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WORKING CONDITIONS OF PLATFORM WORKERS IN NEW EU MEMBER STATES: MOTIVES, WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND LEGAL REGULATIONS

Rita Remeikienė

Vilnius University, Law faculty
Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: rita.remeikiene@jf.vu.lt
ORCID 0000-0002-3369-485X

Ligita Gasparėnienė

Vilnius University, Law faculty
Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: ligita.gaspareniene@jf.vu.lt
ORCID 0000-0002-5535-6552

Romas Lazutka

Vilnius University, Faculty of
Economics and business
administration
Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: romas.lazutka@sf.vu.lt

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ABSTRACT. The article focuses on the differences in motivation, working environment and legal regulation of digital platform work, as well as demographic characteristics of digital platform workers in new EU member states (Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Romania). The research is based on the COLLEEM survey (2018) results. The ANOVA test revealed statistically significant differences only in one group of the characteristics under consideration – the number of digital platforms used by workers. The findings lead to the conclusion that digital platform workers who use 5 and more platforms tend to be more motivated and more satisfied with their working environment and legal regulation than those who use 1 platform. Generally, the first and most important challenge that platform workers are facing is the lack of social protection that is provided by the traditional employment contracts. This applies to all new EU member states under consideration.

Keywords: digital labour platform, working conditions, legal regulation, the self-employed.

Introduction

With the development of technologies, expansion of information and communication networks, and development of smart digital devices, the so-called platform economy is gaining momentum, creating conditions for new forms of business and labour. Digital labour platforms are treated as a form of modern labour that combines decentralized information networks, big data analytics and smart digital devices (Pesole et al., 2018). Digital labour platforms allow employers to outsource work, while geographically dispersed customers get

access to products and services on the basis of an open call. To order a certain product or service, location-based smart device applications (apps) are used. They make it possible not only to locate customers, but also allocate workers (service providers performing service-oriented tasks, such as driving, food delivery, running errands, etc.) to a particular geographical area (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2021a; Giza & Wilk, 2021).

At first glance digital labour platforms respond to today's realities of business and social life digitalisation, help to match market demand with supply, allow better coordination of the provision of products and services, provide more transparency in the direct management of transactions (Fernandez-Macias, 2018), ease labour market entry, and facilitate working conditions for particular population groups (e.g. parents with small children, the youth, the disabled, low-skilled people, the retired, etc.). However, being a non-standard form of work, they often become an "umbrella" for employment arrangements which, actually, deviate from the standard labour relations: formally operating as a self-employed, an individual may have entered into a voluntary or forced verbal agreement with a business manager and actually does temporary, part-time or on-call work, i.e. under the guise of self-employment, the real nature of labour relations is masked. This makes people working through digital platforms socially vulnerable: without concluding an employment contract with the employer, their rights are not protected; lower social insurance contributions result in lower social insurance benefits (e.g., maternity/paternity leave, illness, loss of working capacity, etc.); when working on the basis of self-employment, compliance with health and safety regulations becomes the responsibility of the self-employed rather than the actual employer.

When addressing the problems linked to digital labour platforms, scientific literature tends to focus on the socio-economic impact of digital labour platforms (Evans, 2016; Pesole et al., 2018; Koskinen et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2021, etc.), policy implications (Malik et al., 2018; Nooren et al., 2018, etc.), institutional issues (Malik et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2020, etc.), the effects on organisational structures and international standards (Graham et al., 2017; de Reuver et al., 2018, etc.), work organising (Pesole et al., 2018; Koskinen et al., 2019; Scully-Russ and Torracio, 2020, etc), and risk regulation (Nooren et al., 2018; Nilsen et al., 2022, etc.). However, another problematic aspect that is important to take into account is that working on digital platforms is, in many cases, a modern form of organizing hired and paid work, which is disguised by forcing individuals to work as self-employed (when conducting business through digital platforms, traditional employment relationship is often useless because it does not help to generate maximum profits); as a result, the true status of digital platform workers is not properly defined and their rights are not properly exercised. Thus, it is relevant to research working conditions, including their legal regulation, of platform workers.

