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# Employment and Working Conditions of Selected Types of Platform Work

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# Employment and Working Conditions of Selected Types of Platform Work

## **Abstract**

Platform work is a form of employment that uses an online platform to match the supply of and demand for paid labour. In Europe, platform work is still small in scale but is rapidly developing. The types of work offered through platforms are ever-increasing, as are the challenges for existing regulatory frameworks.

This report explores the working and employment conditions of three of the most common types of platform work in Europe. For each of these types, Eurofound assesses the physical and social environment, autonomy, employment status and access to social protection, and earnings and taxation based on interviews with platform workers. A comparative analysis of the regulatory frameworks applying to platform work in 18 EU Member States accompanies this review. This looks into workers' employment status, the formal relationships between clients, workers and platforms, and the organisation and representation of workers and platforms.

## **Keywords**

platform work, employment conditions, working conditions, organization

## **Comments**

### **Suggested Citation**

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Digital age

# Employment and working conditions of selected types of platform work





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## Country codes

AT	Austria	FI	Finland	NL	Netherlands
BE	Belgium	FR	France	PL	Poland
BG	Bulgaria	HR	Croatia	PT	Portugal
CY	Cyprus	HU	Hungary	RO	Romania
CZ	Czech Republic	IE	Ireland	SE	Sweden
DE	Germany	IT	Italy	SI	Slovenia
DK	Denmark	LU	Luxembourg	SK	Slovakia
EE	Estonia	LT	Lithuania	UK	United Kingdom
EL	Greece	LV	Latvia		
ES	Spain	MT	Malta		



# Executive summary

## Introduction

Platform work, understood as the matching of the supply of and demand for paid work through an online platform, is still relatively small in scale but is developing rapidly in the EU. This dynamism and the ever-expanding scope of platform activities present economic opportunities, as well as challenges to existing regulatory frameworks.

This study identified 10 common types of platform work, which cover almost all platform workers in the EU. It explores three in detail, based on interviews with platform workers:

- on-location platform-determined work: low-skilled work allocated by the platform and delivered in person
- on-location worker-initiated work: low to moderately skilled work where tasks are selected and delivered in person
- online contest work: high-skilled online work, where the worker is selected by the client by means of a contest

The study examines the employment and working conditions of workers engaged in these three types of platform work. It also explores the regulatory frameworks that apply to platform work in 18 EU Member States.

## Policy context

The European Commission in June 2016 launched *A European Agenda on the Collaborative Economy*, which promoted the monitoring of developments in the platform economy. It emphasises that the platform economy could contribute to more innovation, competition and economic growth, while recognising the need to ensure fair working conditions and the protection of both workers and consumers. This is also discussed in the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

## Key findings

### Employment status and access to social protection

Member States do not regulate the employment status of platform workers specifically. As a result, the terms and conditions of platforms determine their employment status, which means workers are often classified as self-employed. This has significant implications for social protection: if they were employees, contributions would be shared with the

platform or the client, but as self-employed workers, they have to cover contributions themselves or accept less coverage. This is a particular concern for workers for whom platform work is their main source of income, which tends to be the case in on-location platform-determined work. Court cases are ongoing in several Member States to investigate whether platform workers should be classified as employees instead of self-employed.

### Autonomy and control

Subordination to an employer is an important criterion for courts in deciding whether an employment relationship should be classified as employment or self-employment. People doing on-location platform-determined work have limited control over their working time and work organisation. Moreover, the platform monitors their performance. In contrast, those carrying out on-location worker-initiated work and online contest work determine when and how to work themselves.

### Earnings and taxation

For most workers, platform work is a side activity. It is a main activity for some doing the on-location types, whereas none of the online contestants interviewed derived their main income from it.

Earnings from most types of platform work are variable. On-location platform-determined work is paid by the hour, per task or a combination of both, while for online contestants, earnings depend on the outcome of the contests. On-location worker-initiated work provides the most predictable earnings since workers can set their own rates and largely determine their own working time.

Many platform workers are unsure about the tax treatment of their income. Numerous interviewees indicated that they avoid exceeding thresholds that would place them under a less favourable taxation regime.

### Skills, training and prospects

Workers engaged in on-location work of both types are often overqualified for the work they perform. In contrast, many online contestants need academic degrees to participate in complex contests.

Provision of training by platforms is rare. It is mostly seen in on-location platform-determined work and tends to focus on how to use the platform's app – or, in the case of transport platforms, on safe driving. Many workers who do on-location worker-initiated and online contest work use online resources to train themselves.

Across all three types of platform work, there are workers who consider their work as a stepping-stone to a job in the traditional labour market.

## Representation

The majority of platform workers are not represented. This is partly due to many being self-employed, with this group traditionally less often represented than employees. However, on-location platform-determined workers are increasingly represented by trade unions or through their own initiatives. So far, worker-organised initiatives have had limited success in securing better working conditions. People involved in worker-initiated and online contest work saw little need for representation.

## Policy pointers

- The absence of a common and shared understanding of platform work by policymakers, social partners and other experts across the EU results in a lack of comparable data, which tends to muddy the policy debate. Adopting a common operational definition would facilitate the monitoring of developments and help to streamline the policy debate.
  - Monitoring developments in the platform economy is increasingly important, with the rapid growth in the number of platforms and affiliated workers and changing business models. Data on platform work should be incorporated into official EU and national statistics, including data on working and employment conditions across different types of platform work and on the longer-term prospects of workers.
- Policy measures should take into account the heterogeneity of employment and working conditions across different types of platform work to ensure that they are fit for purpose, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, which is of limited use when addressing such a diverse phenomenon. Moreover, any measures should target larger platforms primarily, to support healthy competition and innovation from new platforms.
- The heterogeneity of the platform economy should also be recognised in debates on workers' employment status and in efforts to regulate it. It might be necessary for national legislation to clarify definitions for employees and self-employed workers and strengthen enforcement to avoid misclassifications, especially regarding on-location platform-determined work.
- Dispute-resolution mechanisms should be encouraged to ensure that the use of algorithms and the lack of local presence of the platform do not put workers at a disadvantage. This is a particular issue for on-location platform-determined work and online contests.
- Rating systems should be fair, transparent and transferrable across platforms to allow workers to be active on multiple platforms and to ensure equal opportunities.
- Many platform workers spend large amounts of unpaid time searching for tasks. Improving the information on tasks provided by the platforms could help workers to avoid wasting time on unpromising tasks.
- Member States could promote participation in the platform economy for side-earnings with simple tax rules for workers. Such a move would help to legalise earnings that previously went undeclared and could encourage new economic activity.

# Introduction

## Study background and objectives

Platform work, the matching of the supply of and demand for paid labour through an online platform, emerged in Europe about a decade ago. Still small in scale, this form of employment has developed rapidly in 10 years. Not only are the numbers of platforms and workers affiliated to them increasing, but also the types of work handled by platforms and the business models they use are becoming increasingly diverse. This creates an environment in which some platforms are continuously changing their mode of operation to drive growth, while others disappear from the market. Hence, labour platforms constitute a dynamic new part of the economy and a labour market that is expected to grow further.

The fast pace of growth of platform work is explained by the advantages it offers to clients and workers. At the same time, this form of employment transforms traditional employment relationships and the organisation of work. Right now, it is not entirely clear whether and how the triangular relationship between the platform, clients and workers fits into existing legal structures. Such triangular relationships are not new in European labour markets – temporary work agencies are based on a similar model. Nevertheless, the presence of digital technology differentiates this form of employment from what has existed so far. Discussions also address the classification of platforms: should they be considered technology companies, with the algorithm underlying most platforms being the core element of their business model; or, should they be classified according to economic sector based on the type of service they provide, such as transport, professional services or craftwork?

Platform work challenges existing regulatory and institutional frameworks and raises concerns about the quality of work and employment of platform workers, as well as the effects on the economy and society. This employment form has already sparked heated debates at national and EU levels, in the policy domain, in academia and the media. The European Commission places platform work in the framework of its focus on the ‘collaborative economy’. It acknowledges both the opportunities and challenges inherent to the collaborative economy and aims to encourage its development while ensuring consumer and social protection. Accordingly, the European agenda for the collaborative economy provides guidance to citizens,

businesses and Member States on EU rules and recommendations applying to the collaborative economy so that they may take best advantage of this new area of economic activity (European Commission, 2016a).

The EU-level social partners have engaged in the policy debate too. The employer group BusinessEurope, for example, has expressed a positive view of the potential of online platforms to contribute to business formation and job growth. The European Association of European Crafts and SMEs (UEAPME), in contrast, has voiced concerns about potential unfair competition from online platforms for businesses. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has highlighted issues related to workers’ social protection as well as to tax and labour laws.

National media in Member States have brought public attention to the debate, putting particular online platforms, such as those offering ride-hailing and food-delivery services, under the spotlight. Some of these platforms – Uber in particular stands out – have become the subject of the first court cases to determine the employment status of workers or the sector affiliation of platforms.

While a growing body of socioeconomic and labour market research is being conducted on platform work in Europe and beyond, the current evidence base is still limited and dispersed. It fails to capture the heterogeneity of platform work and the diversity of the European context (Codagnone and Martens, 2016). In addition, very little research has examined the working and employment conditions that differentiate the specific types of platform work (Eurofound, 2018).

Against this background, the overarching aim of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of platform work in Europe. Its objectives are to:

- provide a summary of the scale and scope of platform work in Europe
- explore the employment and working conditions of platform workers
- describe the public and policy debates around platform work in Member States
- review the regulatory frameworks applying to platform work
- examine the extent of collective representation among platform workers and the issues it presents
- derive policy pointers for improving the employment and working conditions of platform workers in Europe

This study is part of a broader research agenda, which is outlined in Eurofound's programming document 2017–2020, in the strategic area of intervention 'The digital age: Opportunities and challenges for work and employment'.

Eurofound has compiled a repository of publications on platform work, including research findings and initiatives, which is available here:

<http://eurofound.link/platformeconomy>

## Methodological approach

### Classifying types of platform work

Platform work takes many forms. Eurofound in an earlier literature review identified 27 characteristics of platform work on which to base a classification of these different forms (see Annex 1, Table A1) (Eurofound, 2018). Applying this theoretical typology to the current study required the list of characteristics to be narrowed down further. Some characteristics were eliminated because they are, in practice, related to others. Some were excluded as they capture aspects of platform work to be explored in this study (such as working conditions and access to representation) and hence should not be used as selection criteria. Other characteristics were discounted because no or insufficient information is available in the literature or from the platforms, which makes it difficult to use them in practice. At the end of this process of elimination, five characteristics remained to define the types of platform work to be analysed:

- the skills level required to perform the task (low, medium or high)
- how the service is provided (delivered on-location or online)
- the scale of the tasks (micro tasks versus larger projects)
- the selection process (decision made by the platform, client or worker)
- the form of matching (an offer or a contest)

Cross-tabulating these five characteristics results in 120 types of platform work, but only a subset of these exists in Europe at present. This becomes clear when the prevalence of each type is verified using data available in the database of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) (described in Fabo et al, 2017). This database holds information on close to 200 platforms operating in the EU in early 2017, of which around 170 are involved in platform work as defined in this study. The database does not include granular data on all the 27 characteristics identified by Eurofound; nevertheless, it provides adequate proxy data to assess whether specific platform work types exist in practice. Examining the database yielded 20 types of platform work based on different combinations of the five criteria.

However, when the JRC data were combined with estimates on the number of platform workers engaged in each type of platform work derived from De Groen et al (2017), it showed that for some of these types, the corresponding platforms do not appear to be active; that is, less than 1% of the total number of platform workers identified in the JRC database are affiliated to these platforms. When these types were eliminated, 10 remained, which cover approximately 98% of all platform workers and around 75% of the platforms in the EU.

### Selecting types for analysis

Table 1 presents the 10 types of platform work and their characteristics. Each type is labelled based on the attributes that characterise it. For the assessment of employment and working conditions and labour market effects in this study, the three types of platform work that are most distinct in terms of their characteristics, and hence the assumed effects on employment and working conditions, have been chosen.

Table 1: Most common types of platform work in the EU, 2017

Label	Service classification			Platform classification		Share of platforms in total number of platforms	Share of workers in total number of workers	Examples
	Skills level	Format of service provision	Scale of tasks	Selector	Form of matching			
On-location client-determined routine work	Low	On-location	Larger	Client	Offer	13.7%	1.3%	GoMore
On-location platform-determined routine work	Low	On-location	Larger	Platform	Offer	31.5%	31.2%	Uber
On-location client-determined moderately skilled work	Low to medium	On-location	Larger	Client	Offer	11.3%	10.9%	Oferia
On-location worker-initiated moderately skilled work	Low to medium	On-location	Larger	Worker	Offer	4.2%	5.5%	ListMinut
Online moderately skilled click-work	Low to medium	Online	Micro	Platform	Offer	0.6%	5.3%	CrowdFlower
On-location client-determined higher-skilled work	Medium	On-location	Larger	Client	Offer	2.4%	3.3%	appJobber
On-location platform-determined higher-skilled work	Medium	On-location	Larger	Platform	Offer	1.2%	4.2%	Be My Eyes
Online platform-determined higher-skilled work	Medium	Online	Larger	Platform	Offer	0.6%	1.9%	Clickworker
Online client-determined specialist work	Medium to high	Online	Larger	Client	Offer	5.4%	30.3%	Freelancer
Online contestant specialist work	High	Online	Larger	Client	Contest	5.4%	4.6%	99designs

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the JRC database (Fabo et al, 2017) and De Groen et al (2017).

For the three selected types, brief descriptions and explanations as to why they are deemed relevant to this study follow.

**On-location platform-determined routine work** covers low-skilled work that is delivered in person (hence the term 'on-location') and assigned to the worker by the platform. The latter characteristic makes this type of platform work interesting for further analysis, as the platform (at least partially) takes the role of an employer without, in most cases, providing workers with an employment contract. These workers may find themselves in a precarious situation because they depend on the platform for work and have few opportunities to distinguish themselves from other platform workers. This type of platform work is currently fairly widespread as regards both workers and platforms.

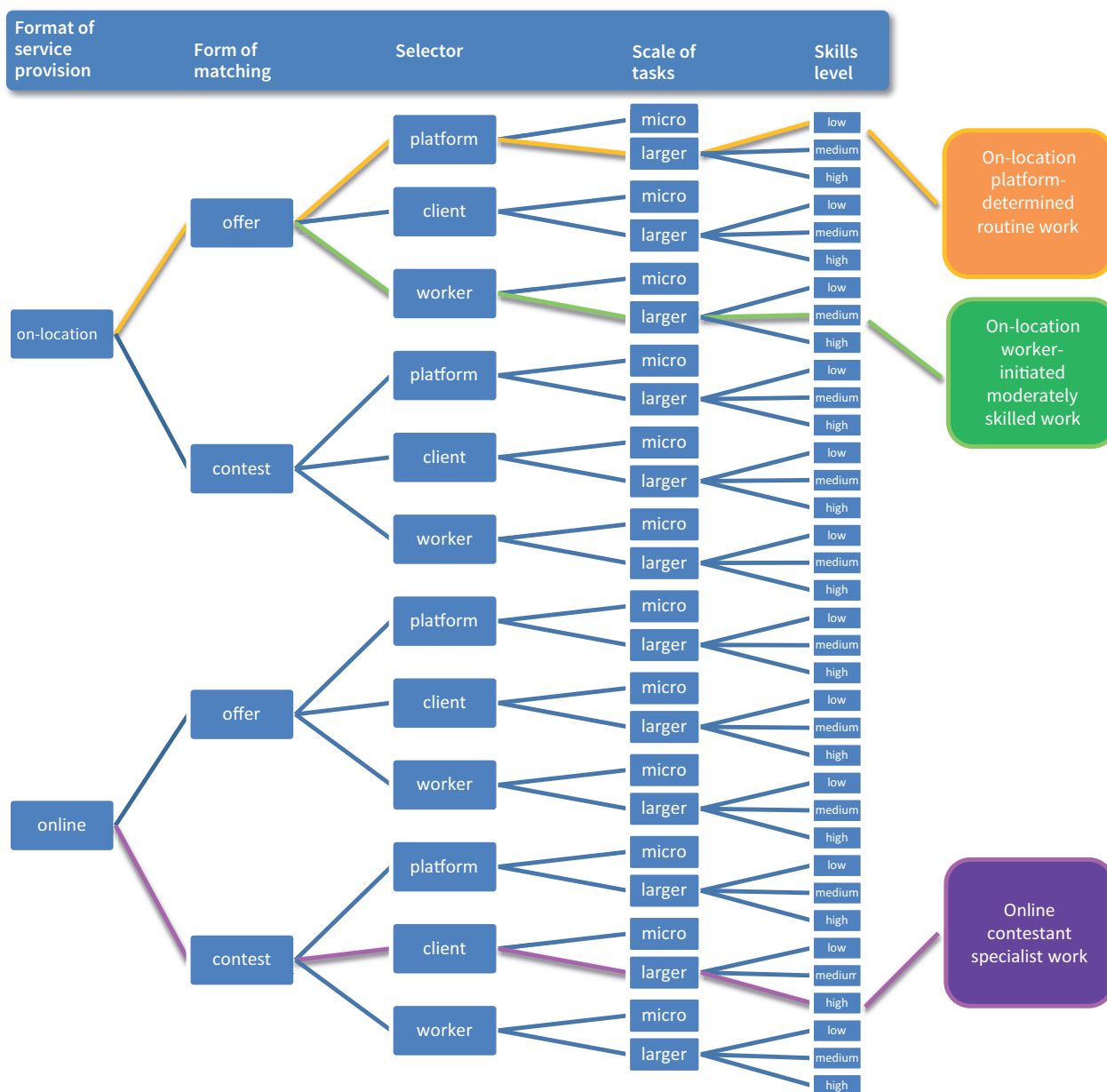
**On-location worker-initiated moderately skilled work** covers low- to medium-skilled work where tasks are selected and delivered on location by the worker.

The ability to choose their own assignments provides these workers with flexibility, which is considered a major benefit of platform work. At the same time, the significant disadvantages of uncertainty and dependence on the platform for work are reduced.

**Online contestant specialist work** is high-skilled online work where the client selects the worker by means of a contest. Workers performing this type of platform work must prove their skills by carrying out part or all of a task before knowing whether they will be selected as winners and paid. Although the contestants are highly skilled, this uncertainty about their earnings and the international competition might put them in a precarious situation, especially for workers who depend on these earnings. This type of platform work is especially prevalent for creative tasks.

For brevity, these three types will be referred to as 'on-location platform-determined work', 'on-location worker-initiated work' and 'online contest work' for the rest of the report.

Figure 1: Schematic of the three types of platform work selected for in-depth analysis



Source: Authors' own elaboration

## Selecting interviewees

For the three selected types of platform work, employment and working conditions were explored using desk research and semi-structured interviews with platform workers. Most information was obtained from interviews with workers, as the literature on these topics is scarce. Moreover, the available research does not usually differentiate between different types of platform work (Eurofound, 2018).

The JRC database was used to identify suitable platforms to include in the study. Preference was given to those that have a higher number of users, had not previously undergone significant research, and operate

in multiple countries. All of the selected platforms operate in at least one of the following six countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland or Sweden. This list was later expanded to include Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, as it became clear that a larger sample was needed to cover all types of platform work sufficiently. For example, finding Polish interviewees proved to be difficult. These three additional countries meet most of the criteria used to select countries for further analysis.

The accessibility of workers' profiles on the platform website was also considered, as this facilitated the identification of potential interviewees. Box 1 describes the platforms selected for the purpose of this study.



## Box 1: Platforms selected for the study

Two platforms were chosen to examine work-initiated work and contestant platform work, to see how different types of activities and platforms within these types influence employment and working conditions.

### Platform-determined work

One platform of this type was chosen. It is an online food-delivery platform through which clients can order meals from selected restaurants. In Europe, the platform operates in Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Sweden. Across these countries, the platform differentiates between delivery methods (bicycle or scooter) as well as the employment status of workers (and related earnings). This platform does not have a rating system.

### Worker-initiated work

The first platform is a Belgian general services platform that mediates a wide range of services including plumbing, DIY, gardening, tutoring, babysitting, and others. Workers generally perform these services in the local area. The platform has three options for matching platform workers and clients: individual requests, group requests and open tasks. This study focuses on individual requests, where workers post their profile and offer services on the platform, which potential clients looking for a specific service can browse. After receiving a request from a client, the worker decides whether to accept it, and if so, schedules a time to carry out the task.

The second platform serves as a marketplace for cleaning services, matching clients to self-employed cleaners. These platform workers do not have the option to become employees of the platform. In Europe, the platform is based in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy and the UK. Workers can be hired for one-off cleaning jobs or for a continuous period. Workers indicate how far from home they are willing to travel and when they would like to do the task. The platform then forwards them client requests that they can accept or decline.

Both platforms have a rating system. Clients can rate workers, but not vice versa.

### Contestant platform work

The first platform is a French 'co-creation' platform for creative work including design, branding and product development that operates globally. The platform allows clients (typically large, well-known brands) to launch different types of creative contests in exchange for a fee. Clients can select one or multiple winners.

The second platform is a marketplace for designers of all nationalities, particularly those specialised in graphic design. The platform allows clients to launch contests or contact designers directly (the latter is not covered in this study). In contrast to the first platform in this category, contests are of shorter duration and follow a two-step approach (qualifying and final round).

Neither of the analysed platforms has a rating system but use a ranking system instead.

For the selected platforms, active workers were invited to participate in an interview for the purpose of this study. Several techniques were used to identify interviewees, such as:

- directly contacting a worker through their profile on the platform or social media (mainly for online contestants)
- identifying workers through other platform workers (for platform-determined work)
- identifying workers through other researchers (for worker-initiated work)
- collaborating with the platform to obtain contact information (for worker-initiated work)
- collaborating with social partners (for platform-determined work)

For all three types, at least two different techniques were combined to avoid biased results. For example, the platforms might have put researchers into contact with workers who they knew to have a favourable

opinion of the platform and the work they do. Similarly, platform workers identified through social partners were likely to be more aware of initiatives to organise and represent workers and might have had a more positive view of such efforts.

The selection criteria gave preference to people with some experience of platform work. Interviewers approached workers in English or the national language, depending on the languages used by the workers or the platform; however, workers had the opportunity to choose the interview language. Researchers conducted interviews in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish (by phone or video conference) and followed a guideline tailored to the type of platform work. Some workers from migrant backgrounds were not proficient in the national language and explicitly requested to do the interview in English.

In total, 41 interviews were conducted from March to May 2018, of which 15 were for the platform-determined type, 16 for the worker-initiated type and 10 for the

contestant type. The interviewees were based in Austria (6 interviewees), Belgium (12), France (4), Germany (4), Italy (4), the Netherlands (1), Spain (1) and Sweden (9).

In most cases, researchers offered prospective interviewees a participation incentive of €20 if they failed to reply to the initial invitation. In total, 29 out of 41 interviewees received the financial reward.

## Selecting Member States

The analysis of the policy debate and legislative frameworks regulating platform work, in Chapters 3 and 4, cover 18 Member States, of which 6 were selected for in-depth investigation.

Seven indicators guided the selection of Member States for in-depth analysis (see Annex 1). Four of these capture the heterogeneity and the development of platform work in the Member States:

- the share of the population engaged in the platform economy as clients and workers
- the number of active platforms
- the heterogeneity of platforms as regards the required skills level of the workers
- whether tasks are carried out on-location or delivered online

Member States in which platform work has already reached a certain maturity tend to be especially active in developing regulatory responses, making them more interesting for research purposes. Three indicators capture the diversity and regulation of EU labour markets:

- industrial relations
- regulatory frameworks/policy response
- labour market situation

A further consideration was geographical balance, to ensure that different parts of the EU were covered.

This led to the initial selection of five Member States: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. Austria was subsequently added to the selection at the request of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMASGK), in light of

the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July to December 2018. For these six countries, the in-depth analysis of the policy debate and regulatory frameworks around platform work took place from autumn 2017 to spring 2018, based on a literature review and expert interviews. Eurofound presents these analyses in full in a series of working papers complementing this report. The main findings feed into the comparative analysis presented here.

Overall, 43 expert interviews were conducted with academics, legal experts and policymakers, including representatives of government, employer organisations and employee organisations (see Table 2). By interviewing a mix of stakeholders, the study can cover and contrast different views on and experiences with the platform economy. Experts were selected based on their position in the organisation they represent, as well as their knowledge on the topic. For example, academic experts were chosen based on the topics covered in their previous studies on platform work. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, following a half-standardised qualitative interview guideline and in the native language of the interviewee where possible.

In parallel to this exercise, a less ambitious analysis of the policy debate and regulatory frameworks around platform work based on desk research was performed for 12 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the UK. For the 12 countries, experts from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents were asked to complete a brief qualitative questionnaire in January and February 2018 to supplement the contextual information gathered for the six countries that were studied in depth. The information provided is mainly based on desk research, partly supplemented with short stakeholder interviews. Experts from the remaining 10 Member States indicated that they had little to contribute to this project, given that platform work is not a major topic of public debate in their country at present.

The comparative analysis of regulatory frameworks in Chapter 4 integrates the findings for all 18 participating countries.

**Table 2: Number of expert and policymaker interviews by country and type**

Country	Academic and research institutions	Government	Employee organisation	Employer organisation	Total
Austria	4	3	4	2	13
France	2	3	2	0	7
Germany	1	2	2	1	6
Italy	3	1	2	1	7
Poland	1	1	1	2	5
Sweden	1	1	2	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>43</b>

**Note:** For France, the three policymakers representing the government were interviewed together.

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration



# 1 Platform work in EU Member States

## Definition and terminology

The EU Member States lack a shared understanding and the vocabulary needed for proper dialogue on the topic of platform work. As a result, a multitude of different terms are used, some of which refer to the same concept, some of which refer to rather different concepts. Box 2 sets out what the term platform work means in this study.

Table 3 (p. 10) presents an overview of the most common terms used to denote platform work. A version of most of these terms exists in the national languages of the Member States. The most widespread terms are ‘sharing economy’ and ‘platform economy’ or ‘platform work’. More than two-thirds of the analysed Member States use these terms.

However, both sharing economy and platform economy tend to have a broader meaning than platform work. The concept of the sharing economy often describes activities beyond paid labour that include, for example, real sharing of goods and services without the exchange of money. The term platform economy sometimes includes a wider range of platforms such as those providing accommodation or financial services. The social partners in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy and Slovenia find the term sharing economy misleading, since sharing scarcely features in

most commercial relationships. This may be why in Finland the term is not used in relation to employment but only in the context of other platform-mediated services.

‘Gig economy’ is the term most commonly used in Ireland and the UK. The term owes its widespread use in the UK to its adoption by the government-commissioned and widely cited ‘Taylor review’ (Taylor, 2017). Even so, outside of policy circles, public awareness of the term is low.

In Ireland and the UK, gig economy tends to refer to on-location, app-based, on-demand services. In Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands, the term is less commonplace and refers to physical tasks (such as household chores or taxi rides). In Italy, gig economy has more negative connotations than in other countries, as it is shorthand for precarious jobs. The same is true for Finland where gig work or gig employment refers to any type of occasional short-term work, not only platform work. Similarly, in Germany and to a lesser extent in Austria, gig economy refers to menial tasks, not necessarily mediated through a platform.

