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Building the future of work together

Platform work: Walking the line between technological innovation and protecting the rights of workers

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Technology has upended many facets of our lives including the ways in which we work. Digitalisation and automation have seen the traditional concept of a workplace transformed and people are increasingly taking more control over how and when they work. There has been a massive proliferation of digital platforms enabling people to work in recent years involving everything from food delivery and transport to professional services.

Innovation like this is to be welcomed but its rapid pace can lead to a situation where rules and regulations are out of step. The platform economy has not been immune from this and it has resulted in fierce debate amongst labour representatives, officials, politicians and workers alike.

High-profile legal disputes such as those over Uber's classification of workers have attracted much media attention and placed the issue firmly on the political agenda. As a result, it is no surprise that the European Commission has decided to try to settle the current legal ambiguity and create a framework for platform work across the EU.

The Commission's publication of the proposal for a Directive on platform work last December was welcomed by many and seen as a crucial step to enable a sustainable platform economy. And while our industry supports the Commission's initiative, there are a number of areas within the proposal that need to be addressed to ensure the best outcome for platforms and workers alike.

As a starting point, it is important how we view and define platform work. Many are characterising it as a brand-new form of work. However, we must remember that much of the platform economy simply involves reorganising the way we work and is already covered by existing employment rules. Platforms therefore offer an opportunity to foster diverse ways of organising work that can improve social inclusion and enable more people to bring their talents to bear in the labour market.

One of the key issues at the heart of the Commission's proposal is around the classification of workers. According to the [Commission](#), nearly 5.5 million people are currently incorrectly classified. However, the solution is not a one-size-fits-all presumption of employment. The diversity within the platform economy merits a considered and flexible approach to classifying labour. Otherwise, truly self-employed workers will find themselves being punished unnecessarily.

Creating a level playing field amongst platforms is a welcome objective of the proposal, however we must ensure that providers of flexible work solutions, like the private employment services industry, can continue to offer a flexible pathway for workers whose needs are outside the traditional concept of work.

During a recent European Parliament Roundtable with MEP Elisabetta Gualmini, participants emphasised the need for balanced regulation of digital labour platforms. Such a framework would allow the platform economy to develop while also ensuring social protection for people working and providing services through them. While there was a consensus that algorithms and automated decision-making play an important role in work intermediated by digital labour platforms, it was also noted that corresponding rules in the forthcoming EU AI Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) should be taken into account to ensure consistency across regulatory frameworks. It was emphasised that creating a level-playing field would add value for traditional private employment services and digital platforms alike, while also ensuring the workers themselves benefit.

The debate over how platform work in Europe should be regulated is set to heat up with the report of the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) Committee expected in May and the full position of the European Parliament set to be adopted by the end of the year. It is crucial that we get this right to strike a balance between innovation and ensuring adequate protection for workers trying to navigate an increasingly complex and fast-moving labour market.

Platform work is more than a gig and we have the opportunity to create an innovative labour market driven by new technologies that also ensures fair outcomes for workers.


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