Eurofound

Digital Age

On-location client-determined moderately skilled platform work: Employment and working conditions

Employment and working conditions of
selected types of platform work
Platform work: Maximising the potential
While safeguarding standards?

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

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Introduction

Platform work - the matching of supply and demand for paid labour through online platforms - is a relatively new form of employment that is small in scale but steadily growing in importance. Besides the size also the diversity in platform work is increasing.

The objective of this report is to contribute to the body of research on types of platform work by assessing the working and employment conditions for platform workers in on-location client-determined moderately skilled work. This type of platform work requires low to medium skills, execution on-location and acceptance of the offer of the worker by the client.

The working and employment conditions are assessed based on a combination of desk research and 17 semi-structured interviews with platform workers in Belgium, France, Germany and Poland, conducted in the first quarter of 2019.

Key findings

Employment status and access to social protection

All the interviewees conducted their platform work as self-employed, which gives them a larger responsibility for their working conditions and access to social protection.

However, platform work is for most of the interviewees a side activity; nearly all the interviewees were either employed or self-employed for their main occupation. The self-employed often have their own business and use the platform as an alternative channel to find customers.

Autonomy and control

Interviewees in general feel completely autonomous from the platform. In their view the platform is a facilitator to connect workers with clients, leaving the agreements with them and the clients. The latter have a very strong position in the agreement and supervision of the execution of the tasks. Although the interviewees indicate that they themselves can determine the tasks to apply for, clients determine which worker obtains the task. The client often mostly relies on reviews of previous executed tasks to choose the worker.

Earnings and taxation

The earnings for client-determined work are according to the interviewees mostly higher than for other types of platform work. The tasks are either charged at a fixed pre-agreed amount or by the hour. Interviewees have some margin in setting their rates as the ratings are considered more important in the decision making by clients than the rates. This margin is larger for tasks that require more specific skills than those requiring more general skills. Some also increased their rates after successfully completing several tasks. Interviewees charging by the hour had occasional disputes with clients about their rates, as the assignment took longer than anticipated.

All the of the interviewees indicated to declare the income obtained from platform work. But some of them did not effectively have to pay tax on the income as their total earnings from platform work remained below the national threshold exempted from tax.

Skills, training and prospects

The interviewees use either the skills they have attained through formal trainings as well as informally for the platform work. They all indicated that their platforms are not providing trainings, but some offer general tips and information in newsletters. For example, to improve the communication with clients.

The self-employed owning their own business indicate that they have the possibility to follow training courses offered by their trade associations. But for the concerned interviewees it was already at least several years ago that they participated in those trainings. The interviewees see little need to attain new skills, as they prefer to apply for tasks that they can complete obtaining a good review.

Interviewees - except for self-employed - do not consider platform work to advance in their career. Instead, they consider it as an interesting diversion from their primary career path, opportunity to earn some additional money or remaining physically active. For some of the self-employed platform work is considered a stepping stone to facilitate the transition to self-employed or grow their business.

The interviews have mixed opinions on whether their activity on the platform is temporary or will endure.

Representation

None of the interviewees knew opportunities for representation as platform worker, whereas some would welcome such representation to improve the social protection. Most of the interviewees, however, consider it unnecessary and in one case even harmful as most platform workers are already organised through other means. Several platform workers indicated to be member of a trade union or trade association for their main occupation or with their business.

Introduction

Background and objectives

Digitalisation is changing the content of work, but also the way work is intermediated. Platform work is one of the main new forms of employment. In platform work supply and demand for paid labour is matched through an online platform. Although this form of employment is still relatively small in scale, platform work is steadily growing in importance. With the growth, the numbers of clients and workers are increasing, but also the number and diversity in platforms. To this end, the platforms are continuously assessing and changing their approach to realise growth, as those without growing activities are likely to disappear from the market.

The research on the socioeconomic and labour market aspects of platform work in Europe is growing, but limited and fragmented. It is not reflecting the heterogeneity in the business models of the European platforms and work they intermediate (Codagnone and Martens, 2016). For example, there is very limited research assessing the working and employment conditions across various specific types of platform work (Eurofound, 2018a).

In response Eurofound has in 2018 published a study in which it identified the 10 main types of platform work, of which for three types the working and employment conditions were assessed (Eurofound, 2018b). This report aims to further fill the gap in the existing research on platform work by analysing the working and employment conditions for platform workers in on-location client-determined moderately skilled work. This type covers low to medium skilled on-location work that is selected by the client by means of an offer. This type of platform has among the 10 types of platform work most similarities with work that is in the traditional labour market performed by self-employed (for example plumbing, handyman tasks, etc.).

Methodological approach

Classifying types of platform work

Eurofound (2018b) presents an initial list of the 10 most common types of platform work in Europe and analysed three of these types in-depth. On-location platform-determined routine work, on-location worker-initiated moderately skilled work and online contestant specialist work were previously selected based on the distinctness in terms of their characteristics, and the assumed effects on employment and working conditions.

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

Sources: Eurofound (2018b) based on the JRC database (Fabo et al, 2017) and De Groen et al (2017).

Selecting type for analysis

For the further assessment of the working and employment conditions and labour market effects of platform work, the seven remaining types were considered. For the selection of the additional type three factors were considered. First, the share of platforms and workers performing the type of platform work. Second, the extent that the characteristics of the type of platform work are distinct from the types that were analysed in Eurofound (2018b). Third, whether there is extensive existing research on the working and employment conditions concerning the specific type.

The type of platform work that has the combination of a large share in platforms and workers, distinct features compared to the previously analysed types and is not or only to a limited extent covered in the existing research was selected. This to maximise the added value of the report for the body of research on platform work.