In Denmark, ‘crowd work’ describes click-work (online micro tasks), while ‘crowd employment’ is widely used in Estonia and Latvia to describe platform work in general. In Austria, the terms crowd work, gig work and cloud work are interchangeable.

### Box 2: Eurofound’s understanding of platform work

Platform work is a form of employment that uses an online platform to enable organisations or individuals to access other organisations or individuals to solve problems or to provide services in exchange for payment. The main characteristics of platform work are the following:

- Paid work is organised through an online platform.
- Three parties are involved: the online platform, the client and the worker.
- The aim is to carry out specific tasks or solve specific problems.
- The work is outsourced or contracted out.
- Jobs are broken down into tasks.
- Services are provided on demand.

As the main traded good is labour, rather than materials or capital, sales platforms (such as eBay) or platforms providing access to accommodation (such as Airbnb) or financial services fall outside this definition. Furthermore, non-commercial transactions like volunteering, networking, social media (such as LinkedIn) or any other form of unpaid transaction (such as Couchsurfing, which matches people looking for accommodation with people offering it free of charge) are not considered platform work. Accordingly, the research focus is on online platforms matching the supply of and demand for paid labour.

Table 3: Alternative terms for platform work used in selected EU Member States

Country	Sharing economy	Platform economy	Gig economy	Crowd employment	On-demand economy	Collaborative economy	Crowd sourcing	Peer-to-peer economy	Freelance
Austria		X	X	X			X		
Belgium	X	X						X	
Bulgaria			X	X					X
Croatia	X	X							
Denmark	X	X	X	X					
Estonia	X	X		X					
Finland	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
France	X	X				X		X	X
Germany		X	X				X		
Ireland			X						
Italy	X	X	X		X	X			
Latvia	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Netherlands	X	X	X		X				
Poland		X					X		X
Slovenia	X	X				X			
Spain	X	X			X	X			
Sweden	X	X	X			X			X
United Kingdom	X		X						

**Note:** Blue cells indicate where the understanding of a term differs from Eurofound's definition of platform work. Translations of several of these terms in Member States' languages are shown in Annex 2.

**Source:** Authors' own compilation based on the national contributions for the 18 countries

Other, less prevalent terms are 'collaborative economy', 'on-demand economy' and 'peer-to-peer economy'. Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland use the term 'freelance', owing to the fact that the first platform workers were freelancers in creative and online industries, such as IT specialists or programmers. In Poland, where the concept of platform work is less well known, it is often associated with working remotely and is linked to outsourcing, freelancing or independent work.

In general, the designations used across Europe do not have a corresponding definition in law or in policy documents, but are instead used inconsistently and ad hoc. Nevertheless, there are a few examples of a

common understanding of terms being shared or set down.

In Ireland, the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the gig economy is commonly used in the media and policy debate. In Finland, the blue-collar Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) settled on the term platform economy and recommended its member unions to follow suit. Furthermore, the academic community, notably in Austria, Germany and Italy, is striving to harmonise terminology. Box 3 describes legislation in France that sets out the meaning of 'electronic platform'.

### Box 3: Labour law reform in France

Law 2016–1088, passed on 8 August 2016 and codified in the labour code, is an important reform to labour law in France. One of its provisions aims to extend social security coverage against accidents at work to platform workers. It provides platforms with a voluntary system for paying social security contributions for their workers. Furthermore, the regulation supports platform workers in exercising their right to take collective action, to access continuing vocational education and to validate acquired experience.

Within the framework of Law 2016–1088, an ‘electronic platform’ is understood as a ‘company that irrespective of its place of establishment puts into electronic contact a client and a worker, with the purpose of selling or exchanging a good or service’. This law only applies to self-employed platform workers. The platforms targeted by the law must determine the main features of the good or service (conditions and technical modalities of the service provided) and set a price (directly or indirectly) based on a scale, remuneration scheme or other reference base.

## Scale of platform work

In general, very limited data are available across Europe on the number of platforms, workers and clients involved in platform work, and on the tasks, revenue and value-added created. Possible explanations include the novelty of this employment form, a general lack of administrative data and the blurred definition of what constitutes platform work. The cross-border nature of many platforms and the volatility in the supply of and demand for services matched through platforms further complicate measurement.

Unfortunately, most of the available evidence is anecdotal, descriptive and narrow in scope. Nevertheless, a number of data-collection efforts have shed light on platform work and its development (see Eurofound (2018) for an overview of data available up to spring 2018). Most of these data come from surveys, but different surveys return different findings, which can be hard to compare due to variations in terminology and survey method.

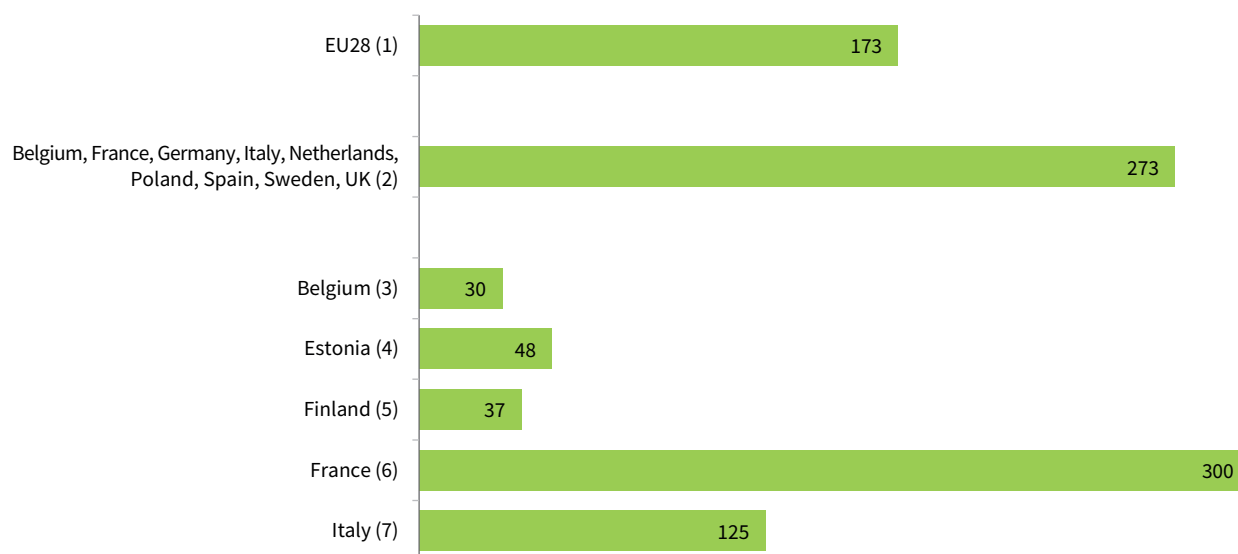
### Platforms

When platform work first emerged in the EU, large, well-known US platforms such as Uber dominated the scene. Later on, home-grown European platforms emerged, inspired by these platforms. The German platform Clickworker, for example, is sometimes described as the European counterpart of Amazon Mechanical Turk.

The legacy of the US platforms is still evident in Europe today. In all countries surveyed, they remain among the best-known platforms and are among the largest in

terms of user numbers. Alongside the arrival of foreign platforms, the development and spread of ICT also contributed to platform work’s rapid growth. Another factor mentioned by German and Italian experts is the Great Recession of 2008–2010. High youth unemployment rates motivated young people to consider platform work in the absence of jobs in the traditional labour market. The economic crisis also increased demand for platform work from clients, whose reduced finances spurred them to seek cheaper services. On a similar note, Swedish experts believed that a strong business cycle and job growth might explain why platform work is less popular in Sweden: with many attractive opportunities to work in the traditional labour market, alternatives like platform work may be less appealing.

As of early 2018, few sources give an indication of the number of labour platforms in Europe. For the EU as a whole, Fabo et al (2017) identified 173 active labour platforms. Comparing this total with findings from individual countries or groups of countries within the EU, however, illustrates the difficulties in measurement already noted (Figure 2 overleaf). For example, the European Commission (2016b) calculates that there are 273 platforms across Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK, while the Interministerial Centre for Forecasting and Anticipation of Economic Change (Pipame, 2015) has estimated 300 platforms in France alone. These variations are largely due to discrepancies in the definition of the term platform, which sometimes covers activities other than paid work.

**Figure 2: Number of platforms in selected EU Member States**

**Sources and notes:** (1) Fabo et al, 2017; (2) European Commission, 2016b, referring to collaborative platforms in 2015; (3) platforms that seek to operate under the framework of the 'sharing economy' tax law; (4) Eljas-Taal et al, 2016, referring to collaborative finance, transport, accommodation and travel, private services and education in 2016; (5) PwC, 2017, referring to finance, accommodation, peer-to-peer transport, household tasks and retail in 2016; (6) Pipame, 2015, referring to platforms in nine sectors in 2015; (7) TRAILab and Collaboriamo, 2016.

## Workers

Table 4 gives an overview of the share of platform workers in the workforce across selected Member States. According to Pesole et al (2018), around 2% of the European working-age population (aged 16–74) in 14 Member States are engaged in platform work as a main job. For around 6%, platform work generates a significant income (at least 25% of the average wage for a standard working week of 40 hours), and almost 8% perform tasks through digital platforms at least once a month.

National data show wide variations – from 0.3% to more than 20% of the population. This may be attributed to differences in scope; for example, whether the respondents had ever done platform work, had done it at a specific point in time, or do it regularly or as their main source of income.

The number of affiliated platform workers varies significantly across different platforms, with a general trend of longer established and international platforms having higher numbers of workers.

For example, in Bulgaria, around 23,000 freelancers were registered on the main platforms in June 2015. By January 2018, this number had increased to more than 43,000 (up 90%). Even when taking into consideration that only a subset of the registered workers are regularly active, this is a good indicator of the dynamism of this form of employment (which is also flagged in other countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Spain). At the same time,

the data show uneven development across platforms, with some growing considerably while others stagnate or even shrink.

Freelance Latvia, a platform matching freelance workers with clients for online jobs, claimed to have 900 registered users (workers and clients) at the beginning of 2018. The freelance workers, who make up around 260 of the users, cover six industries and 52 professions. A similar freelance platform, daru.lv, reports that around 400 workers have opened an account with it. The cleaning services platform klean.lv has around 50 workers (mainly individuals, but also a few small companies) in its database.

In the Netherlands, tasks delivered on location dominate platform work. As of spring 2018, the home repairs and maintenance platform Werkspot had around 8,100 registered users, and Uber had 7,450 self-employed drivers. Deliveroo had over 2,000 riders up to January 2018, when the platform required them to register as self-employed (more recent numbers had not been published as of spring 2018). As regards platforms mediating online tasks, the online journalism platform Villamedia has registered around 3,600 self-employed media professionals.

In the UK, Uber has around 30,000 registered workers. Deliveroo has around 8,000 partner restaurants, works with around 15,000 registered workers, and employs over 600 software engineers and employees in its UK headquarters. CitySprint, a logistics and delivery platform, has 3,500 couriers in the UK.

Table 4: Share of platform workers in selected EU Member States

Country	%	Scope	Source
Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK	2%	European working-age population (aged 16–74) engaged in platform work as a main job	Pesole et al, 2018
	6%	European working-age population (aged 16–74) for whom platform work generates a significant income (25% of average wage for a standard working week of 40 hours)	
	8%	European working-age population (aged 16–74) who perform tasks through digital platforms at least once a month	
Austria	19%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017
Denmark	1%	Platform workers earning money at least once over the last 12 months	Ilse and Madsen, 2017
Finland	0.3%	Population aged 15–74 who had earned more than 25% of their income from work-related and non-work-related platform activities during the previous 12 months	Statistics Finland, 2017
Germany	1.8%	Population aged 15 and over registered as platform workers in January 2017	Mrass and Peters, 2017
	12%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017
Italy	22%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017
Netherlands	9%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017
Sweden	2.5%	Working-age population who performed platform work	SOU, 2017
	4.5%	Working-age population who looked for work on platforms	
	10%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017
United Kingdom	4%	Gig economy, performing tasks online, providing transport or delivering food or other goods at least once over the past 12 months	CIPD, 2017
	4.4%	Gig economy, involving exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment-by-task basis	BEIS, 2018
	9%	Population who has ever done platform work	Huws et al, 2017

## Prevalent types of platform work

### Scale of tasks

In most countries, smaller tasks dominate platform work, though platforms offering click-work remain less common in Europe in comparison to other regions of the world. Larger tasks are more prevalent in Bulgaria (notably ICT tasks) and in the Netherlands (notably online tasks).

### Type of activity

Professional services are the most widespread type of platform work in the majority of the countries analysed; these services include, for example, software development, data analytics, design, writing, translation and consulting. Platform work as an employment form tends to start off with the delivery of professional services online; then when it has become more established, it broadens to encompass other

### Box 4: Clickworker's micro-task model

Tasks mediated through the platform Clickworker are micro or small tasks such as processing unstructured data, survey completion or proofreading, resulting from customer projects that the platform divides into smaller self-contained tasks. Tasks are completed online and may be carried out anywhere in the world. Clients (typically private businesses) publish briefings on the tasks on the platform, and workers submit their offers in response. The platform's project managers check these and then release the tasks for the selected workers to carry out (meaning the client does not select the workers). Workers do the tasks using their own equipment and are paid on a piece rate basis.

### Box 5: Slovenian food-delivery platform

In Slovenia, the platform Ehrana was established in 2011 by the company Trilogic. It allows customers to order food online from more than 100 restaurants across 25 Slovenian cities. In autumn 2017, the company expanded its services to delivering food by bike within a distance of 2.5 kilometres of the restaurant. The platform company hires workers to deliver the food. Around 80% of staff are employed on a full time or part-time basis, the rest are students (sources: Delo, 2017; Ehrana corporate site).

tasks, such as those delivered on-location. This was confirmed by the German and Italian experts interviewed for this study. In Poland, where platform work is still relatively new, IT-related freelancing platforms exist (for example, Freelanceria), but hardly any other types of platform work are available.

Moreover, transport of people (with services similar to taxi rides such as Uber) or goods (notably food delivery) is a common type of platform work in many of the countries analysed. Platform workers also do household tasks (such as cleaning, gardening and maintenance), but this type of activity is less widespread than professional tasks and transport services at present.

#### Format of service provision

Tasks delivered on location dominate platform work in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Slovenia. By contrast, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland and Poland, online provision of commissioned tasks is more common. Interestingly, among these countries, other characteristics of the tasks vary. While in Bulgaria larger tasks requiring higher skills are dominant, in Croatia it is smaller tasks requiring medium skills levels, and in Ireland low-skilled micro tasks are most widespread. This highlights that while there might be some correlation between the different characteristics of platform work across Member States, different combinations emerge in practice. In Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain and the UK, both on-location and online services are prevalent.

#### Required skills

In Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Slovenia, platform work primarily matches supply and demand for low-level skills, whereas in Croatia (in line with the predominance of smaller tasks), Estonia, and the Netherlands (for on-location tasks), it tends to require low to medium skills. In contrast, in Bulgaria, the Netherlands (for online tasks) and Poland, platform work is primarily linked to high skills requirements, which is due to the online character of the tasks. In Austria, France, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Spain, Sweden and the UK, all skills levels can be found in platform work (corresponding to the variety of tasks mediated through the online platforms).

#### Matching and selection

Matching is mainly done through offers or specifications; tasks are posted on the platform by clients and workers can opt to participate. Matching through contests appears to be relatively widespread only in the UK. The existence of contest-based work was also reported in Austria and Italy, but it seems to be less prevalent.

In Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain, both the client and the platform together typically select the workers for the tasks posted, while in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland and Ireland, the selection is more often made by the platform. In the remaining countries, both models are common.

### Box 6: On-location platform-mediated tasks

In the UK, MyBuilder matches the supply of and demand for building work to be carried out by tradespeople. All workers are identity-checked, and the platform evaluates their skills upon registration. Clients (individual households) post details of the tasks they are commissioning, which are then matched to workers through an algorithm. The workers selected can then express their interest in the task, and clients on this basis, as well on the workers' profiles, work history and ratings or reviews, choose a tradesperson for the work.

## Box 7: Selection process on UpWork

UpWork links clients (individuals and businesses) to workers who provide services such as web design, accountancy, engineering and architecture, quantitative analysis, copywriting, translation services, and marketing and sales work. It is therefore typically high-skilled work, which is delivered online to clients anywhere. Clients post jobs on the platform, outlining their project and the specific skills required. UpWork analyses client needs, using data science to identify suitable freelancers, and sends the client a shortlist of potential candidates. However, clients may also search the site for freelancers, and freelancers or sellers may also view jobs and submit proposals for the work. UpWork states that, ultimately, it is the client's responsibility to screen prospective freelancers. However, under the UpWork Pro service, the platform handpicks workers to meet specific client needs.

## In short: Most common types of platform work

Table 5 shows the main characteristics of the platform work carried out in the analysed Member States. In general, the variety of platforms found appears to reflect the level of development and spread of platform work.

**Table 5: Most prevalent characteristics of platform work in selected Member States**

Country	Scale of activities	Type of activities	Format of service provision	Required skills	Form of matching	Who selects?
<b>Austria</b>	Micro/smaller Larger	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client Platform
<b>Belgium</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location	Low	Offers/ specifications	Platform
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Larger	Professional services	Online	High	Offers/ specifications	Client
<b>Croatia</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	Online	Low/medium	Offers/ specifications	Platform
<b>Denmark</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks (most relevant)	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Platform
<b>Estonia</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport	On-location	Low/medium	Offers/ specifications	Client
<b>Finland</b>	Micro/smaller	Transport Household tasks	On-location	Low	Offers/ specifications	Platform
<b>France</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client Platform
<b>Germany</b>	Micro/smaller Larger	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client Platform
<b>Ireland</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	Online	Low	Offers/ specifications	Platform
<b>Italy</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client
<b>Latvia</b>	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client



Country	Scale of activities	Type of activities	Format of service provision	Required skills	Form of matching	Who selects?
Netherlands	Micro/smaller (local) Larger (online)	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location	Low/medium (local) High (online)	Offers/ specifications	Client
Poland	Micro/smaller (local) Larger (online)	Professional services	On-location Online	Low/medium (local) High (online)	Offers/ specifications	Client
Slovenia	Micro/smaller	Transport	Online	Low	Offers/ specifications	Platform
Spain	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client
Sweden	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client Platform
United Kingdom	Micro/smaller	Professional services Transport Household tasks	On-location Online	All skills levels	Offers/ specifications	Client Platform

**Note:** 'Transport' refers to both passenger transport and delivery services.

**Source:** National contributions for all 18 countries



## 2 Working and employment conditions

### Platform worker profile

Forty-one platform workers were interviewed for this study, the majority of whom are under 45 years of age, male, highly educated and living in an urban area. Around two-thirds of them do not have children. Platform workers in the on-location worker-initiated category are, on average, older than other two types of platform workers and are more likely to have children. None of the platform-determined workers lives in a rural area. These profiles are very much consistent with the existing studies, which generally characterise platform workers as young, male and highly educated (Eurofound, 2018) and observe that, at present, platform work is an urban phenomenon in Europe. Table 6 outlines the main characteristics of the interviewees.

Platform-determined work appears to be attractive to students, recent graduates and other people looking for relatively flexible work that they can easily combine with other activities. Most of the workers doing the worker-initiated type are professionals at different stages of their careers, seeking to make side earnings with flexible hours. Most of the online contestants have a variety of skills (for example drawing, writing, graphic design, animation).

### Starting points

The majority of the workers interviewed started performing platform work less than a year ago. However, a few on-location platform-determined workers began two or more years ago, and several online contestants have been engaged in this type of work for more than five years.

Most platform workers discovered platform work through articles published in traditional or social media, through friends, colleagues or family members, or via advertisements on a website. Many platform-determined workers learned of the opportunity by noticing couriers in the street. Most workers indicated that they are active on just one or two platforms.

Both push and pull factors direct workers towards platform work. The main push factor, according to the literature and expert interviews, is the lack of alternative employment opportunities.

This is reported to be the case by interviewees in Denmark; it also appears to be true in Finland, where the majority of the couriers of the food-delivery platforms Foodora and Wolt come from a migrant background (YLE Uutiset, 2016; SAK, 2017). For Ireland, the research suggests that platform work might provide

**Table 6: Profile of interviewed platform workers (by number of workers)**

		On-location platform-determined	On-location worker-initiated	Online contest	Total
Age	< 25 years old	5	1	2	8
	25–45 years old	10	7	8	25
	> 45 years old	0	8	0	8
Gender	Men	10	10	8	28
	Women	5	6	2	13
Children	Yes	1	10	3	14
	No	14	6	7	27
Location	Rural	0	3	3	6
	Urban	15	13	7	35
Highest level of educational attainment	Secondary education	4	5	1	10
	Tertiary education	11	11	9	31

Source: Authors' own elaboration

access to the labour market for workers in remote rural areas, those who cannot go out to work (for example, because of care responsibilities or bad health), and those who face discrimination in the traditional labour market. In Latvia and Spain, the high unemployment rate incentivises workers to use every opportunity to work, including doing platform work. In Spain, many of the new self-employed workers registered during the crisis have found work through platforms (GOVUP and Adigital, 2017).

### One of the main push factors to do platform work is the lack of alternative employment opportunities.

In relation to pull factors, a number of the interviewees, particularly those who do platform-determined work, indicated that the lack of entry barriers (such as formal interviews or the requirement to have work experience) made platform work attractive. For example, due to their recent immigration, two interviewees did not have the language proficiency needed for other types of work. Platform-determined work therefore appears to facilitate access to the labour market. Some of the online contestants also emphasised that anyone can participate in the contests, and workers do not have to prove up front that they possess certain skills. Most saw this as an important benefit, although one platform worker with a university degree in design saw this as a disadvantage, as their formal qualifications provided less of an advantage than they would in the traditional labour market.

Media stories in Belgium suggest that the opportunity to earn additional income is a significant reason for people engaging in platform work. This is also the case in Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain. For most of the workers interviewed for this study, earning additional income was also an important

motivation, particularly for the on-location platform-determined and worker-initiated types. For contestants, additional income is a less important reason for engaging in platform work, due to the unpredictability of winning a task while having to put advance effort in task fulfilment.

Yordanova (2015) finds that the main motivations for female Bulgarian platform workers to engage in online professional tasks are flexibility and autonomy: better work–life balance; opportunity to choose tasks, workload, work schedules and place of work; and absence of a superior. This point has also been raised in other countries, such as Ireland and the Netherlands (Temper, 2017).

To some extent, flexibility (in the sense of choosing when and how much to work) is one of the main motivations for most of the interviewees. However, some workers (particularly of the platform-determined type) have limited ability to choose their own schedules. Others expressed the desire for a more traditional (and less flexible) form of work, with fixed hours and earnings. For the worker-initiated type, some interviewees also indicated that they value the flexibility to choose from a variety of tasks and clients. They use the platform to build a client base for their own businesses, to add variety to their work, to help others and to gain experience.

Online contestants say they engage in platform work if the contests are interesting and fun. Contests spark workers' creativity, allow them the freedom to explore ideas or get inspiration, and help them to develop their portfolio, maintain their skills and gain access to potential clients (especially larger brands). It also provides opportunities to work from home and fill gaps in time. Access to clients was particularly pertinent for some contestants, who pointed out that it can be difficult to convince potential clients to trust and work with them online.

Table 7 gives a summary of the main factors that encourage workers to engage in platform work.

**Table 7: Main motivations for engaging in platform work, by type of platform work**

On-location platform-determined	On-location worker-initiated	Online contest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low entry barriers</li> <li>Additional income</li> <li>Flexible working time, possibility to combine with other activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Means to build or extend the client base</li> <li>Flexibility to choose tasks (to add variety) and clients</li> <li>Additional income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fun, use of creativity and ideas</li> <li>Means to build or extend the client base</li> <li>Flexibility in work organisation (including use of 'empty time')</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 8: Employment statuses of platform workers

		On-location platform-determined	On-location worker-initiated	Online contest	Total
Platform work	Employee	12	0	0	12
	Self-employed	3	7	5	15
	Other, of which:	0	9	5	14
	– <i>Occasional</i>	0	9	0	9
	– <i>'No status'</i>	0	0	5	5
Other activity	Employee	2	10	3	15
	Self-employed	0	3	4	7
	Other, of which:	13	3	3	19
	– <i>Unemployed</i>	2	2	1	5
	– <i>Student</i>	11	0	2	13
	– <i>Retired</i>	0	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	15	16	10	41

Source: Authors' own elaboration

## Employment status and access to social protection

The vast majority of the platform workers interviewed for this study have a main activity outside of platform work, for which they are generally able to identify their employment status (Table 8). Workers reported being classified by a variety of statuses for their platform work, including employee, self-employed and occasional worker. Many workers are well informed about the technicalities of their employment status, in particular when it comes to tax. For example, several Belgian and German interviewees noted the care they take in staying below an earnings threshold to benefit from favourable tax arrangements when doing occasional work. However, knowledge about their rights and entitlements in relation to employment or social protection appears to be much more limited. Other interviewees were unsure of the employment status deriving from their platform work and what it entailed. A number of online contestants, for example, reported having 'no status' when engaged in platform work, as it is something they do as a side activity that does not necessarily result in any remuneration.

While the literature on the employment status of platform workers often presents a dichotomy between employee and self-employed, the interviewed workers did not view it as such. Instead, workers either take on the status the platform ascribes to them or find a status that is most suitable for them. In addition, many interviewees were simultaneously employees based on their main activity and self-employed based on their platform work.

Interviewees in all three platform work categories indicated that their main activity provides them with access to social security, but many are unclear about whether they have access to social protection through their platform work. Some platform workers referred to their social security coverage based on their citizenship, regardless of their employment status within or outside the platform economy. Others, mostly those who are self-employed as platform workers and some who are classified as occasional workers, indicated being responsible for their own social insurance.

### On-location platform-determined work

Workers carrying out platform-determined work reported being either classified as employees or self-employed in their platform activity. It was only in this group that the study found workers for whom the platform acted as employer. Most are full-time or part-time students performing platform work alongside their studies. However, the employment status of these workers (based on their platform work) varies significantly depending on the country. In Sweden, all the interviewed workers are employees; in Austria and Germany, they are self-employed or employees; and in France, they are classified as micro-entrepreneurs. The literature has highlighted that workers of the platform-determined type run the highest risk of being misclassified (Eurofound, 2018). Bogus self-employment is a concern for these workers in particular, as the relationship with the platform could take the shape of an employment relationship in practice, even if the platform's terms and conditions specify otherwise. Correspondingly, court cases on the status of platform workers have largely involved the platform-determined type.

In relation to this, some of the interviewees who are self-employed described tension between the factual circumstances of their work and their contractual employment status. Equal treatment of workers was an additional concern for some interviewees, as workers may perform virtually identical work, but have different statuses and corresponding benefits. At the same time, some workers who are employed by the platform did not recognise the platform as their employer, arguing that it does not treat them as an employer would an employee. For example, they work independently and only interact with a dispatcher through text messages when something goes wrong.