The major purpose of this article – after reviewing the motives, working environment and legal regulation factors representing working conditions of digital platform workers, to identify the differences in the above-mentioned factors and demographic characteristics of digital platform workers in new EU member states.

To fulfil the defined purpose, the following objectives were raised: 1) to provide the concept of digital labour platforms; 2) to review the findings of previous studies concerning working conditions in digital labour platforms; 3) to select and substantiate the methodology of the research; 4) to identify the differences in the motives, working environment, legal regulation and demographic characteristics of digital platform workers in new EU member states. The research methods include systematic and comparative literature analysis, the ANOVA test.

The contribution of this research to the labour market theory is two-fold: first, the differences in the motives, working environment and legal regulation of digital platform

workers as well as the number of digital platforms used for this type of work lead to the conclusion that the workers who use a greater number of digital labour platforms are more motivated and more content with working conditions than the workers who use only one or two platforms (thus, a deeper analysis of the workers' psychological characteristics is relevant); second, the research of the legal regulation of digital platform work in new EU member states revealed the potential and barriers to the development of this type of work.

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be reviewed carefully and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research.

1. The concept of digital labour platforms

Definition of digital labour platforms in scientific literature depends on the context in which they are researched. In a broad sense, Evans and Gawer (2016), Constantinides and Henfridsson (2018), and Jacobides et al. (2018) treat digital platforms as technologically mediated interaction within a user group. This aspect reveals that the interaction of subjects in a digital platform can be of various types - from integration and innovation to making transactions and serving target segments. It is important to note that the subjects interact through online networks and smart technologies.

Gossling and Michael Hall (2019) believe that digital platforms create the basis for resource allocation and exchange in the economy driven by technological advances (sometimes called the platform economy). Fernandez-Macias (2018) sees digital platforms as a system that allows to allocate tasks to different economic agents (workers, the self-employed) who collaborate in the economic process. In this way, digital platforms act as a mechanism through which the input of different subjects is coordinated to achieve a productive goal (reduced time between tasks, standardization of work, orders and tasks). Saberian et al. (2020) and Kiesling (2020) also confirm economic significance of digital platforms but emphasize the benefits of a higher product/service market value rather than productivity, while Kenney and Zysman (2016) focus on the capacity of digital platforms to redistribute the value generated in new ecosystems.

The capacity of generating and redistributing the value determines the increasing use of digital platforms to provide goods and services to a customer and create a positive customer's experience, which is why digital platforms are becoming the basis for creating new employment opportunities. In this context, Pesole et al. (2018) define digital platforms as digital networks through which labour service transactions are coordinated. The European Commission (2021a) defines digital labour platforms as internet-based companies that intermediate and organise the work provided by workers or self-employed people to third-party clients. Work through the aforementioned platforms can be carried out both in a specific physical location and online, and the business execution model is based on technological algorithms. The statistical data show that there are more than 500 digital labour platforms operating in Europe; more than 28 million people within the EU work through these platforms. This number is expected to reach 43 million people by 2025 (European Commission, 2021a). Kassi and Lehdonvirta's (2018) forecast, based on the index that represents utilization of digital labour platforms, suggests that the use of digital platforms tends to grow at a rate of about 25 percent a year.

Carelli et al. (2021) argue that the concept of digital labour platforms goes beyond the traditional concept of the digital sphere: currently they have already become certain

entrepreneurial organizations, i.e. a particular business model. Thus, they can be treated as an infrastructure or an environment (in terms of time, space, organization and structure) through which the conditions for the interaction between two or more groups of economic agents are created. According to Gorlich (2010), digital labour platforms make it possible to deepen the division of labour and combine complementary tasks. The European Commission (2021a) notes that digital labour platforms provide people, especially those population groups that otherwise can face serious difficulties to enter the labour market (young people without previous work experience, parents with small children, the elderly, the disabled, migrants, etc.), additional opportunities to earn income.

