

Adopted by
the Board

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Position Paper

Platform Work

While platform work is still a relatively new form of work, it is a key issue for young workers as it is growing exponentially fast: indeed, the data shows a prevalence of young workers engaging in platform work, which most times do not offer the same protection and rights as the “traditional economy”. As the European Youth Forum, the biggest platform of youth organisations across Europe, we bring young people’s voices and demands on this issue that affects them disproportionately.

1. What is platform work?

Platform work, which is also referred to as the ‘gig economy’, ‘crowd work’, or ‘on-demand economy’, is among the new forms of work increasingly being taken up by young people. A non-standard form of work, it is “a form of employment that uses an online platform to enable organisations or individuals to access other organisations or individuals to solve problems or to provide services in exchange for payment” (Eurofound 2018). It is divided between “on-location labour platform” and “online labour platform”. Following President Von der Leyen’s commitment in 2019, the European Commission unveiled its proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work in December 2021.

2. Young people’s stake in this discussion

Data shows that a large proportion of workers engaging in this form of work are young people: in 2018, while the average workers’ age in platform work was 33.9 years - compared to 42.6 years in traditional businesses - a closer look at the data shows that in most EU countries at least 50% of platform workers are under the age of 34, with high numbers of platform workers under 24 years of age¹. While they come from different backgrounds, most of them, especially with on location platform work, face poor working conditions associated with low wages.

Platform work is precarious and it is many times young people from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds who end up taking on most of this work, usually when already facing discrimination and exclusion from the traditional labour market. Workers with limited acquired formal education and/or from marginalised groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, make up 55% of platform workers².

As platform work is also often advertised to young people as an opportunity to earn an “easy income”, little has been done until now to include the youth perspective in any policies on the topic: there is currently no evidence that the European Commission has consulted directly with young people to take on board their views and experiences in shaping this initiative on platform workers.

It is therefore of the highest importance that young people’s voices are heard and that they are part of the design, implementation and monitoring of any policies that will affect their livelihood. The European Youth Forum’s goal in this discussion is to ensure that no young person is left behind and that any process forward aims at the development of fair and quality conditions and job opportunities within platform work, thus further tackling down any incentives or actions towards precarious work.

Platform work, due to its relatively new status, unregulated nature and fast development creates a number of issues that are key concerns for the European Youth Forum and our broader work on employment. Our mission is to guarantee quality jobs for young people and a fair and decent future of work for the present and future generations. Platform work, if regulated, can represent a great opportunity for young people, in a level playing field; our goal therefore is to ensure the protection and dignity of all persons performing platform work.

1 See figure 10: <https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/the%20platformisation%20of%20work%20in%20europe%20-%20final%20corrected.pdf>

2 Our report on the future of work: <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Future%20of%20Work%20-%20online%20version%202.pdf>

3. Our key demands

The European Youth Forum **welcomes the proposal for a directive from the European Commission**. Some of our key demands were met - while lacking a specific youth perspective - especially regarding employment status and the transparency of algorithms, which will ensure decent and fair working conditions for all platform workers.

As an overarching outcome, we aim for and want to make sure that **young people are always included in i) the policy cycle of decision-making (from beginning to the end - including in the design, implementation and follow-up of measures) as well as in ii) the decisions themselves**, to ensure the needs and interests of young people are accurately reflected in the subsequent policies. This will be crucial for both present and future generations: letting platform work go completely unregulated could create a very low standard for other forms of work, already existing, in development or upcoming.

We want to see the following key points in the final text of the directive:

- Clarity on the **employment status** should stay the top priority of the directive on Platform workers: platform workers should be considered de facto as employees of the platform. This **presumption of employment** must go hand-in-hand with the **reversal of the burden of proof**: it is up to the platform to prove there is no relation of subordination and that the workers are truly self-employed.
- The proposal sets **criteria that could hinder the presumption of employment**. This should be addressed during the negotiations. We recommend that the criteria provided in the proposal for a directive is used only as a guidance for Member States when determining if there exists a relation of subordination between the platform and the workers.

- All platform workers must have access to all relevant **social rights and protection**. Clarifying their employment status should ensure their rights to social protection are guaranteed and respected, while also setting minimum standards for those workers who might not qualify as employees. Workers should also have the right to **collective bargaining and to organise** and the directive should encourage the possibility of workers-owned platforms.
- Any **algorithm** used by platform(s) must be fully transparent to the workers and users to ensure fair working conditions. **Decisions like ending an employment relationship cannot be left to an algorithm or any other AI mechanism**, and there should always be human management and oversight behind those decisions and other matters.
- The workers and users of the platform should also have access to a **clear and easy redress mechanism**. For example, if a worker were to be suspended or fired, they should have the possibility to contest the decision and get full transparency on the reason. It is also of tremendous importance to ensure the protection of workers' personal data at all times and their digital rights in general, including the right to disconnect.

We count on your support to ensure an ambitious Directive is adopted and guarantees decent and fair working conditions for all young people taking part in the platform economy.