These interviewees shared a few other thoughts on the subject of employment status, noting that employed workers were systematically being fired or were not having their employment contracts extended.

### On-location worker-initiated work

The workers in the on-location worker-initiated category were either self-employed or in an ‘in-between’ status (such as occasional workers) on the basis of their platform work, and had a variety of statuses connected to their activities outside of platform work. Only a few interviewees earn a living exclusively through platform work.

Of the worker-initiated platform workers in Belgium who use the general services platform, several carry out work under the specific Belgian tax rules for the platform economy (set out in Loi De Croo). These workers are careful to stay below the cut-off income

level (around €500 per month for 2018) as stipulated in the law, to avoid higher taxes as a self-employed worker (Le Soir, 2017). Other interviewees are either self-employed or entrepreneurs who have their own business and use the platform to expand their visibility and find additional clients.

Platform workers who used the cleaning services platform were self-employed. One of these cleaners said that they preferred being self-employed, believing that clients showed greater respect to self-employed cleaners compared to those employed by a cleaning company.

### Online contest work

Half of the online contestants interviewed were self-employed or occasional workers in the context of their platform work, whereas the other half indicated not having any employment status, as they perform this type of work on a very irregular basis. Depending on the country, self-employment took numerous forms, such as freelancer or sole proprietor. Contestant platform workers had a variety of employment statuses outside of their platform work – students, employees, self-employed or unemployed.

No interviewees earned all their income from contest platforms or considered it a main form of employment. Instead, they tend to see such work as a potential source of occasional income or even a hobby. Furthermore, none expressed any dissatisfaction with their employment status.

## Concerns regarding employment status and social protection

- Workers risk being misclassified, especially those who engage in the on-location platform-determined type of work. There are discernible conflicts between the factual circumstances of their work and their contractual status.
- Platform workers have limited awareness of the effects of having ‘other’ employment statuses (related to occasional work) on their employment rights and social protection, while they often intentionally opt for these statuses to benefit from more favourable tax regimes.

## Autonomy and control

The autonomy of platform workers is a much-discussed topic. In the context of platform work, autonomy involves the freedom of workers to choose which tasks they do, their working time, and how to organise and perform their work. More autonomy is typically associated with more satisfaction with working conditions, although workers with complete autonomy over their working time are more likely to face issues with work–life balance (Eurofound, 2017b). Many platform workers indicate that more autonomy and flexibility in their work is a significant motivation for their platform activities (Berg, 2016; De Groen and Maselli, 2016). Conversely, platforms can exercise control over the tasks performed, and the time and manner of work, as can the clients. Overall, the degree of autonomy platform workers enjoy varies significantly, as does the control exercised by platforms and clients (Durward et al, 2016; Sundararajan, 2016).

**Many platform workers indicate that more autonomy and flexibility in their work is a significant motivation for their platform activities.**

Based on the interviews, and in line with expectations, on-location platform-determined workers have little choice over which tasks they perform, where, when and how. Online contestants, on the other hand, have essentially no limits on their autonomy, except for abiding by the general terms and conditions of the platform and creating work that they anticipate will appeal to customers. Between these two extremes, workers in the on-location worker-initiated group have complete freedom to choose what they work on, but must agree with clients on when, where and how the work is performed (as they would have to in the traditional economy). Additionally, platforms facilitating the on-location platform-determined and worker-initiated types can perform gatekeeping functions, such as interviewing potential workers, verifying their identities, and sometimes requesting criminal background checks. In some cases, failing to abide by the terms and conditions of the platform results in the worker's account being suspended. Lastly, many interviewees noted that client ratings constitute the primary form of control. This is a feature specific to work performed through online platforms.

### On-location platform-determined worker

As the name suggests, the on-location platform-determined type offers limited discretion to workers. In some cases, these workers are employees, and the platform exercises the same elements of control as any employer would, such as dictating the time,

place and manner of work. However, the food-delivery platform in this study exercises significant control over the self-employed riders as well. Regardless of employment status, the platform tracks the progress of deliveries and the location of riders through their smart phones and from this generates data on workers' performance in an automated way, for example average speed and deliveries per hour.

Several Austrian interviewees indicated that a number of formally employed workers were fired (or did not have their contracts renewed) due to poor performance. One worker said that this system is unfair, as the platform does not consider the circumstances related to performance. For example, if the client does not open the door to receive their order, the rider must wait for a dispatcher to instruct them on how to proceed. Although the rider would not be at fault for the delay, their performance ratings could suffer. Such issues are difficult to address when the system is highly automated.

Riders with an employment contract have mandatory working hours that they must fulfil; otherwise, they must find a replacement rider via the app or the platform's WhatsApp group. The self-employed riders can choose shifts to work and, likewise, must either fulfil these or find a replacement rider. Riders can also cancel a shift if they have 'good grounds' (a good reason) (Lutz and Risak, 2017). In the absence of good grounds, if a rider does not fulfil their shift three times, they can be fired (if employees) or have their account suspended (if self-employed).

Riders receive no ratings from clients, although in principle clients can lodge complaints about riders through customer service. As a result, the platform could penalise riders, for example by not extending their employment contract or prohibiting access to the platform.

Lastly, riders must meet various requirements. For example, they must clean their equipment (such as backpacks) prior to beginning a shift, and this time is unpaid. Employees must wear a uniform while they work. Interviewees indicated the platform does little to enforce such rules, but based on interviewees' responses, it seems that the rider captain will speak to the rider in case of insubordination and then decide whether to take further action. From the interviews, it is clear that the platform exercises a high level of control over the workers, and there are few options for recourse if a problem arises.

### On-location worker-initiated work

Interviewees doing the worker-initiated platform work have a higher level of autonomy. The platform can 'nudge' them with suggestions, encouraging them to apply for open tasks, but the workers are not obliged to accept them. In this case, the platform matters too: the cleaning platform appears to exercise more control over



its workers than the general services platform. If workers fail to meet a client three times or otherwise violate the terms of service on the cleaning platform, the platform suspends their account. Otherwise, the primary element of control is a rating system (on both of the platforms analysed). Interestingly, the workers in this category generally expressed very positive feelings towards the rating system and saw it as an opportunity to showcase themselves, rather than a tool used to exert control over them.

For the general services platform, two rating systems exist: a client-based rating system of one to five stars, and a trustworthiness rating of up to 1,000. For client-based ratings, clients can rate workers after a task is completed and leave comments. Interviewees indicated that a high rating is very important in order to receive work, and they strive to ensure client satisfaction. To prevent a winner-takes-all dynamic where high-rated, established workers get all the tasks, the platform can perform assessments on new workers. If the outcome of the assessment is positive, it will be shown on the worker's profile. Furthermore, if a worker feels they have been unfairly rated, they can file a complaint with the platform. A platform representative will then contact the client, to investigate the reason for their low rating and see how the situation might be resolved. The platform representative has the authority to remove a low rating if they decide it is unjustified.

The trustworthiness rating comes from a mixture of factors including client ratings, identity verification through the platform, and a face-to-face meeting with a representative of the platform. Overall, interviewees from the general services platform expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the rating system. Interestingly, they said they would have liked more control by the platform and thought that the marketplace would be fairer if the platform did more to verify whether workers actually have the skills listed in their profile and took more measures to ensure the good behaviour of clients.

The cleaning platform workers also experience some elements of control by the platform, but are most concerned about client ratings. The platform interviews potential cleaners, verifies their identity and requires a clean criminal background check. Additionally, the platform instructs them on how to clean and expects them to follow these instructions. It sends workers client requests based on their preferred location and times, but the workers are free to accept or reject an offer of work. After a cleaning task is completed, the

client can rate the cleaner from one to five stars and leave comments. As indicated by one interviewee, if a worker's average rating is under four stars, clients simply will not select them, as higher-rated workers are likely to be available at a reasonable price for a desired timeslot. Therefore, cleaners are highly incentivised to give their clients a positive experience. Workers indicated that the rating system is both fair and important to their work, as clients must trust them to enter their home, often unsupervised.

### Online contest work

In principle, online contestants are completely free to compete how and when they choose. The only limits on their autonomy are adhering to the rules of using the platform (such as the prohibition on plagiarism). If a contest contains specifications or a timeline that does not suit a worker, they are not obliged to participate. Similarly, contestants are not supervised by the client or the platform. One interviewee said that this is probably due to the fact that clients tend to be well-known brands who can work with any design company they want. When they post contests on the platform, they are looking for original, unfiltered ideas from people who can think outside of the box and offer something special. The more platform workers are restricted in their work by the platform, the less likely the client is to receive what they are looking for.

**The more platform workers are restricted in their work by the platform, the less likely the client is to receive what they are looking for.**

Online contestants may receive feedback from clients or the platform, but only after the contest is closed. The purpose of the feedback is to help contestants understand how satisfied the client was with the completed assignment and why it was or was not selected, but this does not entail any element of control or limit workers' autonomy. Both platforms in this study have a ranking system, but interviewees explained that this has no influence on them. The ranking appears to be based on activity level measured by participation in contests, as opposed to client satisfaction.

## Concerns regarding autonomy and control

- Workers engaged in on-location platform-determined work have limited autonomy to choose their tasks, working time, workplace and work organisation, even when self-employed.
- An automated performance monitoring system operated by the platform controls on-location platform-determined workers, with limited recourse if they feel mistreated.
- Even if they have a formal employment contract, people engaged in on-location platform-determined work have to take on some responsibilities that would traditionally be the duty of the employer (such as finding a replacement if they are not available).
- On-location worker-initiated platform work is highly influenced by the subjective ratings of individual clients; these affect workers' access to future tasks, as they are fully visible to potential clients.

## Earnings and taxation

The literature suggests that very few people rely exclusively on platform work for their income (Huws et al, 2017). Confirming this finding, very few interviewees use this type of work as their main source of income (see Table 9). Furthermore, nearly all interviewees indicated that their platform-based earnings are insufficient to make a decent living. While it may appear from Table 9 that the vast majority of workers doing on-location platform-determined work use the platform as their main source of income, this result needs to be teased out further: of the 12 workers who mentioned that platform work is their main source of income, eight are students. All of them reported receiving support from their parents or having a study grant, so it appears that their income from platform work is used for additional spending, such as for travelling.

Interviewees' pay varied substantially across the platform work types. Factors influencing earnings include the matching and selection procedures used by the platform, which party sets the prices, and the workers' motives for engaging in platform work. The literature suggests that tasks that are carried out on location result in comparatively high wages because of a more limited pool of workers (Aloisi, 2016; De Groen and Maselli, 2016). American Uber drivers have been found to earn substantially more per hour than traditional taxi drivers (Harris and Krueger, 2015). However, this finding has been criticised for failing to account for actual costs to drivers, such as car maintenance and idle time (Huffington Post, 2015).

For contest-based platforms, in comparison to their traditional labour market counterparts, Italian designers were found to earn 30% less, while Serbian designers were found to earn 200% more (Maselli and Fabo, 2015). In addition, time spent searching for or waiting on tasks is usually uncompensated (Berg, 2016).

Several of the interviewees are unsure how taxation is handled in their specific case.

### On-location platform-determined work

For on-location platform-determined work, workers' earnings vary across countries and employment types, and sometimes even within the same country or city. Nevertheless, platform-determined work does seem to offer people a good chance to earn a stable (if modest) income. In Austria, the employees of the food-delivery platform in this study earn €7.60 per hour and 60 cents per delivery, while self-employed workers earn €4 per hour and €2 per delivery. As a result, the self-employed workers have a greater incentive than the employees to deliver as quickly as possible. With tips, the Austrian interviewees claimed to earn a gross hourly wage of between €11 and €14, which compares favourably to average national wages for low-skilled work (Eurofound, 2017a). In Italy, earnings per delivery stand at around €4 on Foodora, and the gross hourly earnings on the platform are around €8. For Deliveroo, gross hourly earnings amount to around €7 for bicycle couriers and €8.50 for motorbike couriers. A French platform worker with a micro-entrepreneur contract indicated that they received €7.50 per hour on weekdays and €11.50 per hour on weekends, with a bonus of €2 per delivery.

**Table 9: Main source of income by types of platform work (by number of workers)**

	On-location platform-determined	On-location worker-initiated	Online contest	Total
Platform work	12	3	0	15
Other	3	13	10	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41</b>

Source: Authors' own elaboration

This worker is motivated by the €4 hourly difference to work more on the weekends. Elsewhere, the weekend bonus is less. In Sweden, workers are paid €11 per hour during the week and €13 per hour on weekends. Several interviewees were unsure of their exact wages, which vary based on the day of the week and peak times.

### Several interviewees were unsure of their exact wages, which vary based on the day of the week and peak times.

As clients do not rate deliverers, ratings do not affect earnings; only the platform influences the remuneration per hour and delivery.

Taxation of platform-determined workers depends on the country, employment status and worker preference. For employees, taxes are always deducted automatically from workers' pay cheques. For the self-employed, taxes can be deducted automatically or declared independently to the tax authorities.

### On-location worker-initiated work

For the on-location worker-initiated type, earnings vary substantially. Previously, German workers for the cleaning platform earned a fixed hourly rate set by the platform (between €10.22 in 2015 and €11.98 in early 2018). As of early 2018, the cleaners can set their own prices, and the interviewed cleaners earned between €12 and €14 net per hour and between €1,000 and €1,300 per month for 70–90 hours of work. In Italy and the Netherlands, the interviewees earned €11 net per hour. All the interviewees indicated they could work and earn more if they wanted to, as there is always greater demand than ability to meet it. For the German cleaners, the primary reason for not earning more is their wish to stay below €17,000 in total annual earnings (€17,500 in Munich) to avoid moving into a higher tax band. The platform deducts taxes automatically for all

cleaners. While client ratings do not directly affect earnings, cleaners with higher ratings tend to set a higher hourly fee.

Hourly income for the general services platform tends to be higher than the cleaning platform but less consistent. These workers can also set their prices. For example, one worker charges an hourly rate of around €29, of which 10% goes in taxes and 20% is the platform fee. As a result, the net hourly wage is around €20.30. Monthly, this individual earns around €400 through the platform, which is around 20% of their family's income. The interviewee's spouse contributes the remaining 80%. Other interviewees charged about the same hourly rate, but those registered as a company on the platform must also pay 20% of their earnings as value added tax (VAT) (deducted automatically by the platform). One interviewee noted that this presents a challenge, as they must charge a higher fee to receive the same income for the same work. For most interviewees who use the general services platform, the work supplements income from other sources (such as a pension or a main job). Ratings do not directly influence the income of any of these platform workers, except that it may convince more clients to offer them work.

For the workers whose earnings fall below the threshold set by the Belgian sharing-economy tax law, the platform automatically pays their taxes.

### Online contest work

Online contestants earn money only if they win a contest. This is unpredictable and insufficient as a main source of income, according to all workers interviewed. None of them engaged in contest-based work as their main activity; these earnings are instead seen as supplementary income. While very inconsistent, earnings can be high: one platform worker pointed out that the first prize of a contest generally amounts to a reasonable monthly gross wage (€3,000–€7,000 on one platform).

The workers declare their income from contests to the tax authorities.

### Concerns regarding earnings and taxation

- Payment rates for on-location platform-determined work vary depending on workers' employment status and whether they work on a weekend or weekday, even for the same platform in the same country. This can affect working time and work intensity.
- Potentially higher competition in online contests increases the unpredictability of earnings already inherent in these occupations.
- There is potential for tax evasion as platform workers are not sure how their taxation is handled in practice.



## Work intensity and working time quality

Work intensity refers to the effort and strain associated with carrying out the work. This includes, for example, physical strain, emotional and mental fatigue, and general stress. Organisation of working time refers to how the worker, platform and client manage the worker's time. It also includes time spent searching for tasks, as discussed in the literature (Berg, 2016). Both work intensity and the organisation of working time influence workers' work-life balance. Generally, the platform workers have control over the intensity of their work (to various degrees) and the organisation of their working time, and report a satisfying work-life balance. However, notable exceptions exist, particularly for those who do on-location platform-determined work.

### On-location platform-determined work

The working time of people doing on-location platform-determined work varies in the way it is organised based on country and employment status. In Austria, the workers employed by the food-delivery platform have fixed weekly shifts, but the self-employed workers must select their shifts on a weekly basis. In Sweden, the workers indicate when they cannot work, and an algorithm automatically assigns their shifts. After their schedule is determined, they can approach others to swap shifts. A few indicated that they spend a good deal of time doing so to achieve a schedule that works for them. These platform workers need to have a very good reason to decline a shift they have previously accepted or an order received while active. Riders who miss a shift and are unexcused receive a 'strike' (a negative mark of their performance). When they have three strikes, the platform invites them to discuss this issue and, typically, their contract is not renewed, or their account is suspended. Some interviewees indicated that in the past the platform removed all strikes from a worker's account if they had completed over 250 rides, but this rule appears to have changed. Some interviewees said that they can cancel a shift 48 hours in advance, while others suggested that this rule no longer stands. Lastly, interviewees noted that they spend no time searching for tasks, as the platform sends tasks automatically. Furthermore, interviewees wait very little between tasks – generally a few minutes or less, with a maximum of 20 minutes.

The platform usually expects workers to complete 2.2 to 2.8 food deliveries per hour. Interviewees said that the pace of work is usually not stressful, but can be in the event of complications (such as receiving the wrong order, or clients not answering the door). Workers have no breaks during their shifts – instead resting briefly between orders or while waiting for a pick-up or drop-off. Swedish riders, however, are entitled to a paid five-minute break every hour. Even so, they need to contact the dispatcher to ask for that break and usually it takes longer than five minutes for the dispatcher to reply. Alternatively, they can contact a dispatcher

before the shift starts to arrange when they can take a break. Many of the interviewees indicated that they struggle with this.

### On-location worker-initiated work

Workers engaged in on-location worker-initiated work have very few concerns about work intensity and scheduling, largely because they only perform tasks of their choosing. For the general services platform, the only exceptions occur when clients understate the scale or difficulty of the task at hand. Because client demand is not steady, there is very little regularity in these workers' schedules. Those who work for the cleaning platform work exclusively for repeat customers, and usually at the same time and day every week.

**Workers engaged in on-location worker-initiated work have very few concerns about work intensity and scheduling.**

These workers generally do not spend much time looking for work. Two indicated not spending any time at all looking for work, instead waiting until they receive an invitation to carry out a task.

The duration of the tasks depends on the kind of activity. For example, one worker collects rubbish from people's homes and transports it to recycling centres. This can take five minutes or several hours, depending on the type of rubbish and how it is stored. Another worker reported spending one to three working days per task on average, and sometimes up to 20 working days.

### Online contest work

Online contestants reported virtually no challenges in terms of work intensity, generally enjoying the time spent preparing submissions. All contestants valued the flexibility of their platform work and participated only when contests fitted their schedules. Contest-based work is not routine and has no fixed schedule. Interviewees explained that in one monthly period, they might spend no time searching for contests, while in other months, they might search more extensively and participate in several. Working time varies depending on how large the project is. For some contests, participants spent just a few hours or one day preparing a proposal, while for others they spend several weeks or even a month. When preparing for a contest, interviewees generally worked 3–4 or 8–10 hours per day. One interviewee said that sometimes deadlines can be tight, but that this also depends on what type of techniques are used to prepare the proposal. For example, a video can be made using actors, or it can be animated. By contrast, another interviewee reported feeling no pressure at all, as it is not necessary to react to a client's feedback immediately.

## Concerns regarding work intensity and working time quality

- Allocation of tasks by algorithm in on-location platform-determined work might affect workers' work-life balance.
- The limited rest breaks provided by on-location platform-determined work could raise health and safety issues.
- For worker-initiated and online contest work, working time can be more unpredictable compared with the traditional labour market due to potential higher competition through the platforms.
- Worker-initiated platform tasks can lead to higher work intensity if clients understate the scale or complexity of tasks.
- Tight deadlines in online contests can cause higher work intensity.

## Physical environment

The physical environment of platform work includes the location, the equipment required and how it is acquired, and the physical health and safety risks deriving from the work.

The most comprehensive report on health and safety of platform work is that by EU-OSHA (2017). For all platform workers, job insecurity may contribute to poor overall health, as is characteristic of atypical work in general. The young age of platform workers can also contribute to a higher risk of accidents. For platform work primarily taking place on location, risks include harassment, accidents (such as traffic collisions), and exposure to chemicals (such as cleaning products). Certain risks are exacerbated by the nature of platform work, which is less likely to provide health and safety training than traditional jobs. Specific risks for online platform work include cyber-bullying, postural disorders, eye strain, and stress arising from numerous factors. Most interviewees, however, seemed unconcerned by or unaware of health and safety issues, with the exception of the food-delivery workers, who expressed concerns about traffic accidents and damage to their equipment.

The challenges of the physical environment for platform workers are similar to those faced by workers in the traditional labour market. However, in some cases, the mechanisms for mitigating risks (such as accidents) or handling problems appear to be inadequate or inconsistently applied to platform work.

### On-location platform-determined workers

For the food-delivery platform, the work is physical, largely taking place in public streets, with brief waiting periods at restaurants and outside clients' homes. Workers ride their bikes to one or several starting locations in central areas of the city as designated by the platform. At the starting location, they receive a notification with instructions to ride to a specific restaurant to pick up an order. There, they wait inside or outside the restaurant (at the restaurant's discretion) to

collect the order and transport it in their backpack to the client following the instruction of the platform's app.

This type of work can be physically strenuous, particularly in stormy weather and during the winter. Some interviewees indicated that the platform responded to difficult conditions by reducing the distances riders were required to travel and easing time expectations for deliveries. Swedish interviewees indicated that the platform has an office, but workers may only visit the office under specific circumstances. Only team captains have a key and workers must request the captain to come and open the door. Austrian interviewees said there used to be a garage where workers could meet and repair their bikes, but the platform closed it to reduce costs. To use the toilet while on a shift, platform workers typically rely on the goodwill of restaurants.

The workers must provide their own bike and a smart phone with internet access. When a worker cannot use their own bike, the platform offers a replacement bike for temporary use (but apparently only in Cologne), or workers use a rental bike. At a minimum, the platform provides a backpack, helmet and jacket. The workers can generally choose whether or not to wear these, although a few interviewees stated that in Austria workers with an employment contract are obliged to wear the provided clothing. Some interviewees received a rain or winter jacket from the platform, while others did not. Some received lights to mount on their bike, and a number of them received a bell or armband for their smart phone. A few said that they must clean their backpacks daily to comply with the country's health and safety regulations on food, but no verification mechanism is in place. In Sweden, there is significant discussion around winter tyres for bikes. The workers had requested winter tyres, and the platform initially refused to pay for them, but eventually agreed to pay around €45 to each platform worker. The interviewees stated that this amount does not even cover the costs for one tyre. Similarly, Austrian interviewees mentioned ongoing discussions about the platform providing winter gloves and face masks.

Interviewees were asked about different types of insurance and coverage, including equipment and damage to third parties. Several interviewees were unsure about the provision of insurance. One interviewee was hospitalised after an accident on the job. While recovering, the worker could not work, but received compensation for their damaged bike and phone. Austrian interviewees confirmed that the platform provides workers with an employment contract with insurance covering damages to their own bike and phone. Other workers mentioned that the insurance only applies if they were wearing a helmet at the time of the accident. A French interviewee said that they had to pay for private accident insurance, which covers damages to themselves or third parties.

### On-location worker-initiated platform work

For the two platforms examined under this heading, the work usually takes place in clients' homes. Interviewees noted that commuting to and from clients' homes is a significant part of the work and therefore they tend to look for tasks near their own home. The cleaning workers could also clean offices, but this was much less common. Workers using the general services platform reported working mostly in clients' homes, but because of the wide variety of tasks, certain work could be performed anywhere. For example, one interviewee visits clients' homes for computer repairs when necessary, but otherwise works from home and solves problems remotely. Interviewees generally enjoy working in clients' homes, indicating that they feel safe, and clients are usually friendly.

Workers using the general services platform are responsible for providing their own equipment. Most interviewees already owned the necessary equipment for prior personal or professional use, but one indicated having bought equipment especially for platform work. This individual saw it as an investment as an aspiring self-employed worker. Additionally, the platform allows workers to bill clients separately for their time, equipment and transport costs. This means, equipment costs can be borne by the worker or the client. By contrast, workers using the cleaning platform are not required to provide any equipment themselves; clients are responsible for providing all necessary materials. However, several interviewees noted that they choose

to bring a few personal items, such as gloves and flip-flops, to be more comfortable.

Occupational risks for these workers vary according to the type of work performed. For example, those who use power tools in their work (sometimes without even having received training on how to use them) risk more serious injuries. Cleaners expressed concerns regarding exposure to chemicals, and a few requested clients to provide less volatile or organic cleaning materials. However, few workers indicated being worried about occupational health and safety risks.

Both the general services and cleaning platforms provide accident insurance, which covers third-party damages. This cost is covered by a portion of the platform fee for services. One interviewee expressed frustration that not all damage to clients' property may be covered. Several workers who use the general services platform noted that they pay for private accident insurance to cover themselves in case of injury or damage to equipment.

### Online contest work

In principle, online contestant platform work can be performed anywhere with a computer. All interviewees usually work from home, in their living room or office, and are happy to be able to choose where they work from.

The equipment required includes a computer and specific software (for example, Microsoft Office or Adobe Photoshop). Some also use other equipment, such as video cameras, an additional monitor or graphic tablets. None of the interviewees indicated that they had bought or were willing to buy specific equipment to be able to participate in the contests, as the investment is too large compared with the probability of winning the contest. One interviewee borrows equipment from family or friends if needed; another sometimes rents specific software for a fixed period.

Few contestants indicated having or addressing health issues. However, some said they deal with back pain by stretching or doing other exercise and avoid eye strain by regularly resting their eyes. None were particularly concerned about health and safety. Furthermore, neither of the analysed platforms provides accident insurance.

## Concerns regarding the physical environment

- Platform workers are required to provide their own equipment, even if they are employees.
- There is a lack of information and awareness among platform workers regarding occupational risks and the related impact on health and safety.

## Social environment and relationships

A supportive social environment allows workers to establish personal and professional relationships with others, be part of a team that works towards a common goal, and learn from others. The social environment can have a substantial impact on the well-being and satisfaction of workers.

The interpersonal relationships of platform workers of interest to this study include their relationships with representatives of the platform, clients and other workers, as well as family and friends. In essence, these relationships are similar to those of workers in the traditional labour market. However, owing to the nature, location and organisation of the work, platform workers run the risk of social and professional isolation (Durward et al, 2016). The interviews show that they typically do not have strong relationships with platform representatives, clients or other workers. Several platform workers consider this a negative attribute of platform work, while others perceive it as a sign of their independence and freedom.

