BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

REGIONAL RESHAPING WORK CONFERENCE

Rethinking the Future of Work: Platform Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Title: Book of Abstracts - Regional Reshaping Work Conference
Rethinking the Future of Work: Platform Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

This volume contains a collection of abstracts of the papers presented at the Regional Reshaping Work Conference, titled *Rethinking the Future of Work: Platform Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, held in Belgrade from 22 to 23 May 2024.

CONTENT

FOREWORD

This Book of Abstracts presents the research and discussions that shaped the conference "Rethinking the Future of Work: Platform Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence", which took place on 22–23 May 2024, in Belgrade. Over the course of two days, more than 100 participants from academia, trade unions, policymakers, civil society organisations, and businesses examined the evolving landscape of platform work, focusing on key issues such as algorithmic management, labour rights, skills development, and the broader implications of artificial intelligence in the world of work. Organised by the Public Policy Research Centre in collaboration with the Amsterdam-based initiative Reshaping Work, the event served as one of the few regional forums dedicated to addressing these urgent issues.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies is reshaping economies, industries, and labour markets worldwide, with Industry 4.0 and platformisation leading this shift. While these innovations enhance efficiency and promote economic growth, they raise concerns about job displacement, wage disparities, and profit concentration. Meanwhile, platformisation has become a defining characteristic of the modern economy, fundamentally altering the organisation of labour. The emergence of platform-based work has created new opportunities but has also resulted in precarious employment conditions, challenging existing labour rights and regulatory frameworks.

Despite growing academic interest in digital labour, research remains largely focused on Western Europe and North America, leaving regions like Southeast Europe underexplored. This conference aimed to bridge that gap by examining digitalisation in different contexts, shedding light on the socioeconomic impact of platform work, algorithmic management, and policy responses. Occurring at a critical moment following the adoption of the European Platform Work Directive, the conference fostered a more inclusive understanding of digital transformation and the future of work.

The conference opened with a compelling keynote by Professor Mark Graham from the Oxford Internet Institute, who shed light on the often-overlooked human cost of AI and the hidden labour-sustaining digital platforms. His thought-provoking address set the tone for discussions on algorithmic management, workers' rights, and the urgent need for regulatory frameworks to ensure fair conditions in platform work.

Day two began with an insightful keynote by Manuela Geleng from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. She explored the European Platform Work Directive's role in shaping the future of platform labour, not only within the EU but also beyond its borders.

Panel discussions, breakout sessions, and roundtables throughout the event offered an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by platform workers and the policies needed to strengthen their protections and ensure fair and sustainable working conditions in the digital economy. The International Labour Organization (ILO) representatives shared key findings from the ILO's Law and Practice report, "Realizing Decent Work in the Platform Economy", offering a foundation for future global labour standards in the platform economy. In her

keynote, Annarosa Pesole, an ILO Labour Market Specialist, emphasised the critical need for international efforts to combat precarious work and build sustainable social protections.

The abstracts in this volume highlight the key themes explored during the conference, reflecting the dynamic intersections between technology, labour, and society. Under the thematic streams of AI at Work, Regulating AI, Intersectionality and Platform Work, and Skills for the New Platform Era, the contributions presented here provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of platform work. As discussions around these themes continue to shape the future of work, the findings captured in these pages offer a strong foundation for advancing research, policy development, and strategies that promote fair, inclusive, and sustainable working conditions in the digital economy.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to all the authors, participants, and esteemed members of the scientific committee, whose contributions were vital to the success of this conference. Special thanks also go to our dedicated organising team for their exceptional efforts and commitment to making this event a success.

The collective insights shared here are truly inspiring, and we look forward to the continued exchange of ideas that will shape the future of our research field.

With sincere appreciation,

Branka Andjelkovic,

Co-founder and Director
Public Policy Research Centre (Re:people)
Head of the Scientific Committee

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STREAM 1 – AI AT WORK

ALIENATED FLEXIBILIZATION OF WORK

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Introduction: Shortening working hours, reducing the intensity of work, de-alienation and reconciling work with family life have traditionally been the objectives of labour movements, which launched initiatives and used the workers' struggle as a tool to exert social pressure to make them happen. In recent decades, there has been a turn in which managerial ideologies of flexibilization have taken these demands away from the workers' movements and taken over the initiative. They did this through models of work organisation that have combined the incompatible: increasing productivity through greater work intensity while promising to reduce alienation, monotony, and the length of working hours.

Main Objective: In recent decades, we have found several such models of work organisation. An early example is toyotism or lean production, which heralded the emancipation of workers by involving employees in innovating production processes and reorganising work along the assembly line into work groups. Another example is 'flexible specialisation', which encouraged workers to be trained for multiple tasks, supposedly improving their qualifications, and giving them more autonomy in the workplace. A third example is 'creative clusters', which encourage (small and large) entrepreneurs to cooperate and coordinate development activities and are said to make these regions (e.g., Northern Italy, Silicon Valley) more successful than others. Platform work is undoubtedly one of the latest innovations that allegedly bring greater autonomy and flexibility to workers.

Research Methodology: The report is based on data from an online survey of 94 Wolt and Glovo food delivery couriers, which was conducted in the summer of 2023. It also includes insights from 20 semi-structured interviews carried out in 2024. Additionally, eight previous interviews from 2020 and 2021 were used to track the changing working conditions and payment system. The data was collected as part of the research project titled "The Future of Social Dialogue in the Platform Economy: The Case of Slovenia," funded by ARIS under grant No. J5-4586.

Key Findings: We argue that platform work is the latest product of the managerial ideology of flexibilization and, therefore, 'alienated flexible work'. In our contribution, we address the contradiction that platform workers consistently support flexicurity, even though this is the exact reason for the deterioration of their working conditions, and the decrease in their pay.

We show how platform workers define themselves in relation to 'imposed' flexibility, how they respond to it at individual and collective (trade union) levels, and the successes (and failures) they encounter in doing so.

Keywords: alienated flexibilization, managerial ideologies, platform work, food delivery

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AI SYNDICALISM AND TRANSNATIONAL UNITY: LEVERAGING EU DIRECTIVES FOR COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM WORKER ADVOCACY

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Introduction: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into platform work is a transformative development, presenting a spectrum of challenges and opportunities for the syndicalist movement. This paper examines critically the impact of recent EU legislative initiatives designed to regulate this sector on syndicalism within platform work. With the EU directives on platform work as a backdrop, our research explores the recalibration of labour relations and the potential for cross-border syndicalist strategies and transnational union solidarity facilitated by AI technologies.