Nevertheless, work through digital labour platforms has its drawbacks. Carelli et al. (2021), who interpret digital labour platforms as a synthesis of economic efficiency and technological innovation, see the inherent uncertainty which is associated with the ideology of the work structure, when a person is one's own entrepreneur (self-entrepreneurship). The European Commission (2021a) points out that about 55 percent economic agents working through digital platforms earn less than the net hourly minimum wages; as many as 8.9 hours per week are spent performing unpaid tasks (e.g. waiting for assignments).

In summary, definition of digital labour platforms depends on the context in which they are researched. In a broad sense, digital platforms are defined as technologically mediated interaction within a user group. When assessing the economic contribution of digital platforms, researchers emphasize that these platforms create a basis for the allocation of resources (including labour). In the context of employment, digital labour platforms refer to an internet-based system, infrastructure or environment that allows to organise the work provided by workers or self-employed people to third-party clients, coordinate labour service transactions and allocate tasks to different economic agents (workers, the self-employed) who cooperate within the economic process. Thus, digital labour platforms are becoming the basis for creating new employment opportunities, allow deepening the division of labour and combine complementary tasks. However, at the same time work through digital platforms is associated with uncertainty inherent to the ideology of the work structure, when a person is one's own entrepreneur (self-entrepreneurship), and a relatively high risk of economic-social vulnerability of the participating agents.

2. Working conditions in digital labour platforms: Theoretical background

The development and proliferation of non-standard forms of work is determined by a variety of forces, including economic environment, technological advancement, demographic factors and labour market regulations. Digital labour platforms are undeniably a product of technological progress, creating more opportunities for workers to integrate into the labour market, but at the same time posing challenges for working conditions since work through these platforms often resembles long-standing work arrangements, with online networks and smart technologies serving as an intermediary (ILO, 2021c). It is also related to a certain orientation not only related to the technical skills of working through IT systems, but may also be related to digital skills and acceptance of new technology (Ujwary-Gil & Godlewska-Dzioboń, 2022). The scientific literature analysis revealed that working conditions in digital labour platforms are generally represented by three major factor groups: motives of economic agents to work through digital platforms, working environment (including remuneration, work time, task performance, health and safety environment, degree of decision making, etc.), and legal regulation.

Motives. Speaking about the motives of digital platform workers, Gagne and Deci (2005) distinguish between intrinsic (doing something for one's own sake, interest,

satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (doing something for instrumental reasons, the main ones of which are tangible awards and recognition). Individuals can be driven by both internal and external motivation or experiencing both types of motivation simultaneously. The authors, however, notice that intrinsic motivation tends to be stronger and longer lasting because it provides improved mental well-being, enhances creativity and stimulates learning (Hon, 2012). In the report provided by the 'Eurofound' (2018), autonomy (i.e. the freedom to choose the tasks performed, the way the tasks are performed, the working time, the methods of work organizing, etc.) is indicated as an important motivator for platforms workers. Autonomy is linked to greater satisfaction with working conditions, a better work-life balance. Rosenblat and Hwang's (2016) empirical study revealed that drivers working through the 'Uber' and 'Lyft' digital platforms choose this type of work due to autonomy, the ability to control their work schedule, and social contacts. The latter motivating factor is also mentioned in Rockmann and Ballinger's (2017) study. Rani (2021) highlights the importance of job flexibility (more pronounced among women).

In the group of extrinsic motivators, Anderson et al. (2021) provide the data showing that the income workers can earn through digital platforms is crucial for meeting their basic needs, and a majority of workers have been satisfied with their remuneration over the past 12 months. Rani (2021), however, indicates complementing the existing income as the major motive to undertake tasks on digital platforms, which is confirmed by Piasna et al. (2022). Rani (2021) also mentions the need or necessity to work from home and a lack of alternative employment opportunities (more pronounced among taxi drivers and delivery workers).

Generalizing the impact of various motivational factors on the decision to work through digital labour platforms, Dunn (2020) states that although personal motivators may differ depending on individual needs, priorities and other circumstances, the general tendency is that subjects choosing work through digital platforms will always evaluate working environment and quality.