### Relationships with the platform representatives

As the mediation of tasks is automatic – without any personal intervention by platform representatives – platform workers generally do not have well-developed relationships with the platform. The relationship differs from the usual relationships between workers and employers or intermediaries in the traditional labour market. This is not necessarily problematic in itself, as long as the allocation of work runs smoothly, and the workers are not faced with issues for which they need to contact the platform. However, when difficulties or conflicts emerge, workers may be unsure where to turn or feel they do not have the platform's support. Several platform workers across the three types brought up this issue. In a conventional work context, the employer or intermediary plays a role in resolving conflicts with clients or among workers, but in the context of platform work, conflict resolution mechanisms are often lacking or absent. One interviewee, for example, noted that a complaint can only be logged via email and that this procedure has a poor response rate. Furthermore, if a worker has an issue with the platform itself, there appears to be little recourse beyond making a complaint to the platform and hoping that a representative of the platform resolves the matter.

### On-location platform-determined work

Of the three types of platform work, workers doing on-location platform-determined tasks are the most dependent on the platform and therefore have the closest relationship with it. This stems from the time-sensitive, local nature of their work, where numerous factors outside of their control can go wrong.

In such cases, the worker usually contacts the platform for support. In principle, workers can communicate with platform representatives through the platform's app, use WhatsApp to contact a dispatcher, or call or text the rider captain. However, most issues must be reported to the dispatcher through WhatsApp, and there is typically a delay before the dispatcher replies (up to 15 minutes according to one worker). Several workers regard this as a problem, because during this time, the food can get cold, or the client might become displeased.

Furthermore, such delays are not taken into account in the worker's performance assessment. In addition, workers indicated that they often feel left to deal with issues on their own, with minimal local support, even with significant issues. For example, workers in Austria must rely on a dispatcher located in Berlin. Some of the interviewees stressed this physical distance as a negative aspect of their relationship with the platform. These factors lead some food-delivery workers, even when formally employed, not to perceive the platform as an employer.

**The food-delivery platform workers said that they often feel left to deal with issues on their own, with minimal local support from the platform.**

### On-location worker-initiated work

For on-location worker-initiated work, platform workers have a more distant relationship with the platform. Because the worker selects their own tasks and is not obliged to accept tasks that seem unclear or otherwise problematic, many potential difficulties are avoided. The level of automation is lower for this type of platform work and many issues can be resolved directly between client and worker. Still, these workers may encounter issues that are difficult to resolve without the support of the platform. For example, one worker was accused of stealing an electronic device by a client and asked the platform to mediate the dispute. In this instance, the platform was very supportive, and the issue was resolved to the worker's satisfaction. Several workers on the cleaning platform reported that they can call the platform if an issue arises when working, for example if they are unsure how to clean a specific object, or if the client did not provide the necessary materials. The workers said that, in such cases, the platform is generally responsive and helpful.

While these workers generally do not interact much with the platform, some interviewees reported that the platform regularly provides them with information and assistance. For example, the general services platform set up a collaboration between its workers and



hardware stores, allowing workers to promote their services further. A number of the workers indicated that the platform is responding to worker feedback and becoming more sophisticated over time. For example, the platform has become better at proposing tasks that may interest workers. It appears the on-location worker-initiated platforms are constantly adjusting to accommodate the needs of the workers, while also keeping clients satisfied.

### Online contest work

Online contestants reported the fewest issues with the platform but also the most distant relationship. They usually interact with the platform only when they have questions about a contest or when they win one. This stems from the highly automated nature of the transaction, which entails little or no direct contact between clients and platform workers. Interviewees most commonly contact the platform with queries regarding the brief describing the requirements of the competition. If the brief is unclear, workers can ask for clarifications, and platforms typically issue a revised brief to all workers. However, the brief is usually sufficiently clear and so normally no contact with the platform is necessary. One of the contest platforms contacts workers when they submit a proposal that does not fully comply with the brief. Workers then have additional time to revise and resubmit their proposal. One of the platforms also offers workers the option to file a complaint against another worker in case of plagiarism. This complaint process is partially automated, but no further details could be found. Most interviewees said that the platforms try to keep them updated with information on the contests in which they participate.

### Relationships with clients

The majority of platform workers do not have ongoing relationships with clients. However, workers who do on-location worker-initiated and online contestant work indicated that having a good exchange with clients is important to gain insight into their requirements and to learn from feedback.

### On-location platform-determined work

On-location platform-determined work involves direct contact with clients but workers do not build relationships with them. These platform workers stated that clients are generally friendly and give tips, but the food-delivery platform instructs workers to courteously deliver the food and then immediately leave to collect the next order. There is no time for prolonged conversation with the client, and the contact only lasts a few moments at the client's door. Furthermore, the payment structure incentivises workers to complete more deliveries in a given time frame, and the lack of a rating system for clients or workers reduces the worth of extended pleasantries. Because workers often spend

time waiting inside or outside restaurants for food to be prepared, there is greater potential for contact with restaurant staff.

### On-location worker-initiated work

Workers doing on-location worker-initiated work often perform tasks in clients' homes and are much more likely to interact and coordinate tasks with them and therefore build stronger relationships. Furthermore, these workers can benefit from the patronage of repeat clients, relying on positive ratings given by clients to attract new assignments. This creates an incentive for workers to forge good relationships with clients. While experiences were generally positive, one cleaner did note that they felt certain clients looked down on them for being 'just a cleaner'. For the general services platform, interviewees said that they feel welcome, and their clients frequently offer them something to eat and engage in conversation. Like the cleaners, some of these workers have repeat clients. Negative experiences with clients appear to be very rare in this type of platform work.

Some workers indicated that they perform tasks outside of the platform for repeat clients they found through the platform. Platforms generally include provisions in their terms and conditions to restrict workers from making these types of arrangements. Some platforms try to convince workers to make all arrangements through the platform by emphasising that workers are then insured and their tax obligations are taken care of, while other platforms sanction workers for operating outside of the platform, for example by removing their profile.

Some workers prefer to continue using the platform even with repeat clients. One worker using the cleaning platform, for example, only has repeat clients but continues to arrange all appointments through the platform. This way their location is logged (which is important for their safety) and they can count on the support of the platform if they need support, for example if they need to know how to clean a specific object.

### Online contest work

Online contestants generally do not have any direct interaction with clients, though this depends on the platform. This is an important difference with the traditional labour market, where a design process typically involves significant interaction with the client on their preferences and vision. One contest platform actually forbids any contact between contestants and clients, with the exception of feedback on the winning submission, and signing a contract to transfer the intellectual property rights to the client. The other platform allows contestants to contact the client to ask questions before the contest is closed. One contestant said that this interaction with clients is crucial to gain a good understanding of their expectations. While some clients reply to questions, others do not, which

dissuades the worker from participating. This issue comes up in the literature: Schmidt (2017) argues that direct contact with the client has a significant impact on the contestant's chance of winning. Many of the contestants interviewed wish to receive more feedback on their submissions to improve the quality their work.

### Relationships with other workers

Most platform workers have not established any relationships with other workers. Schmidt and Kathmann (2017) find that, in particular, online workers and workers carrying out home repairs or providing cleaning services have little interaction with other platform workers. This was confirmed in the interviews with online contestants and workers on the on-location worker-initiated platforms. While numerous platform workers of all types expressed a desire to have more interaction with other workers, platform-organised initiatives do not seem to be successful. Several online contestants, for example, said that there is a community forum on the platform's website, but none of them had used it. One of the workers doing worker-initiated tasks mentioned a meeting organised by the platform but added that hardly any other workers attended.

### On-location platform-determined work

Workers in the on-location platform-determined group are the exception to the general findings, often having close relationships with each other. Many are friends with other workers on the platform and even rival food-delivery platforms, and 'bikers' or 'couriers' regard themselves as a community (Lenaerts et al, forthcoming). These workers stay in touch using chat forums (particularly WhatsApp groups) to coordinate working and free time. Meet-ups have been organised by the platform itself but are usually the initiative of the workers. In fact, several interviewees expressed great disappointment that the platform seems to have taken action to reduce their contact with one another. In Austria, the platform previously had a garage where workers could meet, relax and help each other maintain or repair their bikes. The platform discontinued renting the space, explaining it as a necessary cost-saving measure. Interviewees, however, suggested that it might have been an attempt to impede further the organisation of workers, or to retaliate against the organisation that already occurred with the creation of works councils.

### On-location worker-initiated/online contestant work

Workers involved in the on-location worker-initiated and online contestant types generally indicated having limited interest in establishing friendships or a sense of community with other workers. The lack of contact seems to derive from several factors. Firstly, these workers are usually older than platform-determined workers, more likely to have children and therefore

more focused on their families. Secondly, they do not have any need to coordinate shifts with each other, unlike the platform-determined workers. Thirdly, their work usually takes place in private spaces, whereas platform-determined work primarily takes place in public spaces. These conditions do not lend themselves to mutual recognition between platform workers or a sense of community, and may potentially lead to a sense of alienation or social exclusion (Smith and Leberstein, 2015; Tran and Sokas, 2017), or hinder professional and personal development (Blohm et al, 2016). This situation was confirmed in the interviews, for example by platform workers in Italy.

### Relationships with family and friends

Some workers said that their family and friends are proud and supportive of their platform work and encourage their activities. One, for example, said that their family and friends are happy that they use platform work to remain active after retirement. Several interviewees indicated that the increased flexibility of platform work means they can spend more time with family for pleasure or for attending to personal matters, a point confirmed by the literature (Hall and Krueger, 2015; Balaram et al, 2017). Others said that friends and family are curious and interested in their platform work, but do not necessarily express opinions in favour of or against it.

However, family and friends present challenges for some. For one worker engaged in contest-based platform work, more time with family is a mixed blessing, in that their spouse and children sometimes distract them from their work; however, this observation relates more to occupational characteristics than specifically to platform work. A worker for the cleaning platform regretted spending most of their time working at their full-time job or for the platform, leaving little time for family. Such challenges also appear in the literature (Lehdonvirta, 2018). Other workers experienced pressure from relatives trying to convince them to find alternative work with steadier pay or were subjected to mockery from friends for their platform work. For example, several platform workers on food-delivery platform feel embarrassed by the eye-catching cubical backpacks they wear.

These attitudes, however, reflect just the perceptions of the workers, as no family or friends were interviewed for this study. In fact, some workers do not tell their family and friends that they engage in platform work. This may be because they consider it a hobby or a short-term activity, or because they feel platform work is stigmatised as not being 'real work'. This idea was voiced especially by platform workers on the food-delivery platform.

## Discrimination and harassment in platform work

Compared to traditional forms of employment, discrimination and harassment may be more prevalent for platform workers, who tend to be younger and have less experience in the labour market. Platforms may facilitate discrimination through rating systems and the use of online profiles (Leimester et al, 2016; Graham et al, 2017), and may lack adequate mechanisms to prevent and address these issues. This may be especially relevant for workers who are physically present, where more interaction occurs between clients and workers. At the same time, platform work can serve to reduce discrimination by offering opportunities for individuals who may face discrimination in the traditional labour market (such as young people from migrant backgrounds). For workers engaged in online work, there is less interaction, more anonymity and potentially a lower risk of discrimination and harassment (De Stefano, 2016).

**Most interviewees suggested that platform work offers them the opportunity to work relatively free from discrimination and harassment.**

Overall, the interviews confirm that the risk of discrimination and harassment relates to the format of service provision (on location or online), the level of interaction between parties (high or low) and the ability of the client to select workers, as well as individual characteristics of workers such as age, gender or ethnicity. However, the instances of discrimination discussed by interviewees did not seem to result from

the characteristics of their platform work but from client interactions that could equally occur in traditional occupations (such as retail or restaurant work). Most interviewees suggested that platform work offers them the opportunity to work relatively free from discrimination and harassment.

Several workers doing platform-determined work had experienced harassment on the job or knew of colleagues who had. Some noted that a particular restaurant employee sexually harassed female workers of the food-delivery platform while they waited to pick up their orders. After receiving complaints about these incidents, the platform contacted the restaurant, and the objectionable behaviour seems to have stopped. Another worker using this platform experienced discrimination for not speaking the national language, such as being treated coldly by clients or restaurant employees after their accent revealed a foreign upbringing. One individual indicated that an older client once yelled a racial slur at their colleague. This incident was not reported, as the colleague found the incident humorous rather than troubling. Some of these workers argued that discrimination does not tend to be an issue with clients, as they have no choice in who delivers their order.

For the worker-initiated type of work, harassment and discrimination appear to be less common. None of the workers on the cleaning platform or the general services platform reported facing issues of this kind. Interestingly, two workers using the same platform had different perspectives on the matter. One worker, of the majority group in the population, said that workers from minority backgrounds risk discrimination because the platform shows their name and photograph to clients. Another person, of a minority group, argued that discrimination is not an issue for them as they carry out platform work locally in their own (largely immigrant) community.

### Concerns regarding the social environment

- The detached relationship between worker and platform can be problematic if difficulties arise.
- If platform work acquires a negative reputation among the public, it can result in the stigmatisation of platform workers.
- The use of algorithms and ratings may facilitate potential discrimination in on-location platform-determined and worker-initiated work.
- There is a risk of potential harassment by clients in on-location platform-determined work.
- Community-building is difficult among workers doing worker-initiated work and online contests, which can contribute to professional and social isolation and limit workers' power to negotiate with the platform.

## Skills and training

In many cases, workers reported being overqualified for their platform activities. While platform work is not dissimilar from other forms of work in terms of the skills required to do the task, it does differ significantly when it comes to access to training, especially compared with traditional companies. For the most part, platforms themselves have a limited role in helping platform workers develop their skills. Training, when provided, generally focuses on safety procedures or how to use the platform's app.

Interviewees performing on-location platform-determined work described their work as low skilled, as the app tells them exactly what to do. Worker-initiated platform workers on the cleaning platform also reported using only basic skills, while workers on the general services platform use a much wider variety of skills, including interpersonal skills, painting, electricity, plumbing, plastering and gardening. Most of these platform workers said their

work allowed them to build on their previous knowledge and experience. Apart from a basic induction for workers on the cleaning platform, the worker-initiated types do not have access to training through the platform. Several, however, said they trained themselves through YouTube tutorials and other free online resources.

Of the three types, the online contestants use the most advanced skills. The contests offer them the opportunity to try new ideas and develop their skills while building a portfolio. Some interviewees do not participate in a contest if they do not already have the skills needed, while others select contests specifically because they wish to develop a skill. None of the interviewees undertake additional training specifically to participate in contests. Most contestants train themselves with a variety of free online tools. One online contestant also noted that some contest-based platforms charge workers for proficiency tests and then display a badge on their profile to indicate their skill level.

### Concerns regarding skills and training

- Platform work tends to offer limited opportunities for learning and skills development.
- Platforms themselves provide little training for workers.
- Workers doing on-location platform-determined and worker-initiated tasks tend to be overqualified for the services they provide.

## Prospects and career development

Prospects refer to the opportunities available to platform workers to make a career from their work or to use it as a stepping stone to a different career and generally to achieve job security. Most interviewees indicated that their platform work is a stopgap: a temporary way to earn money without any long-term potential, rather than a desirable career path. Most also approached their platform work with that perspective in mind. Overall, there is little job, employment or income security. However, some workers indicated that platform work has a long-term potential to supplement their main income.

On-location platform-determined work is not a desirable career path for any of the platform workers in this study. None of them indicated that they would engage in it on a long-term basis, or try to make a career out of their platform activities, in fact quite the opposite. The majority of interviewees see platform work as a job that suits them now but have plans to move onto something else. Most said that this type of work does not provide them with any experience that would be relevant for their future career. A few noted

that one opportunity for promotion within the platform is to become a team captain. None of the interviewees considered this an attractive form of promotion; many believed that it would simply mean additional responsibilities for the same pay.

On-location worker-initiated types viewed their long-term prospects and career development opportunities more positively. For example, many workers using the general services platform saw platform work as a useful tool for career transition. One worker, who is employed but currently looking for a new job, aims to use the experience gained through platform work to convince potential employers of his abilities. Another wishes to make a living out of platform work and plans to register as a self-employed worker for that purpose. This worker believes that platform work will continue to grow in the future, when potential clients are more familiar and comfortable with the idea of submitting a request online and sharing credit card information via a website. Other self-employed workers suggested that the platform is useful to help expand visibility to new customers.

All interviewees involved in online contest-based platform work acknowledged that this type of work is not suitable as a long-term form of work, as earnings are too volatile and there is a high degree of competition.



## Concerns regarding prospects and career development

- Opportunities for workers to advance their careers within platform work are limited (but interest among workers to do so is also limited).
- While having the potential to improve labour market access and employability, there is limited information available as to whether platform work acts as a stepping stone or locks workers in.

None of the interviewees considered platform work as a full-time job. Still, many platform workers intend to continue doing this type of work for enjoyment. With the exception of unemployed workers, interviewees had employment security, though not through their platform activities. Additionally, the interviewees emphasised that contest-based platform work can help their career prospects in a variety of ways: for example, contributing to their portfolios (especially for recent graduates); providing additional income; and facilitating interaction with well-known brands. One platform worker explained that their portfolio, which they had built from contest submissions, helped them to find a steady job for a design agency.

## Representation

### On-location platform-determined work

Both the literature and the interviews confirm that the characteristics of on-location platform-determined work facilitate efforts to organise workers (Kilhoffer et al, 2017). These workers may be employees of the platform, may depend on platform work for their income and are in close contact with fellow platform workers. Food-delivery platform workers, for example, may recognise other workers by their backpacks. Interviewees confirmed that they sometimes meet other workers at designated starting points or at restaurants. Furthermore, they appear to be the most likely to find themselves in precarious situations, which may also be a factor contributing to organisation efforts.

The social partners have been particularly active in organising couriers. Consequently, the vast majority of the workers interviewed were aware of efforts towards representation. The highest awareness of and involvement in the representation of platform workers exists among food-delivery platform workers in Austria and Germany. A number of interviewees from these countries were members of a works council for their platform.

Others highlighted the potential advantages of union representation. One interviewee described how the workers had considered organising a strike to demand winter tyres for their bicycles. For some workers in Austria, representation was necessary to ensure fair working conditions; especially, according to a few, because many are migrants and less aware of their rights. Others noted an unfair disparity between self-employed and employed workers and the need for better equipment. Thus, these workers have clear grievances to voice and specific goals to pursue.

Some interviewees, however, questioned how effective unions are and referred to failed negotiations with the platform. Others indicated the works council is irrelevant for them, as they expect to continue the job for only a brief period.

### On-location worker-initiated work

The interviewees doing on-location worker-initiated work identified no specific initiatives to represent or organise them. Most said that representation on the basis of their platform work is not important to them. Many of them were represented on the basis of their other activities and were therefore less interested in additional representation measures.

A few cleaners (those who cannot set their own pay) noted that their hourly remuneration could be improved, and collective negotiations with the platform could help in this respect. Cleaners who could set their own prices had no interest in collective representation for their platform work.

### Online contest work

None of the contestant workers was aware of any formal or informal representation initiatives for contest-based platform work. Overall, online contestants had little interest in representation efforts. One interviewee, for example, questioned the contribution of trade unions or other organisations, given the international nature of contest platforms. Others noted that they do not rely on platform contests for their income and stand to gain little from representation.

## Concerns regarding representation

- Workers engaged in on-location platform-determined work have mixed appreciation of trade unions' efforts to represent them, which hints at a lack of awareness of the potential of collective voice.
- The international character of online contests challenges representation of workers who do this type of work.

## Overall well-being and satisfaction

### On-location platform-determined work

On-location platform-determined work is typically done by young, male, highly educated workers based in urban areas. They are generally attracted to this form of employment by its low entry barriers and the opportunity to earn additional income. While platform work is a main source of income for some, they are not necessarily dependent on this income (for example, many are students funded by their parents or grants).

The overall job satisfaction level of these workers is low. Whereas the main benefit of platform-determined work is the flexibility to access the labour market and earn, the disadvantages include low pay, lack of control over their working schedule, problematic communication with the platform, lack of future prospects, and a feeling that others regard them negatively for their work. Workers using the food-delivery platform described aspects of the job that need improvement, such as the provision of better winter clothing, more flexible shifts, a more user-friendly app, a space to repair bikes and meet other platform workers, and less control via WhatsApp. Despite these issues, most workers remain active on the platform because they consider this as a temporary situation that suits their current needs, while giving them a chance to be paid for an activity they enjoy (bike riding).

### On-location worker-initiated work

In contrast, the majority of the interviewees offering on-location worker-initiated services are satisfied or very satisfied with their work, as they have much more autonomy and control than platform-determined workers. These workers tend to be slightly older and work as professionals (employed or self-employed) outside the platform economy. They engage in platform work to extend their client base or to earn additional income in a flexible way.

Accordingly, the main advantages mentioned by these workers are flexibility and additional income. Some interviewees noted that the platform holds regular

meetings between platform workers and management, and continually strives to incorporate their advice and make improvements.

Most of these workers did not point out specific disadvantages, but those made by a few are notable. One worker is unsatisfied with the platform because it is not suited to the service they provide (tutoring – a recurrent task). The same worker is also unhappy with the platform's interface and would like platform staff to take a more proactive role when matching clients and workers, for example by obtaining further details from the client about the task requirements. Another interviewee would like a higher hourly wage.

A key issue with worker-initiated platform work is the importance of clients' ratings for access to tasks, which are based on subjective assessments. These become problematic if the worker deems them unjustified, as there are limited recourse mechanisms on the platform. Similarly, work intensity and the pay-effort ratio might become an issue if clients understate the scale or complexity of tasks and are unwilling to negotiate with the worker.

### Online contest work

The typical online contestant is a young, male, highly educated professional working as a self-employed worker or freelancer in the traditional economy and taking advantage of platform work to exploit their creative potential and build up their portfolio.

Online contestants reported especially high satisfaction levels. This is likely because none of them depends on platform work to make a living, along with the high level of autonomy to select work, working time, workplace and work organisation. All of these features mean that this form of platform work is often regarded as a hobby or game in which workers only participate when the contest interests them and they have free time.

Online contestants are paid well if they win a contest. However, pay is very unpredictable due to high levels of competition and there is some level of unpaid working time caused by the need to search for tasks and put effort into tasks that will not be awarded payment.

## In short: Comparative overview of selected working conditions

Table 10 shows that working conditions vary considerably across the three types of platform work. None is perfect or abysmal; all fare better in some aspects and worse in others, as indicated by the traffic light colour coding system in the table.

While the table provides a good overview of the conditions under which the different types of platform work is carried out, it should be noted that individual situations might differ in practice, depending on the specific characteristics of the actors and tasks involved.

**Table 10: Comparative overview of selected characteristics of working conditions by type of platform work**

	On-location platform-determined work	On-location worker-initiated work	Online contest work
<b>Example</b>	Uber	ListMinut	99designs
<b>Worker characteristics</b>	Young, male, highly educated  Urban  Students	Slightly older, more likely to have children, male, highly educated  Urban  Have another job as employee or self-employed	Young, male, highly educated  Mainly urban, but also some rural  Have another job, mainly as self-employed or freelancer
<b>Motivation</b>	Low entry barriers Earn additional income	Build or extend client base Flexibility to choose tasks and clients (increasing variety) Earn additional income	Enjoyment, use creativity and ideas Flexibility in time use and work organisation Build or extend client base and portfolio
<b>Employment status on platform</b>	Self-employed or employee  Potential misclassification due to tensions between the factual circumstances of work and contractual status	Self-employed or 'occasional' worker	Self-employed or 'occasional' worker
<b>Autonomy and control</b>	Limited flexibility to choose tasks, with medium-term negative effects if assigned tasks are declined  Responsibility to find replacement if not able to conduct assigned tasks  Very limited as regards time, place and manner of work irrespective of employment status  Automated performance monitoring  Few recourse options if mistreated	Free to choose tasks  Some gatekeeping functions by the platform  Partly instructed by the platform on how to carry out tasks  Control by clients through ratings  Some checks by platforms, assessed positively as quality assurance tool	Full discretion  No control by platforms or clients  Feedback/ratings from clients assessed positively due to inherent learning/improvement potential
<b>Earnings and taxation</b>	Main income source (but not dependent on platform income)  Moderately predictable  Decent pay rates, but earnings low due to nature of tasks  Differences in pay rates by employment status and work schedule  Some awareness of taxation regimes, but unclear about practical handling of tax payments	Additional income source  Often set own rates  Could earn more but prefer to stay below certain thresholds to benefit from more favourable tax regime  Good awareness of taxation regimes and practical handling of tax payments	Additional income source  Highly unpredictable  Potentially high pay rates (but depending on the contest)  Good awareness of taxation regimes, but unclear about practical handling of tax payments
<b>Work intensity and working time quality</b>	Algorithmically assigned shifts  Potential to have negative effects on work-life balance  Limited breaks  Not stressful, unless complications arise  No unpaid search time, some idle time in between tasks	Unpredictable  Potential that clients understate scale or complexity of tasks  Little unpaid search time	Unpaid search and preparation time Tight deadlines  Flexibility appreciated

	On-location platform-determined work	On-location worker-initiated work	Online contestant work
<b>Physical environment</b>	Requirement to provide own equipment, even when employed  Limited information and support on health and safety provided by the platform Physically strenuous tasks, exposed to weather and other external conditions	Limited information and support on health and safety provided by the platform  Often in clients' homes (questionable safety standards and unclear responsibilities)	No particular issues beyond occupational risks also affecting similar workers in the traditional economy
<b>Social environment</b>	Limited relationship between worker and platform problematic if difficulties emerge (but assessed positively in other cases)		
	Potential for discrimination through algorithms and ratings and lack of mechanisms to address this stigma of platform work		
	Good for work-life balance		
	Delays in responses from the platform, which are required quickly due to the nature of tasks Encouraged not to build up relationships with clients by platform and payment structure Close relationships with other workers	Good relationships with clients (important for ratings and learning/improvement) Little interaction with other workers (and little interest in such)	Limited relationship with clients challenges task realisation and success rates Little interaction with other workers (and little interest in such)  Risk of discrimination reduced due to higher anonymity
<b>Skills and training</b>	Limited learning opportunities for developing occupational skills, limited training provision by the platform		
	Low-skilled tasks  Overqualified workers	Depending on type of platform, some possibility to use a variety of skills  Overqualified workers	Advanced skills  Worker-selected skills match between worker and tasks
<b>Prospects and career development</b>	Not a career, but a suitable temporary income-generation tool in a certain life phase	Opportunity to try out self-employment, build up client base  Gather entrepreneurial experience and transversal skills	Opportunity to improve portfolio
	Effects on transitions (stepping stone versus lock-in) unclear		
<b>Representation</b>	Efforts being made Mixed appreciation by workers	Specific initiatives limited Limited need due to representation in the other employment, but some need if autonomy is reduced	Limited interest among workers Challenged by the international character of the activities

**Note:** Under the traffic light system in the table, green indicates good working conditions, red indicates poor and yellow indicates conditions that have both good and poor aspects.  
**Source:** Authors' own elaboration

## 3 Public and policy debate

### Actors and their perspectives

There is an ongoing debate on platform work in most countries, which involves a range of actors who approach the topic from different perspectives. This holds true especially in France, Germany and the UK, where the debate involves policymakers, platform workers and platforms, as well as other stakeholders. In Austria and Italy, the debate is mostly driven by academics and social partners. But in some other Member States, for example Poland, there is no real ongoing debate on platform work as other issues are deemed more pressing. This, however, does not necessarily imply that platform work is not developing in these countries.