Based on the share of platforms and workers and distinctness from the previously analysed online moderately skilled click-work and on-location client-determined moderately skilled work are the main candidates for further research. Given the research that has been already conducted on online micro-tasks, it was agreed as most interesting to analyse client-determined work.

On-location client-determined moderately skilled work covers low to medium skilled on-location work that is selected by the client by means of an offer. Indeed, the workers that perform this type of platform work need to apply for tasks that are posted on an online platform by a client, who determines which of the workers that have applied obtains the task. Clients are typically young to middle age adults living in urban or suburban areas. The majority are interested in one-off services in their homes, often outside core working hours. Small and medium businesses also seek services on this platform type.

This type of platform work is comparable to work that is traditionally provided by self-employed. They need to obtain work, which is often a relatively opaque and network based. The introduction of platforms in the intermediation of these tasks makes this process more transparent and open, which might affect the working conditions of these workers. This type of platform work covers about 11% of the platform workers and platforms.

Selecting interviewees

For the selected on-location client-determined moderately skilled work, the employment and working conditions were assessed using a combination of desk research and semi-structured interviews with platform workers. The interviews with platform workers were most important as there is barely any literature on this type of platform work.

The platforms offering the selected type of platform work were identified using the JRC database (Fabo et al, 2017). Since some of the platforms changed their business model after the JRC database was composed, for all the identified platforms it was checked whether they still provide the selected type of platform work. Moreover, only those platforms operating in the six countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland or Sweden) that were subject to an

extensive context analysis in Eurofound (2018b) were considered. Finally, three platforms operating in France, Germany and Poland were selected (see Box 1).

All interviewees provide platform work through one of the three selected platforms. They were identified based on contacts provided by the platforms, searches on social media and placement of a request on the platform.

Box 1: Platforms selected for assessment of client-determined work

Three platforms were chosen to examine client-determined work, allowing to assess whether there are differences in the working and employment conditions across various platforms and countries within the same type of platform work.

The first platform is a French grown home services platform that is besides in France also active in Belgium and Switzerland. It mediates eight different services including do it yourself, gardening, moving, cleaning, babysitting, pet keeping, an assortment of computer services, and concierge. The work is generally performed on location. The platform allows clients to post a request for service. The worker is asked to provide an offer, based on which the client decides which worker can provide the service. The worker can also ask for any clarifications. This study focuses on the do it yourself and gardening services in Belgium and France.

The second platform is a German platform for home repair and improvement services in both Austria and Germany. It is part of a group active with similar platforms in various European countries. The services intermediated through the platform range from home repairs to complete construction measures and are mostly provided on location. The clients post a request on the platform. The subscribed craftsmen can respond to a certain number of requests depending on their subscription. The client determines which of the craftsmen receives the assignment. This study focuses on electricity, metal work and painting in Germany.

The third platform is a Polish general services platform that mediates a wide range of services including administration, building work, gardening, handyman, transport, photography, marketing, programming, teaching, translation and others. The platform asks the clients to post a request on which the workers can respond. The clients select the worker. This study focuses on the computer services.

All three platforms are the largest platforms through which client-platform work is intermediated in the respective countries.

Working and employment conditions of on-location client-determined moderately skilled work

Profile of the interviewed platform workers

The interviewed platform workers were mostly middle-aged men living in urban areas.[1] A minority (4 of the 17) lived in rural areas, and frequently cited platforms as a convenient way to access clients in surrounding urban areas. Overall, the demographics mostly correspond to the general labour market population performing similar manual, medium-skilled work as the interviewees (with the notable exception of gender, as no women agreed to an interview). In comparison to other types of platform work, these platform workers tend to be older, more likely to have children, and more likely to drive a car (Eurofound, 2018b).

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[1] Urban areas, in this instance, also refer to smaller towns, and areas adjacent to large urban areas.

The highest level of education for interviewees was for most either tertiary or technical school. For those who had tertiary education, it mostly did not relate to their platform work tasks. For example, one interviewee had a degree in nuclear engineering, and their platform work consisted mostly of furniture building and installation. For those with technical school degrees, their platform work tasks tend to correspond with what they trained to do. Lastly, a minority (4 of the 17) interviewees had only completed secondary school.

Overall, the profile of interviewees was quite similar to the worker-initiated platform type, and otherwise slightly older and significantly more male than other platform work types.

Table 2: Profile of interviewed platform workers (in number of workers)

		Total
Age	< 25 years old	1
	25-45 years old	8
	> 45 years old	8
Gender	Men	17
	Women	0
Children	Yes	9
	No	8
Living area	Rural	5
	Urban	12
Highest level of educational attainment	Secondary education	4
	Tertiary education	7
	Technical School	6

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Engagement with platform work

Engagement refers to how interviewees came to be platform workers, and what platform work generally represents in their life (for example, a full-time occupation, part-time job or hobby).

Interviewees found out about platform work through a mixture of ways – search engines, television and radio commercials, posted advertisements in hardware stores, and through friends or family. Interviewees had worked through their platforms for **between one month and four years.**

Some interviewees work very occasionally, **whereas for a few, platform work is a full-time job**. Most fall in the middle, working 10-20 hours per week through the platform. The most occasional worker interviewed performs platform work around 10 hours per month, while the most frequent platform workers perform around 40 hours per week.

