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*Building the future of work together*

## **How diverse forms of work in the Platform Economy are transforming labour markets around the world**

by Bettina Schaller

**Tag:** #platformwork #technology #futureofwork

Platform work is at its core just one of the many ways of organising work. In recent years, thanks to digital technology, it has been made available to a wider group of workers and, as with other ways of working, has raised a host of questions as to how we maximise its benefits while also managing the risks for workers, citizens and society.

Common questions relate to a raft of issues including fundamental principles and rights at work, terms and remuneration, occupational safety and health, social security, social dialogue, grievance mechanisms and labour market intermediation.

A recent research paper produced by World Employment Confederation in cooperation with the International Organisation for Employers (IOE) seeks to address some of these issues and place the emergence of platform work, and the current policy debate surrounding it, within the context of the wider economic and social transformations impacting labour markets around the world.

*Diverse forms of work in the Platform Economy* analyses the regulatory context, benefits and challenges surrounding platform work and makes a series of policy recommendations to ensure that this new way of doing business and organising work contributes to the delivery of four key UN Sustainable development goals: SDG#5 Promoting employment for women, SDG#8 Decent work and economic growth, SDG#9 Igniting innovative business models and SDG#10 Reducing economic inequalities.

It is clear that digital platform technologies have brought significant benefits for workers, consumers, businesses and societies in both developed and developing countries. They were critical in mitigating the damages caused by Covid-19 and offered us a glimpse of the future economy: sustainable labour market participation with a diverse contingent of workers and entrepreneurs able to make a positive impact through new business models that offer them income, flexibility and purpose.

By lowering barriers to entry, platform work has provided workers with access to decent work, flexibility and a pathway to formalised work through skill development. And there has been significant progress in platform business models, policy development and worker advocacy to secure workers rights and protections and expand regulatory coverage.

In exploring the trends towards flexibility and security the report stresses the importance of considering the full implications of platform work in providing access to work and income, delivering important and much needed services and creating a level playing field for citizens and firms.

Platform work is challenging to define. It has multiple manifestations, and comprises a complex, heterogeneous ecosystem of businesses and activity. Given this diversity of business models, work settings and contractual arrangements, any policy intervention will be complex and needs to be multifaceted and focused on the right regulatory level.

Reform processes are underway at both local and national level but experience suggests that rather than seeking ubiquitous solutions, it is better to take a focused, nuanced approach that will deliver improvements to platform work for workers, communities and economies while avoiding the introduction of measures that have potentially harmful and unintended consequences.

And while the diversity of platforms and experiences suggests that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach in setting standards, generic classification has been shown to have detrimental effects for workers - reducing access to work and flexibility and failing to deliver on greater security.

The IOE/WEC report concludes that tripartite and bipartite social dialogue at all levels will need to acknowledge and integrate the diversity of platforms and platform workers and incorporate their variety of needs and traits into similarly diverse frameworks at national level. Governments, Employers and Business Member-based Organisations and platform companies will all have a role to play in shaping the approach.

The fact is that the platform economy currently employs a relatively small proportion of the global labour force – some 4%. It nevertheless offers a powerful force for creating economic opportunity and income – especially for those sectors of society that are sometimes left out of and left behind by the traditional labour market organisation. It will be interesting to observe how promising developments and social innovation in the public and private sector will continue to shape outcomes for this modest but enduring feature of our labour markets.

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