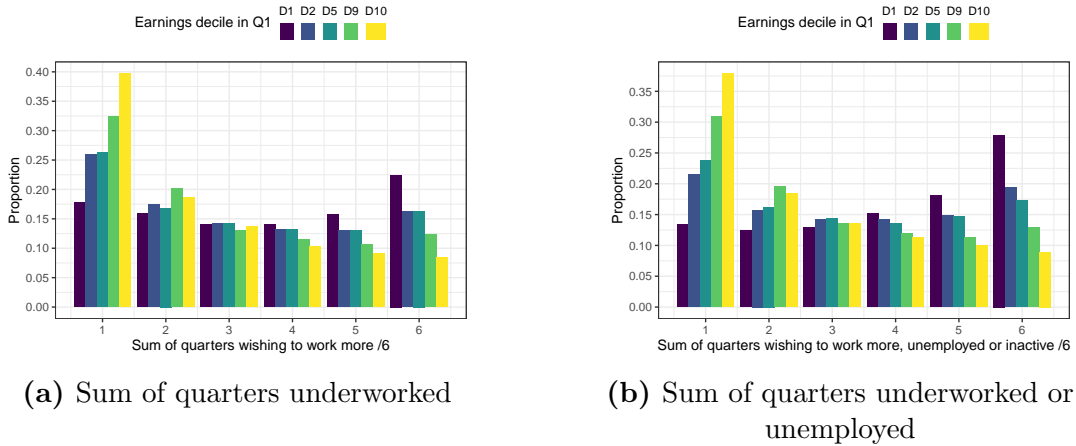


(a) Sum and number of subsequent quarters underworked      (b) Sum and number of subsequent quarters underworked, being unemployed

**Figure 9:** Number of quarters underworked

*Notes:* Individuals observed over 6 quarters, declaring wishing to work more in their first quarter of interview.

Figure 9 refines this picture by comparing the cumulative number of quarters in which individuals report wanting more hours (“sum”) with the number of consecutive quarters (“subsequent”). From this, we can first observe that dissatisfaction often reappears intermittently: for all durations above one quarter, the share in the “sum” measure exceeds that in the “subsequent” measure. This suggests that underwork is not simply a one-off shock, but tends to recur during the six-quarter horizon. Second, there is a clear distinction between transitory and persistent underemployment. About 15% of individuals consistently report wanting more hours in all six quarters, and close to 40% do so in at least four of six quarters. When unemployment spells are also considered (Panel b), persistence becomes even more pronounced, indicating that durable mismatches are concentrated among individuals with weaker labor market attachment. Overall, these results confirm the coexistence of a transitory component—workers dissatisfied for short periods—and a structural component, with a sizable fraction of workers persistently constrained in their hours.



**Figure 10:** Number of quarters underworked by earnings deciles

*Notes:* Individuals observed over 6 quarters, declaring wishing to work more in their first quarter of interview. Deciles computed in the individual’s first quarter of interview.

Figure 10 explores persistence by income decile. Two contrasts emerge. First, in the top of the distribution, dissatisfaction appears more temporary: in the last decile, at least half of the individuals who ever express a desire to work more do so in only one quarter. Second, in the bottom decile, dissatisfaction is considerably more persistent: half of the underworked individuals in this group remain dissatisfied for at least three quarters, and nearly 30% do so in all six. Including unemployment spells further accentuates this persistence, highlighting the stronger vulnerability of low-income workers. Complementing these descriptive patterns, the full transition matrix between quarters (Figure A.10) confirms the coexistence of temporary exits from dissatisfaction and high persistence at the lower end of the distribution.

These results point to a dual structure of underwork in France: for some, dissatisfaction reflects short-lived mismatches, but for others, particularly low-income workers, it is a durable state that standard labor market mobility fails to resolve.

### 3.3 Behavioral preferences

The previous findings suggest that the underlying trade-off workers face is between income (and thus consumption) and leisure. At the bottom of the income distribution, individuals predominantly wish to work more in order to raise their earnings and, consequently, their consumption. At the top of the distribution, by contrast, workers express a preference for fewer hours, where the implied income loss is marginal and can be offset by the gain in leisure time. This heterogeneity points to systematic differences in how workers balance consumption and leisure across the income distribution.