Interviewees had various **motivations for performing platform work**. For some, platform work was a means to earn additional income. For others, it offered flexibility in terms of timing and variety of work. One individual, who was also a student, indicated that they need platform work for extra income after their previous employment contract expired. For several interviewees, who owned small businesses, platforms represent a means of connecting to additional clients for their firms. With more potential work, they can fill in quieter times through the year. One emphasised that searching for work through platforms, in addition to

other means, allows them to be more selective about work they find interesting and worthwhile (see Box 2).

Box 2: Examples of platform workers' motivation for performing platform work

'I am currently retired. But I am not very old, and I can still work, so platform work gives me an opportunity to gain a little extra money and to stay busy.'

'I really needed money. I had an interim contract, which is very unstable, and platforms were a source of additional income.'

'At first, it was an additional source of the revenue. And as I was already working independently, I decided to try [platforms]. It also allowed me to try other types of work, different from what I normally did. I like it. […] It is up to me to choose what to do and what not to do.'

'I wanted to get more contracts and have more variety, more choice.'

Personal reasons seem to be a strong motivator for many interviewees. One worker, who owns a small electrical installations company, appreciates that tasks through platforms tend to be smaller and more diverse than other work available on the market, which are often part of long-term construction efforts, and quite similar to each other. A few workers enjoyed that platform work offered them a chance to stay active after retiring from the labour market.

Interviewees chose particular platforms for different reasons. Some preferred a platform's fee structure (several interviewees mentioned they only choose platforms with no subscription fees), simplicity of use, good reputation, or simply because a platform had a sufficient amount of activity to find work reliably.

Around half of the interviewees worked on a **single platform**, and the other half worked on **multiple platforms**. The choice to work on multiple platforms was mostly to increase the likelihood they would find enough suitable work for their needs.

Interviewees performed a **great variety of work**. Some interviewees offer many services, try out new types of work, and seemed to enjoy variety and being a 'jack of all trades'. All in all, interviewees indicated performing the following specific types of work:

- Carpentry
- Electrical work (including installing data/internet hardware)
- Floor sanding
- Furniture assembly and installation
- Furniture moving
- Furniture renovation
- Gardening
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Metalworking and installation
- 'Odd jobs' around the homes of clients (such as installing and removing kitchen appliances, miscellaneous renovation)
- Painting
- Plumbing

Several interviewees were highly-specialised (such as having a master certificate for electricians), and only performed work in one field. Such specialisation occurred for two

reasons. First, because it is the only type of work the individuals offer through their businesses, and second, because some platforms only allow qualified workers (with an appropriate certificate/diploma/card) to perform work in a given field.

Overall, engagement with this form of platform work appears similar to some of the other forms of platform work – particularly the worker-initiated type. For a minority, platform work is a full-time job. For most, however, it is a side activity to supplement earnings from other sources. One distinguishing feature about engaging in this type of platform work is the great variety of tasks available. The variety itself seems to be a major drawing point for many interviewees.

Moreover, for many types of platform work, the low entry barriers are a significant benefit to workers. This type of platform work, however, usually requires workers to operate autonomously in a client's home. Without a high rating, few clients would accept such an arrangement. For this reason, interviewees often found it difficult starting this type of work.

Employment status and access to social protection

Employment status is a much-discussed topic as regards platform workers. Employment status matters because in many cases classification determines the applicability of labour law, social security law, and collective bargaining rights, and thus impacts both working conditions and access to social protection. An overview of employment statuses of interviewed platform workers appears in Table 3.

Table 3: Employment statuses of interviewed platform workers

Activity	Status	Number
Platform work	Employee	0
	Self-employed	17
	Other	0
Other activity	Employee	8
	Self-employed	6
	Other	3
	…of which:	
	- Inactive	1
	- Unemployed	0
	- Student	1
	- Retired	2
Total number of workers		**17**

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As shown, **no interviewees are employees** on the basis of platform work. This finding corresponds with on-location worker-initiated platform work but differentiates client-determined moderately skilled work from other forms of on-location platform work.

While all are self-employed on the basis of platform work, several types of self-employment are possible depending on the regulatory framework of the country of residence, total annual earnings from platform work, and numerous other considerations.[2] For example, German interviewees were either entrepreneurs (*Unternehmer*) or one-person companies (*Ein-Personen-Unternehmen*). French interviewees were either registered as individuals (*Particuliers*) or micro-entrepreneurs.[3]

Aside from platform work, **employment status on the basis of other economic activities varied**. Around half of the interviewees were employees, just under a third were self-employed, and the rest were either retired or students. For interviewees with their own business, their platform work and non-platform work was essentially identical – the only difference is how they found specific tasks.

No interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with their employment status, indicated that they felt subordinate to the platform, or that they felt they may be in a situation of bogus self-employment. In this regard, this type of platform work is quite similar to on-location worker-initiated platform work and distinguished from the on-location platform-determined type.

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[2] For more detailed discussion of what determines the employment status of platform workers in Germany, France and Poland, see Eurofound's working papers at https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2018/employment-and-working-conditions-of-selected-types-of-platform-work.

[3] 'Micro-entrepreneur' replaced 'auto-entrepreneur' as of 1 January 2016. See https://www.captaincontrat.com/articles-creation-entreprise/differences-autoentrepreneur-travailleur-independant.

Autonomy and control

The autonomy of platform workers is a frequently-discussed topic. More autonomy is typically related to more satisfaction with working conditions, while workers with complete autonomy over their working time are more likely to face issues with work-life balance (Eurofound, 2016). In the context of platform work, autonomy includes workers' ability to select their tasks, working times, and how to organise and perform their work.

Most interviewees indicated that they feel **completely autonomous in relation to the platform**. The platform simply facilitates connections between them and clients, and the clients and workers reach an agreement, which the workers then abide by. One interviewee suggested that the platform is better understood as a marketing tool.

