Policy Paper

12 Points for Decent Work in the Platform Economy
Findings from the European online conference on 21 September 2020

I. Rules for fair platform work

1. Decent Work as the commodity worth protecting

Behind platforms are the people who provide the services. Protecting these people needs to take priority over other interests. This means good working conditions, a fair wage, and social as well as legal insurance, e.g. in the case of illness, accidents or old age. A lack of social insurance, particularly among the solo self-employed, can leave people in a precarious position. Due to the large variety of platforms and business models, it is necessary to (re)define the terms "platforms" and "platform workers" in their social, political, and legal contexts.

2. Promoting positive approaches

Fair working conditions must form the basis of how companies operate. Policy-makers need to promote positive approaches and social innovation. Platform cooperatives provide a model in which employees themselves are owners of the platforms and thus have a much greater say in how the platforms operate. Another positive approach lies in voluntary commitments to Decent Work, for example via the Code of Conduct of the German Crowdsourcing Association, which various platforms have already adopted.

3. Apply existing laws

The same basic principles should apply to platform work as to any other kind of work, even if some adaptation is required. Employment law already offers some applicable regulations, for example to prevent fixed-term contracts that lack a justifiable reason. Procurement law is also relevant in this respect. Tenders must clearly stipulate that contracts will only be awarded to companies whose employees work under the appropriate social conditions. However, the existing regulations are less effective when it comes to digital and international work.

4. Create new regulatory measures

A standardised, European approach to the topic is necessary. The Digital Services Act has the potential to become a milestone on this path.[1] The task is to involve all kinds of platform models and recognise that many platforms are not merely "bulletin boards/yellow pages". An interesting international regulation already exists in the area of seafaring. In the context of shipowners' liability, global standards

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[1] Ursula von der Leyen has declared the "Digital Services Act" a central project of her time in office, with the potential to fundamentally change the digital world. In addition, in 2021 the EU Commission wants to present an initiative to improve the working conditions of platform workers.

for working conditions at sea were introduced and these standards are monitored at ports. Working hours and wage levels are examined. The liability of shipowners does not offer an exact blueprint for the platform economy, which operates in the virtual domain. However, the principle of developing and establishing global minimum standards whose compliance is then monitored by individual states could also serve as a model for the platform economy and its working conditions.

II. Cities as centres of the platform economy

5. Use urban policy to link stakeholders

Cities are important stakeholders, as developments surrounding the platform economy can be seen here as if under a microscope. For this reason, the experiences of cities need to be incorporated into the discussion. Urban policy can play a key role in linking various (governmental) levels and additional stakeholders.

6. Create open dialogue between cities

An open dialogue between cities is necessary to prevent a "race to the bottom", i.e. platform operators locating to those places which offer the cheapest conditions. Existing structures, such as the EUROCITIES network, can be used to facilitate this dialogue, which should also involve employer organisations, trade unions, stakeholders from society, as well as platform workers themselves. For example, rules concerning registration, a minimum wage for Uber drivers, and a central website for complaints have already been introduced in some cities.[2]

III. Representation, advisory services, and transparency:

7. Develop cooperation between trade unions and political institutions and platforms

Trade union structures are key to implementing good working conditions in the platform economy. They must cooperate equally with both political institutions and platforms. Platform operators must ensure that the representation of employee interests is possible. Furthermore, alliances should be formed to challenge companies which do not act transparently or fulfil their social responsibilities. The strong role played by social partners, including in the area of digital work, can be seen most clearly in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Sweden, where collective agreements are highly prevalent.

8. Guarantee advisory services

The active provision of advisory services (in multiple languages) can be seen as an important task of trade unions. The fact that platform workers have certain rights, especially with respect to social

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[2] The cities in question are New York and Toronto.

insurance, needs to be better communicated. The solo self-employed, in particular, need to be informed about social standards. This is also the task of trade unions and government authorities. Existing advisory services and information campaigns must be utilised, and new ones created. Platform operators must also be required to pass such information on.

9. Internal communication for platform workers

Platform workers must be able to make contact with one another. Legislators should facilitate this by obliging platforms to set up a communication channel as well as providing advice.

10. Create greater transparency, including algorithms

Platforms possess all the data and facts required for government authorities to establish suitable regulations to protect platform employees. Algorithms represent a kind of black box in this regard. In particular, algorithms which are used to evaluate employees should be made accessible and subject to expert review.

VI. Developing skills

11. Document skills and develop new forms of certification

Platform work is performed on the basis of skills and offers workers the opportunity to acquire new skills or develop existing ones. Informal, independent learning is a key aspect of platform work. However, when it comes to the portability of skills, new forms of documentation and certification are required. Possibilities include digital references from employers or self-documentation in the form of an e-portfolio.

12. Training in the platform economy

Companies in the platform economy should also contribute to society by investing in training and thus training the staff that they themselves urgently require.

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