

International Conference

The Right to (Digital) Platform Work: Is Everybody Welcome on Board?

Belgrade, 21–22 June 2023

The conference was organised as a hybrid event by the Institute of Economic Sciences in Belgrade and the Public Policy Research Centre, a Belgrade-based think tank. It was held under the auspices of COST Action CA21118 — Platform Work Inclusion Living Lab (P-WILL). The conference addressed the challenges and opportunities associated with digital platform work and explored ways to ensure fair and inclusive practices within this emerging sector.

The conference had several primary objectives. Firstly, it aimed to increase awareness regarding the rights and working conditions of individuals involved in digital platform work. Secondly, it sought to analyse the influence of digital platforms on both the labour market and the broader economy. Additionally, the conference aimed to facilitate discussions surrounding regulatory frameworks and policy choices that can ensure equitable and inclusive conditions for digital platform workers. Lastly, it aimed to promote dialogue among policymakers, researchers, industry representatives, and civil society organisations on these crucial issues.

The conference provided a comprehensive platform for in-depth explora-

tion and discussion of critical aspects of digital platform work. It effectively raised awareness about the rights and working conditions of individuals engaged in this rapidly evolving sector. By delving into the profound impact of digital platforms on both the labour market and the broader economy, the conference offered valuable insights for researchers and policymakers alike. One notable aspect of the conference was its thorough exploration of regulatory frameworks and policy alternatives aimed at promoting fairness and inclusivity within the realm of digital platform work. This aspect was particularly beneficial for the academic community, providing a solid foundation for future research endeavours in this dynamic field. The conference's emphasis on fostering meaningful dialogue further enriched the discourse, allowing for the cross-pollination of ideas and the cultivation of a collaborative spirit. By seamlessly integrating the expertise of policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, and civil society representatives, the conference exemplified a holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by digital platform work.

The work of 30 speakers was discussed across eight panels. Presentations covered a wide range of topics, including labour market dynamics, the economic impact of digital platforms, legal perspectives on platform work, and worker well-being. The research presentations provided valuable insights and stimulated discussions among the participants.

The first day of the conference began with a welcoming address by Isidora Beraha, head of the Sector for Basic Research and Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Economic Sciences, and Branka Anđelković, co-founder and programme director of the Public Policy Research Centre and P-WILL Action Vice Chair. Valentina Vukmirović, a research associate at the Institute of Economic Sciences and a member of the P-WILL Management Committee representing Serbia, presented details of the conference's agenda.

The first panel, "Inclusive employment on (digital) labour platforms: can they assist in solving unemployment issues?" was initiated with a presentation by Jelena Starčević from the School of Labour Studies at McMaster University, Canada. Her presentation, titled "Platform Work and Labour Market Institutions: Can Digital Labour Platforms Break the Vicious Circle of Long-Term Unemployment in Transitioning Countries?" explored the potential of digital labour platforms to disrupt the enduring cycle of long-term unemployment while examining their relationship with labour market institutions. The second presentation in the panel, titled "People with Disabilities and Work on Digital Work Platforms as a Path to an Independent Life," was delivered by researchers from the Institute of Economic Sciences: Milena Lazić, Valentina

Vukmirović, and Jelena Banović. Their presentation highlighted the potential of online labour platforms in facilitating increased independence through enhanced employment prospects for individuals with disabilities. Concluding the panel, Elvira Drishti and Brikena Kapisyzi from the Faculty of Economy, University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," along with their colleague Bresena Koplaku from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," Albania, presented "School-to-Work Transitions and Platforms in the Albanian Labour Market." This presentation delved into the dynamics of school-to-work transitions in the context of the Albanian labour market, with a particular focus on the role of digital platforms. Following the presentations, there was an interactive 10-minute Q&A session, with the first panel moderated by Tanja Jakobi, executive director of the Public Policy Research Centre and Co-Leader of P-WILL Working Group 4.

