



# PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPE

## Mellon Fellowship 2009 Report

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In the United States and Western Europe, much of the postwar legal and regulatory framework governing labor relations, employment regulation and social policy has been based on a model that assumed full-time, on-site and indefinite-contract work. Non-standard forms of work (part-time, temporary and self-employment) have increased in prevalence since the 1970s, posing a challenge to pre-existing laws, regulations and social policies that assumed the existence of a standard employment relationship. Governments have responded to these changing conditions of employment by redefining the legal employment relationship, changing the qualifying conditions for employment-based social benefits, and increasing enforcement of circumvention, to name a few strategies, yet there remains wide variation in state responses to this challenge.

How have states managed the growth of non-standard forms of employment since the 1970s? What factors account for the variation in state responses to this trend? These were the questions motivating my summer research stay in Europe, generously funded by a Mellon Pre-Dissertation Grant from the Council for European Studies. Visits to sites in Germany, France and Switzerland in the summer of 2009 helped me to clarify this research question, identify the most compelling outcomes of interest, improve the case selection justification, and make contact with European experts in political economy, employment law and social policy.

I was based in Germany for most of the summer at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, where I was affiliated with Jens Albers' research unit on inequality and social integration. The stay at the WZB provided me with ample opportunity to meet with other relevant researchers based at my unit and researchers from the units on Skill Formation and Labor Markets; Knowledge, Production Systems and Work; as well as researchers who had worked on the completed unit on Labor Market Policy and Employment, headed by Günther Schmid. A meeting in late June with Jutta Allmendinger was helpful in providing me with contacts at other German research institutes, especially at the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung (IAB) in Nürnberg. While in Berlin I was also able to meet with scholars at the Hertie School of Business, as well as Katrin Vitols from the Institute for Ecological Economy Research, who had previously written a dissertation on the regulation of temporary employment in Germany.

I also had the chance to visit the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung in Nürnberg, where I was able to learn more about getting access to the IAB Establishment panel, a survey of employment practices at about 10,000 firms that may be of future use. While there I also inquired about the possibility of affiliation with the IAB during future research stays. A visit to the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung in Düsseldorf gave me a better sense of the data which they been collecting on relevant issues, confirmed some of my hunches about the implications of the growth of non-standard employment for social policy provision and coverage, and raised new questions about differential social insurance costs that merit further research.

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In France I met with researchers from CEPREMAP and Bruegel (based in Belgium) to learn more about the growth of non-standard employment as a firm-level strategy, as well as the French government's strategy to regulate its growth. These discussions alerted me to different data sets and archives, though my case selection has shifted as a result of the overall summer research experience in favor of treating Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as the central cases of interest. While in Paris I was also able to attend the conference of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics. This provided me the opportunity to meet scholars working on issues of non-standard employment in countries that I have not yet been able to study and from perspectives that are different from my own, especially from the legal perspective. Finally, a trip to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Switzerland in August provided me with a chance to discover ILO employees' perceptions of which challenges non-standard employment presents to preexisting social policies and regulatory structures. While there I visited with employees of several of the groups within the Social Dialogues unit to learn about the Institute's role in regulating non-standard employment, labor law and social policy, as well as the developments and discussions that have occurred at the supra-national level.

My research trip in summer 2009 helped me to determine how to narrow the scope of the research in a way that allows for sufficient leverage on my outcome of interest - policy updating. In addition, my initial conceptualization of the problem at hand was a bit too fuzzy to be tractable. The summer research trip helped me to narrow the scope of the research in a deliberate way that developed out of discussions with people closer to these policy developments. For example, while I began my research project with the intention of focusing on three types of non-standard employment – temporary, part-time and independent contracting – data collected and information gathered from interviews suggested instead that self-employment is an understudied yet promising area that is worth more attention.

The other thing that this research stay helped to shape was my case selection. I went into my fieldwork having undertaken some preliminary research on the United States, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark and Japan, but without a clear idea of what case selection would provide the most causal leverage, or whether I should expand the universe of cases beyond those five initial ones. Interviews in Germany, France and Switzerland (in particular with academics who already had some expertise on the subject) helped me to justify a case selection comparing the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands as the project progresses. Finally, many of the researchers I met with were happy to share their contacts in academia, politics and journalism who may be of help in the future

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