Dependent Variables:	satisfied		log(ideal hours)		job search			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Logit	Logit	OLS	OLS	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit
<u>Variables</u>								
log(usual hours)	1.300*** (0.0172)	2.941*** (0.1886)	0.7516*** (0.0025)	0.6598*** (0.0091)	-0.8877*** (0.0298)	-2.244*** (0.3098)	-0.4707*** (0.0324)	-2.130*** (0.3333)
underworked					1.100*** (0.0170)	1.565*** (0.1073)		
hours gap							0.0829*** (0.0017)	0.0653*** (0.0090)
<u>Fixed-effects</u>								
diplome	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
matrimonial status	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
contract type	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ISCO (3-digits)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
departement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
individual		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
<u>Fit statistics</u>								
Observations	411,396	51,462	411,249	411,529	411,364	12,759	411,318	12,759
R <sup>2</sup>			0.55316	0.90169				
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.06799	0.05276	3.3982	9.7832	0.11991	0.07142	0.11378	0.05364

**Table 3:** Determinants of satisfaction, ideal hours, and job search activity

Regression estimates in Table 3 confirm and extend our descriptive findings, while underscoring the contrast with the German case studied by Jarosch et al. (2025). In France, satisfaction with hours is strongly increasing in actual hours worked: doubling usual hours raises the probability of reporting satisfaction by roughly one third in the cross-section and by nearly three quarters when including individual fixed effects. This pattern is the mirror image of Germany, where longer hours reduce satisfaction, consistent with overwork being the main source of mismatch. Desired hours in France also scale with actual hours: a 10% increase in actual hours raises ideal hours by around 7%, in-

dicating that preferences are endogenous to current work intensity but increase less than one-for-one. This again contrasts with Germany, where ideal hours are typically below actual hours. Regarding job search, we find that dissatisfaction translates into observable labor market behavior. Working longer hours significantly reduces the likelihood of searching for another job, while being underworked increases it by nearly 30 percentage points. Likewise, each additional weekly hour of gap between actual and desired hours raises the probability of job search by about 2 percentage points. Overall, the French evidence highlights that dissatisfaction is primarily rooted in insufficient hours, not excessive work. While underworked workers are systematically more likely to search for a job, the majority don't, pointing to demand-side frictions and institutional constraints rather than pure worker passivity. These findings emphasize that the welfare and policy implications of hours mismatches differ sharply across countries: whereas Germany faces challenges of reducing overwork, in France the central issue is expanding opportunities for those constrained by insufficient hours.

## 4 Discussion

The interpretation of the hours gap requires caution. Mechanically, the distribution of actual hours reflects firms' labor demand, shaped by the production function and institutional environment. In our data, the majority of workers—around 70%—report being satisfied with their schedules. Dissatisfaction is concentrated among part-time workers who would prefer to work longer hours. Yet even these workers may be in their first-best outcome relative to unemployment: a constrained part-time job still dominates non-employment. This perspective suggests stepping back from the simple interpretation often adopted in the literature, where deviations between actual and desired hours are taken as *prima facie* evidence of inefficiency. In the French case, a policy intervention that mechanically aligned actual with reported desired hours could be counterproductive, as reported “underwork” does not necessarily imply an outcome that is socially or individually sub-optimal. Rather, the crucial question is to understand what drives individuals off their notional labor supply curve—whether institutional rigidities, demand-side constraints, or individual preferences—before assessing whether such gaps warrant policy intervention. Recent work by Gethin and Saez (2025) underscores the role of institutions in shaping hours. Building a working-hours regulation index across countries, they show that moving from the least to the most restrictive regulatory regime reduces average hours worked by about 20% in economies with large formal sectors. Importantly, they specifically highlight France as the country with the most stringent regulations. Our findings complement this

perspective: the French context is not one of excessive hours but of insufficient hours among part-time workers, suggesting that regulatory and institutional features may simultaneously constrain both the intensive and the extensive margins of labor supply, with heterogeneous consequences across the income distribution.

Our study makes three main contributions beyond the existing literature, and in particular relative to the German case examined by Jarosch et al. (2025). First, we show that dissatisfaction in France is overwhelmingly driven by underwork rather than overwork, and is concentrated among part-time workers at the bottom of the distribution. Second, exploiting the panel dimension of the French Labor Force Survey, we document that underemployment is not merely transitory: while some mismatches are short-lived, a sizable share of workers remain durably constrained in their hours, with dissatisfaction persisting across multiple quarters. Third, we provide direct evidence on feasibility. Survey responses reveal that underworked individuals overwhelmingly declare themselves available and willing to increase hours, yet few actively search for alternative jobs, pointing to demand-side constraints and institutional frictions rather than worker-side limitations. These contributions highlight how the French case differs from Germany: whereas German mismatches are shaped by rigid full-time norms, French mismatches are driven by insufficient opportunities to expand part-time hours.