The second panel, "Platform economy intersectional gender perspective", commenced with a presentation by Jing Hiah, P-WILL Working Group 1 co-leader from the Department of Law, Society & Crime at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her presentation "New mobilities or persistent inequalities? Exploring the intersections of migration, gender, race/ethnicity in paid domestic and care work in the platform economy" shed light on the complex intersections of migration, gender, and race/ethnicity within the platform economy, specifically in the context of paid domestic and care work, to assess whether it perpetuates existing inequalities or presents new opportunities for mobility. The second presentation of the panel, "Platform Patriarchy? Gender and Fairwork in the Platform Economy", was delivered by

Anjali Krishan from the Oxford Internet Institute. The presentation investigated the presence and implications of gender-related issues within the platform economy, focusing on aspects related to fairness and work conditions, shedding light on potential “platform patriarchy” dynamics. The panel was concluded by Alesandra Tatić, affiliated with the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales and Centre Norbert Elias. Her presentation “Building Resilient Communities through Feminist Unionizing in the Platform Economy — The Case of Household and Care Workers in Catalonia” focused on the experiences and activism of women house workers and caregivers, particularly members of the Sindihogar union in Barcelona, as they confront systems of oppression related to housework and caregiving, emphasizing their diverse backgrounds and the impact of COVID-19 on their feminist community. These insightful presentations set the stage for an engaging 10-minute interactive Q&A session. The second panel was moderated by Mariacristina Sciannamblo from the Sapienza University of Rome — Department of Communication and Social Research, who facilitated the exchange of ideas among the panellists and the audience.

The third panel, “Gigmetar™ South East Europe — how good it is in capturing inequality”, provided a comprehensive exploration of the platform’s effectiveness in capturing inequality across various dimensions. The session commenced with an introduction to the Gigmetar™ report by Zoran Kalinić, a member of the Gigmetar team and full professor of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Kragujevac. Subsequently, associate professor Vladan Ivanović, also from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Kragujevac and a

member of the Gigmetar team, delved into the critical aspect of “Professions and Pay,” shedding light on the platform’s ability to analyse disparities in this domain. Following this, the discussion expanded to include the intersection of pay and gender, with insights provided by Branka Andjelković and Tanja Jakobi from the Public Policy Research Centre. Together, these presentations offered a comprehensive overview of Gigmetar™’s potential to address inequalities in Southeast Europe. The moderator of the third panel was Ljubivoje Radonjić from the Public Policy Research Centre.

The fourth panel titled “Ensuring Fair Competition in Digital Labour Platforms: Can We Mitigate Inequality Traps?” held promise for shedding light on several pertinent topics. The discussion commenced with an examination of ways to enhance the fairness of platform work, drawing valuable lessons from a Europe-wide dialogue on the future of work. This segment was presented by Jovana Karanović from the Rotterdam School of Management and Jelena Šapić from Reshaping Work. Following this, Laura Valle Gontijo, representing the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Brasilia in Brazil, delved into the intricacies of platform work and piece wages. The session also reflected on the importance of preserving the dignity of work within the realm of digital labour platforms, with insights provided by Brikene Dionizi, and Elvisa Drishti, from the Economic Faculty, the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, and their colleague Bresena Kopliku, who works at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Albania. The presentations were followed by an interactive 10-minute Q&A session. The panel discussion was facilitated by Melissa Renau Cano, representing the

Internet Interdisciplinary Institute at the Open University of Catalonia in Spain.

The final panel of the inaugural conference day, titled “How Platforms Utilise Failures of Labour Markets in Times of Crisis?”, addressed a critical inquiry regarding the adaptability of digital labour platforms during periods of crisis. The discourse commenced with a focused examination of the impact of the new Serbian national Strategy on SMEs and entrepreneurship on platform employment, as presented by Miloš Milosavljević, an associate professor at the Faculty of Organisational Sciences, University of Belgrade, Serbia. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, Liva Grinevica, representing the Latvian Council of Science, Latvia, explored the potential of remote work platforms as a viable avenue for labour market entry. Additionally, the session delved into the intersection of digital technologies and female workers within the platform work domain, featuring insights from Esra Kabaklarlı, associated with Selçuk Üniversitesi in Konya, Turkey. Following these presentations, an engaging 10-minute interactive Q&A session was moderated by Valentina Vukmirović, a research associate at the Institute of Economic Sciences, providing the audience with a dynamic exchange of ideas.

The second day of the conference began with a comprehensive review of the key insights gleaned from the preceding day, laying a sturdy foundation for the subsequent discussions. The rapporteur was Tanja Jakobi from the Public Policy Research Centre, who adeptly encapsulated the salient points that emerged during the initial day’s deliberations, thus offering attendees a holistic perspective on the proceedings. Moreover, a concise preview of the second-day agenda was provided,

effectively priming the atmosphere for the ongoing exploration of pivotal conference themes and the continuation of fruitful dialogues.

