

Session D2

Platform Work - Technology assessment and organizational options

Chair: Linda Nierling (Institute of Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis)

The rise of platform-work creates many difficulties to represent and organize crowd workers and challenges the traditional forms of organized labor and the European social model. There is a need to analyze strategies of alternative unions or movements and trade unions aiming to represent crowd workers in Europe with the insights from the technology assessment perspective: which are the technology determinants of the emergence of this new form of work? Which socio-technical problems it may present? What are the organization options available to improve the working conditions and the work-life balance?

The debate will reflect on strategies to organize and represent crowd workers, and about the policy options ensuring social protections and labor rights. In this session, it will be possible to discuss new pathways for exploiting the potential positive effects of crowd economy and platform-based work.

Guiding questions for the session:

- (Technology) How crowd work is influenced by technology and how is technology adapted to the demands of platform work? In which way does technology affect working routines and organization? Which socio-technical problem can we observe?
- (Values) How can “values” towards favorable working conditions be included into technology driven platform work? How may this be connected to organizational options as well as working conditions? What are further individual or organizational challenges (e.g. skills and competences, control via technology)?
- (Policy level) What are the policy options to ensure social protection and labor rights against the background of ongoing development of digital technologies?

Contract Prototypes for the Platform “Crowd” Work – The Case of Serbia

Authors: Branka Andjelkovic, Maja Kovac, Tanja Jakobi (Public Policy Research Centre)

This paper principally interrogates the changing landscape of the working conditions in the field of crowdwork on Internet-based platforms, and reflects on the legal position and the socio-economic status of digital workers from Serbia by employing the concept of the decent work agenda (ILO, 2008: vi). At present the country, together with Romania and Ukraine, represents one of the largest pools of platform crowdworkers among European countries (OLI, 2019; Kuek et al., 2015).

A number of scholars (De Stefano, 2015; Berg, 2016; Aloisi, 2016; Prassl, 2018) argue that platforms, not governments, regulate labour markets at the moment. In ‘new’ employment relations platforms act as intermediaries between clients and workers while equally holding employer role without intertwining in regulating positive socio-economic and legal statuses of their workers. National legal and policy regulations in the domain employment relations are lagging behind to accommodate these new realities.

The paper draws on the findings of the first national study on the socio-economic position and legal status of digital workers from Serbia performed by the Public Policy Research Center in 2018. While work on the digital platforms provides opportunities for decent pay for the Serbian workers compared to their counterparts in ‘offline’ world, and enables high flexibility in the domain of

working hours including relatively positive work-life balance, it hinders security of employment and social protection due to the lack of appropriate contracts. The only solution that the current legislation offers is the registration of a business entity. At present this modality is used by almost a third of the surveyed digital workers. On the other side, the existing legislation falls short to accommodate the needs of great majority of those workers who remain in disguised employment, without social security benefits.

This paper provides an original contribution to academic and policy discussions about features, evolving challenges and current solutions with respect to socio-economic position of platform workers from Serbia, their legal status at the labour market viewed through the prism of decent work agenda.

Crowdwork and Its Implications for Employment Relations: Flexibility and Labour Market Inclusivity

Authors: Csaba Makó, Miklós Illéssy (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Máté Vörös (University of Pécs)

Crowdwork and more generally digital platform work represents important new challenges in the concept and practice of work and employment relations. Contrary to the narrow technological view, their diffusion and real-life experiences are shaped by institutional variations (e.g. labour relations, legal regulations) of the countries surveyed. In addition, these new forms of work are source of social status, recognition and integration via online labour market into the society and not only simple or more complicated set of tasks of “algorithmic management”.

In spite to the fast growth of this type of employment, it still represents only a minority of the workforce and not yet located into the focus of the public debate or in the centre of interests of stakeholders in the Central and Eastern European countries. However, even in this early stage of its development we may observe visible country differences in the quality of the digital platform work (i.e. income, working conditions, employment security and social protection). These differences partly shaped by the status of the crowdworkers (‘contract workers’ vs. ‘freelancers’) and partly by the institutional ‘filters’ of the country concerned. In this respect, the influence of the national institutions (e.g. labour relations, legal regulations) of the offline world has significant role in this transformation process.

In order to better understand both positive (i.e. flexibility, better work & life balance) and negative (i.e. employment security, social protection) impacts of this new form of work, it is necessary to integrate into our analysis the ‘time’ perspective. The results of the short-term oriented empirical studies may contradict the outcomes of the longer-term analysis. Comparison of the both short and long-term research outcomes may help social actors and digital platform workers to develop a more balanced and comprehensive employment regulations in the digital economy.

Labour conflicts in platform labour: between online-irrelevant and offline-effective?

Authors: Philip Schörpf (FORBA), Benjamin Herr (University of Vienna)

Platform labour depicts a new mode of work where platforms act as intermediaries between demand and labour (Barnes et al. 2016). In public and scientific debates on platform labour emphasis lies on first the modern and disruptive technologies, second the (potentially) more efficient allocation of labour and third the dubious working conditions. While the technologies are often neither particularly modern nor disruptive and efficiency of the allocation of labour primarily stems from undermining existing regulations and working standards, the working conditions draw attention: vague and unilaterally stipulated contracts (Lutz & Risak 2017) foster the transfer of entrepreneurial risks onto the workers (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014) and new and often far-reaching technology-assisted control of workers through GPS or programmes (Schörpf et al. 2017; Woodcock 2019), while at the same time workers are dealing with issues typical for the self-employed, such as tight deadlines, temporary labour peaks and long stretches of being available for clients (Huws et al. 2017; Schörpf 2018). In addition, workers frequently work secluded and spaces for communicating with other workers are either not supported (Choudary 2018) or are even prevented by the platforms (Schörpf et al. 2017). This is applicable for virtual platform labour (Wood et al. 2018), but also for space-dependent platform labour, e.g. in food delivery (Herr 2018).

Organising platform labour hence apparently is challenging and despite a few attempts by unions, union representation in platform labour is rather weak (Vandaele 2018). Workers on platforms are easily replaced due to high levels of standardisation, relatively simple work processes and low qualification levels, further diminishing the workers structural power. However, workers in space-dependent platform labour (especially in food delivery) have shown in numerous European striking actions (Vandaele 2018) that resistance is not futile.