Main Objective: Our analysis includes a review of a proactive initiative by Novi Sindikat in response to technological and regulatory shifts. The organization's development of a centralized platform for union collaboration is one such response to the need for consolidated action across the EU. Additionally, we developed a comprehensive *Toolkit on AI Awareness and Data Rights for Trade Unions* to provide practical resources for unions to engage with AI-related challenges effectively. The toolkit serves as a crucial component of our strategy, offering educational materials, legal guidelines, and advocacy tools to empower workers and unions. We delve into the implications of the EU Platform Work Directive and the EU AI Act. The Platform Work Directive provides criteria for employment classification and introduces regulations on algorithmic management. The AI Act calls for AI systems to be transparent, accountable, and respectful of labour rights. These directives could significantly alter the landscape of worker advocacy, providing new tools for trade unions to address exploitative practices and advocate for fair work conditions.

Research Methodology: Our approach combines theoretical and empirical analysis, drawing on data from trade union activities, legal case studies, and the development of practical resources like the aforementioned toolkit. We outline the evolving nature of platform work and how AI requires new syndicalist tactics and collective action. The paper describes both resistance and adaptation within labour movements as they navigate technological change. AI's influence on work extends to job design, performance evaluation, and surveillance. Given that AI algorithms carry the biases of their creators, there is an urgent need for legal literacy and ethical dialogue about their use in the workplace. The EU's legislative actions, including the Platform Work Directive, initiate this dialogue by enforcing algorithmic transparency and accountability, setting precedents for global labour rights. The AI Act further protects workers by ensuring high-risk AI systems meet strict standards. The paper highlights the importance of transnational union networks in developing a unified approach to advocacy. These networks are instrumental in creating a European model of platform work regulation that could influence global labour standards. The platform and toolkit of Novi Sindikat are parts of these broader efforts, contributing to the syndicalist response to the digital transformation of work.

Key Findings: In conclusion, this paper presents a vision where AI and syndicalism converge to foster a fairer platform economy. It emphasizes the need for proactive, informed, and collaborative responses to AI's challenges, advocating for the use of technology to empower workers and uphold decent work standards. The discussion herein is significant for a wide array of stakeholders within the EU labour market and has broader implications for work in the digital age.

Keywords: AI, Syndicalism, Platform Work, EU Directives, Transnational Union Solidarity

CONSENT AND RESISTANCE: THE ROLE OF GAMIFICATION IN ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT OF THE WORK PROCESS (THE CASE OF FOOD DELIVERY COURIERS IN BUDAPEST)

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Introduction: In recent years, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, the number of food delivery couriers in Budapest, Hungary, (Makó et al., 2020) has risen exponentially. The gig economy and the application-based, algorithmic management affect more and more people, many of whom work in precarious conditions (Kahancová et al., 2020). This research contributes to the literature on food delivery from a sociological point of view by examining the role of gamification in the management of delivery companies.

Main Objective: The aim of the research was to explore the different aspects of gamification (Burawoy, 1982) used by application-based, algorithmic management. I investigated the ways in which they affect couriers, focusing on the formation of consent and the appearance of resistance. In the study I *(1)* give a brief theoretical overview of platform work, labor in digital capitalism and gamification; *(2)* outline the technical details of the work organization of *Foodpanda; (3)* present my findings on the forms of gamification I encountered during my research; *(4)* explore the topic of consent to the organization of work and the possibilities of resistance against the algorithmic management.

Research Methodology: I conducted my research in the period September 2021 - March 2022 using qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observations. I investigated the algorithmic management of *Foopanda* (which was renamed *Foodora* in 2023*).* My focus was on the bicycle couriers' experiences, and attitudes toward the gamified segments of the management.

I distinguished gamification *from above* and *from below* (Woodcock & Johnson, 2018)*.* In the first case, gamification is created from the side of the management, while in the second, games are initiated by workers. Gamification *from above* consists of the gambling-like work process, the ranking of the couriers and the bonuses offered for completing "challenges" during work. Gamification *from below* includes all kinds of "games" that the couriers initiate. These may be different strategies to earn more while sparing energy, small sabotages of the application and bets among one another. In the analysis, I categorized the observed games into acts of *making do* and *making out* (Alasoini et al., 2023) in order to understand better which games may be perceived as resistance against the management. In the case of *making do* games stay within the boundaries set by the management, acting towards the same interest, while in the case of *making out*, the games go against the interests of the company. Differentiating between *making out* and *making do* is often difficult, because consent and resistance are present at the same time in many games. Nonetheless, the two categories are used in the analysis to shed some light on the relationship of certain games and the interests of the management and to examine which games are to be seen as modes of (potential) resistance (Bronowicka & Ivanova, 2020).

Key Findings: I examined the way in which the games contribute to the formation of consent among the couriers. However, I also emphasized that some games may be seen as a form of resistance. My findings conclude that gamification *from above* can cause addiction and self-exploitation among couriers. Furthermore, successful participation in the game results in pride and recognition by other workers. By taking part in the games, the couriers must accept the rules and the logic of the work organization. Furthermore, the games give space for relative satisfaction during one's work. In the games *from above* the workers can only *make do,* which implies consent to the algorithmic management (Perrig, 2021). The formation of consent is also heavily influenced by the internalization of the economic logic of our age (Purcell & Brook, 2020). The ethos of efficiency and productivity dictated by contemporary capitalism makes it seem irrational to question the remarkably rationalized and efficient organization of labour. The system seems unquestionable and unchangeable, and the workers are forced to accept this type of management. In the case of gamification *from below*, the games played by many couriers also fall into the category of *making do*. The few opportunities for defiance provide a sense of relative freedom. Strategizing and tricking make the couriers feel that they are at least in some control of the labour process. However, these maneuvers mostly stay between the lines drawn by the company. Nonetheless, small acts of resistance do appear in some forms of *making out*, although only among a small minority of the couriers. However, games can transform, spread and liberate themselves from managerial interest. Although the games I observed are not (yet) capable of sabotaging management considerably, they lead to the development of *digital agency* (Alasoini et al., 2023)*.* These small practices can also lead to the formation of more organized forms of resistance. Examples of successful organization may be found in many European countries including Italy, the UK and Germany (Cant, 2019; della Porta et al., 2022).

