

Gigmetar, an Instrument for Informing Policy: New Kind of Data for New Forms of Employment

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to the lack of official statistical data related to the emerging phenomenon of platform (digital) work and new forms of employment (NFEs) in Serbia in general (Eurofound, 2020). This shortcoming makes platform (digital) workers³ invisible to policy makers, which in turn leads to their fragile position when it comes to their labor and social rights. As an innovative business model, digital platforms play an important role in labour markets by facilitating the demand and supply of digital work. Because of the global nature of these platforms, digital workers often remain under the radar of national policy makers and regulators, as well as national statistical agencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this and other NFEs skyrocketed globally and in Serbia. Since the number of digital workers continues to grow at a steady rate, the government should formulate policies to support these workers and use their potential for the development of the national economy. Yet, this endeavor is almost impossible without the data about their number and characteristics, which the Republican Statistical Office will begin to collect as of 2025 (NSO, 2021). The paper, therefore, argues that novel data methods shall be used to ensure a timely institutional response to NFEs in Serbia, and consequently improve the socio-economic position of digital workers.

This paper presents Gigmetar, an instrument developed by the Public Policy Research Center (PPRC) aimed at monitoring the number, gender, incomes, and occupations of platform workers. Since December 2019, Gigmetar screens digital workers at the three most significant general digital platforms – Upwork, Freelancer, and Guru in Serbia and its neighboring countries: Romania, Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria, i.e. the region of Southeast Europe. Rare quantitative studies on online labour markets were based on small samples (Pesole et al., 2019; Brancati et al., 2018, etc.). On the contrary, Gigmetar is based on the analysis of massive data, representing approx. 80% of the total number of active digital workers on the observed platform. The data are collected by web scrapping of publicly available data at worker profiles on the selected platform. The developed instrument enables various analyses: regional distribution of digital workers within the country, distribution between genders, demanded hourly rates, or distribution of workers among six main groups of occupations (as classified by the Oxford's Online Labour Index (OLI)). Gigmetar can also be used for the analysis of national online labour market at one point of time; to compare digital labour force in different countries (by several characteristics); to monitor the development of the digital labour market in one country over time (since the measurements and analyses are done periodically). The obtained results can be used for defining new public

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³ In this paper platform workers and digital workers are used as a synonym

policies in diverse areas: from those related to labour rights to those referring to the future of work, i.e., educational and training policies. The paper contributes to the growing body of literature aimed at reconciling the application of technology, big data, and policy making, the latest being the World Bank's World Development Report (2021).