The second day of the conference was opened with a panel titled “Equalizing Freelancers’ Rights: Creating a Regulatory Framework for (Digital) Platform Work”. The panel raised a pivotal question: Can we bridge the gap in rights between freelancers and other workers through the establishment of a regulatory framework for (digital) platform work? This inquiry served as the cornerstone for discussions encompassing various facets of platform employment. Sanja Stojković Zlatanović, senior research associate from the Institute of Social Sciences — Centre for Legal Research in Belgrade, initiated the dialogue by sharing valuable insights through a presentation titled ‘Flexibilisation, Platformisation, and Autonomisation’ of an Employment Relationship — Lessons Learned So Far. Tamara Petrović, representing the Association of Internet Workers (Srb. Udruženje radnika na internetu) in Belgrade, underscored the imperative of enhancing working conditions for freelancers and the pressing need for regulatory measures specific to (digital) platform work in the Western Balkans. Meanwhile, Zuzanna Kowalik, affiliated with the Institute for Structural Research at the University of Warsaw, provided evidence shedding light on job quality disparities between migrant and native gig workers, focusing on the case of Poland. The presentations were followed by an interactive 10-minute Q&A session. Branka Anđelković, from the Public Policy Research Centre, moderated the session by facilitating the exchange of ideas and perspectives on the regulation of platform work and its implications for worker rights.

The second panel of the day highlighted the importance of inequality mitigation by posing a fundamental question: Who are the stakeholders involved in shaping the landscape of digital work? This session brought together diverse perspectives to shed light on this pressing issue. Aleksandar Kovačević, from the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade, delved into the vital role played by trade unions in navigating the ongoing digitisation of work processes within Serbia. Tamara Gavrić, serving as the Upwork ambassador, offered a unique platform-centric viewpoint, providing valuable insights from the perspective of digital work platforms. Furthermore, P-WILL Action Chair Mayo Fuster Morell, faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, and Dimmons, director of research at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute of the Open University of Catalonia, delved into the complexities of platform equality and its intricate relationship with policymaking, as exemplified by the co-creation working group of the Sharing Cities Summit and the Matchimpulsa programme in Barcelona. Her comprehensive discussion served as a vital contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding inequality mitigation, reflecting on the perspectives of different members of the platform economy ecosystem. Ljubivoje Radonjić, from the Public Policy Research Centre, moderated the session and guided the participants through an interactive 10-minute Q&A session that followed the presentations.

The concluding panel of the second conference day, "Brain Drain and Online Platform Work as Transitional Option", delved into the evolving dynamics of labour migration and its connection to

digital work platforms. The first presentation, by Bresena Koplaku from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Brikene Dionizi from the Faculty of Economy, University of Shkodra in Albania, examined the influence of digital work on the changing patterns of migration in Albania. This study provided valuable insights into the role of online platform work as a transitional option in addressing the brain drain phenomenon. Slobodan Golušin, from the Central European University in Vienna, Austria, explored the integration of Serbian software developers into the global labour market through digital labour platforms, shedding light on the potential for reversing brain drain trends. Furthermore, Ahmet Yaman, a visiting research fellow at Lund University, Sweden, and assistant professor at Tarsus University, Turkey, discussed the co-creation model as a potential solution to unemployment, illustrated through the case of the Mersin Virtual Employment Fair Platform in Turkey. Jelena Šapić, from Reshaping Work, moderated the session, facilitating an enriching exchange of perspectives on the intersection of brain drain, labour migration, and online platform work. These presentations collectively contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of digital work platforms in addressing labour migration challenges and fostering transitional employment opportunities.

The conference was closed with a session that encapsulated collaborative efforts and paved the way for future directions within the P-WILL community. Mayo Fuster Morell, in her role as the P-WILL Action Chair, fervently emphasised the action's core mission of advancing gender equality and nurturing inclusivity within the ever-evolving

platform economy, aligning seamlessly with the principles embedded in the EU Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. In the course of the presentation, she also shed light on the roadmap that lies ahead for P-WILL, delineating the path toward future action and meaningful impact. Following this, Aida Hanić, a research associate at the Institute of Economic Sciences, delivered a presentation with the aim of spotlighting the Institute's ongoing international collaborations within the framework of research projects. Her presentation underlined the Institute's dedication to cultivating international scientific partnerships and establishing further connections. Additionally, she shed light on the Institute's commitment to providing researchers with the opportunity to publish their findings in

the Institute's journals. To wrap up this informative session, Branka Anđelković, representing the Public Policy Research Centre, provided closing remarks. Her presentation underscored the commitment to collaborative research within the P-WILL community but also served as a platform for outlining the future steps and directions of this COST action.

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