Keywords: platform work, algorithmic work management, gamification, consent, resistance

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PLATFORM PROFESSIONALISM IN HOME REPAIR WORK

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Introduction: The increasing prevalence of platform work introduced changes in the emphasis on professional skills and in the definition of professionalism alike. Many professional services are now offered on platforms, resulting in the emergence of the platform professionalism concept (Arcidiacono et al., 2023). In platforms offering traditionally non-professional services, professionalism is used as a discourse by the platform to control workers and encourage them to act in line with client expectations (Ray, 2023). In both cases, the high level of competition in the platforms is effective in the emergence of new definitions of professionalism and in the use of professionalism discourse by platforms.

The goal of platforms to create network effects results in the increased presence of workers, leading to a higher level of competition and struggle to find gigs. As reported, 86% of online web-based platform professionals would prefer to perform additional work (ILO, 2021). In the period 2017 - 2021, there was a large growth in the labour supply on platforms, although the demand for labour remained the same. Consequently, the workers struggle to compete, and the number of workers having success in the platforms diminishes dramatically. At the same time, in order to guarantee a service of better quality, platforms need to impose certain work standards on the workers, and this is often conducted through emphasis on professional demeanor.

In the absence of managers and direct control mechanisms, platforms rely on market tools such as customer ratings to build trust and ensure client satisfaction. However, ratings are far from imposing professional standards as the customers do not possess the required knowledge to judge the professional level of workers. Therefore, what platforms achieve is the presence of large numbers of workers and their availability, rather than the guarantee of professional standards and competencies. Consequently, professional identities among platform workers are in decline, at the expense of competition and the constant availability of workers (Pongratz, 2018). In this sense, platform work advocates for the de-professionalization of the workforce by providing clients with the chance to acquire the services of a labour force that is adaptable, self-trained, and capable of sustaining itself. (Fuchs, 2010). The professional class, which is more costly and more stringent in its approach to work in terms of following procedures, norms, and standards, was intentionally weakened in order to make such service feasible (Wexler, 2011).

Main Objective: In light of the discussion on the effects of platforms on professionalism, the paper explores the professional skills and identities of workers in different competitive settings. What is the effect of varying competitive designs of the platforms on the professional identity formation of workers? In which ways is the professionalism discourse employed by platforms reflected on worker identities and agencies? How are the professional skills and

competencies used by workers against clients? In order to answer these questions, the paper focuses on two repair work platforms: in Turkey and Russia, with different competitive designs, one involving a directory listing design and the other a competitive bidding design.

Research Methodology: The analysis is based on constructivist grounded theory. The data consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with workers from both platforms as well as platform content like YouTube videos or web articles to guide workers.

Key Findings: The findings point out to the varying definitions of professionalism in different competitive designs. While professionalism is defined vis-à-vis the relations with the client on both platform designs, in less competitive platforms, the workers protect their professional autonomy and can afford to exclude clients from the sphere of their work. In more competitive designs, professionalism takes the form of discourse and implies the treatment of a client by accommodating their wishes, indicating a client-oriented approach. In both cases of platforms, we found that the professionalization of repair workers is market-driven, where new tools and technologies offered by material and tool brands are crucial in the formation of a professional worker identity.

Keywords: Platform labour, gig work, professionalism, worker autonomy, labour control

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AUTOMATION IN SHARED SERVICES CENTRES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SKILLS AND AUTONOMY

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Introduction: The study explores the impact of automation on skills and autonomy within Shared Service Centres (SSCs) in a global organization, specifically in the context of Poland. It examines the influence of technologies such as Intelligent Process Automation, Robotic Process Automation, and Artificial Intelligence on the employment model of SSCs and the necessity of a shift in workers' skills. The study is set against the backdrop of the offshoring trend that began in the early 2000s, where multinationals sought cost-cutting opportunities by relocating services to low-cost locations. This led to the creation of SSCs, which are partly autonomous entities within companies' organizational structures.

Main Objective: The primary aim of the research is to explore the implications of automation in Shared Service Centres (SSCs) on skills and worker autonomy. The study seeks to understand how automation technologies, such as Intelligent Process Automation and Robotic Process Automation, impact the employment model of SSCs, particularly in the context of Polish SSCs. It challenges the deskilling hypothesis by investigating whether automation leads to upskilling and increased worker autonomy, and how these processes are negotiated between headquarters, SSCs, and their workers.

Research Methodology: The research employs an explanatory case study approach, using data from semi-structured interviews with employees, managers, and CEOs, as well as aggregated data from various sources. The companies selected for the study were identified as SSCs in Poland. The selection also considered various sectors and sizes (with over 250 employees) to examine differences in automation adoption. Additionally, the companies with different lifespans in Poland were included to explore variations in experience with automation.

Key Findings: The study underscores that automation in Shared Services Centers (SSCs) is a dynamic process shaped through the interactions between headquarters, SSCs, and their workers. Rather than being a top-down imposition, automation is increasingly driven by employee-led initiatives that focus on upskilling and continuous improvement. This approach is particularly critical in the context of labour shortages, which constrain the expansion of SSCs and compel companies to maximize the potential of their existing workforce. By empowering workers to take the lead in identifying opportunities for automation and process improvements, companies not only enhance job satisfaction but also improve overall job

quality. However, this enhancement often remains secondary to core business objectives, only gaining prominence when labour shortages necessitate a focus on employee retention and productivity. The study highlights that technological change is not inevitable but shaped by ongoing negotiations, emphasizing the importance of proactivity from both workers and management. Automation, in this context, acts as a powerful tool that amplifies human expertise and creativity, fostering a symbiotic relationship between technology and the workforce rather than replacing it.

Keywords: Automation, shared services centres, deskilling, skills, job quality

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STREAM 2 – REGULATING AI

LEGAL COMPLEMENTARITY AS A *CONDITIO SINE QUA NON* ON ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT

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Introduction: Information technology (hereafter: IT) has, without a doubt, profoundly changed the world of work. These changes may be considered from several aspects. First of all, the development of IT has allowed for the emergence of some completely new forms of work, such as platform work. On the other hand, IT has also changed the way people work in traditional forms of work. Taking the agore into consideration, two completely opposite approaches are present – a pessimistic one, which is based on the thesis that progress in the IT sphere will result in a large number of people losing their jobs due to the automation of work processes, and the optimistic one, which anticipates the advantages of the work digitization in terms of its potential for people to participate in work to a lesser extent and thus to have more free time.

