

SKILLS LAB NETWORK OF EXPERTS

Webinar - “New forms of work and platform economy in developing and transition countries”

Event summary and conclusions - 7 November 2022

On 7 November 2022, the ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts held a webinar on “New forms of work and platform economy in developing and transition countries”. Overall, a total of 54 people attended the webinar, from the ETF partner countries, EU Member States and further abroad. The event presented new research and innovative methodology used to quantify and analyse the scope of platform work, particularly how it affects skills development and demand. The event was the occasion for network members to share their research on the topic and to learn from researchers in other regions.

Session 1 – Framing the discussion on platform work and evidence from transition countries

After the opening remarks, **Iwona Ganko and Eva Jansova** presented the ETF’s recent research on new forms of work in the [Eastern Partnership](#) countries and the [Western Balkans](#).

The first part of their presentation focused on the **theory and methodology** behind the research. They started by underlining the importance of understanding platform work as an element amongst bigger trends of **digitalisation, greening, and automation** of the economy, with an observable shift away from traditional workplaces and work patterns towards flexible labour relations, remote employment and learning opportunities.

The presentation then moved on to discuss the main characteristics of platform work, the differences between **digital capital platforms** and **digital labour platforms**, and the methodology behind the ETF’s research, including a discussion of the **big data methods** used to scrape and analyse data from global freelancing platforms.

The second half of the presentation focused on the **main findings** of the research. Platform work and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are thus found to have exacerbated pre-existing trends regarding the **digitalisation and flexibilisation** of the labour market. These developments provide many job opportunities with lower entry barriers and requirements for skills, but profit mainly to young men from urban areas.

The research also underlined the limited scope for career development and skills recognition. An important point in this regard is to foster the **portability of work experience and skills** gained on the job by recognising those acquired in new forms of employment and platform work.

Branka Andjelkovic and Tanja Jakobi then took the floor to present [Gigmetar](#), an online tool developed by the Public Policy Research Centre in Serbia to describe the **geography of digital work in Serbia and South East Europe**.

Their presentation included details on the methodology behind Gigmetar, the main uses of the tool, and the limits of the data that such tools can provide. Gigmetar is accessible online and can be used to **analyse national online labour markets** at any given point in time, to monitor the development of labour markets over time, and to compare the labour force between countries. This data provides crucial input for defining new public policies regarding digital work in this region.

Ana Diakonidze from the Tbilisi State University then presented her research on the profile of food delivery couriers and their working conditions in Georgia. Her findings include the surprising fact that, although in high-income countries platform work is mainly a side job, 65% of workers indicated it here as their **main source of income**.

The development of online platforms is also found to be exacerbating a **shortage in labour supply** for the traditional service sector, with the pandemic leading many workers to move from **informal employment in the service industry** to more formal work with a platform, despite the ambiguities surrounding the status of such workers and the development of **bogus self-employment**.

Platform work thus emerges as an attractive opportunity for many workers, simply because it provides **meaningful income** compared to very low-paid service sector jobs. However, despite most workers only considering it as a temporary job, they often find themselves staying longer than expected due to the **lack of skills development and portability**. In this sense, platform work can become somewhat of an employment trap.

Session 2 – Lessons from Indian platform workers and benefits of platform work data

The second session started with a presentation by **Dr Sakshi Khurana** from the National Institution for Transforming India, regarding a [recent study](#) on **India's booming gig and platform economy**.

After presenting the latest estimates regarding the size of the platform economy in India and the **projections for the future**, both in terms of size and skills demand, Dr Khurana discussed some recent initiatives from the Indian state, including the **Code on Social Security** recognising gig and platform workers as a distinct category of workers, and e-SHRAM, a **unified platform that organises all social security and welfare benefits** for unorganised workers.

The presentation then focused on some challenges related to the platform economy, including the **widespread skills mismatch**, difficulty in providing **upskilling opportunities** and the **issue of portability** between platforms. Dr Khurana also underlined the need for more training programmes related to digital skills and technology, along with further **awareness programmes and skills development opportunities**, especially for women.

Finally, the presentation covered some perspectives for **overcoming the growing skills polarisation** in the sector and the wider Indian economy. These include the further development of **platform-led skill training**, on-the-job learning apprenticeships for workers, better skills recognition, and the use of **skill certificates** or skilled badges that can be displayed on the online profile of workers, in the manner of a "gig CV".

The webinar closed with a presentation from **Dr Fabian Stephany** from the Oxford Internet Institute, on the value of skills and how this can be measured, based on the analysis in his latest working paper, [What is the price of a skill?](#) that focuses on what we can learn about **reskilling and the value of skills** in the future of work using online-generated data.

Dr Stephany started by discussing the pros and cons of automation and AI. On one side they may have some positive effects by **outsourcing repetitive tasks**, thus freeing more energy for creative occupations, but they may lead to a **skills mismatch**, as it is mainly low-skilled work that will be replaced, with high demand for the software-related skills needed to operate this new technology.

Hence the importance of identifying **which skills are most valuable** in this context, and of finding evidence-based answers to the question. The presentation showed that online platforms can be a crucial source of information due to the **granularity and wide spectrum of data** that they provide, both on the supply and demand side.

By using network analysis, Dr Stephany and his colleagues have shown how **relationships between different types of skills** affect their added value. In this regard, Dr Stephany underlined the importance of developing **complementary skills**, i.e. skills that can easily be combined with others in a worker's skill set.

Conclusions

The platform economy regularly suffers criticism in regard to its **lack of social protection** and the **ambiguity of its legal framework**. The webinar showed nonetheless that it can provide a regular source of income for both low-skilled and high-skilled workers and can help to reduce informal work. It can however remain an **employment trap** due to the limited opportunities for skills development that it provides. In this regard, it is crucial to develop **learning initiatives** such as **platform-led skill training** and to improve skills portability through the use of **skill certificates** or a “gig CV”.

It will be important in the coming years to continue studying the development of the platform economy, and to better understand how specific skills requirements differ and overlap for online workers versus offline workers. The draft [EU Directive on improving working conditions for platform work](#) is also highlighted as an initiative that can help to improve the situation and clarify the legal status of platform workers.

Resources

All presentations and material presented at the event can be found at:

<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/events/webinar-new-forms-work-and-platform-economy-developing-and-transition-countries>

Useful resources were also shared by the Network’s members:

[Friedrich Ebert Stiftung project – Mapping the platform economy](#)

Sieker, F. (2022). [Platform work and access to social protection across major European countries. Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy](#), 1-15. doi:10.1017/ics.2022.13

[Draft EU Directive on improving working conditions for platform work](#)