From a welfare perspective, income emerges as the central determinant of dissatisfaction. Individuals at the bottom of the monthly earnings distribution are the most likely to wish for longer hours and face the largest discrepancies between actual and desired schedules. In other words, those who earn the least and work the fewest hours are also the most dissatisfied, and they stand to gain the most—both individually and collectively—from aligning their hours with their preferences. Allowing such workers to increase their hours at prevailing wages would generate substantial income gains, raising aggregate consumption and, by extension, output. While not all observed hours gaps may carry normative significance, the concentration of underwork among low-income workers highlights a first-order welfare and policy dimension. Future research should further disentangle the institutional, demand-side, and preference-based drivers of hours mismatches, and evaluate their implications for labor supply, inequality, and aggregate outcomes in modern macroeconomic models.

## A Appendix

Selection	N. observations	N. repondents
Baseline	6,101,127	1,325,219
Employed, 18 to 65 yo	2,878,742	699,808
Non-agricultural salaried	2,489,014	611,657
Wage reported	708,864	480,695
Hours > 8	700,056	474,543

**Table A.1:** EEC sample selection

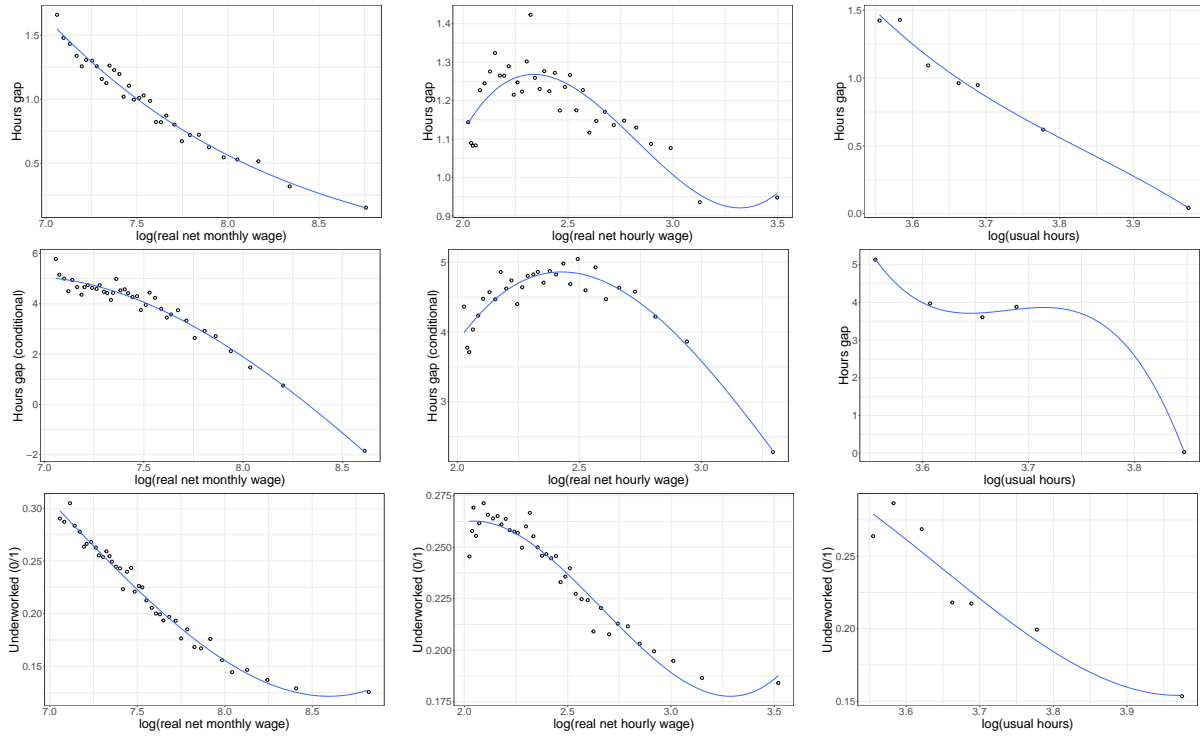
Selection	N. observations	N. repondents
Baseline	416,298	171,910
Employed, 18 to 65 yo	189,497	83,623
Non-agricultural salaried	160,751	71,194
Wage reported	45,259	44,691
Hours > 8	44,681	44,119