Overall, it appears that the debate is more advanced in countries with strong social partners and where platform work is more prevalent. In addition, the debate is largely focused on a subset of platforms or platform work types. In particular, transportation platforms, including food-delivery platforms such as Deliveroo and Foodora, and passenger-transportation platforms, such as Uber, have attracted attention.

#### Trade unions

Across the Member States analysed, trade unions seem to be the most vocal actors in the public and policy debates on platform work. Most unions have become involved following concerns over employment and working conditions, including pay, employment status and access to social protection. Arguments around the organisation and representation of platform workers are also driving the debate.

In Germany, the IG Metall trade union took up the issue of platform work when large, influential German firms started to outsource parts of their activities to platforms. IG Metall expressed concerns over the employment and working conditions of platform workers and feared a race to the bottom. Trade unions in Belgium, France and Ireland have also expressed similar concerns. In the UK, trade unions view the rise of platform work as part of a general shift towards less secure and more exploitative employment. In Sweden, trade unions have started to consider the role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in the context of platform work.

Croatian trade unions perceive the absence of legal regulation (not only related to labour and employment law but also to business law) as problematic, as it might result in unfair competition and a deterioration of working conditions. Similarly, Danish trade unions are

pushing for regulation of the platform economy within tax legislation and with a view to collective bargaining. Trade unions in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK have requested legal clarification on the employment status or employment relationship of platform workers.

At the same time, the Spanish Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (CCOO) acknowledges the need to be open and flexible and to adapt to this new form of employment. It recognises the potential of platform work to tackle the shadow economy and increase business opportunities.

#### Governments

Across the countries analysed, governments are less vocal in the debate on platform work. This seems to be particularly true in Finland, Latvia, Poland, Spain and Sweden. In Finland, the public debate on digitalisation hardly touches on employment, while in Latvia, government institutions monitor the discussion and actions at EU level but do not drive the discourse at national level. In Poland, there is barely any debate on platform work, and in Sweden social partners play a much more active role than the government, due to the importance of collective bargaining and self-regulation in the Swedish model. In Denmark, the government is beginning to engage in the debate but appears to be still trying to determine its position and to decide whether or not to take action. To this end, the government has appointed expert and social partner committees as advisors, with the aim of drawing up a national stance and strategy.

Nevertheless, there are also some examples of more active engagement of governments on the topic. The governments of Belgium and Estonia have established specific tax regulations for platform work (see Chapter 4 on taxation, pp. 48–49). The Belgian government acknowledges the potential of platform work to foster entrepreneurship and combat social security fraud, and intends to provide favourable framework conditions. The Slovenian government has proposed an amendment to the Road Transport Act, which would better enable private individuals to work through platforms such as Uber.

In Bulgaria, the Commission for Consumer Protection has called for regulations to be introduced in the platform economy. In Ireland, an initiative begun by policymakers in spring 2018 to improve the protection of workers in less favourable employment situations is likely to also affect platform workers.

The French government became actively involved in the discussion after Uber entered the market in 2014. At the time, the Ministry of Labour took an active role in the debate. After consultations with a range of stakeholders, the government introduced Law 2016–1088 on 8 August 2016 (see Box 3 on p. 11).

The UK government commissioned a review of modern working practices, including platform work, which was published in summer 2017 (Taylor, 2017). The government issued its response in February 2018 and merely promised further consultation, based on the recommendations of the report and of the two parliamentary select committees that were set up to investigate issues in the growing sector of platform work. For example, the government committed itself to reforming the legal framework for employment status and to better align definitions in employment law and taxation. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee conducted an inquiry into the ‘Future world of work and rights of workers’, with considerable discussion around ways to clarify the employment status of workers in new forms of precarious work, including platform work. The Work and Pensions Committee launched an investigation into self-employment and platform work, with a particular focus on how the benefits system might be adapted to cater for growing numbers of self-employed workers.

### Employer organisations

Employer organisations are not as vocal on the topic as trade unions and tend to focus on different issues, particularly unfair competition. The employer organisations in Belgium perceive some risk that platform work might result in unfair competition for traditional employer companies due to their higher labour costs. Similarly, in Spain, Fedetaxi (the umbrella organisation of associations and organisations of taxi drivers) has argued that ride-sharing platforms compete unfairly because the transport services they offer might

not be subject to some sector regulations, meaning they can offer lower prices and undercut traditional taxi drivers.

Employer organisations in Estonia and Latvia also acknowledge the potential risks associated with platform work, although they are generally open to new forms of employment. Employer organisations in Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands also voice some concerns about platform work (notably related to competition, taxation and employment quality) while at the same time seeing it as an opportunity for economic and employment growth.

In the UK, business representatives seem to have a more positive attitude towards platform work. They see it as a new form of flexible labour that gives individuals more choice about how, when and where to work, as well as providing businesses with the flexibility they need.

### Other actors

Practitioners (such as individual platforms and workers) in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany and the Netherlands, as well as researchers in Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, are involved in public and policy debates on platform work, exploring a range of topics such as employment status and other regulatory challenges.

In the Netherlands, the Federation of Private Employment Agencies (ABU) considers platforms to be job creators, thereby contributing to the economy and labour market. Nevertheless, it has called on the government to regulate the platform economy to reduce the uncertainty around the employment status of platform workers, to reduce the risk of bogus self-employment and to prevent unfair competition (ABU, 2017). Representatives of temporary work agencies at European level (such as the World Employment Confederation – Europe) have also entered the debate.

## Box 8: UK business organisation assesses platform work positively

In a submission to the Taylor Review, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the UK’s largest representative organisation for business, identified the flexibility of the UK labour market, including platform work, as a strength that stimulates growth, inward investment, innovation and real wage growth and meets business needs. The CBI views flexible work arrangements as the result of positive decisions by individuals rather than as a last choice due to lack of other alternatives for work. This perspective champions platforms as progressive and liberating, offering workers freedom and flexibility.



## Box 9: Participation of platforms in public debate

In the Netherlands, five platforms – Helpling, Temper, Thuisbezorgd.nl, Werkspot and Foodora – participated in public hearings in November and December 2017. Each of them produced a position paper, focusing mainly on the legal relationship between workers, clients and the platform. The stance of all five is that they are intermediaries matching supply and demand. They stated that accepting work is at the discretion of the worker, which means that workers, or the government, are responsible for their social protection. Helpling argued that in the current legal environment, platforms are not able to organise social protection without compromising their marketplace character. It asked the government to consider allowing platforms to buy collective social security benefits and offer them at an affordable price to platform workers, without making the companies into legal employers (Helpling, 2017; ABU, 2017).

Labour courts, tribunals and labour inspectorates too are contributing to developments in this area. For example, the French labour inspectorate produced an influential report on platform work (IGAS, 2016). Together with a report prepared by a member of the National Assembly, Pascal Terrasse (Terrasse et al, 2016), and a report prepared by the French Labour Ministry's Department for Statistical Research (DARES, 2017), this informed the new law on platform work in France (see Box 3 on p. 11). While actors of this sort do not directly participate in the debate on platform work, they have significant influence in this area by ruling on emerging issues, notably the employment status of platform workers and the sector affiliation of platforms (see Chapter 4: Regulatory issues).

## Topics in the debate

The discussion on platform work is commonly set in a broader context. For example, in Finland and Latvia, it has featured in the discourse around digitalisation; in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Spain, it has been a hot topic in debates around new forms of employment or the future of work.

The public and policy debate on platform work covers a vast range of topics (see Table 11 on p. 41). In almost all of the countries analysed, employment regulation, employment status and working conditions of platform workers are a major focus. In Belgium, for example, food-delivery platform Deliveroo put a spotlight on the issue of employment status with its announcement that it would only use self-employed workers, meaning that people in full-time education could not be employed under the alternative status of 'student work', which is more beneficial for workers (see Chapter 4 on the employment status of platform workers, pp. 43–45). In France, the arrival of Uber in Paris sparked a debate on employment status and working conditions. In Estonia, there have been discussions over whether platform work should be considered a new economic activity, thus requiring new regulation, or whether existing regulations should simply be amended to apply to this employment form.

In Sweden, the debate focuses on the classification of platform workers (whether they should be considered employees or self-employed under Swedish civil law), and on how platform work can fit into the Swedish labour market model. Three labour market challenges are especially relevant in the short run: the treatment of platform workers as regards taxation, the position of such workers in the social insurance system (particularly unemployment insurance), and issues relating to occupational health and safety (for example, how this should be organised when the employer–employee relationship and place of work are unclear). In the Swedish debate, regulatory complexity and uncertainty hinder the development of platform work significantly.

The social protection of platform workers is also a topic of discussion in most Member States. In Croatia, for example, equal social protection for all, irrespective of employment status, is being contemplated along with the introduction of means-tested pensions (instead of the current basic pension which is not means tested). In France, the risks associated with platform work in terms of job security and social protection are underlined strongly in the debate. In Spain, the Workers' General Union (UGT) has proposed that platforms contribute to social security funds.

In many countries, the public and policy debate on competition and sector regulation is often related to transport services. In Croatia, for example, Uber's entry into the market triggered a debate on the conditions under which drivers could offer rides. In Estonia, discussions on whether platforms such as Uber or Taxify must follow all regulations applicable to taxi companies are ongoing. In Austria, Uber suspended operations in Vienna in April 2018 after a court upheld a complaint against its business practices filed by a local taxi company. In order to comply with trade regulations, Uber drivers may only pick up customers when they start the trip from their permanent establishment or when they receive the order at their permanent establishment or at their home.



### Box 10: Public debate on Uber's market entry in Slovenia

In Slovenia, employer organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have opposed an agreement between the government and Uber on the terms and conditions of the platform's entry into the national transport market. The agreement has also provoked considerable negative publicity, raising issues concerning the economic and social insecurity of workers, lower protection of consumers and deregulation of the transport sector.

Taxi drivers and the social partners are unhappy about the deregulation of taxi services, which in their opinion will jeopardise the quality of services, drivers' labour protection, and consumer protection. The Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia (OZS) is demanding more regulation of taxi services rather than less, while the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS) is concerned that the state might abandon the control and inspection of the quality of taxi services (Kořak, 2018).

According to the Slovene Transport and Communications Workers Trade Union (ZDPZ – ZSSS), the present system already allows platforms to operate while giving at least some protections to drivers. As many taxi drivers are already low-paid workers in precarious jobs, increasing uncertainty and price wars can bring no benefit either to drivers or consumers (source: email message to Eurofound's national correspondent, 5 February 2018).

The position of the government has remained unchanged, however, and it emphasises the new employment opportunities, flexible work organisation and new sources of revenue inherent to this new form of employment (Ministry of Infrastructure, 2018).

In Finland, some employer organisations have demanded deregulation of conventional companies to ensure fair competition. Others, such as the Finnish Taxi Owners Federation, oppose deregulation and call for the same regulations that apply to traditional taxi companies to be imposed on platform work.

In Denmark, the policy debate on the taxation of the platform economy centres on the issue of platforms' obligation to inform authorities about workers' earnings and the potential for tax evasion in the current absence of such responsibility. As of spring 2018, the tax authorities have not yet found a model for receiving data from platforms, while some platforms have already offered to provide such information. Similarly, in Estonia, discussions are ongoing on how to enforce the existing tax regulations in the platform economy.

In Belgium and Estonia, as noted earlier in this chapter, taxation has come into the debate as both governments have established a beneficial tax regime for platform work and plan further improvements (see Chapter 4, pp. 48–49). The Croatian government is also discussing taxation, but with a focus on uncollected public revenue rather than finding solutions to avoid tax evasion.

Representation of platform workers is publicly discussed in several countries, notably Austria, Croatia, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. In Ireland, for example, it centres on a new regulation removing perceived obstacles to certain categories of self-employed organising and being represented by trade unions. In the Netherlands, the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions (CNV) produced a position paper criticising the exclusion of

### Box 11: Perspective on the taxation of platform work in Spain

In Spain, the taxation of platform work is being discussed in public debate, but with rather different entry points and perspectives among the actors involved.

- The revenue authority is concerned about potential tax evasion and announced that it will look into the taxation of freelancers accessing tasks through platforms in 2018.
- Sharing España, the association of collaborative and on-demand platforms, agrees with the obligation to pay taxes, but complains that the Spanish public administration is not taking into account the idiosyncrasies of the platform economy and is creating barriers rather than promoting its development (Rodríguez Marín, 2017).
- Experts argue that adequate taxation is positive for the platform economy as it promotes a message of normalisation and social responsibility, potentially counteracting prejudices linking this form of employment with the shadow economy (El País, 2017).

the Riders Union, a group of self-organised workers affiliated to the food-delivery platform Deliveroo, from public consultation. In Sweden, the discussion is linked primarily to the role of the social partners and the collective bargaining model.

In Croatia, representation is discussed in more general terms; it considers, for instance, whether current trade union structures are suitable for new forms of work and the need for adjustment for future collective bargaining. In Finland, where platform work is discussed in the

broader sense of digitalisation, this form of employment is often presented from an entrepreneurship perspective, as a source of economic growth, new jobs and efficient use of resources.

In Latvia, a considerable amount of the public debate revolves around Taxify, a platform matching supply and demand in passenger transportation. Next to competition and taxation issues, transport safety is a significant topic of discussion. In Italy, discussion mostly centres on delivery platforms, with other sectors and activities receiving substantially less attention.

**Table 11: Topics covered in the debate on platform work in selected EU Member States**

Country	Employment status	Working conditions	Social protection	Competition	Taxation	Entrepreneurship	Representation	Protection of users
Austria	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Belgium	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Bulgaria	X	X	X					
Croatia	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Denmark	X	X		X	X			
Estonia	X			X	X			
Finland	X	X	X	X	X	X		
France	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Germany	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Ireland	X	X	X				X	
Italy	X	X	X	X			X	
Latvia	X	X	X	X	X			X
Netherlands	X	X	X			X	X	
Poland	X			X				
Slovenia	X	X	X	X		X		X
Spain	X	X	X	X	X			X
Sweden	X	X	X		X		X	
United Kingdom	X	X	X		X	X		

Source: National contributions for the 18 countries

### In short: Engagement in public debate and topics discussed

- Platform work is seldom discussed as a standalone issue in the public and policy debates, but is frequently covered in broader discussions on new forms of employment and digitalisation.
- Developments in on-location platform-determined work – especially passenger transportation services – often trigger debate and are a main focus of discussions.
- Trade unions drive the public debate on platform work due to their concerns about working and employment conditions; for the most part, they ask for clarifications and regulation.
- Governments are less vocal; for the time being, and with some exceptions, they are monitoring developments and considering what stance to take.

- Employer organisations have least involvement in public debate and have mixed perspectives; on the one hand, they appreciate this flexible employment form for its potential contribution to innovation and competitiveness; on the other hand, they express concerns regarding unfair competition.
- While not actively contributing to public debate, labour courts and tribunals are influential because they are making the first rulings on employment status and sector affiliation.
- Taxation features increasingly in policy debate; discussions centre around the potential for tax evasion by platform workers versus the platform economy's potential to help legalise earnings that previously went undeclared.

## 4 Regulatory issues

### Employment status of platform workers

Despite being one of the main topics in the debate on platform work, the employment status of platform workers generally remains uncertain from a regulatory perspective. Platform work is blurring the boundaries between traditional employment statuses, and in particular between employees and self-employed workers, and therefore it is not always easy to determine the status of a worker.

None of the 18 countries analysed has clear regulations specifying the employment status of platform workers, so in practice it is the platforms' terms and conditions that determine the status of the workers.

In a few countries, certain platform workers are currently covered by collective agreements if platforms are recognised as belonging to a specific sector. In Italy, for example, delivery riders can be covered by the collective agreement in the logistics sector, under which rider is a contractual position for which working conditions can be negotiated (Linkiesta, 2017). Similarly, platform workers employed in the sectors covered by the IG BAU trade union in Germany (construction and engineering, building materials, building cleaning, facility management, gardening, forestry and agriculture) are included in collective agreements.

In most of the countries analysed, the debates on regulating platform work have not led to a specific framework that determines employment status. In Germany and Italy, discussions have focused on extending the current framework rather than setting up a dedicated framework for platform workers. In contrast, in Poland and Sweden, policymakers seem to

agree that the current regulatory framework for self-employed workers is sufficient to cover platform work.

In the absence of a dedicated status for platform workers, workers fall back on the existing regulatory framework and adopt one of the employment statuses it recognises. Typically, a distinction is made between employees and self-employed workers. In some countries, one or more additional categories or subcategories of these two statuses exist, such as the subcategory of temporary agency work.

In theory, any of these employment statuses could apply to platform workers. In practice, however, the terms and conditions of the platform determine employment status, and in most cases, this means that platform workers are considered to be self-employed. Particularly among workers whose main income comes from platform work, self-employed is the most common status. In some countries, notably Poland, platform workers are self-employed by default and this study found no examples of workers having an employment contract. While Poland has a specific framework for companies to establish permanent cooperation with freelancers that could also apply to platform workers, so far no discussions have been held on this issue.

Another reason why platform workers tend to be self-employed relates to the characteristics of an employment relationship as defined in employment law. In countries such as Belgium, Finland and Italy, several conditions defined in employment law need to be fulfilled simultaneously for an employment relationship to be classified as one between employee and employer. Platforms seem to seek to avoid the fulfilment of all the listed criteria in their relationships with platform workers.

#### Box 12: An employment relationship as defined in Finnish labour law

In Finnish labour law, an employment relationship exists if the following characteristics are fulfilled:

- the employment is based on an agreement between the employer and the employee
- the employment applies personally to the employee (and no other person)
- the employee carries out work in return for compensation
- the direct profit of the work goes to the employer
- the employer may decide when, where and how the work is to be carried out

If all of these conditions are not simultaneously fulfilled, there is no employment relationship and the worker has the legal status of entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is not defined in law, but is generally characterised by factors such as scale, publicity, independence and orientation towards earnings.

### Box 13: Employment model of Slovenian platform GoOpti

The largest Slovenian platform, GoOpti, an 'online marketplace' for transport services was established in 2011. The platform matches the supply of and demand for transport to nearby airports and other destinations. At its inception, the platform directly hired drivers and subcontracted self-employed drivers. In 2015, however, it decided to change its business model, mainly because of the labour inspectorate's ruling that hiring of self-employed drivers is a misclassification of the employment status. As a result, the platform now outsources all transport tasks, cars and drivers. The platform works with 81 transport companies that act as subcontractors (out of which 10 are franchise companies). Although now subcontracting, the platform company still selects and trains drivers as well as controlling their work (sources: GoOpti, n.d; interview).

The contracts between GoOpti and the transport companies specify that the transport companies should employ drivers, but in reality the transport companies decide whether they employ drivers or hire self-employed people, students and pensioners. The labour inspectorate's check in 2017 confirmed that some transport companies hire self-employed workers contrary to law. GoOpti commented on its role in protecting the labour rights of drivers by saying that 'control over franchise companies is not perfect precisely due to the franchise model which gives us only limited possibilities for sanctioning subcontractors' (Kořak, 2017).

A similar model to that of GoOpti is applied by Uber in Spain, which works with self-employed workers as well as third companies that access tasks through the platform and carry them out through their employees.

Nevertheless, there are a few examples of platforms offering workers an employment contract (for example, Book A Tiger in Austria and Yougenio in Italy). In some instances, this is the result of a decision by an authority (such as a labour court) rather than the platform (see the next section on litigation).

The existence of employment contracts between workers and platforms does not necessarily mean that all affiliated workers operate under this employment status. This is the case for Foodora, for example, which works with a mix of employees and self-employed workers (though not in all countries where it operates). Similarly, in Slovenia, the food-delivery platform Ehrana employs around 80% of its riders as employees on a full-time or part-time basis, while the rest are students with a specific employment status. In Denmark, the platform Chabber has become a temporary work agency with employer status and now hires its workers as employees.

In some countries, workers can be classified under another employment status – somewhere between employee and self-employed – and it is clear from the interviews that many workers favour one of these statuses. France, for example, has an intermediate status that is often used by platform workers – micro-entrepreneur. This was introduced in 2008 (as 'auto-entrepreneur') to enable freelance activities to be combined with an employment contract or another status (for example, that of 'student'). This gives platform workers the benefit of a lighter administrative regime and lower social security contributions than self-employed workers. Another example is Austria, where 'employee-like' status could also apply to platform workers. This status, however, comes with stringent criteria for economic dependence that are difficult for platform workers to meet. In the UK, a

specific 'worker' status exists, and employment tribunals have already ruled that some platform workers should be classified as workers rather than as self-employed.

In Belgium and Slovenia, for example, platform workers may also be employed under the employment status of 'student'. In Belgium, this constitutes an employment contract under which the worker can work up to 475 hours per year and pay lower social contributions than a regular employee. Wages are subject to collective agreements, or, since 1 June 2017, may be set at the 'average minimum monthly income' (€1,562.59), which may be pro-rated according to age. For example, a 16-year-old would be entitled to 70% of the average minimum monthly income, and an 18-year-old would receive 82% (FOD, n.d.). In Slovenia, student work is casual work carried out by young people in education. It is considered as one of the most flexible forms of work as it is based on oral agreement with no notice period. Student workers are subject to social insurance on months where their income reaches a minimum of 60% of the average monthly salary (determined annually), and can apply up to 12 months per calendar year. This social insurance covers pension contributions, protection against occupational injury and disease.

In Croatia, platform workers can also work under a contract for services. In this case, they are not considered self-employed and pay pension contributions at half the rate set for self-employed workers. Platform workers in Estonia also have the option to work under a service contract, in theory. These workers are then considered to be self-employed offering services under their own name, and the terms of employment are regulated by the civil code and the Law of Obligations Act.

There is an ongoing debate in a number of countries on introducing a third status for platform workers, one that falls in-between employee and self-employed. In Sweden, the social partners have discussed but rejected this idea, arguing that a strict legal definition would be too static and give rise to new boundary issues between statuses. They deem the current system sufficiently flexible to deal with individual cases and more suitable to accommodate labour market developments. Moreover, in Sweden, individuals who earn income from temporary work assignments for different clients can join a so-called 'umbrella organisation'. This enables them to retain the main characteristics of entrepreneurial activity (risks, independence, autonomy and control), while the umbrella organisation provides them with administrative support. It charges clients for certain commissions, pays employees' contributions, makes tax deductions and subsequently pays the rest as a wage to the individual who performed the work. Being employed by an umbrella organisation is not a formal type of employment or a legal concept.

In France, the idea of establishing a third status has been rejected by policymakers, who argue that such a status might have the perverse effect of encouraging workers to transfer from employee status to this third status – which would come with fewer protections. They also believe that a third status would not resolve issues relating to the blurred boundaries between the different statuses. Another interesting example is Italy, where a third status between employee and self-employed called 'quasi-subordinate worker' was introduced in 1973 (for individuals deemed to be continuous and coordinated collaborators). Many employers preferred this status as it entailed lower social security contributions. In response to abuses, the conditions for meeting that status were revised and fewer workers took it up. In this light, it seems unlikely that a new status for platform workers will be introduced in that country.

## Litigation

The ambiguity of the employment status of platform workers has been the subject of court cases in several countries (see also Eurofound, 2018). Courts have been asked to clarify the status of platform workers when there is an alleged misclassification. Rulings are made on a case-by-case basis, with the courts considering the specific circumstances. This suggests that the courts could arrive at different conclusions for workers active on the same platform and in the same sector or country.

The courts are not bound by the formal agreement between the parties but investigate the implementation of the agreement. In most cases, their decisions are based on a set of criteria that help determine the level of subordination and autonomy of the platform workers, as well as their economic and personal

dependence on the platform. However, these criteria are assessed differently across countries. In Germany, a court has stated that an employee is a person who, through a contract under private law and in a relationship of personal dependence with an employer, provides instruction-bound externally determined work for payment. In Austria, the conditions to assess personal dependence include external determination of working time and place, being subject to control, having to carry out personal and material instructions and other conditions. In Sweden, the courts make an independent assessment of the legal nature of the employment relationship by considering the actual relationship between the parties. They take into account factors such as a personal duty to perform work according to the contract, performance of work, being prevented from performing similar work, being subject to order and control, and using the equipment of the employer.

In France and Italy, there have been or are ongoing court cases to decide whether platform workers are employees of the platform or self-employed. In France, these court cases have generally involved micro-entrepreneurs aiming to claim the status of employee before the court. In a first set of court cases, the French institution responsible for collecting social security contributions (Urssaf) argued that Uber drivers are employees and that Uber is therefore guilty of facilitating undeclared work. This case was rejected for procedural reasons. Another set of cases was launched by platform workers, with similar claims. Some of these cases were ruled in favour of the platform workers; for example, at the end of 2017 the Court of Appeal in Paris ruled that Uber drivers had to be reclassified as employees. In other cases, drivers were classified as self-employed. The highest judicial court in France, however, still has to rule on these cases.

In Italy, the Labour Tribunal of Turin in April 2018 rejected the claim by six Foodora couriers that they should be reclassified as employees. The court argued that the workers are free to decide when to work and to disregard previously agreed shifts. This freedom to accept or decline work and determine work organisation situates them as autonomous actors vis-à-vis the platform. This decision, however, may be appealed based on the 2015 Jobs Act, which stipulates that if the employer has the power to set the place and time of work of a freelancer, this corresponds to an employment relationship (Di Gennaro and Pavone, 2018). The court argued that this did not apply in the Foodora case, as its couriers have the right to refuse as well as decide whether and when to work.

In Spain, the labour inspectorate of the autonomous community of Valencia concluded in December 2017 that Deliveroo riders are employees and not self-employed as the platform claims. As a result, the platform was obliged to pay around €161,000 in unpaid



social security contributions. As of spring 2018, this ruling was not final because the platform could still appeal against the decision in court (El País, 2017).

In the UK in 2016, following two test cases brought forward by the GMB trade union, an employment tribunal ruled that Uber drivers should be classified under the worker status rather than self-employed, and hence should benefit from the associated employment rights, including payment of the national minimum wage (GMB, 2016). This was based on the level of control the platform exerts over the workers: interviewing and recruiting drivers; directing how they work (for example, suggesting routes and limiting their choice of vehicle); requiring them to accept trips; fixing fares; handling passenger complaints; and subjecting drivers to performance review through customer ratings. Following this ruling, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) won a similar tribunal case against the logistics and courier platforms CitySprint and Excel. On the other hand, the labour tribunal ruled that Deliveroo riders are self-employed rather than workers, which was justified by their right under their contracts to assign a substitute to carry out the work for them (Personnel Today, 2017).

Court cases have also addressed the legality of the activities of platform workers, primarily transportation services. In Italy, a number of cases were launched against Uber. In 2015, the Court of Milan ruled that UberPOP (which offers a budget Uber service) functions as a transportation company, and as a result, its services were declared to constitute unfair competition to traditional licensed taxi companies, which have higher costs due to sector regulations. In another ruling, the Court of Milan declared that UberBLACK (which offers a luxury service) was not compliant with the legislation. In other courts in Italy, and in Germany (UberPop in the Frankfurt District Court), similar cases have been launched, all with the conclusion that the platform violated transportation regulations, and the service was subsequently banned from operating in the cities in question.