Working environment. Rani (2021) argues that in terms of working environment, digital labour platforms provide asset-lightness, network effects, data fication, mobility, and income-earning opportunities. The author indicates that workers operating in the app-based taxi and delivery sectors tend to earn more than workers doing similar works in the traditional sectors. The potential for higher earnings is determined by bonuses paid to digital platform workers and the policy to maintain competitive prices, which helps to divert customers from the traditional sectors. The survey conducted by Rockmann and Ballinger (2017) revealed that digital platform workers consider the working environment to be comfortable and flexible, and the empirical analysis disclosed that this work tends to expand the knowledge and increase the expertise in a particular industry.

However, working environment in digital labour platforms possesses many downsides. Reviewing the major challenges related to working environment in digital platforms, the European Commission (2021a) notes that this form of employment is characterized by a lack of transparency, unpredictability of contractual agreements, health and safety risks, and inadequate access to social protection. Similar problems are highlighted by Behrendt et al. (2019), Joyce et al. (2020), Rani (2021), Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021) and other researchers: agents working on digital platforms often do not have social security coverage, so their work environment is characterized by a high risk of vulnerability considering that without social security coverage, these workers do not have the right to work-related injury, unemployment and disability benefits, old-age pension, etc.

Apart from the risk of social vulnerability, working environment in digital labour platforms can be characterized by a flawed revenue model. Rani (2021) notes that it is common for different fees to be applied to platform workers rather than subscribers (clients). In fact, digital platforms generate about 62 percent of the revenue by charging fees to

workers, which is against international labour standards, for instance, the ILO Protection of Wage Convention (1949, No. 95), and Private Employment Agencies Convention (1997, No. 181). The European Commission (2021b) emphasizes the risk of unpredictable, low and unfair income, while ILO (2021d) indicates that a substantial part of platform workers work more hours than workers in traditional sectors to earn similar income.

Flexibility and autonomy of the working conditions are also not absolute: control of digital platforms through algorithms can have a negative impact on workers' access to work, limit their autonomy and freedom (Rani, 2021). 'Eurofound' (2018) suggests that digital platforms can control work tasks, time and methods (manner), customers can rank workers, so the level of autonomy may vary significantly from platform to platform.

Legal regulation. Carelli et al. (2021) point out that legal regulation of the relationship between Labour and Capital is necessary considering the fact that there is a deep imbalance between the parties involved in this relationship (Labour is represented by an employee, while Capital is represented by an employer); the imbalance is determined by structured economic and social inequality in the labour market. Labour laws make it possible to at least partially eliminate the actual asymmetry, dispel the illusions of market self-regulation, and provide the immediate protection for people who live on work income. Also, the laws regulating work activities allow to take into account the difference between the workforce and the worker as a person.

Labour relations can be complicated when the rights and obligations of the parties are not clear, when labour relations and regulating laws have so-called 'grey areas'. For instance, although theoretically workers in digital labour platforms can be treated as the self-employed, in practice they provide services to businesses under a contract different from a contract of employment and receive directions regarding how the work has to be done (ILO, 2021b). These inconsistencies are essential for countries with a large share of informal economic relations (Mishchuk et al., 2018; Shkolnyk et al., 2020) with appropriate impact on the employment sphere (Remeikiene & Gaspareniene, 2021). The steep development of IT-based opportunities for business and employment typical for current business environment changes (Habánič et al, 2021; Lipták & Musinszki, 2022; Roshchyk et al., 2022) only deepened the issues of online business activity regulation.

In foreign countries, the practice of recognizing the status of digital platform workers is very different. For example, on 12 November 2016, the London Central Employment Tribunal in its decision in the Aslam v. 'Uber' case stated that 'Uber' drivers shall not be considered the self-employed, but employees. This UK court ruling provided 'Uber' drivers access to the minimum wage and paid holidays, which they had not been granted before, being treated as the self-employed ('Judiciary UK', 2016).

The opposite decision was issued by the District Court of Appeal of Florida in the Darrin E. McGillis v. 'Uber' case on 1 February 2017 (District Court of Appeal of Florida, 2017). In this decision, the court indicated that when deciding whether a person is a self-employed or an employee, it is important to take into account the person's subordination, control, workplace, equipment provided by the employer, work duration, and assessment of the mutual relations by the employer and the employee. Taking into account the fact that the drivers use their own cars, not those provided to them by the employer, freely choose how much to work, when to start, whether or not accept individual orders, i.e. in fact, no one controls their work, and they can simultaneously work for direct competitors, the court decided that the relations under consideration shall be treated as self-employment.