**Table A.2:** EEC sample selection - 2019

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10
Average monthly real wage	449	866	1,043	1,163	1,278	1,409	1,576	1,801	2,174	3,743
Average hourly real wage	6.4	7.3	7.6	8.2	9	9.7	10.7	12.1	14.1	22.3
Average working hours	20.3	30.4	35	36.5	38.5	39.4	40.5	40.8	41.3	45.2
Share willing to work more	0.4	0.32	0.25	0.23	0.21	0.19	0.17	0.14	0.11	0.07
Share willing to work less	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05
Average ideal hours	27.8	34.3	37	37.6	38	38.4	38.7	39.3	40.5	44.3
Average hours gap	5.6	2.3	1.4	1.1	1	0.84	0.67	0.43	0.2	-0.2
— conditional unsatisfied	13.6	6.8	5	4.5	4.4	3.9	3.3	2.4	1.3	-1.67

<sup>1</sup> Notes: real wages are expressed in January 2003 euros.

**Table A.3:** Descriptive statistics by wage decile



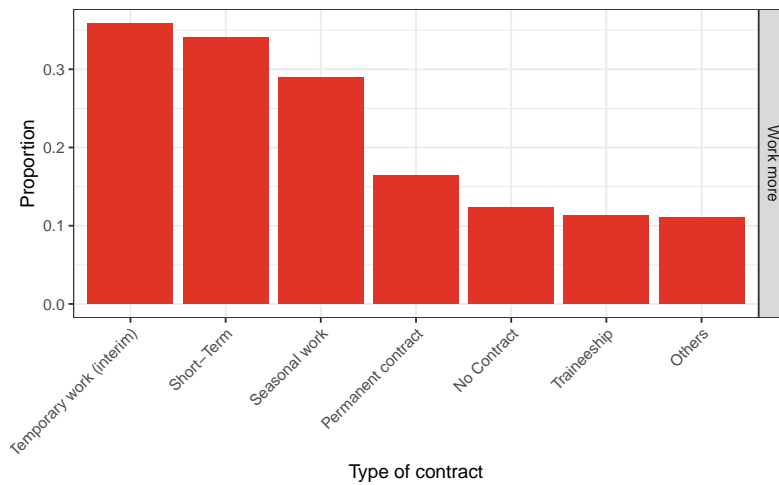