Main Objective: However, none of the aforementioned impacts of IT on the world of work will be discussed here. This research starts from a different premise, which is how digitization and artificial intelligence (hereafter: AI) have replaced the management powers of the employer with algorithmic management (hereafter: AM). AM is a software that collects a large amount of different data and uses it to perform an automated decision-making process on the selection of a worker for a specific task, the way he/she should perform the task, monitoring of the work, and finally how to evaluate his/her performance (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022).

But, the practical problem lies in the fact that one of the main characteristics of AM is the absence of transparency regarding the way it functions. For this reason, AM is often referred to as a "BlackBox" in the literature (Pasquale, 2015). However, several recent studies revealed interesting details regarding the correlation between the data AM collects and the decisions it makes. All this has created the urgent need to establish new rules that will regulate the way AM is used as a special form of AI, as well as to establish a legal framework for the effective protection of those affected by AM decisions.

Since the development of AM is closely related to the platform economy, it should not come as a surprise that the first attempts to develop legal norms on AM came through the efforts to regulate platform work. It was first approached by certain countries, such as Spain (Barrio, 2020). However, a major step towards regulation of the AM was made by the European Union (hereafter: EU), where Chapter III in the Proposal for a directive on improving working conditions in platform work (hereafter: Directive) is dedicated to this very issue. The ultimate objective of Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the Directive is to provide transparency and explanation on how automated decisions are made (Rosin, 2022). However, the Directive applies only to platform workers, while AM has a much wider use than digital platforms and goes beyond the platform economy because it is becoming ever more present in traditional forms of work (Baiocco et al., 2022). This makes the problem significantly more complicated from a legal point of view.

Having this in mind, we find ourselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation. It was only yesterday that we talked about the importance of having a regulation on platform work, and now certain aspects essential for the protection of fundamental rights at work will be regulated in platform work, and not in traditional forms of work. Therefore, we conclude that the described tendency of the Directive should not be reserved for platform workers exclusively but must also find a place in traditional forms of work.

Key Findings: The idea of this research is that AM can be adequately regulated only by the complementary action of provisions similar to those in the Directive with GDPR – especially bearing in mind its Article 13 (Information to be provided where personal data are collected from the data subject), Article 22 (Automated individual decision-making, including profiling) and Article 88 (Processing in the context of employment) – and EU's Artificial Intelligence Act. This Act adopts a risk-based approach - that AI systems are classified in relation to the threat to the Union values. The risk levels are classified as unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal (or no) risk. It is important to note here that AI systems used in employment for recruitment, selection, and evaluation of workers are classified as high-risk systems (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2023). This results in special obligations for the employer when using AI for decisions affecting work-related relationships, promotions, and terminations.

Keywords: algorithmic management; artificial intelligence; GDPR; AI Act; Directive on platform workers

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THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF FOOD DELIVERY RIDERS IN BULGARIA AND THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE EU DIRECTIVE ON THEM

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Introduction: The number of digital labour platforms worldwide has increased fivefold in the last decade. Globally, the highest number of platforms – 383 - operate in the delivery sector (ILO, 2021). As observed by Pape and Spinaci (2023), many platform workers face precarious working conditions and inadequate access to social protection. Workers commonly receive insufficient information about their working conditions. Social security systems may not provide coverage for sickness, accidents, unemployment, workplace protection, and pension benefits for the riders. Other authors also claim that the riders have precarious working conditions, including a lack of medical coverage, no minimum wage, no paid holidays, no job security (Lenaerts, Kilhoffer & Akgüç, 2018). As a result of precarious working conditions and improper employment status, the European Commission proposed a new directive in 2021 to improve the working conditions of platform workers. The directive aims to improve the working conditions and social rights of platform workers by setting criteria for distinguishing between self-employment and employment.

Main Objective: First, the research seeks to analyze the employment status of food delivery riders working through the two largest food delivery platforms in Bulgaria – Takeaway and Glovo. Second, it aims to ascertain whether the riders are correctly classified. Third, it compares the working and employment conditions offered by the two platforms. Finally, it establishes what riders expect from the implementation of the EU Platform Work Directive on improving working conditions.

Research Methodology: The study relies on qualitative methodology to achieve its research objectives. The method used was desk research, through which I collected and analyzed data from existing publications on the topic, data from national and international sources, findings from previous studies on the rights and employment status of platform workers, and the potential changes that the Directive would introduce. A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted with food delivery riders - six with Takeaway riders conducted in 2020-2021, and a follow-up of four interviews with Takeaway and Glovo riders, conducted in spring 2024. In total, seven people working through the Takeaway platform and three people working through the Glovo platform were interviewed. Seven respondents were male, and the remaining three were female.

Key Findings: Interviews conducted in Bulgaria with Takeaway riders revealed that workers have employment contracts -a fundamental requirement for the assurance of healthy and safe working conditions and job security. The workers are correctly classified as employees in accordance with the relevant legislation.

In contrast, Glovo riders are bound by a civil contract, i.e., they are not classified as "employees" within the context of the Labour Code and thus cannot benefit from the

protections provided by this law. Rather than receiving a fixed salary, these riders are paid on the basis of the number of deliveries they complete.

The respondents had not heard of a Platform Work Directive but shared the need for wage increases and new rules on data protection. Some of them expressed doubts about the expected improvements the Directive will bring. One respondent believes that the Directive will have a positive impact on the working conditions, but that the riders will be disadvantaged in other ways. In other words, both positive and negative changes are expected. Other respondents believe that the new rules will undoubtedly have a positive effect on the riders, but not in the near future. They believe that it will take a long time for these changes to be implemented.

A civil contract that requires an individual to complete work within a specified timeframe in exchange for regular monthly payments, as observed in the case of Glovo riders, may be classified as a disguised employment contract. In such cases, the Platform Work Directive could have an impact on such relations between the platform and the rider, contributing to a correct classification of the status of workers, fair working conditions and access to social protection.

Keywords: food delivery platforms; platform work; delivery riders; Platform Work Directive

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NAVIGATING REGULATORY SPACE: UNRAVELING THE DYNAMICS OF ONLINE PLATFORM WORK REGULATION IN SERBIA

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Introduction: The rapid growth of platform work in recent years has sparked an increasing movement to regulate this emerging sector. However, most regulatory efforts have focused on geographically tethered forms of platform work, such as ride-hailing and food delivery services. Due to their physical presence and local impact, these types of platform work have drawn more attention from policymakers (Vallas & Schor, 2020). In contrast, the segment of platform work performed entirely online, often called "crowdwork," remains largely unregulated (DeStefano, 2016). This gap in regulation poses significant challenges, particularly in countries that are major sources of labour for online platforms (Graham et al., 2017).

