EU-OSHA WORKSHOP

PROTECTING WORKERS IN THE ONLINE PLATFORM ECONOMY

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Platform work and OSH

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The historical context

A convergence of several pre-existing trends reaching critical mass, linked with digitalisation and globalisation

- Use of online platforms for managing work
- Development of a global ‘reserve army’ of workers equipped with digital skills and speaking global languages
- Further evolution of global outsourcing of digital work – extending to SMEs the advantages previously only available to large corporation (through business models that absorb transaction costs of intermediation and charge a rent for use)
- Formalisation of the informal economy, bringing casual workers within the disciplinary scope of online platforms
The policy context

High policy interest in the gig economy at the European level:

- Digital single market – seen as essential for economic development and growth
- An example of social innovation?
- Potential for job creation?
- Restructuring in the aftermath of financial crisis
- Concerns from trade unions, consumer groups and government bodies about (inter alia):
  - Occupational health and safety – including psycho-social risks
  - Consumer safety
  - Employment status and workers’ rights
  - Insurance
  - Tax and insurance
  - Implications for social benefit systems
  - Sustainability of new work models
- Need for systematic research
Towards a working definition of ‘crowd work’

• Defined as paid work managed via online platforms (in recognition that dimensions may be blurred) e.g.
  – Fuzzy distinction between paid and unpaid work where work is done speculatively or wage theft occurs
  – Where is the dividing line between in-house platforms used to manage workers on zero hour contracts (eg Starbucks) and external platforms?

• A functional typology
  1. Online work with online management
     a. High-skill work carried out online - independently of location – managed via platforms like Upwork, typically by creative professionals such as graphic designers, editors, software engineers etc.
     b. Low-skill work carried out online - independently of location – managed via platforms like Clickworker or Amazon Mechanical Turk, typically by people without formal qualifications in the tasks they are required to do (though some high-skill workers/tasks may be involved)
  2. Offline work with online management
     a. Driving or delivery work carried out in public spaces – managed via platforms like Uber, Lyft, Deliveroo etc.
     b. Service work carried out in people’s homes or other premises – managed via platforms like Taskrabbit, MeetACarpenter etc.
A survey to measure extent and characteristics of crowd work

- Piloted in UK, then carried out in Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Italy & Switzerland
- Questionnaire developed at University of Hertfordshire
- Online survey, carried out by Ipsos MORI
- Funded by FEPS (European Foundation for Progressive Studies) and UNI (International Trade Union Confederation) plus national partners
- Sample stratified by age, gender, region, work status and income grade
- > 2,000 respondents per country – working age adults
- Results weighted to reflect total population
- Additional offline surveys (n=1,000) to calibrate results in UK (face-to-face CAPI) and Switzerland (telephone – CATI)
- Complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews (ongoing)
Some survey results – Participation in the online economy as a source of income

- **Any crowd work**: 0% (NL), 10% (AT), 12% (DE), 14% (SE), 23% (UK)
- **Rent to paying guest (eg Airbnb)**: 8% (NL), 10% (AT), 11% (DE), 12% (SE), 16% (UK)
- **Sell/resell on own website**: 8% (NL), 7% (AT), 8% (DE), 10% (SE), 11% (UK)
- **Sell self-made products (eg Etsy)**: 8% (NL), 8% (AT), 9% (DE), 12% (SE), 17% (UK)
- **Resell products on online marketplace (eg Amazon)**: 13% (NL), 10% (AT), 12% (DE), 10% (SE), 20% (UK)
- **Sell own possessions (eg Ebay)**: 53% (NL), 53% (AT), 57% (DE), 53% (SE), 57% (UK)
People earning a living from crowd work

- **At least weekly**
  - NL: 3%
  - AT: 5%
  - DE: 3%
  - SE: 4%
  - UK: 3%

- **At least monthly**
  - NL: 5%
  - AT: 9%
  - DE: 6%
  - SE: 4%
  - UK: 4%

- **At least biannual**
  - NL: 8%
  - AT: 15%
  - DE: 9%
  - SE: 7%
  - UK: 7%

- **At least annual**
  - NL: 9%
  - AT: 18%
  - DE: 11%
  - SE: 8%
  - UK: 6%

- **Any crowd work**
  - NL: 12%
  - AT: 18%
  - DE: 14%
  - SE: 12%
  - UK: 11%

- **Seeking crowd work**
  - NL: 18%
  - AT: 23%
  - DE: 22%
  - SE: 24%
  - UK: 21%

- **Netherlands (NL)**
- **Austria (AT)**
- **Germany (DE)**
- **Sweden (SE)**
- **United Kingdom (UK)**
Earnings from crowd work as a proportion of all income