## Formal relationships among the parties

The formal relationships between platform worker and platform, between platform worker and client, and between platform and client are debated in all surveyed countries. The relationships between the platform worker and the other two parties have been discussed most extensively. This is linked to the uncertainty surrounding platform workers' employment status and the heterogeneity of platform work.

Experts from all the countries analysed reported that the terms and conditions of the platforms set out the formal relationship between the parties involved and the type of contract applied to each of them. This

follows from the lack of specific regulation and the platforms' position of power to dictate the rules of the business relationship. Note that the terms and conditions must be in line with peremptory legislation in a number of countries, such as the General Civil Law Code in Austria, which specifies requirements on the content and transparency of contracts (Warter, 2016).

In their terms and conditions, platforms typically state that they simply serve as an intermediary matching labour supply and demand. Platform workers are, therefore, widely considered to be self-employed, and the relationship between the worker and platform is based on a civil law contract.

The relationships between platform worker and client and between platform and client are generally based on civil law or a commercial contract. The relationship between the platform and the client is discussed less, as this relationship is the most clearly defined.

Of the Member States surveyed, France is the only country in which the contractual system has designed specific rules to take into account some of the particularities of platform work. These rules set specific contractual obligations applicable to all platforms as well as contractual limitations and contractual and regulatory duties applicable to platform users. Platforms are obliged to offer user-friendly, direct and permanent access to information on their identity, such as contact information. Information provided on pricing must be transparent – requiring, for example, platforms to indicate whether delivery costs and taxes are included in the price.

Some of the experts consulted noted that applying the general terms and conditions of the platform to establish formal relationships is not without risks. Platforms may claim to be only intermediaries, but act like employers towards the workers regardless. In addition, platforms' terms and conditions tend to be vague and ambiguous, for example about how disputes over formal relationships are handled (Lutz and Risak, 2017).

## Regulatory frameworks

Across the Member States examined in this study, there is little new or adapted legislation on employment, labour or social protection that deals specifically with platform work. Consequently, the current general regulations on employment status also apply to platform workers. This, however, leaves many questions unanswered because it is not always so clear which regulations apply and how they can be enforced when it comes to platform work. As a result, platform workers may find themselves without coverage as regards employment and working conditions (in relation to working time, minimum wages, health and safety, or protection against unfair dismissal, for example). In addition, as platform workers are most likely to be



considered self-employed, rules on businesses and competition come into play, next to consumer law, criminal law, data protection and privacy, and other areas. Intellectual property rights, for example, may be an issue for online workers engaged in creative tasks or competitions, as the platform, clients or other workers may not always respect workers' rights in this area. Similarly, there is very little information on how platforms protect data and the privacy of workers as well as clients. Platforms are sometimes reluctant to share information on this topic, arguing that this may reveal their business model.

## Social security

National social security systems are funded by contributions paid by workers and employers and, to various degrees, through taxation. In many countries, the status of employee is an essential prerequisite underpinning a worker's social security coverage as regards pensions, health and unemployment. Occupation-based schemes provided through collective agreements can also play an important role, for example, as regards pensions in Sweden.

As platform workers are generally considered to be self-employed, they are often covered by the social insurance systems of self-employed workers, which tend to be less favourable and more costly than those of employees. In addition, some national regimes set minimum eligibility thresholds that might be difficult for platform workers who work on a part-time or occasional basis to reach. For example, the experts interviewed about Italy noted that platform workers generally do not meet the minimum income requirements for obligatory social security. Moreover, self-employed workers (*lavoratori autonomi*) must register and make

contributions either to a separate organisation (called a *cassa*), which is a social security fund allied to their profession, or directly to the National Social Security Institute (INPS). This rarely happens among platform workers.

In France, the dominant status for platform workers is micro-entrepreneur, which is a subtype of self-employed status. When platform workers are registered as self-employed workers (including as micro-entrepreneurs), they are affiliated to la Sécurité sociale pour les indépendants (the French self-employed social insurance scheme). There are no minimum working hours or income requirements. Self-employed platform workers who carry out occasional work are insured under the scheme. They must pay contributions and are entitled to social security benefits, notably pensions. However, the healthcare cash benefits and retirement pensions available are much less favourable than in the general scheme applicable to employees. French self-employed workers are not insured for unemployment, accidents at work or occupational diseases. Platform workers working under the micro-entrepreneur status, however, can join a social insurance scheme for accidents at work and occupational diseases funded by the platforms as required by the new law for self-employed platform workers.

Platform workers generally lack protection against unemployment. In Austria, self-employed workers, including platform workers who are considered self-employed, are not automatically covered by unemployment insurance but have the possibility to opt-in voluntarily. However, to be eligible for benefits, one must have made contributions over a minimum period (at least half of the past 12 or 24 months).

## Box 14: Examples of social protection challenges for platform workers

In Croatia, platform work is considered to be a type of non-standard employment, which often lacks or is inadequately covered by social insurance. Grgurev and Vukorepa (2018) show that flexible forms of work tend to result in lower pensions and limited access to some pension rights. This holds particularly true for work arrangements with low earnings, such as those observed in platform work. The authors propose the introduction of state measures equalising the contributions regime for all types of employment. In contrast to pensions, health insurance and social assistance seem to be less of an issue, as these systems are based on the same entitlements for all citizens, irrespective of employment status.

In Finland, an entrepreneur (the status of workers who are not employees) is responsible for arranging their own social insurance. They may take out entrepreneur's pension insurance (which also covers sickness, parental and basic unemployment allowances) if the entrepreneurial activity continues for at least four months. If the entrepreneurial income amounts to over €7,656.26 per year (as of 2018), the insurance is compulsory. If entrepreneurs have also joined an unemployment fund, they receive the entrepreneur's unemployment allowance if the membership has lasted for at least 15 months and the annual entrepreneurial income amounts to at least €12,576 (as of 2018). Prior membership in an employee unemployment fund can continue for up to 18 months from the start of entrepreneurship, thereby providing additional unemployment insurance in the early stages of entrepreneurship. While strong evidence is not available, it is likely that few platform workers arrange their own social protection given its cost.

This might be a difficult requirement for platform workers to meet (Cheselina, 2017). In Sweden, unemployment protection, although largely publicly funded, is not administered by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency but is based on voluntary membership of special unemployment insurance funds. Both employees and self-employed workers can be covered by this scheme.

## Platform workers generally lack protection against unemployment.

Proposals about how to provide platform workers with better social protection are emerging. In Germany, for example, the Artists' Social Security Fund (KSK) is being discussed as a potential framework to organise social security for platform workers engaged in creative work. KSK pays the employer's portion of the social security contributions for their members, who include self-employed writers, publishers and artists. The German platform content.de, which mediates creative writing tasks, collects and contributes 5.2% of earnings to the KSK on behalf of the workers using their platform (Content.de, 2014).

## Health and safety

Issues pertaining to health and safety in the context of platform work have not been discussed extensively. In general, health and safety provisions are usually tied to employment status, so the same risks exist as for access to social protection. In the majority of the countries analysed, no specific provisions for platform workers are in place. Some platforms have started to offer this insurance to workers (for example, the cleaning platform Helpling), but these platforms are an exception to the norm.

In Germany, the main occupational health and safety law does not cover self-employed workers. In Austria, accident insurance is mandatory for both employees and the self-employed, but it is organised differently for each: the employer is fully responsible for financing accident insurance for their employees, whereas the self-employed pay the contribution themselves. This distinction also applies to platform workers. In France, the self-employed are generally not covered for occupational illness and workplace injury insurance, but a voluntary insurance scheme specifically for self-employed platform workers has been set up under Law 2016-1088. In Sweden, employers have the main responsibility for health and safety measures in the workplace, and the Work Environment Act includes provisions to ensure that even when there is no employer, those in charge or in control of a workplace are responsible for healthy and safety.

Under the French social security system, all residents are entitled to healthcare and family benefits. Hence, people who are not economically active or are on a low income receive the same healthcare (medical treatment, medicines and hospital care) and the same family benefits as any other insured individual. Furthermore, residents on low incomes are entitled to supplementary healthcare coverage, which guarantees protection free of charge. This means that platform workers, like any other individual on a low income, are entitled to family benefits and to comprehensive healthcare coverage.

## Taxation

As with other forms of work, work on online platforms is subject to taxation (European Commission, 2016a). The platform economy more broadly is considered as both a problem and an opportunity for tax authorities. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity to formalise the informal economy and reduce undeclared work. Due to its digital nature, information can be easily stored and shared with the responsible authorities. On the other hand, they appear to have difficulty enforcing the taxation rules pertaining to platform work, and many workers are unaware of the rules that apply to them.

This again relates to the uncertainty around the employment status of platform workers, which has implications regarding who is responsible for what. If platform workers are classified as employees, the platform is responsible for paying the income tax. If the workers are self-employed, the responsibility is theirs (for income tax, value-added tax and corporate income tax if applicable).

The available anecdotal evidence suggests that a low share of platform workers are employees. No information is available to establish whether self-employed platform workers fulfil their tax obligations. It needs to be borne in mind that some countries have minimum thresholds that must be reached before income from self-employment or work done on the side are liable for tax. As the fragmented data available suggest that the large majority of platform workers use this form of employment for side earnings, it can be assumed that this income falls below these thresholds (this assumption was confirmed in interviews with workers in Belgium, for example).

In only a small number of countries have specific regulations been introduced regarding the taxation of platform work. In July 2016, the Belgian government introduced a favourable taxation regime for platform work. Income of up to €5,100 per year generated through one of the recognised platforms is taxed at a reduced rate of 10% (compared to 33% for other forms of income), and platform work is exempt from value added tax. As of spring 2018, there are further plans to completely relieve earnings of up to €6,000 per year for small tasks (specified by the government in a list).

In Estonia, in 2015, the Tax and Customs Board agreed with Taxify and Uber to establish a system to simplify the declaration of taxes related to earnings through the platforms. Drivers have the option to declare their income through a prefilled form provided by the Tax and Customs Board. The idea behind this approach is that a convenient public service is more effective than compliance checks. Furthermore, the Simplified Business Income Taxation Act introduced in Estonia in 2018 simplifies tax responsibilities for part-time self-employed workers. While this legislation is not exclusively for platform work, it also applies to this form of employment as it includes on-request services such as transport, accommodation and food delivery. For individuals, income of up to €25,000 per year for services provided to other people are taxed at a rate of 20%, which includes both income and social taxes (compared to the regular tax rate of around 50%). As of spring 2018, no worker had registered yet on this system.

In France, platform workers with the micro-entrepreneur status receive tax allowances that they can deduct from their income when calculating their tax liability. The allowance is 34% generally, 50% for services and 71% for sales activities. In addition, under the French tax code, individuals whose income is low (up to around €15,000 per year) are exempt from paying income tax, and can receive complementary social benefits under the *prime d'activité* (activity bonus) if their income is below a threshold set at the equivalent of 1.3 times the minimum salary.

While tax rules in Sweden have not changed, the Swedish tax authorities have been very proactive in identifying and addressing tax evasion and bogus self-employment among platform workers. The reason for this is that workers can have a different status for taxation and social insurance purposes (derived from tax and labour law), meaning that the tax authorities can approach platforms and make their own assessment of the employment status of the workers using it. This is done on a case-by-case basis; there is no general rule that applies to all. The Swedish tax authorities have been assessing cases involving platform work, and experts believe that by doing so, they are successfully tackling the issue of bogus self-employment, by forcing platforms to take the role of employer when applicable.

## Modifications to the regulatory framework

New employment regulations currently under consideration or being formulated in Member States tend to have a broader perspective, tackling emerging labour market or economic issues more generally. Where platform work is being regulated, it is happening under the umbrella of these reforms.

In Croatia, for example, there are plans to amend the labour code in the second half of 2018 to better regulate flexible forms of work, which could have implications for platform work. Similarly, in Finland, a legislative change is planned to allow for a better combination of employee and entrepreneurial social protection, which could also benefit platform workers. However, as of spring 2018, the timeline for the reform had not been published.

In Ireland, the Competition (Amendment) Act 2017 introduced two novel categories of workers, the 'false self-employed' and the 'fully dependent self-employed'. By declassifying such workers as 'undertakings' for the purposes of competition law, they can organise and be represented by trade unions. While not specifically and exclusively addressing platform work, the law may have effects on this employment form.

In Italy, two draft bills that affect platform workers have been published. One, the Italian Sharing Economy (Tax) Act suggests reducing or even abolishing tax on income up to €10,000. The other is a Bill on 'provisions on self-employment mediated by digital platforms regulating umbrella organisations such as cooperatives for self-employed persons'. This contains a definition of platform-mediated labour, defines and regulates the 'contract of assistance and mutual protection' to be used by umbrella companies. Umbrella companies provide continuity of income and essential social security coverage. In addition, a parliamentary question was raised on the working conditions of Foodora riders, and in June 2018, the new Italian government announced at a meeting with Foodora riders that it would adopt a new decree law recognising the riders' activities as subordinate work, a move opposed by Foodora. No further information is available as of late June 2018.

In the Netherlands, a minimum tariff for the self-employed will be introduced in 2018 to combat bogus self-employment. As a result, clients will have to pay a minimum rate of €15–€18 per hour (around 1.25 times the minimum wage) to offset the additional costs self-employed workers must cover in, for example, insurance and social security contributions. Tax authorities will consider any self-employed person earning less than the indicated rate for longer than three months as being in an employment relationship with their client.

As regards sector regulation, in Estonia, the Public Transportation Act, which entered into force in 2017, regulates ride-sharing services and their status compared to traditional taxi services. If a ride is ordered and the price is calculated online, there is no requirement to have a taximeter. Price limits set by local governments for taxi services do not apply to platforms that display the price of a trip before the passenger enters the car (the argument being that rides can be rejected if they are considered to be too expensive).

In Slovenia, an amendment to the Road Transport Act was proposed in spring 2018, which defines the conditions for the entry of Uber into the national market. If the new law is adopted, taxi drivers will no longer need to obtain a state licence (which requires proof of ownership of the car, a certificate of no prior criminal record, proof of financial adequacy and a professional exam), and the regulation of taxi services will be the responsibility of local communities. Since few communities have regulated taxi services to date, this amendment is likely to result in the deregulation of taxi services. Moreover, the transport inspectorate will no longer have the authority to control taxi services. Furthermore, the amendment would introduce 'chauffeur service' (*najem vozila z voznikom*) as a new type of activity, providing for the transport of a maximum of eight passengers; it may be possible for drivers to offer this service without an employment contract. The driver will need to have a 'licence for the

transportation of passengers', but as of spring 2018, it is unclear whether the platform or the driver will have to obtain this licence and what the conditions will be. A taximeter will not be required if the online application calculates fares before each ride, which would allow platforms to charge prices according to demand levels.

The impact of such general regulatory developments on platform work is illustrated by the case of Uber in Denmark. In 2017, Denmark passed new taxi regulations, including requirements for tax reporting and control devices in taxis. Following this, Uber chose to stop its activities in the country, as it did not agree to being considered a 'taxi company'.

Table 12 presents an overview of specific regulations for platform work as well as general regulations affecting it (either planned or recently entered into in force). These are listed by country and are accurate as of early 2018.

### In short: Regulatory discourse on platform work

- As of early 2018, there was no specific regulation clarifying the employment status of platform workers in any of the Member States analysed. As a result, existing employment statuses are valid for platform workers if their characteristics are applicable to platform work.
- In practice, the terms and conditions of platforms largely determine the employment status of workers, which is usually self-employed. Some platforms offer an employment contract, although this is often not provided consistently for all workers on the same platform.
- The ambiguity of employment status has led to court cases across the EU; decisions are made case by case, with courts considering the specific employment relationship and the national regulatory frameworks. This results in differing rulings on comparable cases, and the highest judicial court rulings (hence, final decisions) were still pending as of early 2018.
- Self-employment or other employment statuses generally provide lower social protection than employment contracts. These workers are not covered by social insurance against unemployment, accidents or occupational diseases unless they cover the cost themselves.
- Health and safety regulation is linked to employment status and hence conditions for self-employed platform workers are less favourable.
- A specific employment status for platform workers has been proposed in some countries, but this has generally been rejected by policymakers who argue that it is unlikely to solve the issue of potential misclassification.
- No information is available on whether or not self-employed platform workers fulfil their tax obligations. However, there is some evidence that workers are familiar with the regulations and intentionally limit their income to stay below certain thresholds in order to benefit from more favourable tax regimes.
- Specific tax regulation of platform work has been established in Belgium and Estonia. In several other countries, amendments to labour law (related, for example, to flexibility or bogus self-employment) or regulation of certain sectors (such as transport) are planned; while these do not exclusively relate to platform work, they will most likely also affect this form of employment.

Table 12: Regulation of platform work, by Member State, early 2018

Country	Specific regulations for platform work	Recent or planned general regulations affecting platform work
Belgium	As of 2016, a favourable tax regime applies to platform work if income is generated through a recognised platform (reduced tax rate and exemption from value-added tax on earnings up to a certain amount).	
Croatia		Plans to amend the labour code to better regulate flexible forms of work.
Denmark		New taxi regulations passed in 2017.
Estonia	In 2015, the Tax and Customs Board agreed a simplified declaration of taxes on earnings through the platforms with Taxify and Uber.	Since 2018, part-time self-employed workers benefit from a reduced tax rate, which is also applicable to platform workers. The 2017 Public Transportation Act regulates ride-sharing services vis-à-vis taxi services.
Finland		Planned legislative change for a better combination of employee and entrepreneurial social protection.
France	Law 2016-1088 defines 'electronic platforms', extends social security coverage against accidents at work to self-employed platform workers, and facilitates their exercise of collective action rights, access to continuing vocational education and validation of acquired experience.	Favourable taxation for micro-entrepreneurs for income up to a certain threshold. Many platform workers operate as micro-entrepreneurs.
Ireland		The Competition (Amendment) Act 2017 introduced two novel categories of workers, the 'false self-employed' and the 'fully dependent self-employed', enabling such workers to have union representation, a development that could benefit platform workers.
Italy		Two draft bills: the Italian Sharing Economy (Tax) Act, suggesting a lower or no tax charge apply to income up to a certain threshold); and a Bill on 'provisions on self-employment mediated by digital platforms regulating umbrella organisations such as cooperatives for self-employed persons', which is related to social protection.
Netherlands		Plan to introduce a minimum tariff for the self-employed to combat bogus self-employment.
Slovenia		Plan to amend the Road Transport Act could introduce 'chauffeur services' as a new type of activity and could result in deregulation.

Source: Source: Authors' own elaboration





## 5 Representation

### Representative bodies for platform workers

Both trade unions and new bodies are making an effort to represent platform workers in a considerable number of countries. Among the analysed countries, trade union activities are reported for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK. New bodies, such as cooperatives and foundations, play a role in the representation of platform workers in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Spain and the UK. Platform workers have launched their own initiatives in several countries, which have materialised into protests and strikes in Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the UK.

Regardless of the representative body, the representation of platform workers comes with significant challenges. The uncertainty around their employment status and the intermediary role of platforms imply that existing industrial relations and social dialogue structures are often not a good fit with platform work. Furthermore, platform workers typically do not share a common identity, may not consider themselves workers, are not physically present at a single workplace, may frequently enter and exit employment, and may fear retaliation if they join a union. The global nature of some platforms and the diversity in the types of platform work further complicate organisation and representation. At the same time, two-thirds of German platform workers responding to a survey indicated that unions play a role in improving their working conditions (Al-Ani and Stumpp, 2015).

#### Trade unions

In some countries, national competition laws prohibit the organisation of self-employed platform workers. This is the case in Denmark, where it is common practice to classify platform workers as self-employed without employees, and national competition law forbids these workers from joining a trade union or employer organisation. In Poland, where the default status of platform workers is self-employed, they can only join dedicated unions for the self-employed.

In other countries, platform workers can join a union. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) in Ireland, for example, have platform workers among their members. In Austria, platform workers with an employment contract can join a union and are required to become a member of the Austrian Chamber

of Labour, though there is no union specifically targeted at platform workers in the country.

In a number of countries, trade unions have opened up their membership to the self-employed, making them accessible to platform workers. IG Metall and Ver.di in Germany, for example, have changed their statutes so that self-employed workers can join. Similarly, in Sweden, self-employed workers can join some unions, but these tend to be predominantly unions representing white-collar workers, such as Unionen.

**In a number of countries, trade unions have opened up their membership to the self-employed, making them accessible to platform workers.**

Another interesting case is France, where self-employed workers can join any trade union, though there are also unions dedicated to self-employed workers. With the 2016 revision of the labour code, the self-employed have the right to undertake collective action, even without the involvement or support of a trade union. This also applies to platform workers, who have explicitly been given the right to collective action, to form or join a union, and to have their collective interests defended. In Italy, three unions have set up sections dedicated to those in precarious and freelance work, which can include platform workers. Platform workers in Italy do not seem to have a strong interest in being represented, while unions do not appear to be concerned about their representation.

Nevertheless, in some of the surveyed countries, trade unions are taking action, by, for example, supporting court cases and conducting information campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the conditions of platform work (such as handing out flyers or joining existing Facebook groups). Some unions have set up working groups or published position papers on the issue (in Italy, for example).

German trade unions, in particular, have been frontrunners in engaging platform workers, notably IG Metall, Ver.di and a number of smaller actors such as IG BAU, the Free Workers' Union, and the Food, Beverages and Catering Union. In 2016, IG Metall launched Fair Crowd Work, an initiative aimed at collecting and sharing information on issues related to platform work, including workers' rights, working conditions and platform reviews. Fair Crowd Work has

developed into a joint project of IG Metall, the Austrian Chamber of Labour, the Austrian Trade Union Confederation (ÖGB), and the Swedish union Unionen. These four organisations, in cooperation with the Danish Union of Commercial and Clerical Workers (HK), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 117, and the Service Employees International Union, drafted and signed the Frankfurt Declaration on Platform-based Work. This declaration outlines the conditions for fair platform work such as minimum income and working hours and access to social security. In addition, the Swedish trade union Unionen is developing a plan to certify platforms that provide fair and socially sustainable working conditions. Swedish unions see it as their primary task to inform platform workers about their rights and the conditions of platform work, whereas organising these workers remains a goal for the longer-term.

The German unions Ver.di, IG BAU, the Free Workers Union, and the Food, Beverages and Catering Union have also facilitated negotiations between platforms and platform workers with regard to working conditions and pay in their respective sectors. These negotiations have resulted in several collective agreements.

In Belgium, trade unions try to mobilise those platform workers employed under the status of student or employee. Their efforts have mostly focused on people working on transportation platforms. This is also true in France, where the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (UNSA) established a specific branch for Uber drivers and the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) launched a union for bike couriers in the department of Gironde. No further information on these initiatives is available at present.

In the UK, several unions, notably the GMB, Unite, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), the United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Industrial Workers of the World Union (IWW), have been heavily involved in tribunal cases clarifying the employment status of platform workers, as well as in industrial action and other initiatives of collective voice.

In Denmark, HK has developed a special insurance scheme for freelancers (HK Freelancer) in cooperation with the insurance company Alka. It covers company insurance and health and safety insurance, including accidents at work. While not exclusively targeting platform workers, self-employed workers can access the service without being full members (as noted above, the self-employed cannot be members of trade unions in Denmark), and it is offered at an affordable price, making it particularly appealing to platform workers. Furthermore, the Danish trade union 3F and the platform Hilfr signed the first collective agreement on platform work in Denmark in April 2018 (Fagbladet3F, 2017; Fagbladet3F, 2018). The agreement will enter into force by 1 August 2018 and will run as a pilot for 12 months. Workers will be paid at least DKK 130 per hour

(€17.45 as at 17 August 2018) and an additional DKK 20 (€2.70) as a 'welfare supplement'. The latter must be set aside by the worker for sickness, retirement, holidays and similar contingencies. There will be an information exchange between the platform and tax authorities.

In Italy, the Riders' Union Bologna, the three main trade union confederations, the city council and the local food-delivery platform Sgnam-MyMenu signed a Charter of Fundamental Rights of Digital work in an Urban Context (Carta dei diritti fondamentali del lavoro digitale nel contesto urbano) in May 2018. This is a voluntary framework on minimum standards for pay, working time and insurance coverage.

## Employer organisations

Platform workers are represented by employer organisations in some countries. In the Netherlands, for example, all Uber drivers are registered with the Chamber of Commerce as self-employed; private driving for Uber is forbidden. Another example is Austria, where all the self-employed, including platform workers, are obliged to register with the Austrian Economic Chambers. These examples, however, are the exception rather than the rule. In the majority of the countries, employer organisations have undertaken hardly any action to represent platform workers. This does not come as a surprise, given that platform workers generally cannot be classified as employers.

## Other bodies and initiatives

Next to these traditional representative bodies (employee and employer organisations), new formats of institutionally organised collective voice for platform workers have emerged in some countries, partly in cooperation with or as a spin-off from traditional representative bodies. Vandaele (2018) mentions examples in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

Arguably, the most discussed initiative is the SMart cooperative. Initially set up in Belgium in 1998 to provide services to freelancers in the creative industries, SMart is now also active in the field of platform work (negotiating employment and working conditions with platforms) and has expanded to other European countries (Vandaele, 2018).

In Denmark, the Danish Association of Professional Technicians has established a bureau for freelancers (technicians and designers), which also encompasses those performing platform work. The bureau provides advice to freelancers regarding contracts but was not able to establish a collective agreement for freelancers as it had planned. Similarly, in Finland, the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff, Akava, established Entre, a lobbying organisation to represent entrepreneurs and self-employed professionals with higher education, in collaboration with 21 trade unions of the Confederation

## Box 15: Bike couriers' collective in Belgium

After the platform Take Eat Easy went bankrupt in 2016, food-delivery platform workers formed the Collectif des coursier-e-s/KoeriersKollectief in Belgium. The group organises bike couriers from several platforms, such as Uber Eats, Deliveroo and Takeaway, and is supported by the National Union of Employees (CNE) and the Transport and Communications (Transcom) division of the General Christian Trade Union (ACV). As well as holding meetings and liaising with other representative bodies across Europe, its members exchange ideas with activists from different places on Facebook. Their Facebook group has more than 1,700 followers as of May 2018.

Furthermore, the members organise protests (three in 2017, four in the first half of 2018) and strikes (two in January 2018), mainly related to issues with Deliveroo. In January 2018, they set up a strike pot to collect money to support striking workers and 'strike banks', that is, physical locations where supporters could donate money to strikers. With this, they raised €1,300.

Sources: Andersen, 2018; Collectif des Coursier-e-s, n.d.; Voor Verbetering Vatbaar, 2017.

of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff. Membership in one of these unions is a prerequisite for becoming a member of Entre. Entre aims to secure fair working conditions for platform workers, particularly to ensure that they are covered by similar protections as employees and have access to unemployment insurance and occupational healthcare (with workers covering the costs of the occupational healthcare). As of spring 2018, Entre had around 15,000 members and estimates that less than 5% of these are platform workers.