One interviewee indicated that if they face problems at a client's home, for example notice something that may have a risk of accident, or realise the task will take longer than anticipated, **they may call the platform to seek advice**. The platform has responded with practical advice, but not what the worker considered instructions.

While clients may issue instructions, **interviewees indicated they do not feel 'controlled' by clients**. For some platforms, the work required can be discussed or negotiated between workers and clients. On the one hand the workers do not accept work that is uninteresting, not a good fit for their skills, or undesirable in any other way. On the other hand, several interviewees, especially those who were newer on the platform and had less of work history built up, noted feeling pressure to please the clients to receive their first positive reviews.

A few interviewees noted that at times, instructions from clients are extremely clear, and other times quite vague. Generally, instructions are clear enough on the task description posting, and when not, the worker asks the clients for clarification. For the most part, interviewees had no issues with the clarity of instructions. In some cases, the initial job description prepared by the client understated the actual amount of work, which then resulted in a dispute.

One interviewee indicated that one of the four platforms he works through tends to have less-clear instructions than the others.[4] For example, some (but not all) platforms allow clients to post pictures besides a textual description of the task, which substantially help workers to get a clear idea of the job. Additionally, some platforms have more specific categories for posting tasks and algorithm-suggested prices.

Interviewees were not controlled or monitored (for example via geo-location in cell-phones). One exception may be clients interested in observing, or even helping perform, work taking place in their home. In most cases, clients placed a great deal of trust in workers to work independently in their homes or on their properties.

In some cases, interviewees took photos of their work in case disputes might arise with clients. This ensured the workers had proof of their work in case of a dispute, such as if the platform intermediated a disagreement between them and clients. A few workers indicated that photos provide important safeguard in the rare event that clients create problems, such as refusing to indicate a task had been completed.

In a few cases, the interviewees owned a firm and oversaw a few employees, who then carried out a portion of tasks intermediated by platforms. In these cases, **the interviewee was responsible for supervision** and quality control of their employees' work.

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[4] It is not clear whether the platforms for this study have any screening procedures for clients' postings.

Earnings and taxation

Earnings are an important consideration, as platform work is often considered to be a precarious and low-wage form of work. Taxation is also a key consideration, as previous studies have found that platform work has the potential to both increase and decrease tax declaration (Eurofound, 2018a). Overall, the literature suggests that very few people rely exclusively on platform work for income; instead, it is a side activity (Huws et al, 2017; Eurofound, 2018a; Pesole et al, 2018).

Compared to most other forms of platform work, **interviewees usually earn more for the same amount of time and also work more regularly**. Workers also had significant freedom to charge rates however they wanted; the only limitation is what clients are willing to pay. For example, several interviewees said they add the cost and time of commuting, and any time and costs shopping for materials, into the total rate.

The **earnings from platform work varied relative to total income**. One interviewee only works via platforms for 5-10 hours per month, as he has a full-time job. For him, the income from platform work is marginal. One interviewee stated that tasks from clients found on platforms constituted 50% of his business income. The remainder came from clients found through more traditional means. A few interviewees earn all of their income from platform work.

Platform workers earned various gross rates depending on the type of task, as well as amount of experience they had on the platform. For those who were willing to give their hourly rates, earnings varied from €10-55 per hour gross. Several workers noted that they charged higher prices after completing several tasks and establishing a reputation. For more demanding work (in terms of skill requirements or difficulty) and for more experienced workers (in terms of total completed tasks and high ratings), rates seemed to be around those in the general labour market or even higher. For tasks that do require fewer particular skills, and for workers without an established reputation on the platform, rates sometimes were as low as the national minimum wage. In some cases, the platforms had a minimum rate built into the job posting system.

Most interviewees have had **occasional disputes with clients about pricing**. Most commonly, clients were upset that a task took longer than initially anticipated. Most interviewees charge hourly, so additional hours, even if unexpected, must be paid by the client. In a few cases this resulted in some upset clients, who then gave the worker a low rating. One interviewee suggested that if the platform allowed clients to upload pictures, this would mitigate the problem by allowing more accurate estimates.

One interviewee suggested that their platform should change the way commuting costs are handled, allowing separate categories for time in transit and time working. At present, transportation costs for the worker are not included in the pricing, and the worker must therefore account for travel time and expenses in what they charge.

Almost all interviewees indicted that they **pay taxes on their earnings from platform work.** A few stated their earnings from platform work are below the national tax threshold, so they do not need to pay taxes. While most interviewees indicated that they must handle taxes by themselves, with accounting, declaring revenue, and associated paperwork, a few interviewees from France spoke of a new law coming into effect in 2020, which requires that taxes are withheld at source.[5] Some interviewees were unsure of how this will affect them.

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[5] The law in question probably refers to 'LOI n° 2018-898 du 23 octobre 2018 relative à la lutte contre la fraude (1)' [Law n ° 2018-898 of 23 October 2018 on the fight against fraud (1)], see https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037518803&categorieLien=id.

Depending on the interviewee's employment status, **platform work may be taxed for income, or for both income and social security contributions**. The two interviewees with their own companies receive gross income, and they then must declare and pay taxes as any company would. When asked about whether the interviewee's employees are paid in gross or net, one interviewee hinted that these payments may be undeclared.

Work intensity and working time quality

Work intensity refers to the effort and strain associated with carrying out work. This includes physical strain, emotional and mental drain, and general stress. The organisation of working time refers to how the worker, platform, and client delegate the worker's time. It also includes time spent searching for tasks. As discussed in the literature, this can be a significant (and unpaid) portion of platform work (Berg, 2016). Both work intensity and the organisation of working time influence workers' work-life balance.