Main Objective: The primary objective of this paper is to explore the contested space of online platform regulation, using Serbia as a case study. Serbia is one of the leading providers of online labour in Europe and beyond, with estimates suggesting that between 70,000 and 100,000 individuals in the country engage in platform work for at least ten hours per week (Public Policy Research Centre, 2021). Despite the growing importance of this labour segment, it operated in the gray area of law and informal work for years. The 2021 mass protest of Serbian freelancers who demanded a suspension of retroactive tax collection and regulation of the status of workers on the Internet, initiated a two-year process of finding a regulatory solution. The end result of the process was the adoption of several amendments of Serbia's Personal Income Tax Law.

Research Methodology: The paper understands this regulatory outcome as the result of the contestation, competition, and cooperation of different actors occupying the regulatory space (Hancher & Moran, 1989). By analyzing how regulatory space was occupied and influenced by various actors, the paper advances the understanding of the rule-making process and particular regulatory outcomes. The analysis is based on a comprehensive examination of primary data sources, including official documents, public statements, and interviews with key policy stakeholders involved in the regulatory process. These sources provide insights into the positions, strategies, and interactions of various actors occupying the regulatory space.

Key Findings: The findings reveal several important insights into the regulation of online platform work. First, online platform work occupies a grey area in the traditional labour and regulatory framework, blurring the lines between service providers and workers, global and local jurisdictions, and temporary and permanent work. Such an ambiguous nature of work on online labour platforms challenges fundamental questions as to what, how, and by whom should be regulated. This frustrates the regulatory power of those actors who lack the necessary information, knowledge, and organizational resources to address the complexities of platform work. Particularly, government institutions struggle due to a limited understanding of the ways in which these platforms operate, and their reliance on outdated frameworks. It also results in a fragmented regulatory space where different actors promote

different discourses advancing particular regulatory solutions. In this context, the power dynamics among these actors tend to favor dominant discourses prioritizing economic flexibility and entrepreneurship over worker welfare, resulting in the redefining regulatory objectives. The adopted regulatory solution in the form of amendments to the Personal Income Tax Law, while a step forward, left many issues unresolved, particularly regarding the status and rights of online platform workers. Such regulatory solutions adopted in Serbia reflect a broader trend of piecemeal regulation that addresses some aspects of online platform work while leaving others unaddressed.

Building on regulatory space theory and adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the paper demonstrated how regulation of new forms of work represents a contested space affecting regulatory outcomes. This case study also offers valuable lessons for other countries grappling with similar challenges, particularly as the increasingly global nature of work challenges traditional regulatory frameworks.

Keywords: Platform work, regulation, Serbia, crowdwork, online labour platforms, rule-making process, regulatory space.

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DIGITAL MICROENTREPRENEURS AND FOOD DELIVERY LABOUR PLATFORMS IN ROMANIA AND GERMANY.
DO MIGRATION BACKGROUND AND ALGORITHMIC CONTROL REALLY MATTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY?

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Introduction: Networked digital technologies have led to innovative work arrangements, such as micro-entrepreneurship, gig work, and crowd labour platforms, operating within a collaborative economy landscape. Digitalisation and AI become core subjects in the debate on the future of work in the EU policy context. Starting with the 2016 political agenda, the European Commission and the European Parliament issued several proposals to clarify uncertainties about the employment status, rights and working conditions of the workers participating in the digital platform labour. However, there are concerns about job insecurity and fair working conditions in labour platforms, as seen in companies like Uber, Foodora, Glovo, Lieferando, Wolt, and Bolt. A critical interrogation on regulating the digital transformation of labour refers to many structural problems marked in many industries transformed by technology and AI, such as hospitality, accommodation, restaurants, care, cleaning, or medical services.

Main Objective: My research proposal employs the platformisation of labour as a new societal issue related to the direct consequences of flexible capitalism and technological changes in Europe (Sennet, 2006). While there has been some focus on the working conditions in the EU public policy, demographics and backgrounds, algorithmic management with gender and migration requires further attention of policymakers. The key component in platform governance is algorithmic management, which regulates and organises the work. Platforms introduce new forms of subordination that rely on automated systems to match supply and demand for work to clients and corporate customers. They involve high levels of control and power authority relations that exclude people from decision-making and create gaps in the subordinative relationship between platforms and workers (Altenried, 2021).

In light of the new Directive on improving working conditions in platform work (2024), the core policy issues related to platform work highlighted grey areas that require further attention of the policymakers: a stable income, social insurance coverage and safety measures for all workers involved in the labour intermediated by platforms, including the vulnerable status of migrants and women. At the European level, only a few European countries introduced a regulatory framework for digital labour platforms by addressing specific regulations for the working conditions of people working through platforms. The potential impact of the EU public policy on digital labour platform regulation concerns the differences among countries in terms of the socio-demographic background of workers and the vulnerabilities related to labour regulation.

In my proposal, I aim for two cases that illustrate the regulatory framework of food-delivery labour platforms and the migrant background of workers: Germany and Romania. Both countries are massively affected by migration. Germany is affected by non-EU and EU migration for labour. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Romania has been a target country for immigrants from South Asia to get an easy one-year visa (and a possibility of an extension) to work in the affected sectors currently uncovered by workforce supply. The immigrants are visible, particularly in the food delivery platform sector. In Romania and Germany, digital labour platforms operate under unclear legislation to the minimum standards established at the national level. National regulations need revision to address social protection and secure working conditions of people working through platforms. The biggest international delivery platform companies in Romania, Bolt, Glovo, and the national platform Tazz by Emag are not registered as employers. Their employment relations with couriers are within the standard employment framework, primarily collaborating with freelance and self-employed individuals known as 'partners'. On the opposite side of the case study, the platform sector in Germany has not received much attention in the public policy debate because platform labour is considered a secondary source of income and occasional work. Platform work is considered 'complimentary' to existing activities performed by workers and ensured by setting an income threshold for personal taxation.

Research Methodology: My research methodology involves a comparative analysis in two steps: First, I conducted a coding thematic analysis of media discourse on migrant workers from the Lieferando platform in Germany. In this step, I mirrored digital discourse with the policy perspective for transparent monitoring and fair decision-making systems in the context of legal regulation of labour platforms in Germany. Second, to further explain how digital labour platforms use their algorithms to manage working conditions, I showcase employment strategies adopted by vulnerable workers from the food delivery platforms in Romania. The workers in Romania were at risk of social exclusion during the pandemic. They faced uncertainty and potentially precarious situations due to the widespread use of untransparent digital algorithms that control their work quality.