In some countries, platform workers started their own initiatives to join forces to raise the issue of their employment status. This type of organisation typically starts online, with Facebook or WhatsApp groups or on other social media. In Poland, where platform workers are self-employed by default, freelancers and self-employed workers tend to organise themselves through internet forums and other associations such as the Self-Employed Association established in 2013.

Because these initiatives are launched by the platform workers themselves, many are limited to specific sectors. In France, for example, platform workers working through transportation platforms have created the Union of Private Chauffeurs (SCP-VTC). In Austria, a works council for Foodora couriers was set up with the support of vida, the transport and service trade union. Although works councils are normally exclusive to employees, the Foodora works council allows self-employed couriers to participate in their discussions informally. The works council has entered into discussions with the Austrian Economic Chambers about how collective agreements could be applied to platform workers. As of spring 2018, the works council had not yet concluded any agreements with Foodora. Nevertheless, the works council and platform have negotiated on specific issues, such as bike repair.

However, the success of such initiatives in terms of improving employment and working conditions of platform workers seems limited. In Estonia, for example, Taxify drivers organised a meeting in 2018 to

campaign against the platform's new pricing plan that resulted in a lower income for the drivers. During the meeting, the drivers expressed their dissatisfaction with the pricing policy, including lack of codetermination. No particular outcome can be reported at present.

### The success of workers' initiatives in improving their employment and working conditions seems limited.

In Slovenia, drivers affiliated to GoOpti, a platform matching the supply of and demand for transport services, posted leaflets on vans to protest against working conditions in 2014. Together with the trade union ZSSS, they reported violations of drivers' rights to the labour inspectorate, which sanctioned the platform on the grounds that the employment status of the workers was misclassified (they were classified as self-employed rather than employees). As a result, in 2015, the platform adopted a new business model. Since then, it has subcontracted the tasks to transport companies rather than employing drivers themselves.

In the UK, Uber drivers in London formed a collective and online social media presence, the Uber London Drivers Network, which supported them in their case against Uber. After the Employment Tribunal acknowledged that Uber drivers should be classified as workers in 2016, the network shared information on Facebook about the implications of the ruling. It also provided contact details of people who could help the drivers to retrieve the back pay that they were entitled to and to assist drivers in raising similar cases against Uber. Following this, when Uber appealed the decision, the Drivers Network protested at the court house in London in September 2017. The organisation is part of the trade body for private car hire, United Private Hire Drivers (UPHD). UPHD is a not-for-profit company with free membership that describes itself as a driver-run

trade organisation that exists exclusively for private-hire drivers. Also in the UK, one of the Uber drivers established Networked Rights, a not-for-profit organisation focusing on research and advocacy for the advancement of rights in platform work, consumer supply chains and business networks.

In Spain, delivery riders, notably those affiliated to Deliveroo, founded a Facebook group Riders x Derechos (Riders for Rights), to agitate for better working conditions, including the right to be granted employee status. They have also created the National Association of Bike Courier Services (Asociación Nacional de Ciclomensajería), which tries to support and offer useful information to delivery riders. For example, the association maintains a website that explains the different tax regimes that may apply to riders, what they should do in the case of an accident and more. In July 2017, the association organised a march in Madrid to protest about the conditions of Deliveroo riders.

A similar, more institutionalised example of worker-organised initiatives is the Riders' Union in the Netherlands. This was started by workers affiliated to the food-delivery platform Deliveroo who set up a Facebook group and tried to also mobilise riders of similar platforms (such as Foodora, Uber Eats and Thuisbezorgd). Their marches during late 2017 to protest against plans for riders to be treated as self-employed by default as of February 2018, as well as two strikes in January 2018, were supported by the Dutch trade union FNV. In May 2018, Deliveroo announced it would automatically insure all of its 35,000 workers across 12 countries for accidents that occur while working. Riders would be entitled to three-quarters of their salary for a period of one month. The Riders' Union and FNV have criticised the proposal as inadequate (Riders' Union Facebook page).

## Industrial action

Examples of industrial action (strikes, lockouts or other action due to disagreement over a particular issue between workers and employers (ILO, 1993)) can be identified in several countries. This is especially true for transportation and food-delivery platforms, notably Deliveroo, Foodora and Uber. Vandaele (2018) notes, for example, that food couriers have gone on strike in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. Like the worker initiatives, little information about the effectiveness of such activities is available, suggesting it has been limited.

In the Netherlands, for example, around 80 workers affiliated to the food-delivery platform Deliveroo went on strike in major cities in January 2018 because of the platform's refusal to extend contracts unless the workers registered as self-employed. The strike was supported by FNV jong, the youth branch of one of the country's major trade unions. Later in the month, Dutch riders went on another one-day strike to support Belgian Deliveroo riders who had been on strike for more than a week (as in the Netherlands, supported by trade unions). Furthermore, Deliveroo riders from France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands travelled to Brussels to join their Belgian counterparts in demonstrations (Bhagwat, 2018).

Delivery-platform workers in Italy have organised strikes, boycotts and mass disconnection during promotional events and flash-mobs in Bologna, Milan and Turin, in addition to organising information campaigns (for example handing out flyers). These workers have organised themselves into groups with the help of social media.

In Spain, hundreds of Deliveroo riders went on strike in July 2017, halting work for several hours to take part in protests in Madrid and Barcelona (Retina, 2017). Their demands included a decent salary, reduced salary uncertainty (at least two guaranteed deliveries per hour) and a minimum working time of 20 working hours per week (Eldiario.es, 2017). Traditional trade unions such as the CCOO and the UGT supported their demands, arguing that this kind of digital platform refuses to adhere to the current labour legislation and may increase precariousness in the labour market (El Mundo, 2017).

In the UK, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) supported a group of Deliveroo drivers during their six days of strike action and protests against changes to pay in August 2016, following the announcement of plans to reduce hourly pay during quieter periods for some riders (The Independent, 2016). The dispute, which was also backed by the government, was resolved largely in the workers' favour and a new pay system introduced (Metro, 2016). The pay-per-delivery structure is optional and any rider who had made the switch is allowed to opt back out.

From this discussion, it is clear that several forms of representation can co-exist and may even come into competition with each other, as suggested by an expert interviewed for this study. However, this concern was neither voiced by other interviewees nor mentioned in the literature, and no examples were found. In fact, trade unions appear to support the initiatives of platform workers rather than attempt to compete with them.



## Representative bodies for platforms

Traditional employer organisations are generally not very active in bringing platforms into their organisation, as they do not perceive platforms as employers but rather as intermediaries. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence is available of cases where platforms joined employer organisations or registered with the Chamber of Commerce. In Croatia, for example, Uber joined CEA-ICT, a branch of the Croatian Employers' Organisation (CEA) on its own initiative in 2016. Also in the Netherlands, Uber is registered with the Chamber of Commerce (under NACE code 62.09 – other information technology and computer service activities). In Austria, platforms such as Book A Tiger, Foodora and Uber are registered with the Economic Chambers, as any company registered in the country is legally obliged to do. Austria and the Netherlands are particularly interesting cases in this context, since platforms and self-employed platform workers are required to join the same representative body. This leads to situations in which Uber drivers, Uber and competing transportation companies (including platforms) end up in the same representative body.

The platforms GoOpti and Cammeo are members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Slovenia, GZS. In the interviews conducted for this project, representatives of both platforms mentioned that this was on their initiative as they wished to stay informed.

Initiatives to represent platforms by other bodies or the platforms themselves are scarce. Research conducted for this project shows that platforms appear to have little interest in organising and representing themselves. Platforms may refrain from joining an employer organisation because most consider themselves intermediaries, matching supply and demand, rather than employers. Another issue is that platforms may not always be fully aware of what sector or organisation they would best fit in (for example, IT versus transportation). In addition, platforms are still relatively new and frequently regard each other as competitors.

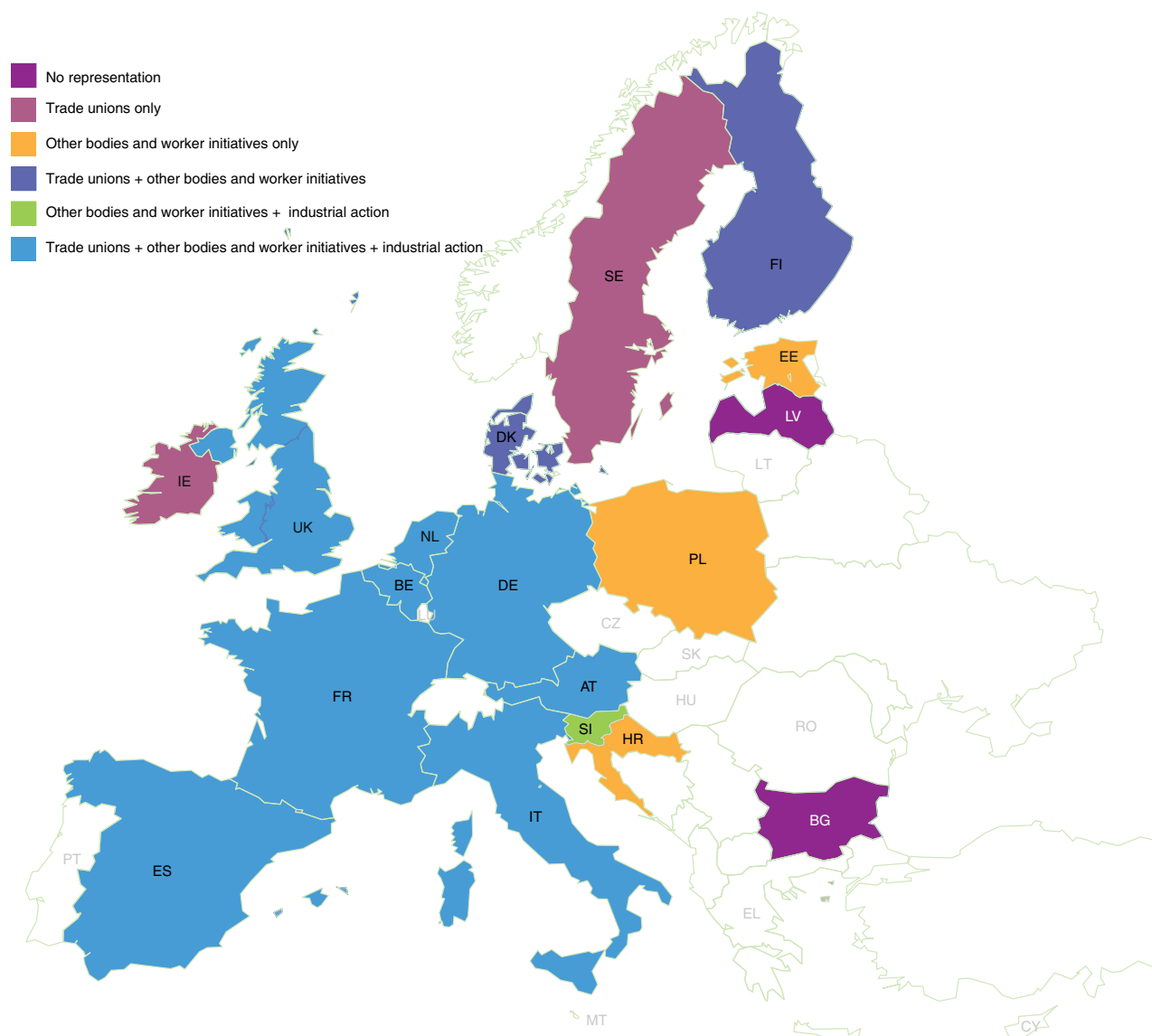
That being said, several specific bodies representing platforms have been identified. In Germany, for example, eight platforms formed the German Crowdsourcing Association. This association aims to promote collaboration between platforms and platform workers, adhering to principles of self-regulation stipulated in the Frankfurt Declaration. Together with the trade union IG Metall, the association has established an Ombuds Office, which functions as a conflict resolution mechanism.

In Estonia, the NGO Estonian Sharing Economy Association (Eesti Jagamismajanduse Liit) was founded in 2016. The founding members are a mix of work-related platforms (Goworkabit, Helpific, Postpal, Taxify and Wisemile) and platforms facilitating other types of transactions (including the car rental service Autolevi, the crowdfunding platform Bondora, the crowd investment portal Fundwise, the logistics service Shipitwise and the catering service Toitla). A current list of members was not available as of spring 2018. The Minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure met representatives of the association to discuss how the state can eliminate obstacles to their operation and to explore opportunities for cooperation between the state and platforms. As of spring 2018, there had been no legislative changes that can be traced back to these efforts.

Sharing Economy Denmark and Ireland are non-profit associations made up of platforms (not limited to labour platforms). Their objectives are to raise awareness of the platform economy, to establish standards for responsible practices related to the platform economy (for example, they published a code of conduct on their website) and to respond to the shared challenges of their members.

A final example is Sharing España in Spain, which aims to promote the development and growth of platform work and improve the reputation of this employment model. It stemmed from Adigital, the Spanish Association of Digital Economy, and started in December 2014 at the initiative of platforms. As of spring 2018, Sharing España had more than 30 platforms as members, including Deliveroo and Uber. Its objectives are to analyse and disseminate the impact of these new economic models, to build trust around them and promote their growth, and to collaborate in the development of policies affecting them. Sharing España provides updated information on recent developments concerning the platform economy and lobbies in favour of its members.

The lack of representation of platforms has been a cause for concern among trade unions and other bodies representing platform workers. In the absence of platform representation, there may not be a partner for the platform worker representatives to negotiate with. In light of this, public authorities in France have announced plans to take measures to encourage representation of platform workers and platforms. One idea is to create a platform observatory that includes the social partners and relevant stakeholders. The platform observatory would collect and share knowledge on the employment and working conditions of platform workers and stimulate social dialogue between platform workers and platforms through discussions and working groups (France Stratégie, 2017).

**Figure 3: Overview of representation of platform workers by Member State, early 2018**

**Notes:** No data were available for 10 EU Member States.

### In short: Representation of platform workers and platforms

- The representation of platform workers is made difficult by unclear employment status; a general lack of common identity; the absence of a common, fixed workplace; and the volatility of this employment form.
- In many countries, trade unions endeavour to organise platform workers and provide a collective voice for them: they support court cases, organise information campaigns, draft codes of conduct, or facilitate negotiations between workers and platforms, resulting in first collective agreements.
- In parallel, new types of institutions have been set up to provide information to platform workers and assist them in improving their working conditions.
- Furthermore, less institutionalised worker initiatives are being established; generally, these are sector- or task-specific and mainly serve to provide information and foster exchanges among platform workers; hence, for the time being, they have limited success in terms of improving working conditions.
- Platform workers have already organised a number of strikes across Europe; however, in most cases, their outcomes remain unclear.
- Overall, the organisation of platforms is limited; in several countries, however, specific bodies representing platforms have been established to promote this new business model and establish standards through codes of conduct.



# Conclusions and policy pointers

## Conclusions

This study, as well as the existing literature on the topic, shows that platform work is an emerging form of employment in Europe. While still small in scale, and despite the lack of good data, it is clearly growing rapidly. It is a dynamic form of employment, continuously evolving in its scope. In the last few years, platforms have gone from handling mainly online, small-scale and low-skilled routine tasks (click-work) to mediating a wide variety of services.

Platform work is already high on the policy agenda and has entered the public debate in at least some Member States, driven mainly by trade unions and media reporting, which have voiced concerns about the employment and working conditions of the workers involved. With regard to this, it should be borne in mind that platform work could simultaneously have positive and negative impacts on both individual workers and the labour market. In light of this potential, this study aimed to set out the possible advantages and disadvantages of this employment form, with the goal of raising awareness among policymakers and facilitating their debate. For that purpose, some of the main challenges associated with platform work, or its specific types, are summarised below.

**No common definition or conceptualisation of the platform economy or platform work exists across Europe.** A wide range of terms are used at present (such as sharing economy, gig economy, collaborative economy, on-demand economy and peer-to-peer economy), with similar or identical meanings to that used in this study. The proliferation of terms and meanings complicates the policy debate, because it leads policymakers to have different understandings of similar issues. The main debate regarding the definition of platform work is around the inclusion of online services and services delivered in person, as well as the services implicit when providing goods (such as renting out a property). Discussions seem to lack awareness of the increasing heterogeneity of the platform economy and platform work, and the impacts this may have on working and employment conditions.

**The scale of the platform economy and its importance for the EU labour market is practically unknown.** Several attempts to quantify the platform economy have had varying results. The differences are due to issues with the quality (accuracy, completeness and comparability) of administrative data, potential sample biases in surveys and inconsistencies in definitions. A lack of reliable data complicates the assessment of the different types of platform work and their importance. However, based on the limited available data and a

review of the active platforms in the different Member States, online professional services and local transport services seem to be the types of work most widely mediated by platforms, followed by household services, which are emerging in many Member States.

**Platform work is highly diverse, and models are constantly changing.** An earlier Eurofound study identified 27 characteristics with which to classify platform work. A subset of these was selected to identify the types of platform work most prevalent in Europe as of 2017. Ten types were identified, and for three of these, this study assessed the employment and working conditions in detail: on-location platform-determined work, on-location worker-initiated work and online contest work. The findings suggest that substantial differences exist in employment and working conditions between the three types.

**The employment status of many platform workers is currently unclear.** To date, no Member State has a dedicated employment status for platform workers, which means that they are classified under traditional employment statuses. But the legal definitions of employee and self-employed are often unclear, making any final judgement of potential misclassification of platform workers dependent on case-by-case court rulings. Some platforms explicitly offer their workers an employment contract or other status such as student worker. Otherwise, the terms and conditions of the platform usually determine the official relationship, but platforms may not specify which status a worker has – merely that the platform intermediates between them and the client. It could thus be assumed that the platform worker is considered to be self-employed by the platform. This has been contested in court in several countries, where platform workers, often with the support of trade unions, claim to be employees instead of self-employed. Cases have been taken mainly in the case of platform-determined work, where platforms have a certain level of control, determining the time, place and manner of work, while ‘outsourcing’ traditional employer responsibilities to the workers.

In other cases, it is clearer that the platform workers are not employees, such as workers doing on-location worker-initiated and online contest work, as they act more autonomously when carrying out the tasks mediated by the platform. Interestingly, certain platforms providing on-location platform-determined work consider the workers in some countries as employees and in others as self-employed. A person’s employment status is important, since in most Member States it determines the level of social protection they receive, and the level is generally lower for self-employed workers than for employees.

Platform work was not the main source of income for the large majority of the interviewees; it is a side activity. For most of these platform workers, their main activity provides their access to social protection. These country-specific exemptions and exceptional employment statuses have thus far received little attention in the academic literature.

**Additional income, flexibility, gaining experience, attracting clients and lack of opportunity in the traditional labour market appear to be the main motivations for platform workers to engage in this employment form.** However, large differences exist across types of platform work regarding earnings and opportunities in the traditional labour market. For example, migrants who do not speak the national language and often lack job opportunities seem to be drawn to on-location platform-determined work, which has few entry barriers and requires only basic skills. For these workers, earnings from platform work are more likely to be their main source of income, and they often have less flexibility in determining their working hours than other types of platform workers. For on-location worker-initiated work, there tends to be more scope for flexibility, which gives the workers more independence from the platform. The workers in this category can usually set their own rates and determine their own hours. Some providers use the platform to attract clients prior to launching a new business or expanding their existing business. For the online contestants, the opportunity to gain experience and work for well-known brands are significant motives for engaging in platform work. This also explains why contestants are willing to participate in the contests despite highly unpredictable outcomes and no guarantee of earnings.

While platform work can generally be considered a beneficial tool for labour market integration, insufficient information is currently available on the long-term career prospects of platform workers. Overall, they seem to have little interest in establishing a career within the platform economy and have few opportunities to do so if they had. This is somewhat problematic as regards on-location platform-determined work. As this type of platform work is characterised by low-skilled tasks and limited access to training, it is questionable whether it fosters workers' employability by acting as a stepping stone to more traditional forms of employment. Similarly, training provision and occupational skills development were found to be limited for worker-initiated platform work and online contestants. However, these types of platform work can enhance a worker's employability in the traditional labour market, since they can increase opportunities for freelance and self-employed activities, for example by attracting clients or enabling workers to build up a portfolio.

**Some working conditions of platform workers are similar to those of workers conducting the same activity in the traditional labour market.** For example, the physical environment and social environment are largely determined by the work the platform workers actually perform, so do not differ substantially from self-employed activity in the same sector. It is frequently the case that platform workers must be more self-reliant than employees. This can be particularly problematic for on-location platform-determined work, where workers are more exposed to physically demanding tasks and potentially unsafe work environments, while receiving less support from a platform than a traditional employer would be obliged to give (with regard to working time or health and safety standards, for instance). Workers must also provide at least some essential equipment or materials for the job themselves (for example, cars or bikes).

**The use of new technologies creates specific challenges for working conditions.** New technologies allow platforms to continuously monitor these workers while they work, the results of which are in some cases communicated to the workers, indicating their relative performance. This can be problematic if the performance review is exclusively automated (that is, based on algorithms) as this type of monitoring can fail to take into account specific situations beyond the workers' control that might negatively affect their rating and hence their access to work (for example equipment failures, harassment, accidents and wrong client or restaurant addresses). Most of the platforms automatically suspend the worker after a number of 'strikes' (negative marks of their performance) or when their rating falls below a certain threshold. This is even more problematic when the details of the algorithm are not transparent to the workers and unfavourable ratings are kept in the workers' track record indefinitely.

**Platform workers generally have much less contact with clients or the platform than workers performing similar work in the traditional labour market.** They often receive limited local support from superiors and colleagues when problems arise, which creates problems for on-location platform-determined work especially. And when support is provided, it is often after a time delay and from a distance, leaving the workers to fend for themselves. For the local worker-initiated workers and online contestants who have more control over their own activities, the automation of the interaction is perceived to be less problematic. However, as this work used to be conducted in an undeclared way or completely independently, platforms may provide more support for workers than in the traditional labour market as regards finding work or clients and formalising the employment relationship.

**The risk of discrimination and harassment is both reduced and amplified in platform work.** On the one hand, the use of ratings and online profiles might disadvantage new entrants doing on-location types of work or allow clients to treat some preferentially based on factors such as ethnicity. With regard to harassment, difficulties contacting the platform and the platform's delay in dealing with issues can put platform workers in a more precarious position than traditional employees.

On the other hand, ratings can reduce discrimination and harassment compared to similar work in the traditional economy when workers can conceal parts of their identity, as is the case for most online services. And some platforms have introduced trial assignments to screen entry to the platform based on objective criteria. Moreover, the use of algorithms for on-location platform-determined work with no biases in terms of age, gender or ethnicity appears to lead to less discrimination than traditional work.

**Ratings are particularly important for on-location worker-initiated platform work.** For workers engaged in this type of work, having a high rating signals trustworthiness, which substantially enhances their chances of finding work. To some extent, higher ratings may be offset by lower prices, though for tasks that require a certain level of trust (such as tasks in a private home), ratings are more important. For on-location platform-determined work, a minimum rating is often required to continue providing services on the platform, but even with a score below that of other platform workers in the same location, there are usually opportunities to work. For online contestants, while clients can sometimes rate their work, the ratings are largely irrelevant with regard to earnings.

**Most platform workers consider themselves overqualified for their platform work.** In most cases, on-location work requires basic skills, whereas workers often possess professional qualifications or academic degrees. Online contestants, however, usually need more advanced skills to participate in contests. Some of the platforms conduct interviews or require platform workers to prove that they have the required credentials to perform the tasks. Moreover, platforms in the on-location platform-determined work category sometimes offer workers induction training, which is usually very basic and tends to be focused on app usage and safety guidelines. Considering their more 'employee-like' relationship, these workers are likely to be disadvantaged as regards access to training compared to workers in the traditional labour market doing similar tasks. However, confirming this would require a more in-depth analysis of training provision for specific occupations, sectors and skills levels across the different employment forms. Many of the workers doing on-location worker-initiated work and online contests indicated using online resources to train themselves, which is probably very similar to workers in

the traditional labour market conducting comparable tasks.

**Earnings are highly uncertain for most types of platform work.** On-location worker-initiated work seems to have most predictable earnings, as workers set their own prices and largely determine their own working time as long as there are sufficient tasks available. Earnings from platform-determined work is often dependent on the shifts, tasks and bonuses granted by the platform, making it possible to estimate earnings to some extent, but still with a large degree of variation. The workers are paid by the hour, by task or a combination of both. If they are paid per task, waiting time in between tasks is unpaid and can vary in duration. The online contestants have the least control over their earnings, as they depend on the outcome of the contests. For this reason, they consider the contests unsuitable as a main source of income, whereas a small portion of the workers carrying out on-location work obtain their main income from this source.

Many of the platform workers limit their participation in the platform economy to remain within the lower tax brackets or below the thresholds for preferential tax treatment.

Finally, with the exception of some of the platform workers with an employment contract, earnings across all three types of platform work depend at least to some extent on demand for tasks and availability of platform workers.

**As well as the predictability of income, income levels are an important issue.** Again, considerable differences can be identified across types of platform work. Low-skilled and small-scale routine tasks that can be executed by anyone, anytime, anywhere tend to garner low rates of pay due to a high level of competition. In contrast, larger tasks that require higher skills levels are offered at decent market prices, comparable to or even higher than in the traditional labour market. Similarly, services matched online and delivered physically tend to have decent rates due to less competition and face-to-face contacts between workers and clients, which exerts some form of 'ethical pressure' on the latter to offer fair payment. Finally, as collective action initiatives, organised either through trade unions or through newly emerging representative bodies, seem to be more prevalent for on-location platform work, some first successes in negotiating decent rates with individual platforms could be identified.

**Tax compliance seems best ensured when the platform is responsible for declaring workers' earnings.** Many of the platform workers interviewed for this study are unsure about the appropriate tax treatment of their earnings from platform work. This is less of a concern for platform workers with an employment contract (as is the case for some of those providing on-location platform-determined services), or

when a specific tax regime requires the platform to pay the taxes (as is sometimes the case for on-location worker-initiated work). For the other situations, where there is no exchange of information between the platform and the tax authorities, it is highly uncertain whether workers' tax obligations are currently being fulfilled, in particular for earnings from services delivered online through a foreign platform, as is the case for some online contests.

**In most cases, platform workers do not have collective representation, and when they do, it is generally through their own initiatives or trade unions.** When platform workers have the status of employee, representation is similar to that of conventional employees, including coverage by collective agreements. When platform workers are self-employed, however, it becomes more complicated since many trade unions and business organisations do not consider self-employed workers eligible for membership. This has changed somewhat in recent years, with trade unions in several countries allowing self-employed workers to become members or setting up dedicated unions for self-employed workers. In addition, in about half of the countries analysed, platform workers have launched initiatives themselves. In particular, workers providing on-location platform-determined services have used social media and WhatsApp to create groups to exchange their experiences and coordinate strikes and protests to prevent deterioration of their working conditions. However, for now at least, these initiatives have not had much impact. The situation is different for platform worker groups that are supported by trade unions, which in some cases have been able to secure better working conditions. Workers performing on-location worker-initiated work and online contestants showed substantially less or no interest in organising themselves, which might derive from their greater independence from the platform. Moreover, for the online contestants, some interviewees expect that the potential role of trade unions is limited because the workers are based worldwide, and platforms may be based abroad.