Regarding work intensity, most interviewees stated that they **work at their own pace**, and generally feel relaxed. Even for physically demanding tasks, such as moving heavy furniture, no workers expressed discontent with their working intensity. All felt they could take time to rest as required, and scheduled breaks as they wished.

Depending on the type of and scale of tasks, the **duration of tasks varied from under an hour to several weeks**. Most tasks required a few hours of work. A few workers specifically mentioned avoiding long duration tasks, which they find repetitive and boring.

In some instances, **clients are billed by how many hours workers require to complete a task**. In this case, workers are not incentivised to rush, but neither do they drag the work, which could upset the clients and result in a negative review. Generally, interviewed workers emphasised the need to do quality work, rather than rush to finish it. When platforms base pricing on time, postings for under an hour of work are not possible (and thus must be rounded up to one hour).

Box 3: Examples of platforms workers' time spent looking for work

'I spend relatively little time searching. Per week, maybe one hour.'

'My search function with [the platform] works such that I get an email where it says there's new tasks for you, and then I can see the customers who have a question. It has a great search function, and at a glance I can see if a task is for me or not. Then I can decide to pursue the customer or not.'

The **amount of time spent looking for work varied substantially**. Some individuals, namely those who own their own businesses, spend the first hour or two of most work days contacting clients via phone and email, and looking through platform/s for work. Several interviewees stated that when they first began on the platform, they had to spend more time searching and bidding for work rather than performing it. This improved upon completing several successful tasks and receiving positive reviews (see Box 3).

In most cases, interviewees did not express difficulties in finding acceptable times to perform work for clients. In some cases, clients were quite limited by their own tasks, which meant that evening or weekends were the only times they could have the platform worker at their home. One worker stated they rarely work weekends, as they charge clients extra compared to weekdays, and clients wish to avoid that.

All but one interviewed worker stated they are pleased with their work-life balance. Interviewees generally attributed this to the ability to adapt platform work to their needs, whether these be other work obligations, or family time. The one exceptional worker was unhappy with their work-life balance due to needing to work too many hours – frequently

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more than 50 hours per week, of which around 30% is platform work. This individual noted, however, that their discontent was a factor of the high demands of running a successful business, rather than related to platform work.

Overall, it seems that interviewees are unstressed while performing their platform work. However, it is difficult to generalise about work intensity and working time quality to compare with other forms of platform work, as the interviewees perform many different types of tasks.

Physical environment

The physical environment of platform work consists of the location of work, materials required for work and how they are acquired, and the physical health and safety risks associated with the work.

The most comprehensive report on health and safety of platform work is EU-OSHA (2017). EU-OSHA finds that for all platform workers, job insecurity may contribute to poor overall health, as is characteristic of atypical work. The generally young age of platform workers can also contribute to a higher risk of accidents. For platform work primarily taking place locally, risks include harassment, accidents (such as collisions in traffic), and exposure to chemicals (such as cleaning products). Certain risks are compounded because platform work is less likely to provide training for employees in traditional employment.

Workers organise their platform work (finding and accepting new tasks) from their office, their home, or from anywhere (in the case of cell phone they can opt to receive notifications/emails on potential work). A few interviewees, specifically the two who own their own firms, spend a portion of their work days in their firm's office, where they take care of billing and searching for or arranging work with clients.

For the **physical location of work**, interviewees generally worked indoors in the homes of clients. The main exception were interviewees performing gardening, landscaping, wood treatment, wiring, or metalworking tasks outside a client's home or business.

A few interviewees **frequently visit supply stores to buy necessary materials for the work**. Typically, platform workers simply add the price of materials into the total fee. One interviewee, who performed metalwork, spends part of their day in their firm's workshop. This is to fabricate materials which are then installed at the client's home.

For most interviewees, **commuting was a significant part of their work day**. Around half used their personal vehicle, while the remainder used public transport or bicycle. The amount of commute time varied considerably; some interviewees only selected clients located 5-8 kilometres away from their home. Another interviewee used a platform to access more lucrative contracts in an urban area around 100 kilometres from his rural home. No interviewees stated they bill clients for travel time, though they would consider how much time they commute in the price total.

All interviewees are responsible for **providing their own tools and materials**. One interviewee mentioned that one of the platforms they work on allows two options – to provide their own tools, or to use the client's. The interviewee prefers to use their own tools, as they want to use materials they are familiar with and know to be reliable and high quality. When additional materials are necessary for a task, interviewees mentioned they would purchase them themselves, but bill the clients for them.

Typically, the platform issues **very little or no guidance on Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) considerations**, and the worker is responsible for deciding how to carry out their contract with the client. For the most part, interviewees simply stated they are responsible for their own safety. A few interviewees mentioned that some clients were rather clueless as to potential risks (for example, trimming branches very high in the air).

A **portion of interviewees had formal work safety training** (typically as mandated by their respective trade association). For these workers, strict OSHA regulations apply to all their work – including their platform work – due to their trade association membership. For others, their safety training was informal, coming from their practical experience doing handiwork.

A few interviewees mentioned **the need to keep clients safe**, for example warning them to keep away while they use machinery (such as a grinder or other power tools).

Most, but not all, interviewees had health insurance. For some this came through their main occupation, and for others it was covered by mandatory social protection laws in their country.

Some interviewees were unsure if their platform offered **accident insurance for personal injury**. Interviewees generally expressed the care they take to avoid risks on the job and ensure their own personal safety. Several explicitly said they would simply stop a job if it seemed risky.