It should be noted that to date there are more than 100 court decisions and 15 administrative decisions in the EU related to the employment status of persons working through digital platforms. In most cases, judges decide to classify platform workers as employees and platforms - as employers. Digital platform drivers are considered the self-

employed in most EU countries, for instance, in Belgium, Estonia, France. To facilitate the work of the drivers and collect taxes to the state budget, the legal acts in these countries oblige platforms to inform the drivers about the taxes and social insurance contributions they have to pay, and submit the annual amounts of the taxes payable to the drivers and state tax administration authorities.

More and more states are starting to prioritize social protection of platform workers, especially those to whom it is their main job or who combine it with another, usually temporary, job. For instance, the French and Italian governments have enacted legislation that provides some social guarantees to digital platform workers; the guarantees are slightly greater than those available to the self-employed. In 2016, French legislation enshrined the right of the self-employed operating through digital platforms to be insured against accidents at work, to receive free professional training and the right to defend their interests through collective means (the laws obliged the platforms to negotiate with employee representatives). In 2019, Italy adopted the law on protection of the self-employed operating through digital platforms. The law gave the self-employed the right to resolve disputes through collective means and established some social guarantees. Addressing the issue of social guarantees for platform workers in the Italian Lazio region, the regional legal acts were passed to regulate the remuneration, health and safety and social protection, granted to all digital platform workers, regardless of their employment status. These are the most detailed platform work considering legal acts within the EU.

In December 2021, the European Commission proposed a Directive aimed at improving working conditions on digital platforms (the European Parliament and the Council, 2021). This Directive:

- ✓ provides a list of criteria for determining whether a digital labour platform controls a person who should therefore be presumed to be an employee. If at least two criteria are met, the platform is considered an employer;
- ✓ asks member states to ensure that the presumption of employment status is effective, enforceable and rebuttable. This includes establishing a framework to ensure that the legal presumption applies in all relevant administrative and judicial processes, and that enforcement authorities, such as labour inspectorates or social security institutions, can rely on that presumption. The member states should also undertake the supporting measures to ensure effective implementation of the legal presumption, for instance, they should prepare the appropriate guidelines for digital labour platforms, workers, social partners and enforcement authorities. The member states should also strengthen controls and on-the-spot checks;
- ✓ establishes new rights for individual's subject to algorithmic control when performing work on digital platforms. In this way, employees and their representatives will be provided with the necessary information about how their work and tasks are distributed, how accounts are assessed or terminated. The new rights will also ensure that the decisions having a significant impact on working conditions are subject to human monitoring and review;
- ✓ asks digital labour platforms to declare the work in the country where it is performed and provide national authorities with information about the workers and their working conditions. This will improve monitoring and enforcement.

3. Methodological approach

To identify the differences in the respondents' experience of digital platform work and the number of platforms they work with, the ANOVA analysis was conducted. The authors of this article used the results of the survey "Platform Workers in Europe" commissioned by the

European Commission (2018) (the COLLEEM survey was conducted by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in 2018 (Pesole et. al., 2018). The countries that accessed the EU in 2004 were selected for this research (Lithuania – 13.5 percent of digital platform workers, Slovakia – 8.5 percent of digital platform workers, Hungary – 8.9 percent of digital platform workers, Romania – 14.2 percent of digital platform workers, Croatia – 12.1 percent of digital platform workers). The above-mentioned countries were selected for the research for the following reasons: according to Pesole et. al. (2018), around 2 percent of the European working-age population (aged 16–74) in 14 member states, including all 5 member states in the research sample, are engaged in platform work as a main job. For around 6 percent of digital platform workers, platform work generates a significant income (at least 25 percent of the average wage for a standard working week of 40 hours), and almost 8 percent perform tasks through digital platforms at least once a month. Basically, the ANOVA test allowed to form the testing groups to see if there are any differences among them.