- **Up to 10%**
  - UK: 31%
  - SE: 21%
  - DE: 9%
  - AT: 14%
  - NL: 13%
- **10% to 25%**
  - UK: 12%
  - SE: 9%
  - DE: 6%
  - AT: 9%
  - NL: 4%
- **25% to 50%**
  - UK: 12%
  - SE: 6%
  - DE: 9%
  - AT: 9%
  - NL: 5%
- **50% to 75%**
  - UK: 13%
  - SE: 4%
  - DE: 6%
  - AT: 3%
  - NL: 3%
- **75% to 99%**
  - UK: 19%
  - SE: 5%
  - DE: 7%
  - AT: 9%
  - NL: 6%
- **All**
  - UK: 27%
  - SE: 4%
  - DE: 6%
  - AT: 4%
  - NL: 2%
- **Don't know**
  - UK: 32%
  - SE: 22%
  - DE: 20%
  - AT: 20%
  - NL: 27%
- **Prefer not to say**
  - UK: 10%
  - SE: 5%
  - DE: 7%
  - AT: 6%
  - NL: 10%

**Geographical breakdown:**
- UK
- SE
- DE
- AT
- NL
Gender of crowd workers by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age of crowd workers by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Up to 24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison with non-crowd workers

1. Sending or receiving email from home, by country: comparison of frequent crowd workers, occasional crowd workers and non-crowd workers

- At least weekly crowd workers
  - AT: 92%
  - DE: 90%
  - NL: 89%
  - SE: 89%
  - UK: 95%

- Less frequent crowd workers
  - AT: 79%
  - DE: 76%
  - NL: 78%
  - SE: 85%
  - UK: 75%

- Non-crowd workers
  - AT: 46%
  - DE: 27%
  - NL: 51%
  - SE: 51%
  - UK: 35%
Comparison with non-crowd workers

2. Use of ‘app’ to notify when work is available, by country: comparison of frequent crowd workers, occasional crowd workers and non-crowd workers
3. Use of ‘app’ or website to log work done, by country: comparison of frequent crowd workers, occasional crowd workers and non-crowd workers

- **At least weekly crowd workers**
  - AT: 71%
  - DE: 78%
  - NL: 76%
  - SE: 76%
  - UK: 76%

- **Less frequent crowd workers**
  - AT: 44%
  - DE: 45%
  - NL: 51%
  - SE: 68%
  - UK: 49%

- **Non-crowd workers**
  - AT: 15%
  - DE: 5%
  - NL: 13%
  - SE: 19%
  - UK: 9%
Occupational safety and health risks – the physical risks

- **Physical risks to online workers**
  - Muskulo-skeletal problems related to poor posture (inappropriate furniture, keyboards, mice, screens etc.), repetitive work, lack of breaks, cramped working space etc.
  - Visual problems, related to inappropriate screens, poor lighting, lack of breaks, intensive/repetitive work
  - Other health problems related to poor working environment, extremes of temperature, lack of control etc.

- **Physical risks to offline workers**
  - Accidents
  - Lack of safety training and information
  - Lack of suitable equipment/tools
  - Lack of protective clothing
  - Risk of assault by clients, members of the public
  - Lack of information about risks in unknown workplaces
  - Fear of saying no (to avoid negative customer ratings) leads to acceptance of practices known to be unsafe
Psycho-social risks

- Psycho-social risks, linked inter alia to:
  - Precariousness
  - Unpredictability
  - Work intensity
  - Traumatic stress due to exposure to pornographic or violent media images
  - Impact of customer ratings
  - Arbitrary suspension
  - Interaction of impacts from multiple jobs
  - Abuse from customers
  - Exposure to crime
  - ‘the customer is always right’
  - Precariousness
  - Interaction of impacts from multiple jobs
  - Debt
  - Disruption of routines – impacts on family life
‘Crowd workers’ are typically combining this form of work with many other means of income generation.

Definitions of crowd work are fuzzy, with many overlaps with other forms of temporary, agency and casual work.

The new working poor combine ‘new’ and ‘old’ forms of work as well as other forms of income but remain largely outside scope of existing protections.

Meanwhile many of the practices of the ‘gig economy’ are spreading to other sectors of the labour market, including:

- Expectations to be available 24/7
- Use of customer ratings
- Expectation to meet quantitative performance targets
- Monitoring and tracking of workers
- Use of ‘apps’ for communication with employers and clients, summons to work and logging of working hours
- Deterioration in working conditions and health and safety coverage – especially psycho-social risks

For every crowdworker using an app to be summoned to work or log working hours there are 2-3 non-crowdworkers doing so.
Towards a new regulatory model for 21st century labour markets?

• Need for universal coverage – creating new categories of worker is likely to lead to distortions, gaps in coverage and risks for traditional categories

• Clarification of the definition of self-employment – for employment, tax and social protection purposes

• Clarification of the definition of subordinate employment. All workers not deemed self-employed to be regarded as subordinate workers with the onus of proof on the employer. Workers’ rights to be clearly specified in relation to *inter alia*:
  – Health and safety – including rights to call in inspectors
  – Insurance and legal liability
  – Data protection
  – Communications with employers/platforms, including rights to challenge arbitrary suspensions, customer ratings etc.
  – Other national statutory rights

• Clarification of the definition of private employment agencies and temporary work agencies. Online platforms to be regarded as such by default with the onus proof on the platform?

• Need for inspection and compliance, with clear reporting procedures and realistic penalties for failure to comply.

• Adjustment of social security and tax systems to fit the new labour market realities
WORK IN THE EUROPEAN GIG ECONOMY

For further information: http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/08673ebb-ca52-4a65-a7d7-d82c9542d957/europeagigeconomy-longversionpdf.pdf