For **liability insurance,** some interviewees were unsure whether their platform offered this, stating they had not read all the information on the platform's website. An interviewee of the same platform stated that the platform recommends each worker purchase their own liability insurance but does not mandate it. A few interviewees clarified that **the platform itself has liability insurance; therefore, the platform is protected from liability**.

A few interviewees had liability insurance for their companies, as mandated by their membership to trade associations. Some interviewees purchased their own insurance independently of the platforms, as mandated based on their employment status (for example, entrepreneur in France).

One interviewee claimed to have dealt with a client who made multiple false claims of property damage in an attempt to scam the platform's insurance. The platform's insurer interviewed the worker about their experience, and while the worker suffered no negative consequences of the ordeal, they were unaware of how the situation played out.

One interviewee spoke about the **burden of providing their own liability insurance** for their platform work. They perceived a burden because a registered professional, who legally must pay for their own insurance, may be undercut by amateurs on the platform who have lower overhead costs.

At least one interviewee receives liability and accident insurance for personal injury through the platform. The contribution is paid mostly by the platform, and a 'small fee' from the worker's revenues. The insurance covers health and safety as well as liability. The interviewee stated that he had one accident in which they filed a claim through the insurance company, and the situation was resolved to the worker's and client's satisfaction.

Only **one worker mentioned a minor injury from platform work**. In this case, the client helped them clean the cut and gave them bandages, but the worker did not find it necessary to visit the hospital or make an insurance claim.

Relationships with the platform, clients, other workers and family and friends

Interpersonal relationships of platform workers comprise their relationships with representatives of the platform, clients, other workers, and family and friends. 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 workers' well-being and satisfaction.

The interpersonal relationships of platform workers can be 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).

Relationships with the platform representatives

As the intermediation of tasks takes place without any personal intervention of platform representatives, platform workers generally do not have well-developed relationships with the platform. This relationship between platform workers and the platform differs from the usual relationships between workers and employers/intermediaries in the traditional labour market but appears the same as the worker-initiated platform type. 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. For example, when difficulties or conflicts emerge, if workers are unsure where to turn to or feel they do not have the platform's support.

As is common in all types of platform work, interviewees had **effectively no relationship with platform representatives**. In some cases, platforms have a newsletter workers can subscribe to, which contains tips, updates, and miscellaneous information. Platforms sometimes offer tips on communicating with clients, timeliness, and looking presentable.

In a few cases, workers have contacted the platform to handle particular challenges or disputes. A few examples include when a client gave an incorrect address, when the actual task was much different than as described in the posting, and when the worker accidentally damaged the client's property. In each of these cases, the workers indicated that the platform responded quickly and efficiently, and helped to resolve the problem.

All platforms charge fees to workers and/or clients, either per contact, per month or year, or as a percentage of the charges for completed tasks. Most client-initiated, like worker-initiated platforms, seem to charge the worker a fee: typically, a percentage of the price for a completed task. **The fee arrangements vary a great deal**, and platforms seem to be experimenting with this. For example, one platform allowed clients to post prices, which almost invariably were considered too low by the interviewees. This created a race to the bottom and drove away qualified workers. In response, the platform has changed its system, and now workers have a much more positive view of the platform. Several interviewees said they want greater transparency on the pricing system.

Relationships with clients

Interviewees generally have **very positive views of their client relationships**. Interviewees mentioned feeling very trusted and receiving courtesies such as friendly chatting or being offered a drink or lunch. Several interviewees indicated that they felt great satisfaction from helping clients to solve their problems. One interviewee said that feedback from clients has helped them to improve their skills.

Only a **small minority of contacts with clients have a negative element** or dispute. When disputes occur, they tend to be over the task requiring more time than anticipated (and thus costing more when billed hourly), or clients cancelling a task last minute. This makes it difficult for workers to find a replacement task on short notice, so they may face an opportunity cost.

Most workers have **relatively few clients with repeating services**. This is due to the sporadic nature of work (for example, household repairs, installing hardware of miscellaneous decorations). By contrast, some worker-initiated platform work (for example, domestic cleaning) lends itself to longer-term relationships between workers and clients.

Each interviewee agreed on **the importance of their ratings from clients**. Several interviewees mentioned that they found it unfair that a client could leave a low rating and negative comment, and there was little they could do to contest it. Several interviewees contacted the platform about ratings they found unfair. In a few cases, the platform reached out to the client to understand what happened, but rarely did the platform take follow-up action. One interviewee said the platform's justification for taking no action is that the client's rating and comments are their intellectual property (see Box 4).

> **Box 4: Examples of platforms workers' experience with ratings**
>
> *'There are ratings of course, and right now I'm at 5 stars. It's really only one in a thousand customers who is unreasonable, and just wants to damage you with an unfair rating.'*
>
> *'For example, there was one instance where a client accused me of stealing from them. It was completely untrue.'*
>
> *'95% of my clients are nice. However, if the client has left a negative comment, there is no way for us to reply to it or contest it. Unless it is a very bad comment that is unjustified.'*

One interviewee mentioned that often clients leave a comment saying they are extremely satisfied with their work, but then leave only 4 stars out of 5. This is very frustrating, as the damage to their average rating is more visible than the positive comment. In more extreme cases, clients might leave one star, but a positive comment saying they are completely satisfied. Clearly these instances are clients who either make a mistake in their review or misunderstand what one star means. Because clients tend to prioritise the workers' ratings, which require no reading, these instances can significantly harm the worker's reputation.