The first step was checking homogeneity of variances by employing Levine's test. The results of this test for the three groups of questions under consideration - Q13 (How important, if at all, have the following factors been to you as motivation to work via online platforms?) (see *Table 1*, annex), Q19 (To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your working conditions via online platforms? (working environment) (see *Table 2*, annex) and Q25 (To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your work via online platforms (regulation)) (see *Table 3*, annex) - suggested identifying the statements with a statistically significant value of this test.

Table 1. Statistically significant ANOVA test results for Q13

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q13_1 I prefer flexibility over where I work	Between Groups	12.752	4	3.188	3.379	0.010
	Within Groups	427.414	453	0.944		
	Total	440.166	457			
Q13_10 This allows me to find more clients./customers	Between Groups	20.732	4	5.183	3.603	0.007
	Within Groups	651.731	453	1.439		
	Total	672.463	457			
Q13_11 I like being my own boss	Between Groups	23.868	4	5.967	3.868	0.004
	Within Groups	698.737	453	1.542		
	Total	722.605	457			

Source: *own compilation*

Table 2. Statistically significant ANOVA test results for Q19

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q19_2_I can decide when to work	Between Groups	8.469	4	2.117	2.646	0.033
	Within Groups	362.500	453	0.800		
	Total	370.969	457			
Q19_3_I can decide how many hours to work	Between Groups	8.786	4	2.197	2.572	0.037
	Within Groups	386.893	453	0.854		
	Total	395.679	457			
Q19_4_I have a choice over which tasks I perform	Between Groups	15.827	4	3.957	4.150	0.003
	Within Groups	431.955	453	0.954		
	Total	447.782	457			
Q19_5_I can decide on how to perform my tasks	Between Groups	9.889	4	2.472	2.507	0.041
	Within Groups	446.742	453	0.986		
	Total	456.631	457			
Q19_8_I work on tasks that require me to learn	Between Groups	12.967	4	3.242	3.162	0.014
	Within Groups	464.421	453	1.025		
	Total	477.389	457			

Source: own compilation

Table 3. Statistically significant ANOVA test results for Q25

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q25_2_Platform provides sufficient information on the regulations with which I have to comply (e.g. tax regulations)	Between Groups	18.970	4	4.743	3.565	0.007
	Within Groups	602.560	453	1.330		
	Total	621.531	457			
Q25_3_Platform provides sufficient support in dealing with regulation related issues	Between Groups	18.513	4	4.628	3.476	0.008
	Within Groups	603.163	453	1.331		
	Total	621.677	457			

Source: own compilation

The preliminary estimations show that the statistically significant results were obtained only for the demographic question “Via how many different online platforms have you provided services in the past 12 months?”. When analysing other demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education and work experience, no statistically significant differences were found.

4. Empirical results and discussion

Graph 1 presents the results of the ANOVA test revealing the differences in the platform usage experience. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied, and the statistically significant differences in the answers provided by the respondents were identified for question Q13. In the questions that used a Likert scale, 1 represented the rating

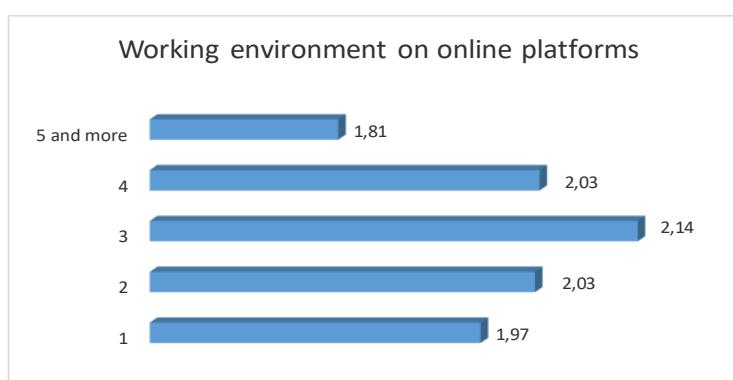
'extremely important', and 5 – 'completely unimportant'. *Graph 1* shows that the workers who use 5 or more platforms, compared to those who use between 1 and 4 platforms, tend to value flexibility of the platform work (mean rank 1.55), the potential to find as many customers as possible (mean rank 2.09) and being one's own boss (mean rank 1.81). Compared to the workers who use only one platform, the impact of the motivational factors on platform work is less significant.