(a) Monthly wage

(b) Hourly wage

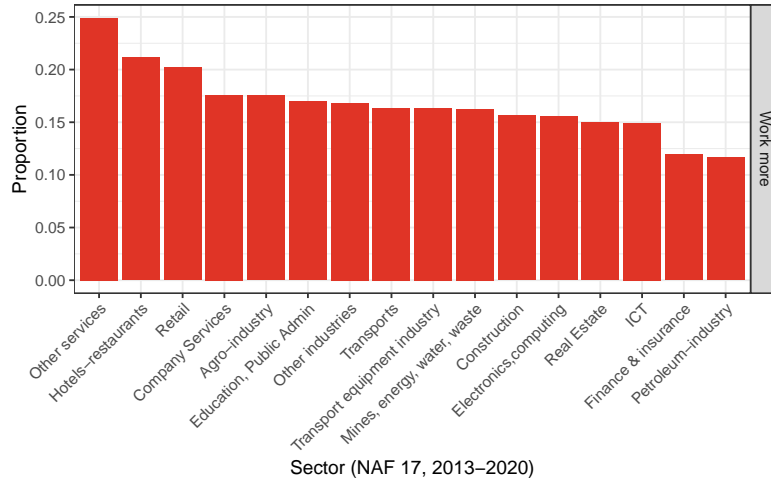
(c) Hours

**Figure A.1:** Hours gap by monthly income, hourly wage and usual hours  
Full time workers - Residualized

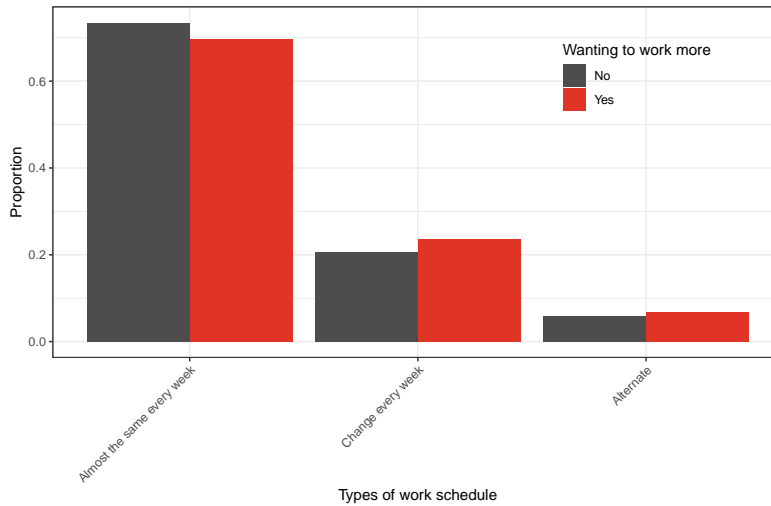
*Binscatter plot, controlling by using Cattaneo, Crump, Farrell and Feng (2024a). First row's outcome is hours gap (weekly desired - usual hours), second row shows hours gap conditional on usual hours being different from usual hours, third row shows dummy variable for being underworked (whishing to work more hours).*



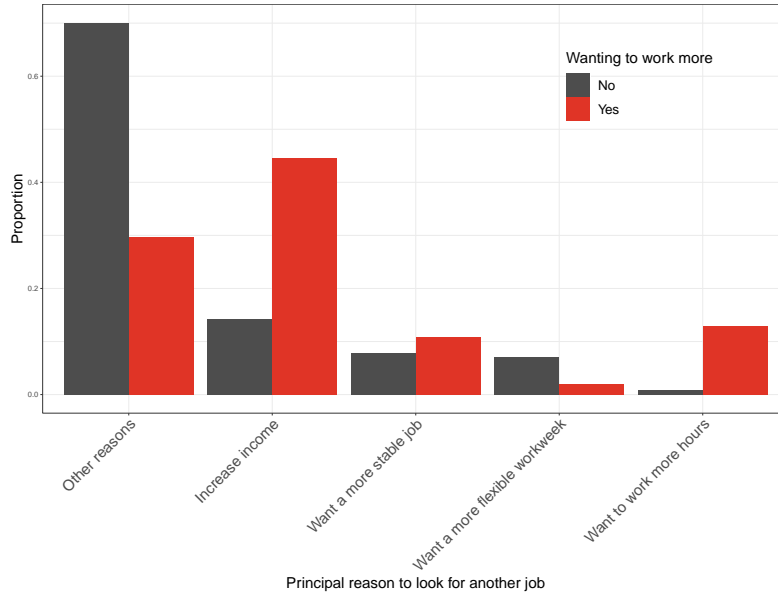
**Figure A.2:** Proportion who wants to work more by contract type.



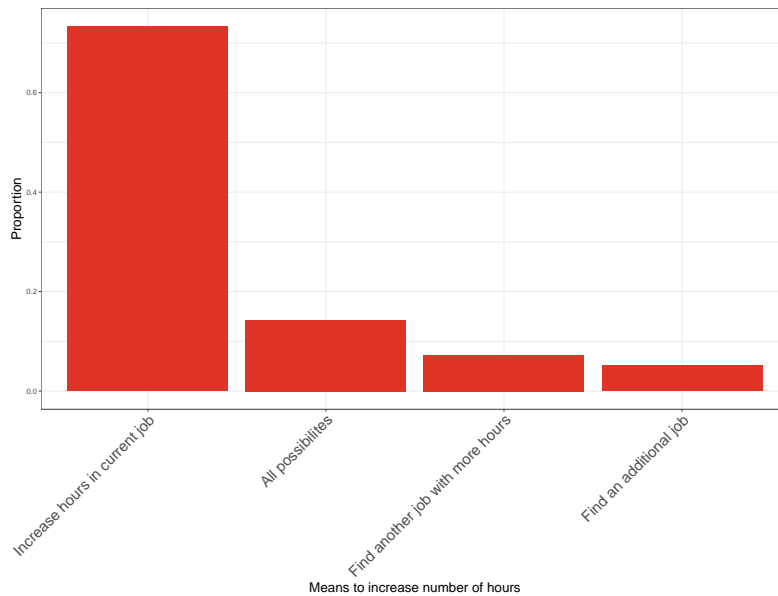
**Figure A.3:** Proportion wishing to work more by industry (NAF 17 levels).