Relationships with other workers

Generally, platform workers do not have relationships with one another. Schmidt and Kathmann (2017) find that online workers, and workers doing home repairs or cleaning services, have particularly little interaction with other platform workers.

Similarly, most interviewees know no or few other platform workers personally. In a few cases, interviewees stated they knew other platform workers, and it was friendly between them. The interviewee also stated they sometimes refer other workers, with whom they are friendly, to tasks they cannot personally complete (see Box 5).

> **Box 5: Example of platforms workers' relationships with other workers**
>
> *'I don't know any others who use [the platform] personally, but I can see them online. But really nobody says 'I work for the platform'.'*

Even so, several indicated that the relationship between workers is one largely defined by competition rather than comradery. Another interviewee stated it was **difficult to say if there was more a feeling of comradery or competition** between them. One interviewee stated that the feeling of competition is stronger between 'professional' workers on their platform.[6]

Relationships with family and friends

Generally, interviewees feel supported by friends and family as regards their platform work, and do not believe platform work impedes their personal relationships. This is likely a result of the significant flexibility these platform workers have in arranging their work. A few interviewees were recommended to try platform work by a friend, and others recommended platform work to friends.

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[6] This particular platform has two possibilities for workers – to register as a 'pro' by demonstrating professional certification, which the platform must verify, or to register as an 'individual' without professional certification.

Two interviewees mentioned that their **families were sceptical with platform work at first**, but later became supportive after seeing benefits (such as filling in free time with profitable activities, more autonomy in scheduling working time). For example, one interviewee said that his spouse was initially upset that they spent weekends doing platform work rather than being with their family. This was a particular issue because the individual additionally works a full-time job on weekdays. In response, the worker reduced his amount of platform work, restricted his work to weekdays, and the worker's spouse is now supportive.

Discrimination and harassment in platform work

In comparison with more traditional forms of work, discrimination and harassment may be more prevalent for platform workers, who tend to be younger and less experienced in the labour market. Platforms may enable clients to discriminate through rating systems and online profiles (Leimeister et al, 2016; Graham et al, 2017). Additionally, platforms may lack adequate mechanisms to prevent and address these issues. This may be especially relevant for workers performing local activities, 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 face discrimination in the traditional labour market (such as young people of migrant background). For workers engaged in online work, there is less interaction, more anonymity and potentially lower risk for discrimination and harassment (De Stefano, 2016).

No interviewees felt discriminated against in their platform work. Only one could offer a concrete example of another worker being discriminated against. In this case, a client hired two platform workers for a task – one of European descent (who was interviewed for this report), and one of African descent. The client treated the individual of European descent warmly, while being rude with the individual of African descent. This made the interviewee feel very uncomfortable, but they did not confront the client because they did not want to risk a bad review.

A few interviewees mentioned that clients may be discriminatory in selecting their workers, however they cannot directly observe this. Additionally, interviews unanimously believed that positive feedback, amount of experience on the platform, and acceptable pricing are the most important criteria for clients (rather than the worker's ethnicity, gender, or other considerations).

In a few cases, notably when platform workers operated in Belgium, clients posted tasks in either Dutch, French or English, and were sometimes limited to speaking a language that the worker did not. This resulted in some difficulty in communication, but not what the interviewees would qualify as discrimination.

Skills and training

Interviewees had attained the skills they use for platform work in a number of ways. A number of interviewees had formal technical training, while others simply picked up skills informally. One interviewee mentioned that they continue to learn a great deal from client feedback, and free tutorials on the internet.

No interviewees indicated that their platform offers training opportunities. Some platforms offer more general tips and information in newsletters, such as how to improve communication with customers. Several mentioned that they would be interested in additional training opportunities to improve their skills and learn new techniques, while a few interviewees said that they would not have any interest in training even if it were offered.

Several interviewees have **mandatory, regular OSHA trainings through their trade association membership**. The same interviewees have many offers for trainings to improve their skills through their trade associations. However, one of these interviewees stated that it has been years since they did such trainings. They stated they lack the time or pressing need

to take part in these trainings, particularly as they have decades of experience in their crafts and sufficient professional certifications.

Overall, interviewees selected tasks that they feel qualified for, rather than tasks that would require them to learn new skills. This is likely because workers would not want to risk performing a job poorly and harming their reputation.

Prospects and career development

Prospects refer to the opportunities available to platform workers to make a career of their work, use it as a stepping stone to a different career, or generally to achieve job or income security.

A few interviewees saw platform work as a tool in their transition to self-employment. For example, one worker was employed as a painter, and he credits platform work with the ability to work as self-employed. However, most interviewees **did not view platform work as a way to advance their careers**.

Box 6: Examples of platforms workers' career prospects

'I've worked in different ways - as an employer, as an employee. In the end, I decided I wanted to be independent and make my own decisions.'

'I don't really see how I have chances to advance with the platform. I'm already old – 60 years old, so what I plan is to work another five years and retire. You can never really plan these things, but I want to keep doing this work like I am. I'm very happy doing it.'

Generally, interviewees did not envision platform work as meaningfully affecting their career trajectory. Still, workers had very different views on prospects and career development in relation to their platform work. For some, **platform work is an interesting diversion from their primary career path**. For others, **platform work is a means of earning money and staying physically active** in their older years. Several others – particularly those with their own business – view platforms as a **means of supplementing demand from other sources**.

One interviewee mentioned that acknowledging platform usage may impede his career by damaging their company's reputation. While the worker found the platform **very useful to find contracts**, the platform has an undeserved **bad reputation** from how it previously operated. The interviewee stated the platform has largely remedied the problems that previously resulted in it being known as a 'junk platform', where few qualified workers were active, clients posted unrealistic prices, and remaining workers attempted to undercut one another. Nevertheless, the interviewee does not advertise that he uses the platform for fear of damaging their company's reputation.