Graph 1. Motives to do the digital platform work (mean ranks) and the differences for the groups of workers using a different number of platforms

Source: *own data*

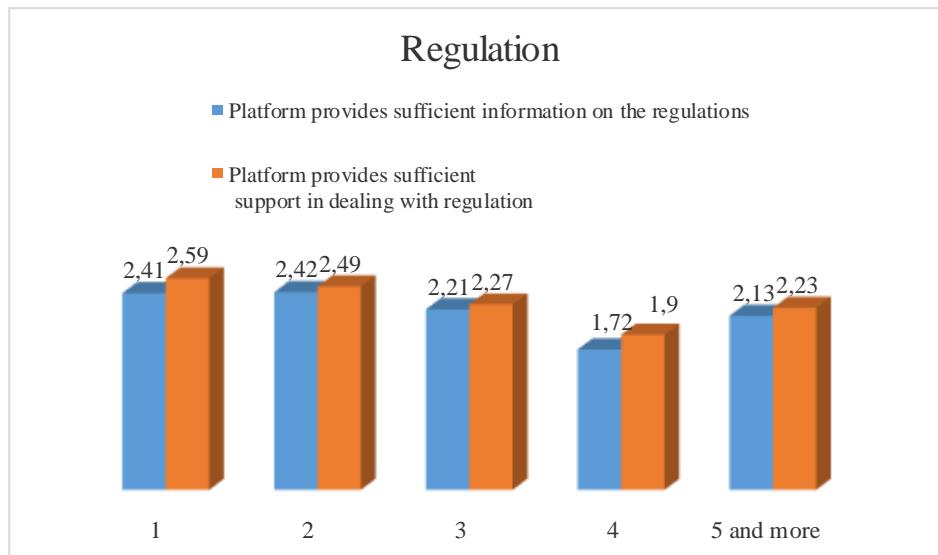
The analysis of the attractiveness of working environment from the position of the workers who use 1-5 or more platforms (see *Graph 2*) revealed that the workers who use 5 and more platforms are more satisfied with such working environment factors as distribution of the number of working hours per day, the ability to select the tasks to be performed and the method of task performing, and the opportunity to improve (the lowest mean rank equal to 1.81). The workers who use only one digital platform also expressed satisfaction with working environment, although the degree of satisfaction was somewhat lower (mean rank equal to 1.97); they indicated the ability to freely decide when to work as the best characteristic of the digital platform work.



Graph 2. Evaluation of working environment on digital labour platforms (mean ranks) and the differences for the groups of workers using a different number of platforms

Source: *own data*

Finally, the analysis of legal regulation revealed that the workers who use 4 and more platforms are more satisfied with legal regulation of digital labour platforms (see *Graph 3*), while the workers who use 1-2 platforms tend to be less content with legal regulations.



Graph 3. Evaluation of legal regulation of the work on digital labour platforms (mean ranks) and the differences for the groups of workers using a different number of platforms

Source: *own data*

Nevertheless, the position of the workers operating on digital labour platforms is more similar to the employer-employee relations rather than a status of a self-employed or an entrepreneur. Thus researchers (Davulis, 2020) tend to raise questions as to whether workers of digital labour platforms can apply only to instruments granted by civil law and whether these instruments are sufficient for protecting these workers. Although most jurisdictions recognize digital platform workers as the self-employed, the features of the work relations propose that they tend to operate as employees: they follow the instructions of the application which is used to find customers, comply with the rules of service provision, cannot freely determine the work time, the service price, etc. (Davulis, 2020, p. 43). Based on the data of the European Parliament (2021), digital platform workers in Lithuania do not have a status of an employee, and thus do not have the right to collective bargaining or the conclusion of collective agreements. Nevertheless, digital platform workers are represented by the Courier Association, founded in 2020. This is Lithuania's first ever organisation uniting people working on digital platforms. Although being treated as the self-employed, digital platform workers in Lithuania are covered by pension, sickness or maternity/paternity leave social insurance, the risks of unemployment, accidents at work or occupational diseases are not included.