Key Findings: Finally, my research offers an analytical tool to position the consequences of digital labour platforms for food delivery workers in Romania and Germany. Specifically, it focuses on the intersectional risks of social exclusion from the labour market and possible responses from the EU policy-making process.

Keywords: platform governance, algorithmic management, migration, food delivery platform labour

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STREAM 3 – INTERSECTIONALITY AND PLATFORM WORK

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE: A ROADMAP FOR AI INTEGRATION IN FEMINIST UNIONIZING

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Introduction: This paper explores the future of feminist unionizing among household and care workers, focusing on the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to transform union strategies. Through anthropological participant observation within Spain's pioneering feminist union Sindihogar Sindillar, the research delves into the role of AI in empowering marginalized workers in the platform economy.

Main Objective: The primary aim of this study is to examine how AI tools can be integrated into feminist labour advocacy, specifically for household and care workers, in ways that overcome linguistic, informational, and geographic barriers to empower these workers.

Research Methodology: Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork with Sindihogar Sindillar and theoretical insights from Arjun Appadurai on globalization and power dynamics, the research utilizes speculative inquiry to explore future scenarios for AI integration. The paper proposes the development of AI-driven tools, such as multilingual legal aid bots and adaptive communication platforms, as a means to enhance union advocacy.

Key Findings: The research highlights AI's potential to democratize technology and revolutionize communication within the labour movement. It proposes AI-driven legal aid bots that offer real-time, personalized labour rights support and AI-powered platforms for dynamic political communication campaigns. These tools could enhance advocacy efforts, create new opportunities for collective action, and address the ethical considerations involved in AI's use in marginalized communities.

Keywords: Feminist unionizing, platform work, artificial intelligence, labour advocacy, marginalized workers

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UNVEILING REGIONAL E-COMMERCE DYNAMICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ETSY MARKETPLACES IN THE BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Introduction: The rise of e-commerce has reshaped the global marketplace, providing artisans and small businesses unprecedented access to international consumers (Watson et al., 2021; Piasna, 2020). Among these platforms, Etsy has emerged as a leader, with over 7.5 million sellers generating a revenue of $13.2 billion in 2023 by offering more than 100 million products to global audiences. Despite the platform's growing influence, research on Etsy's performance and presence in smaller, developing markets—particularly in Southeastern Europe—remains sparse (Aleksynska, 2021; Kirov & Yordanova, 2022). These countries, especially in the Balkans, represent a unique segment of the gig economy, contributing significantly to digital labour while often being overlooked in large-scale economic analyses.

Main Objective: This study aims to fill the research gap by providing a descriptive analysis of Etsy marketplaces in 11 Balkan countries. The research focuses on identifying the number and performance of Etsy shops in the region, with particular attention to the roles played by gender, geographical concentration, and sales distribution.

Research Methodology: The research employed advanced web scraping techniques to collect and analyze data from 15,708 Etsy shops across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. The data collected includes key shop characteristics, such as sales volume, product categories, year of registration, and gender of the shop owner. Additionally, Large Language Models (LLM) were used to accurately extract structured data from shop descriptions and owner information, achieving a high degree of accuracy (95%). The analysis also maps Etsy shop distribution across countries, assessing both *per capita* sales and the concentration of shops in urban centers, particularly capital cities.

Key Findings: The analysis reveals several key trends. First, the number of Etsy shops has grown steadily across the region, with a notable peak in new shop openings in 2020, likely influenced by the economic disruptions and digital shifts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bulgaria leads with total sales of 6.6 million items, significantly outperforming other countries, followed by Romania with 3.7 million items and Greece with 3.4 million items. Bulgaria's sales *per capita* is the highest at 1. However, when sales *per capita* are considered, Slovenia stands out with a figure of 0.5, indicating a more robust market relative to its population size. Romania shows a lower sales-per-capita figure of 0.2, indicating potential market saturation or lower consumer purchasing power despite its high overall sales.

EU membership appears to be a significant factor, as the countries that joined the EU before 2013 (such as Bulgaria and Romania) tend to have more Etsy shops and higher sales per capita

compared to non-EU countries. Moreover, economic activity is highly concentrated in the capital cities of some countries more than others, with up to 56% of total sales originating from urban centers, particularly in the countries like Albania, Serbia, Greece and Slovenia.

The measurements show significant differences in the distribution of sales across stores in different countries. In Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia, sales are more evenly distributed across Etsy stores. In contrast, Montenegro and Greece have a higher concentration of sales in a smaller number of stores.

The crucial finding of the study is the specialization of Etsy shops by country. Bulgaria, the country with the most shops and sales, stands out with the highest number of items listed, especially in the "Home and Living" category, and has a notably larger number of clothing items compared to other countries. In contrast, Greece shows a strong focus on jewelry, with a high proportion of shops dedicated to this category. Romania, while having fewer items overall, demonstrates a more focused approach with shops prioritizing specific niches rather than broader product offerings. This indicates varying strategies for market engagement across the region, with some countries emphasizing diversity in product categories and others adopting a more specialized approach.

The key demographic finding is the gender disparity in shop performance. While Etsy globally has a predominantly female user base, male-owned shops in the Balkans tend to outperform their female counterparts in terms of average sales. This finding contrasts with Etsy's general trend but may reflect broader regional socio-economic dynamics. Furthermore, the study uncovered a high level of specialization within certain countries.

Keywords: E-commerce, Etsy, Balkans, Gender, Cross-country analysis

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STREAM 4 – SKILLS FOR THE NEW PLATFORM ERA

GRADUATE TRANSITION TO WORK, SKILLS MISMATCH, AND THE PLATFORM ECONOMY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NORTH AFRICA AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Introduction: The paper deals with graduate skill mismatch in North Africa and the Western Balkans, and in particular on case studies of Morocco and Serbia. While these two countries have distinct economic and geographic characteristics, there are some close similarities in the structure of their economies. Both countries face similar economic challenges, such as high unemployment rates, income inequality, and a lack of economic diversification. In particular, technological change has increased the demand for university graduates with ICT, while the skills learned at university are often not appropriate to the labour market, leading to potentially high levels of skill mismatch. This implies that the higher education and labour market systems are not allocating resources efficiently, and this may constrain economic growth now and in the future.