One interviewee mentioned that **proof of their experience and success working through platforms** would be helpful for future career progression.

Lastly, **interviewees differed on whether they plan to stick with platform work**. For many, platform work seemed to offer an ideal mixture of free time and autonomous work. For others, platform work simply plugged a gap in their career due to an employment contract ending, or supplemented their finances from retirement or ongoing studies. One platform worker, for example, emphasised that his ongoing studies to be an optometrist had nothing to do with the 'odd jobs' he performs via platforms, and he simply needed money until their studies are finished.

Representation

Previous research has typically found that platform workers are much less likely to be organised (for example, as trade union members) than workers in the traditional labour market (Kilhoffer et al, 2017). Interviewees largely confirmed this narrative.

No interviewees knew of representation opportunities specifically for platform workers, though some were organised on the basis of their other employment. A few interviewees with their own companies are members of a trade association and represented in this regard. Furthermore, most interviewees who are full-time employees outside of platform work are represented on the basis of their main profession.

Several interviewees stated that unions, syndicates, or cooperatives for platform workers would be positive developments. For example, one interviewee argued that organisation is unnecessary at present because 'the platform hears us' and is responsive to workers' concerns, but in the future, this could change. While the platform initially focused on small 'handyman' types of tasks, it now intermediates large and complex tasks that enterprises or professionals usually carry out. As the platform continues to develop, more social partner action may be necessary. Other interviewees stated that they hoped social partners could help improve social protection provision for platform workers who lack it and provide training opportunities.

A few interviewees had negative feelings toward any potential organisation of platform workers. One interviewee claimed that representation for platform workers would be premature and ill-advised for a few reasons: platform work is still a developing concept, and thus unionising would simply be an activity for 'hype' rather than for substantive reasons; and platform workers on their platform are almost always organised through other means (such as trade associations).

Wrap-up: Overall well-being and satisfaction

Overall, interviewees had a positive sense of well-being and spoke of being quite satisfied with their platform work. This is similar to the worker-initiated type, and otherwise stands out in comparison to other forms of platform work, which have a more mixed picture. Several interviewees emphasised they enjoy working with a variety of tasks in different settings, and they could not imagine a typical job in a single location.

The largest reason why 16 of 17 interviewees were satisfied seems related to their autonomy. In this regard, two main points stick out. First, workers only bid for work that they want to do. Second, after establishing themselves on a platform, workers tend to work exactly as much as they want.

Platforms seem to try very hard to retain workers and attract new ones. In this regard, platforms need to distinguish themselves from other platforms by offering workers something better than the competitors. For example, each time a worker experienced a problem and requested help from the platform, they received it very quickly and were satisfied with the outcome. For a group of 17 workers to have had no seriously negative experiences with a platform, over many hundreds of tasks, is quite noteworthy, and distinguishes this type of platform work from others.

For the most part, the negative experiences were shortly after registering. Lacking a reputation, workers found it difficult to find work, as clients prefer workers with positive reviews over those with no work history. For this reason, interviewees starting out may need to search for a few weeks before finding their first few tasks.

Interviewees also mentioned a few points they would like to be changed. For example, platform fees, and transparency of pricing, were important issues for those who paid to use a platform. Otherwise, workers would like platforms to help deal with occasional unfair client reviews, as ratings are so critical to them finding work, and how the rates are set.

Concluding remarks

On-location client-determined moderately skilled work mainly refers to household tasks conducted by professionals to earn additional income or to fill idle times.

In general, working and employment conditions in this type of platform work are rather satisfying. The workers benefit from a high level of autonomy and control, which also positively affects their earnings and work intensity/working time. They experience good relationships with clients and can organise their work to result in a beneficial work-life reconciliation.

On the negative side, however, are potentially long commuting times and unsocial working hours as there is the need to adapt to the client's needs and preferences. Learning opportunities are limited as for efficiency and reputation reasons workers tend to select tasks that match their existing occupational skill rather than aiming to expand them. Nevertheless, this type of platform work can positively contribute to the workers' career prospects if used as a tool to enhance entrepreneurial or self-employment skills.

Table 4: Overview of the general impact of on-location client-determined moderately skilled work on working and employment conditions

Working and employment conditions	Impact
Autonomy and control	Full discretion No control by platforms or clients Advice from the platform in case of problems with clients
Earnings and taxation	Often set own rates Rather predictable Good awareness of taxation regimes, and practical handling of tax payments
Work intensity and working time quality	Satisfaction with work intensity/speed Unpaid search time decreases with experience on the platform Large influence in determining working time
Physical environment	Limited information and support provided by the platform regarding health and safety standards Often working in private clients' homes (questionnable safety standards and unclear responsibilities, but high own awareness and precaution measures) Significant commuting times
Social environment	Limited relationship between worker and platform problematic in case difficulties emerge Stigma of platform work Good for work-life reconciliation

	Good relationships with clients (important for rating and learning/improvement)
	Little interaction with other workers (and little interest in such)
Skills and training	Limited learning opportunities for occupational skills, limited training provision by the platform
	Depending on type of platform, some possibility to use a variety of skills
	Client-selected skills match between worker and tasks
Prospects and career development	Try out self-employment, build up client base
Representation	Limited specific initiatives
	Limited need due to representation in the other employment, but some need if the platform economy develops further (to ensure social protection and decent working conditions)

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 compilation

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