Being a non-standard form of employment, digital platform work is undergoing slow reforms in Croatia. Labour unions still tend to treat flexible forms of employment as unreceptive (Bejaković and Håkansson, 2021). Grgurev and Vukorepa (2018) note that digital platform work in Croatia is often not covered by the adequate social insurance, and in many cases – not covered by any social insurance at all. The progress in the area under consideration started in 2021, when the Union of Platform Workers (SRDP) as part of the SSSH Trade Union Federation in Croatia was established. The major problem envisaged by the Union is inadequate legal regulation of digital platform work which leads to violations of workers' rights and a lack of their social protection (digital platform workers do not have the

right to paid holidays or sick leave, are not granted the minimum wage, etc.). This problem is especially relevant considering the fact that this type of work has been practiced for over eight years.

The situation of digital platform workers in Romania is similar to that in many other countries, i.e. it is characterized by a gap in legal regulation. Digital labour platforms provide the conditions to start work easily: a person can either register as a self-employed or set up a limited liability company (Rîmbu and Benga, 2022). However, when it comes to platform workers who transfer their activities offline, the situation seems slightly different. For now, Romanian legislation only includes provisions for workers who operate in the transport sector, i.e. work as ‘Uber’ and ‘Bolt’ drivers. In the latter case, the Romanian Road Administration issues a license for each car that is intended to be used for alternative transport activities. Although digital platform activities are regulated to some extent, social protection of workers is not granted. Currently, drivers can operate through digital platforms as the self-employed or fleet workers. In the latter case, workers can also operate as employees (as long as they do not join the fleet as the self-employed). This option is, however, disadvantageous because an employee will be charged additional taxes and will not be able to enjoy flexibility (Rîmbu and Benga, 2022).

Legislation does not recognize a specific status of platform work and does not offer any targeted regulation to correspond to the specificities of platform work in Hungary and Slovakia (Kahancová, et al., 2020). In addition, platform workers are hardly considered by the labour unions in both countries. This tendency along with the fact that digital labour platforms are not treated as employers (except ‘Uber’ that joined the National Association of Employers) lead to non-standard employment agreements between workers and digital platforms. In Hungary, the most common form of on-demand work is bogus self-employment. Since the Slovak labour market does not have any special regulation of digital platform work, platform workers do not have the right to social protection. Likewise, due to the absence of the relevant legal regulation of digital platform work, platform workers are not entitled to social protection in Slovakia and Hungary (Kahancová, et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Digital labour platforms play a significant role in the transition of the EU to the digital economy. The volumes of digital platform work are soaring, and the size of the digital platform economy grew almost fivefold from €3 billion in 2016 to €14 billion in 2020. Digital labour platforms provide the potential of innovation, job creation and competitiveness. They reduce labour market entry and facilitate working conditions for socially vulnerable population groups.

One of the biggest challenges associated with digital platform work is poorly-defined employment status of those involved in this activity. Digital platform-based activities are not comprehensively defined in traditional labour law, which indicates a necessity to specify the status of digital platform workers, exercise their labour rights and ensure the adequate access to social protection and labour union representation. Currently, the new EU member states allow digital platform workers to operate as the self-employed (in Lithuania, digital platform workers are treated as the self-employed and are subject to the provisions the Civil Code only; in Croatia, Slovakia and Hungary, digital platform workers are also treated as the self-employed) or set up a limited liability company (Romania). In Romania, drivers can also operate as active employees. Unfortunately, in most cases when digital platform work is treated as self-employment, workers have limited social guarantees, which may deteriorate their social well-being (especially in the cases of disability, sickness, unemployment, retirement, etc.)

The analysis of the motives, working environment and legal regulation of digital platform work revealed that the persons who use a greater number of digital labour platforms tend to be more satisfied with their working conditions than the persons who use 1-2 platforms. The causes of this result could be lying in one's psychology, in particular, type of personality, attitude towards technologies, internal determination to understand the nature of platform work.

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Annex