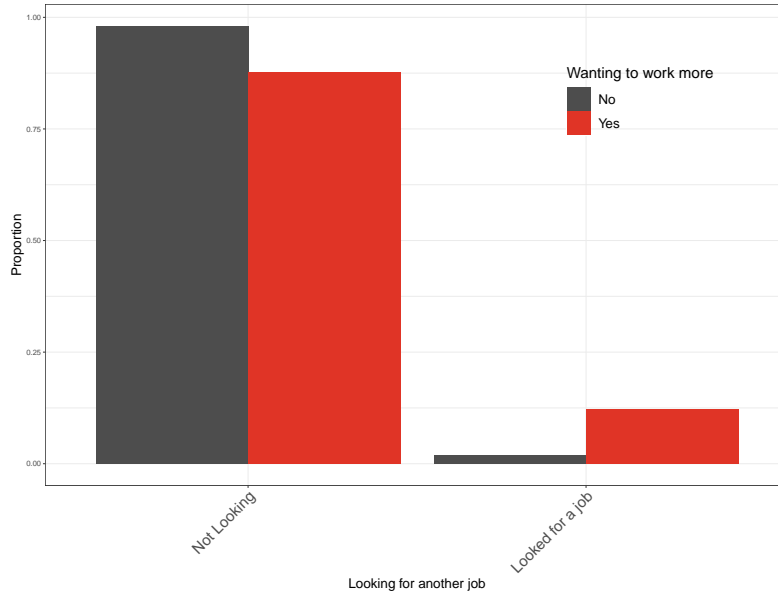
**Figure A.4:** Work schedule - by wishing to work more



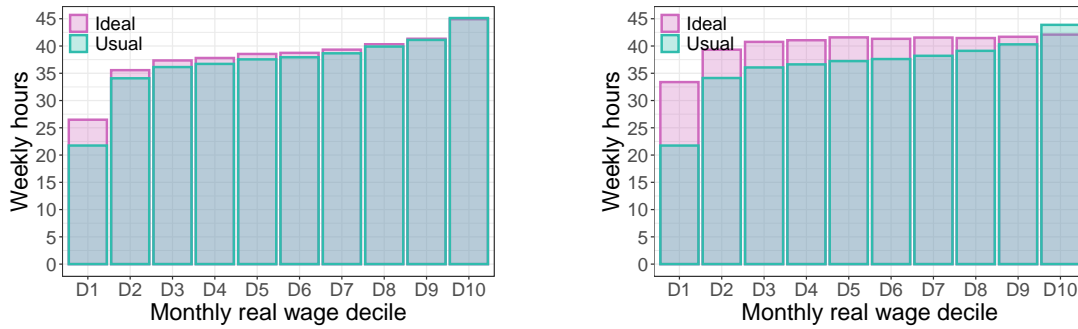
**Figure A.5:** Principal reason to look for another job by wishing to work more