**Trade unions dominate the public debate in the large majority of the studied countries.** This focuses the debate on the negative impact that platform work might have on the labour market, such as erosion of working conditions, reduced access to social security and job insecurity as well as concerns over employment status. Concerns have also been raised that platforms might have an unfair competitive advantage over traditional employers because platforms have fewer responsibilities for working conditions and workers have greater scope to avoid or evade tax. Some actors additionally highlight data privacy and consumer protection issues. Although most of the public debate takes place within national contexts, it may also cross

borders, as illustrated by worker organisations from Europe and North America issuing the Frankfurt Declaration on Platform-Based Work.

Business representatives are much less vocal but have sometimes drawn attention to the possibility of enhanced flexibility, innovation and competitive advantage for the economy driven by platforms. Governments are largely absent from the debate in most of the Member States studied. In the countries where governments are active, they primarily commission studies about the potential implications of platform work, sometimes within the context of wider debates on digitalisation and the future of work. Limited concrete action could be identified as of early 2018.

## Policy pointers

Platform work is an emerging form of employment in Europe, characterised by increasing scale and scope for application. The current and previous research has demonstrated that it provides both advantages and disadvantages for the workers who perform it and the labour market. As the concept of platform work is still relatively new and rapidly evolving, its potential impacts are not yet fully clear and may change in the years to come. Nevertheless, it is safe to suggest that this employment form will multiply across European labour markets and beyond in the future. Policymakers should be advised to look further into platform work and to consider interventions to take advantage of the benefits inherent in this employment model while at the same time minimising the downsides for the workforce and the society. The following policy measures would be advised on the basis of the current research to improve the information available, mitigate the disadvantages, and stimulate positive outcomes from platform work.

**Use of a common definition for 'platform economy' and 'platform work'.** Most policy measures require a clear and neutral definition of platform economy and platform work to ensure that measures cover the targeted activities. Ideally, this definition should be shared by platforms, social partners, national governments, EU institutions and other stakeholders (such as researchers and NGOs). As a start, EU institutions and agencies could harmonise their terminology and understanding of the platform economy and platform work as presented in this study. Furthermore, an agreed definition should be accompanied by a shared typology of platform work, acknowledging the increasing heterogeneity within the employment model, which should be further considered in research and policy debate for a more meaningful discussion. The 10 types identified in this study as being most common in Europe as of 2017 could be a good starting point for further development.



**Extended monitoring of developments in the platform economy.** Although understanding of the platform economy has increased in recent years, it is still growing rapidly and the business models used by platforms are constantly evolving. Monitoring should incorporate the platform economy in official statistics at both Member State and EU levels (for example, by including several questions in the EU Labour Force Survey and the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), in addition to employment and working conditions across different types of platform work and longer-term prospects of workers. In this regard, efforts should be made to encourage platforms to share data, for example through experimentation and innovation sandboxes, which are controlled environments that allow initiatives to be tested safely. Furthermore, collecting qualitative information could facilitate the creation of synergies between individual interventions and exchange between stakeholders, while at the same time tackling the anticipated information overflow on the topic. Information could be gathered from policy papers and initiatives, court rulings and the experiences of workers, clients and platforms and made available in a ‘one-stop-shop’ online repository on platform work, allowing quick and user-friendly access. Such a resource could be organised by the European Commission, EU agencies and national governments.

**Policy measures should address the heterogeneity in the platform economy.** Platform work is very diverse, and different types have entirely different consequences for the workers. Policy measures (including potential legislation) should avoid oversimplification of platform work to prevent unintended consequences, meaning that targeted measures tailored for specific types of platform work may be required. Moreover, the measures should primarily target the larger platforms with many affiliated workers, which would limit the compliance costs for new platforms, allowing them to develop new and innovative business models. This in turn should help to ensure a healthy level of competition among platforms and avoid a ‘winner takes all’ dynamic within the platform economy.

**Platforms should be required to provide effective dispute-resolution mechanisms to ensure fair treatment of workers.** Platforms are largely automated, which means that when certain situations are not foreseen in the algorithm, it can disadvantage platform workers to the extent that they unfairly face suspension or even dismissal. Platforms often provide insufficient means to resolve such issues with actual people. This is particular problematic for workers who provide services in person, with tasks allocated by the platform. Additionally, platform clients may not always respect the intellectual property rights of online contestants – for example, clients paying for the winning submission but using other submissions as well – or their behaviour towards workers may be inappropriate. The resolution mechanism could

be arranged by the platform to allow for a swift procedure, but the possibility of appeal to an independent third party should also be considered, to ensure impartial treatment and to cater for conflicts between the worker and the platform. Legislative action at national level may be necessary to ensure that appropriate dispute-resolution mechanisms are put in place.

**Ratings should be fair, transparent and transferrable across platforms.** For some types of platform work, ratings determine whether workers can remain active on the platform or whether clients select them. It is often unclear to workers how the ratings are determined. The rating system and its influence on workers’ access to tasks should be transparent for both workers and clients. This also implies that algorithm-based ratings should be designed in a way that ensures their fairness. In this context, the potential advantages of standardising rating systems across platforms could also be explored. Additionally, the lack of positive ratings presents a barrier for new workers. Therefore, the option to establish an online reputation in the absence of previous ratings and the ability to transfer ratings between platforms that offer similar tasks could reduce friction costs, increase labour market access and mobility, and enhance competition between platforms. Moreover, platform workers often have no means to challenge unfair ratings. The option to appeal in such cases, alongside greater transparency, would promote fair rating systems for workers. Mechanisms that allow unfavourable ratings to be deleted under certain conditions should also be considered (for example, if there is evidence that they are not justified or if they are outbalanced by a certain number of positive ratings).

**The employment status of platform workers should be clarified.** The heterogeneity of work in the platform economy means it cannot be captured by a single employment status. Some platforms exert a substantial amount of control over workers, suggesting some level of subordination work and creating an employment or employment-like relationship (this is particularly the case for on-location platform-determined work). On the other hand, other types of platform work are more similar to traditional freelance work. Accordingly, there is a need to better differentiate the specific characteristics of certain types of platform work in the current discussions on employment status. In some situations, the definitions of employees, self-employed and any intermediate categories might require clarification in national legislation and stricter enforcement to avoid misclassifications.

**Minimum standards for platform-determined work should be set.** Platforms that allocate the work of platform workers and where limited skills are required are most likely to create a situation of dependent employment for platform workers. In these situations, there is a clear argument for stronger protection of

workers. This could include the introduction of a minimum hourly wage when the work is not covered by collective agreements or the legal minimum wage, but also could include working time arrangements (regarding lengths of shifts or breaks, for instance), access to training, or health and safety measures common in the traditional labour market. Such a regulatory intervention would limit competition between platforms on wage costs. For those providing more professional services (namely workers doing worker-initiated work and online contestants), this appears to be less of an issue, given their opportunities in the traditional labour market and the seemingly lower likelihood that these workers depend on platform work as their main job.

**Enhanced transparency before tasks are matched.**

Platform workers sometimes spend large amounts of unpaid time searching or preparing for tasks, while knowing relatively little about their chances of success. For example, information on how many workers participate in online contests and how many workers compete for a given type of on-location task is usually unavailable. Requiring enhanced transparency from the platforms on the number of participants or the chance of being selected for tasks could make time allocation and task selection more efficient for platform workers.

**Simple tax rules for side-earnings in the platform economy should be promoted.**

The large majority of the platform workers in Europe currently perform activities in the platform economy as a side activity. Many such activities previously went undeclared in the traditional labour market, or hardly existed (in particular, certain on-location worker-initiated work such as semi-professional handicraft work). To promote participation while ensuring tax compliance, simple tax rules should allow the platform and the workers to easily manage the payment of taxes to the authorities. Policymakers across the EU could consider a tax threshold, similar to the Belgian tax regime for platform work presented in this report. Furthermore, limiting the administrative burden associated with filing with tax authorities (as already established in Estonia) could increase declared economic activity. In turn, a clear limit with regard to the activities covered by the regime

might avoid creating unfair competition with full-time workers in the traditional economy.

**Platform workers should be supported to organise and establish representation.**

In terms of collective representation, this study found that, so far, efforts mainly relate to workers doing on-location platform-determined tasks. This is not surprising, considering that among the three types studied, this is the one with the most obvious challenges as regards working and employment conditions, and probably the one most similar to traditional employment relationships. However, activities of traditional representative bodies, newly emerging bodies and workers' initiatives are still limited and faced with challenges on how best to mobilise and represent workers. Enhanced exchange of experiences and ideas across the relevant stakeholders in Europe would foster joint learning on how to deal with the particularities of this emerging employment form and may even help to form joint initiatives for increased negotiating power. To achieve buy-in from the platform workforce, a tailor-made approach could be considered. Rather than aiming to address all platform workers, a specific and relatively homogenous group (such as the on-location platform-determined workers) could be targeted, taking into consideration their distinct characteristics and needs. Cooperation between traditional representative bodies and newly emerging structures should also be encouraged to reap the benefits inherent in the various approaches.

Going beyond the aspects of work and employment, which is the focus of the current study, policymakers should be aware that platform work is also related to other regulatory areas, such as business and competition law, data protection and privacy, intellectual property rights, consumer protection and third party liability. Public debate and policy intervention should consider a holistic package of approaches rather than isolated and individualistic measures, as the different areas are interrelated.

The overview in Table 13 summarises the conclusions and policy pointers derived from the current research, and indicates the stakeholders that could be considered suitable for implementation.



**Table 13: Main conclusions, associated policy pointers and stakeholders to whom they are relevant**

Conclusion	Policy pointer	Stakeholders
No common definition or conceptualisation of the platform economy and platform work exists across Europe, and awareness of the heterogeneity within platform work is widely lacking.	Use of a common definition for the platform economy and platform work, accompanied by a shared typology of platform work.	Platforms, social partners, Member States and EU
The scale of the platform economy and importance for the labour market in the EU is practically unknown.	Extended monitoring of developments in the platform economy and provision of a one-stop-shop for information on platform work.	Member States and EU
Platform work is highly diverse, and models are constantly changing.	Policy measures should recognise the heterogeneity of the platform economy.	Member States and EU
Additional income, more flexibility, gaining experience, attracting clients and lack of opportunity in the traditional labour market seem to be the main motivations to perform platform work; on-location platform-determined work seems to be more necessity-driven, while on-location worker-initiated tasks and online contests tend to be more opportunity-driven.		
Platform work is generally positive for labour market integration; as regards transition to the traditional labour market, employability-enhancing effects are limited as regards on-location platform-determined work, but positive for on-location worker-initiated tasks and online contests.		
Some working conditions are similar to those in the traditional labour market; notably on-location platform-determined workers might, however, be subject to less protection than their counterparts in the traditional labour market.		
The use of new technologies creates specific challenges for the working conditions, for example as regards automatised performance reviews affecting the access to work.	Ratings should be fair, transparent, and interoperable. A 'right to be forgotten' should be an option for negative ratings in certain circumstances. Workers should be able to also rate clients and platforms.	Platforms, Member States and EU
Platforms often support workers after a time-delay and from a distance, leaving the workers to fend for themselves.	Dispute-resolution mechanisms should be set up.	Platforms, social partners, Member States and EU
Discrimination and harassment is both mitigated and amplified in platform work	Dispute-resolution mechanisms should be set up. Raising awareness for the potential of algorithms to discriminate and ensuring that this does not happen.	Platforms, industrial partners, Member States and EU
Platform workers often consider themselves overqualified for the platform work they perform.	Extended monitoring of developments in the platform economy.	Member States and EU
The employment status of many platform workers is currently unclear.	Clarify the employment statuses of platform workers. Ensure social and legal protection of platform workers irrespective of their employment status.	Platforms, Member States and EU
Most platform workers seem to have special employment statuses.	Extend monitoring of the developments in the platform economy.	Member States and EU
Earnings are highly uncertain for most types of platform work.	Minimum standards for platform-determined work.	Platforms, social partners, Member States and EU
	Enhanced transparency before tasks are matched.	Platforms, Member States and EU

Conclusion	Policy pointer	Stakeholders
Tax compliance seems best ensured when the platform is responsible for declaring workers' earnings.	Promote simple tax rules for side-earnings in the platform economy and limit administrative burden.	Member States
Platform workers are usually not represented, and when represented, it is mostly through worker initiatives or trade unions.	Encourage exchange and cooperation across initiatives for collective voice of platform workers and apply a targeted approach for representation.	Platforms, social partners, Member States and EU
The public debate is dominated by trade unions in the large majority of the countries.		

Source: Authors' own elaboration

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# Annexes

## Annex 1: Additional information on the methodological approach of the study

Table A1 shows the basis for Eurofound's theoretical typology of platform work. It identifies 27 characteristics and the variants for each one. A platform work type can be regarded as a combination of one variant from each of the characteristics. In this way, millions of potential types of platform work can be identified.

**Table A1: Eurofound's theoretical characteristics of platform work and their variants**

No.	Characteristic	Variants
1	Relationship between platform, client and worker	Platform owner ≠ client, undefined crowd of clients and workers Employer-owned internal platform (platform owner = client, defined group of workers) Company-owned outsourcing platforms (platform owner = client, undefined crowd of workers) Cooperative platform structure (client = members of the platform, undefined crowd of workers)
2	Geographic scope of the platform	Regional/national International/several countries
3	Size of platform	Number of clients (relative to other platforms) Number of workers (relative to other platforms) Number of tasks or activities (relative to other platforms) Platform revenue
4	Market position of platform	Monopoly Oligopoly Competition
5	Sector, occupations	NACE (alternatively, as often used: transport, household tasks, professional tasks) ISCO (alternatively: task descriptions)
6	Dynamism of platform	Stable/static Dynamically changing
7	Transparency of client and worker	Anonymous Disclosed
8	Fees to platform	Registration (client, worker, task) Successful matching Successful task completion
9	Realisation of payments	Directly between client and worker Through the platform (deposit)
10	Conduct of platform	Existence and characteristics of terms and conditions Adherence to specific codes of conduct (for example, anti-discrimination) Data protection mechanisms Control/surveillance mechanisms Information provided to workers and clients (transparency) Ratings
11	Autonomy, including price setting	Hierarchy-like (low autonomy) (working time restrictions imposed by clients/platform; price determined by platform (standard or minimum prices) or client) Market-like (high autonomy) (worker free to choose when and how long to work; price determined by worker)

No.	Characteristic	Variants
12	Additional services offered by the platform	Matching vs. management of tasks Guidance or recommendations for clients and workers Pre-screening of ads or offers Training for workers
13	Type of contract/employment status between platform and platform workers	Employment relationship/labour law Civil law contract
14	Access to social protection	Full access Partial access No access
15	Access to representation	Full access Partial access No access
16	Clients	Private individual Private organisation Public organisation
17	Accessibility of platform (technical)	Generally open Restricted (eligibility criteria, vetting of workers)
18	Accessibility of platform (social)	Generally open Restricted (eligibility criteria, vetting of workers)
19	Form of matching	Competition/contest Procurement/specification/offer
20	Initiator	Client Worker
21	Selector	Client Platform (by algorithm, manual) Platform worker Third party/panel
22	Number of paid platform workers per assignment	One winner Several winners All participants
23	Scale of tasks	Micro Larger (projects)
24	Complexity of tasks	Routine tasks (simple, non-innovative) Complex tasks (moderately complex) Creative tasks (sophisticated, innovative, cognitive)
25	Type of activities	Generalist Specialist
26	Required skills	Low (manual, amateurs) Medium (clerical) High (professionals, specialists)
27	Format of service provision	Online On-location (platform, client and workers in the same location) On-location (platform, client and workers in different locations)

Source: National contributions for the 18 countries

To operationalise this theoretical categorisation for the purpose of this specific research project, some of the above elements were eliminated as selection criteria as they were among the aspects of employment and working conditions to be assessed for the selected types of platform work: accessibility of the platform (technical and social), conduct of platform, transparency of client and worker, autonomy, access to social protection, and access to representation. For the remaining characteristics, the list below explains why they were rejected:

- Market position of platform – The market situation of most platforms is still unclear. Moreover, even when the platform is the only one offering a specific service it might not have a monopoly, since it is competing with traditional companies that offer similar services.
- Dynamism of platform – The development of most platforms is still unclear. Most of the platforms are still start-ups, which are almost by definition continuously changing until they either have achieved a successful, more ‘stable’ model for intermediation between clients and workers, or cease to exist.
- Relationship between platform, client and worker – The database used to determine the types of platform work does not include employer-owned internal and company-owned outsourcing platforms. Moreover, most platforms did not provide ownership information.
- Size of platform – This characteristic is used as a second order selection criterion for the types of platform work. The combined size of the platforms is used to determine whether the types of work provided through the platform exist as well as to determine their importance, rather than to distinguish different platform work types.
- Sector, occupations – The main aspects relevant to sectors and occupations are largely covered by other characteristics such as required skills and format of service provision.
- Services offered – This characteristic is partially captured by some of the five selected characteristics, such as matching process. Moreover, other considerations are part of the assessment of the selected types of platform work.
- Fees to platform – Most platforms are still start-ups, which are almost by definition continuously changing until they have found a successful more ‘stable’ model. The latter often comes with market power, which allows platforms to introduce or raise fees. What fees are raised in itself provides insufficient information to distinguish different types of platform work.
- Initiator – This characteristic is largely captured by selection process, which indicates which party (client, worker, platform or other) leads in the selection process.
- Complexity of tasks – This characteristic is largely captured by other characteristics, such as required skills and scale of tasks, which provide an indication of the skills and time required for the tasks, and should thus be a proxy of the complexity.
- Type of activities – The required skills also function as a proxy for the type of activities.
- Award of competition – This characteristic is largely captured by the matching process, which indicates whether platform workers are matched based on offers or a contest.
- Realisation of payments – The modality of payment seems particularly important for the remuneration of the platform, which is of lesser importance for the assessment of the working conditions where the focus will be primarily on the remuneration of the platform worker. This assessment is performed for the selected types of platform work.
- Client – Whether the service is delivered to consumers or businesses is typically not clearly defined; only very few platforms intermediating a consumer service explicitly exclude businesses or public authorities and vice versa. Without the data from the platform (which is usually confidential), it is impossible to determine the main type of clients.

Accordingly, the combination of the following elements have been considered to establish the platform work typology applied in the project:

- scale of tasks (micro, larger projects)
- skills level required (low, high)
- format of service provision (local, online)
- matching process (offer, contest)
- selector (decision by the platform, client, worker)

Table A2 includes further information on the seven indicators used in the selection of the Member States for in-depth analysis. For each of these indicators, the table explains what the indicator captures and what threshold is applied to it.

Table A2: Indicators and thresholds used in the selection of Member States

Depth and heterogeneity of the platform economy		
Indicator	Definition	Threshold
Clients	Share of the population engaged in the platform economy as users, derived from Eurobarometer (2016).	At least 5% of the population
Platform workers	Share of the population engaged in the platform economy as workers, derived from Eurobarometer (2016).	At least 2.5% of the population
Online platforms	Number of active domestic and foreign platforms, derived from Fabo et al (2017).	At least 1 domestic and 5 foreign
Heterogeneity	Presence of platforms with local and offline activities and with high-skilled and low-skilled activities, derived from Fabo et al (2017).	At least 2 types of platforms
Diversity and regulation in labour markets		
Industrial relations	Presence of efforts to organise/represent platform workers by traditional or new representative bodies, based on publicly available information.	Efforts to represent workers found
Regulatory frameworks/Policy response	Prevalence of government responses to limit the scope, or support the development of the platform economy, and changes to the existing regulation/legislation, based on publicly available information.	Existence of policy responses to the platform economy
Labour market situation	The degree of labour market flexibility (measured as the share of workers in the total active population that is classified as involuntary part-time employed, temporary and self-employed without employees)* and unemployment rate.	Mix of countries with high and low levels of flexibility and unemployment

\*The level of flexibility could also be assessed using the level of employment protection (OECD EPL) but this indicator is not available for all countries. The actual level of flexible labour has been used instead.

**Note:** Court rulings are not considered in the indicator capturing government responses.

**Source:** National contributions for the 18 countries

## Annex 2: Terminology in Member States

**Table A3: Terms used for platform economy and related terms in national languages**

	sharing economy	platform economy	gig economy	crowd employment
Austria		<i>Plattform-basierte Arbeit</i>		
Belgium	<i>deeleconomie</i>	<i>platform economie</i>		
Bulgaria				
Croatia	<i>ekonomija dijeljenja</i>	<i>rad preko platformi</i>		
Denmark	<i>deleøkonomi</i>	<i>platformsøkonomi</i>		
Estonia	<i>jagamismajandus</i>	<i>platvormi majandus</i>		<i>töötamine koostööplatvormi vahendusel</i>
Finland	<i>jakamistalous</i>	<i>alustatalous or alustatyö</i>	<i>keikkatalous or keikkatyö</i>	
France	<i>économie du partage</i>	<i>économie des plateformes</i>		
Italy			<i>economia dei lavoretti</i>	
Latvia	<i>kopīgošanasekonomika or kolaboratīvāekonomika</i>	<i>platformasekonomika</i>		<i>pūļnodarbinātība, pūļadarbs or kolektīvsdarbs</i>
Netherlands	<i>deeleconomie</i>	<i>platform economie</i>	<i>klus economie</i>	
Poland				
Slovenia	<i>delitvena ekonomija</i>	<i>platformna ekonomija</i>		
Spain	<i>economía colaborativa</i>			
	on-demand economy	collaborative economy	crowd sourcing	peer-to-peer economy
Austria				
Belgium				
Bulgaria				
Croatia				
Denmark				
Estonia				
Finland	<i>tilaustalous</i>	<i>yhteistyötaalous</i>	<i>joukkoistaminen or joukkouttaminen</i>	<i>vertaistalous</i>
France		<i>économie collaborative</i>		<i>pair à pair</i>
Italy				
Latvia	<i>darbstiešaistesplatformās</i>	<i>sadarbīgaekonomika</i>		
Netherlands	<i>op-afroep-economie</i>			
Poland				
Slovenia				
Spain				

## Annex 3: List of acronyms

**Table A4: Acronyms and full titles of organisations**

Abbreviation/ acronym	Full name (original language)	Full name (English)
ABU	Algemene Bond Uitzendondernemingen	Association of Temporary Work Agencies
ACV	Algemene Christelijke Vakbond	General Christian Trade Union
BMASGK	Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales, Gesundheit und Konsumentenschutz	Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection
CCOO	Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras	Spanish Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions
CEA	n/a	Croatian Employers' Organisation
CEPS	n/a	Centre for European Policy Studies
CGT	Confédération générale du travail	General Confederation of Labour
CIPD	n/a	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CNE	Centrale Nationale des Employés	National Union of Employees
CNV	Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond	National Federation of Christian Trade Unions
ETUC	n/a	European Trade Union Confederation
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging	Netherlands Trade Union Confederation
FOD	Federale Overheidsdienst	Federal Public Service
GZS	Gospodarska zbornica Slovenije	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia
HK	n/a	Danish Union of Commercial and Clerical Workers
IGAS	Inspection générale des affaires sociales	General Inspectorate of Social Affairs
INPS	Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale	National Social Security Institute
IWGB	n/a	Independent Workers Union of Great Britain
IWW	n/a	Industrial Workers of the World Union
JRC	n/a	Joint Research Centre
KSK	Künstlersozialkasse	Artist Social Fund
NUJ	n/a	Irish National Union of Journalists
ÖGB	Österreichische Gewerkschaftsbund	Austrian Trade Union Confederation
OZS	Obrtno – podjetniška zbornica Slovenije	Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia
Pipame	Pôle interministériel de prospective et d'anticipation des mutations économiques	Interdepartmental Centre of Foresight and Anticipation of Economic Change
SAK	Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö	Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions
SCP-VTC	Syndicat des chauffeurs VTC	Union of Private Chaffeurs
SIPTU	n/a	Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
SOU	Statens Offentliga Utredningar	State public reports
UEAPME	n/a	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores	Workers' General Union
UNSA	Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes	National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions
UPHD	n/a	United Private Hire Drivers
Urssaf	Union de Recouvrement pour la Sécurité Sociale et les Allocations Familiales	Organisation for the Collection of Social Security and Family Benefit Contributions
UVW	n/a	United Voices of the World
ZDPZ – ZSSS	Sindikat delavcev prometa in zvez Slovenije	Slovene Trade Union of Transport and Communications Workers
ZSSS	Zveza svobodnih sindikatov Slovenije	Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia



## Annex 4: Authors of the national contributions

**Table A5: Authors of the national in-depth analysis, by country**

Country	Author	Organisation
<b>Austria</b>	Willem Pieter de Groen, Zachary Kilhoffer, Karolien Lenaerts Elias Felten	CEPS University of Salzburg
<b>France</b>	Jean-Philippe Lhernould	University of Poitiers
<b>Germany</b>	Willem Pieter de Groen, Zachary Kilhoffer, Karolien Lenaerts	CEPS
<b>Italy</b>	Valerio De Stefano Antonio Aloisi	KU Leuven Bocconi University
<b>Poland</b>	Lukasz Sienkiewicz	Institute for Labour Market Analyses, Warsaw
<b>Sweden</b>	Ola Sjöberg	Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI), Stockholm University

**Table A6: Authors of other national contributions, by country**

Country	Author	Organisation
<b>Belgium</b>	Dries Van Herreweghe	KU Leuven
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Gabriela Yordanova	ISSK-BAS, IR Share
<b>Croatia</b>	Predrag Bejakovic Irena Klemencic	The Institute of Public Finance (IJF)
<b>Denmark</b>	Carsten Jørgensen	FAOS
<b>Estonia</b>	Märt Masso, Liina Osila	Praxis
<b>Finland</b>	Anna Savolainen	Oxford Research Ab
<b>Ireland</b>	Tony Dobbins	IRN Publishing
<b>Latvia</b>	Kriss Karnitis	EPC Ltd.
<b>Netherlands</b>	Rebecca Florisson	Eurofound
<b>Slovenia</b>	Maja Breznik	Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana
<b>Spain</b>	Jessica Durán	IKEI research & consultancy
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Claire Evans	IRRU, University of Warwick





Platform work is a form of employment that uses an online platform to match the supply of and demand for paid labour. In Europe, platform work is still small in scale but is rapidly developing. The types of work offered through platforms are ever-increasing, as are the challenges for existing regulatory frameworks.

This report explores the working and employment conditions of three of the most common types of platform work in Europe. For each of these types, Eurofound assesses the physical and social environment, autonomy, employment status and access to social protection, and earnings and taxation based on interviews with platform workers. A comparative analysis of the regulatory frameworks applying to platform work in 18 EU Member States accompanies this review. This looks into workers' employment status, the formal relationships between clients, workers and platforms, and the organisation and representation of workers and platforms.

An online repository of publications on platform work, including research findings and initiatives, is available at: <http://eurofound.link/platformeconomy>

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