Main Objective: The paper analyses the extent to which universities are successful in preparing students for their future careers, and how this differs in the cases of Morocco and Serbia. It analyses the difficulties facing young graduates in their transition to work, their exposure to platform work, and the extent and nature of qualification and skills mismatch.

Research Methodology: The research is based on an online survey of graduates from the University of Belgrade in Serbia and Ibn Zohr University in Morocco and a set of in-depth interviews with key informants.

Key Findings: The most important factors that influence the graduates' transition to work are the subject studied, the networks or opportunities they access through personal contacts, their family and friends, and personal initiative. In Serbia, the university where graduates obtained their degree was most important, followed by personal initiative, the subject studied and networks. In Morocco, the most important factor was personal initiative, followed by previous work experience in a company, the subject studied and networks.

The survey reveals that university graduates have a relatively low incidence of platform work. In Morocco, only 18% of graduates have ever engaged in platform work, and 15% in Serbia. On-line platform services are more important for graduates than on-site platform work. The most frequent activities are online tutoring or consultations, research, accounting, legal services, and project management and similar services. The most frequent forms of on-line platform work are creative and multimedia work (e.g. animation, graphic design, audio &

video content) and sales and marketing support work (e.g. lead generation, posting ads, social media). Among on-site platform work, the most frequent are teaching and counselling services and on-site marketing activities (such as mystery shopper). Platform work only provides a limited additional income for graduates and is rarely their sole source of income in either country.

The survey shows that 38% of graduates in Morocco and 32% of graduates in Serbia are overqualified for the needs of their jobs. Overqualification is found more in the public than the private sector, especially among master's degree holders. Women suffer more from overqualification in both sectors, while in the Moroccan public sector, women also face a problem of underqualification. There is also a high level of underqualification in Morocco, suggesting a shortage of skilled labour despite the overall labour surplus in the country. The age of graduates plays a role in explaining the high skill mismatch, although the degree of mismatch diminishes over the life course as graduates adapt to the world of work, learn new skills on the job, and switch to more appropriate employment over the span of their career. In addition, there is a large economic cost to skill mismatch expressed as a wage penalty associated with all types of qualification mismatch. The wage penalties have a large gender dimension in Serbia, indicative of gender discrimination in the graduate labour market. In both countries, while the public sector attracts more overqualified graduates than the private sector, there is little wage penalty in the public sector on account of this. Wage penalties for mismatch are far higher in the private sector.

Despite a general overqualification of graduates in both countries, in relation to skill mismatch we find that the general trend is towards underskilling. There is some improvement in skill matching for Moroccan Master's degree graduates compared to Bachelor level, while in Serbia Master's courses surprisingly offer no improvement in skills. While skill matching improves over a graduates career, just as with overqualification, in Serbia the gender gap in skill mismatch worsens over the course of graduates' careers, a phenomenon that is not observed in Morocco.

Keywords: University graduates, transition to work, skill mismatch, Morocco, Serbia.

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DIGITAL NOMADS: NICHE OUTLIERS OR NEW MAINSTREAM

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Introduction: The rise of digital nomadism marks a significant shift in contemporary work culture, challenging traditional notions of employment, location, and identity. The paper delves into the evolving landscape of digital nomadism, examining its developments, conceptual underpinnings typologies, and policy implications. Through the exploration of agency, narratives, identities, and temporalities, the paper seeks to establish whether digital nomadism represents a niche phenomenon or a harbinger of new mainstream work and lifestyle.

There are 35 million digital nomads (DN) globally, including 16.9 million DN in the US. The study focuses on the European dimensions of digital nomadism: DN from one to another EU/European country; DN in EU/European country. It is based on narrative interviews (on and off-line) with digital nomads and discourse analyses of sites, and digital networks of DN in social media.

Main Objective: The study poses the questions: How to *count* the DN; How to *theorise* the DN; How to *become* a DN; How to *create* the DN; How to *narrate* the DN; How to *imagine* the DN; How to *analyse* the DN; How to *manage* DN.

Research Methodology: The analysis is structured in four parts: mapping the field, typologies, theoretical zoom on crucial issues; policy implications.

The first part maps the field in two ways: conceptual history a la R. Koselleck and development of the digital nomadism. The scholarly interest is very recent – the first publication indexed in Web of Science dates 2006, yet exponentially expanding. From early explorations of remote work to contemporary analyses of global mobility, researchers have sought to understand the complexities of digital nomadism through various conceptual lenses. The conceptual cluster is composed of 17 notions, among which are nomadic work, gig economy, youth travel, networks, etc. The working definition adopted and further nuanced in this study is the one of Dave Cook (2023) of digital nomads as the ones who use digital technologies to work remotely; have the ability to work and travel simultaneously; have autonomy over frequency and choice of location; visit at least three locations a year that are not their own or a friend's or family home. At the heart of understanding digital nomadism lies a theoretical framework that juxtaposes agency against policy, interrogates the tension between work-from-anywhere practices and marketing narratives, explores the temporalities of borderless identities, and examines the interplay between narratives and imaginaries. By unpacking these dimensions, the paper elucidates the motivations, constraints, and aspirations that shape the digital nomad experience.

The second part introduces the typologies of David Cook and the author herself. They categorize digital nomads based on various criteria, including employment arrangements,

mobility patterns, and lifestyle preferences. By delineating distinct typologies, one can better understand the heterogeneous nature of digital nomadism and the divergent trajectories they embody.

The theoretical zoom on mega-narratives, identities, temporalities, and tax implications offers deeper insights into the structural forces that underpin digital nomadism. Mega-narratives, such as the pursuit of freedom and self-actualization, shape individual and collective identities within digital nomad communities, while temporalities reflect the fluidity of time and space in remote work environments and are detailed in life in time zones, strong authorship of personalized work and life temporality, navigation between different cultural and work temporalities. Additionally, tax considerations underscore the complexities of transnational employment and the regulatory challenges faced by digital nomads operating across multiple jurisdictions.

The policy responses to this new phenomenon are managed by the digital nomad visas among other policy tools.

Key Findings: In conclusion, the study on digital nomadism reveals a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that defies easy categorization. While some may view digital nomads as niche outliers operating on the fringes of mainstream society, a closer examination suggests that they embody broader socio-economic trends reshaping the future of work and lifestyle. The conclusion analyses digital nomadism along the axes of remote work vs mobility in the post-Westphalian order and the 'Revenge of the State' order; the access to mobility as the new inequality; work in the nexus technology vs mobilitarian ideology. By engaging with the conceptual frameworks, typologies, and theoretical perspectives the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of digital nomadism and its implications on work, society, and policy.