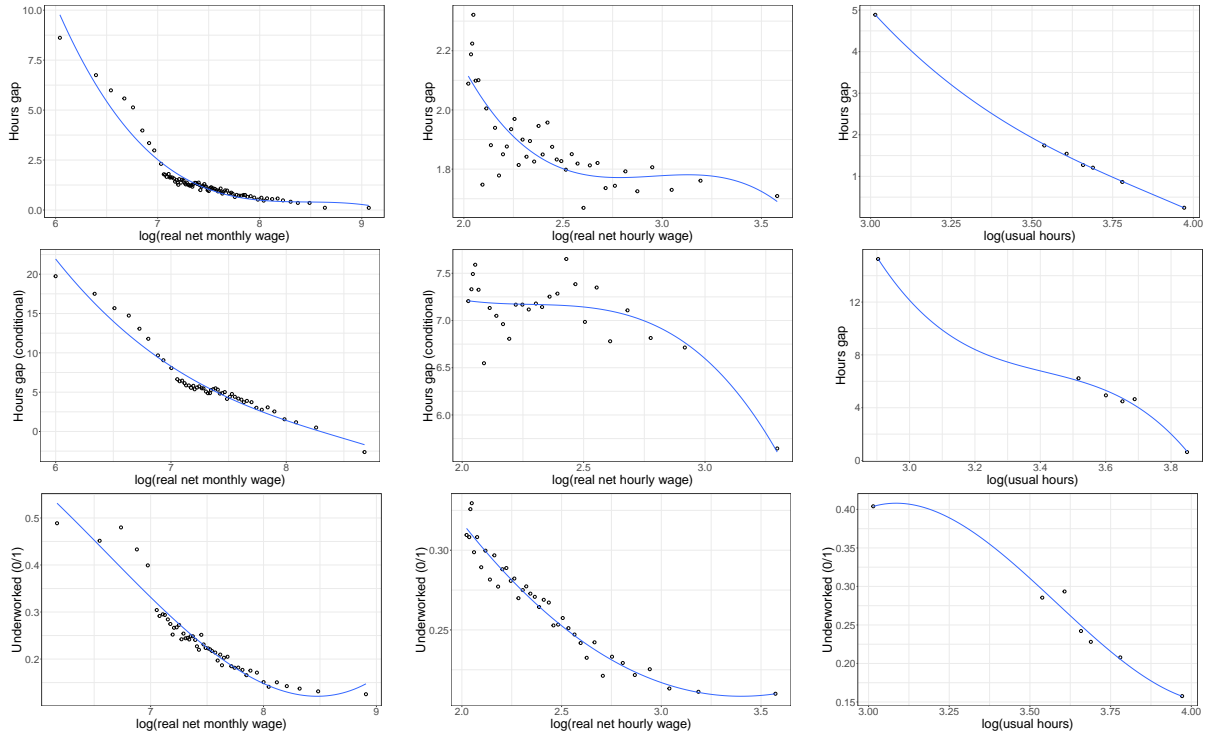
**Figure A.6:** Means to increase their number of hours, conditional on wishing to work more.



**Figure A.7:** Proportion of individuals who looked for a job in the past month, if declared wanting to work more.



**Figure A.8:** On the left: ideal and actual hours worked. On the right: ideal and actual hours worked, conditional on being unsatisfied. Workers in permanent contracts.



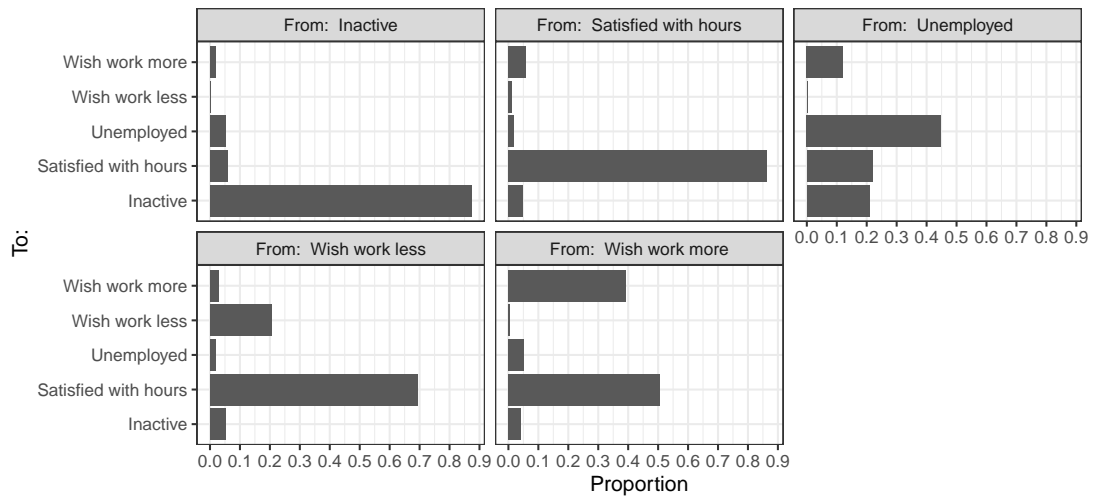
(a) Monthly wage

(b) Hourly wage

(c) Hours

**Figure A.9:** Hours gap by monthly income, hourly wage and usual hours  
2019 - Residualized

*Binscatter plot, controlling by using Cattaneo, Crump, Farrell and Feng (2024a). First row's outcome is hours gap (weekly desired - usual hours), second row shows hours gap conditional on usual hours being different from usual hours, third row shows dummy variable for being underworked (whishing to work more hours).*



**Figure A.10:** Transition probabilities after 6 quarters

*Note: Transitions probabilities computed for individuals observed for 6 quarters (55% of individuals).*

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