Keywords: digital nomad, digital nomadism, remote work, telework, future of work, digital technologies

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ARE ADVANCED DIGITAL SKILLS CRUCIAL FOR THE NEW-AGE MARKET?

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Introduction: When the authors discuss the new-age market, they always mention globalization, which has, primarily, led to removing the boundaries between countries and their employees. The second, newer, term is the COVID-19 pandemic, whereafter everyone realized the necessity of ICT technology in everyday life. The one factor that is filtered as the most important, and that influences the satisfaction and productivity of employees (Davidescu A.A. et al., 2020; Ma, X., 2018; Angelici, M. & Profeta, P., 2023.) is the flexibility of work. To be flexible and to have more satisfied employees, companies need to transform their work environments into a hybrid, involving more ICT and Artificial Intelligence - AI. The problem is having continuous work, i.e., work that does not face problems or challenges. In order to have it, the workers must be up-to-date regarding skills necessary for their work environment. As mentioned, the workers need to know at what level their digital skills are (one of the life-learning skills according to the European Commission, 2006) so that they always try to be updated. Artificial Intelligence (AI) encompasses computer systems with the ability to execute intricate tasks traditionally exclusive to human capabilities, including reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. Hence, the help of AI in work these days is making it more efficient and more effective. We all know that "everything comes with a price", so using AI can sometimes be problematic if not used properly. Therefore, this is one more aspect to be taken into consideration in discussions on the necessity of digital skills.

Main objective: The primary aim of this paper is to analyse the statistical data on digital skills in the Republic of Serbia and to establish a base for future research.

Research Methodology: The methodology utilized in this study is desk research, upon which descriptive statistical analysis is applied. The tool used for the analysis is SPSS.

Key Findings: The preliminary findings indicate the gap between the digital competences of the Serbian population and market requirements.

Keywords: Digital competences, AI, new-age market.

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DIGITAL LITERACIES AND BEYOND: EXPANDING SKILL SETS FOR THE NEW PLATFORM ERA: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ACADEMIA, CASE OF ALBANIA

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Introduction: In today's digitally driven world, where economic transactions and social interaction increasingly occur through digital platforms (Kirchner & Schussler, 2019), the acquisition of critical digital literacies has become imperative for success within the platform economy. However, there exists a notable lack of clarity regarding academia's role in fostering these essential competencies. This study aims to delve into this ambiguity, seeking to explore how academia can strategically incentivize the acquisition and application of digital skills tailored to the demands and challenges posed by platform-based ecosystems. By identifying the barriers, gaps, and opportunities within current educational frameworks, this research seeks to propose strategies for academia to address the evolving needs of individuals and industries in the digital era, ultimately enhancing economic participation and societal engagement in platform-based environments.

The key concepts such as platform economy, digital literacy, academia, and skills development serve as pillars in this research, conceptualized within the contemporary transformative environment. While facing challenges in securing job opportunities or sources of income within local labour markets, people search for work online (Graham et al., 2017). Despite the promise of autonomy and flexibility in freelance work, practitioners often encounter hurdles due to limited institutional support and training opportunities (Wood et al., 2019). Anwar (2019) estimated that seven percent of people opening a profile on Upwork manage to get a job. The conditions and career pathways on platforms continually steer freelancers in various directions, somewhat featuring the domain, necessitating freelancers to adapt with suitable strategies to keep pace (Gussek & Wiesche, 2024). The capacity of workers to accumulate experience and expertise within platform-based environments is limited, hindering their transition to higher-skilled positions (Anwar, 2019). In the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a combination of technical expertise, creative thinking, and advanced cognitive abilities are emphasized (Alexander et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2019). Acquiring the necessary skills is imperative to be distinguished and progress in the professional journey (Gussek & Wiesche, 2024). Academia plays a pivotal role in addressing the challenges by designing institutional strategies to outline comprehensive frameworks to incorporate innovative technologies and teaching methods into the curriculum (Eberhard et al., 2017; European Commission, 2013).

The study explores how academia can effectively incentivize the development of critical digital literacies tailored to the demands of the platform economy.

Research Methodology: The study used a multi-faceted approach to gather comprehensive insights into the subject matter. Firstly, the research involved conducting 20 in-depth interviews, both online and onsite, with individuals involved in the platform economy. This was part of a research project financed by WBF[1]. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and enable thorough analysis. Additionally, as part of the Erasmus+ CBHE project, U2SID- University to Society Collaboration for Inclusive Digital Transformation in the Western Balkans, financed by the EU[2], a needs assessment process was conducted to evaluate digital literacy among students, academics, and stakeholders. This assessment aimed to gauge the current level of digital proficiency and identify areas for improvement within the academic community. The assessment process at the University of Shkoder included the distribution of questionnaires to 58 students and 49 academics. Furthermore, three focus groups were organized, comprising students, academics, and stakeholders respectively. These focus groups provided a stand for detailed discussions and qualitative insights into digital literacy issues.

Key Findings: The results of the research shed light on various aspects of digital literacy among different groups. Insights from stakeholders were interesting as they expressed concerns about the existing gap between the skills imparted by the university and those demanded by the job market. Suggestions included revising curricula to incorporate digital software knowledge, thus aligning academic offerings with industry requirements. Overall, the findings underscore the critical need for improving digital literacy among students, academics, and stakeholders to navigate effectively the challenges and opportunities presented by the job market. Collaboration between academia and industry stakeholders emerges as a key strategy for addressing these challenges and fostering digital skill development in Albania, supported also by (European Commission, 2013). Research further supports partnerships between educational institutions and businesses as an adequate method for mitigating the disparities between workforce competencies and requirements of the companies (Simões et al., 2021; Taylor, 2006). This study is a contribution for the HEIs in Albania to be more flexible and to acknowledge the rapid technological development with an immediate impact in the job market. In addition, it recommends to policymakers to include HEIs when designing national strategies[3], Albania being in the process of designing the Smart Specialization Strategy, within the framework of the reformed EU Cohesion Policy.

Keywords: digital literacy, platform economy, university, digital skills

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[1] More information on the report on https://repeople.rs/unpacking-the-potentials-of-the-platform-economy-in-albania/
[2] More information on the project on https://u2sid.al/home
[3] Actually Albania is in the process of designing the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3), a tool developed by EU to promote innovation and regional development, more information on https://s3albania.org/home-english/

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