

Anticipating and managing the impact of change

Initiatives to improve conditions for platform workers: Aims, methods, strengths and weaknesses



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Introduction

The rapid rise of the platform economy is transforming European labour markets. The diversity of business models and practices used by platform companies require existing regulatory frameworks and voluntary initiatives to catch up and enable a transition towards a fair and competitive digital economy.

Working through platforms raises several challenges for workers. Employment and income tend to be unpredictable and are determined by algorithms that are beyond workers' control. Access to social security is limited as it is linked to employment status. Social security contributions and income tax are difficult to levy as existing tax regulations are vague. Working conditions vary depending on the type of platform, the nature of the tasks and the level of skills required to perform those tasks. Collective bargaining, which could facilitate consensus around employment and working conditions, remains marginal.

However, the platform economy also presents opportunities for both workers and consumers. Technological innovations can improve matching in the labour market and facilitate

employment for self-employed and freelance workers. With low entry barriers and the prospect of flexible working time, platforms can help disadvantaged labour market groups to secure work. During moments of crisis or high unemployment, platforms can provide workers with opportunities to earn an income. In broader terms, a well-functioning platform economy can contribute to innovation, growth and competitiveness.

Across the EU, governments, social partners, grassroots organisations and platforms themselves have begun to introduce initiatives to tackle the negative aspects of platform work. Eurofound's Platform economy repository (<http://eurofound.link/platformeconomy>) compiles examples of such initiatives. As most are relatively new and small in scale, awareness of them is limited, as is knowledge of their coverage, generosity, effectiveness and aims, and the actors involved. To help close this knowledge gap, this policy brief looks at several initiatives launched across the EU, describing their purpose and how they work. It also makes an initial assessment of their effectiveness.

Platform work is defined by Eurofound as the matching of the demand for and supply of paid work through an online platform using an algorithm.



Policy context

Forms of employment and business models are constantly changing, bringing novel challenges for the European economy and labour market. Platform work emerged in Europe in the early 2000s, as part of a broader set of shifts driven by digitalisation.

The scale of the platform economy is still relatively small: just 1.4% of EU workers perform work mediated by platforms as a full-time job, while 11% have worked through a platform at least once, according to COLLEEM II, a survey on platform work conducted by the European Commission Joint Research Centre in 2018. Nevertheless, platforms raise numerous challenges for European labour markets relating to working conditions and collective bargaining, algorithmic management and the employment status of platform workers, as well as to the monitoring and enforcement of employment rights legislation.

Concerns about platform work have intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which aggravated the issues around employment and working conditions. A substantial number of platform workers in the EU, notably those engaged in platform work requiring contact

with clients, are thought to have lost their employment and income or to have been at increased risk of infection. Emergency support measures initiated in the Member States, such as short-time working schemes and income support for self-employed workers, were likely to have been insufficient to cushion the effects of the crisis on platform workers. However, this does not appear to have dented the growth of the platform economy. On the contrary, in the aftermath of the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, further growth is expected.

Due to the potentially disruptive effects of platform work on the labour market, several initiatives have been launched at EU and Member State levels to address gaps in the employment and working conditions of platform workers.

A few recent EU-level regulations explicitly refer to the platform economy, such as Directive 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions and Regulation 2019/1150 on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services.

The EU-level social partners, including the European Trade Union Confederation and BusinessEurope, refer to platform work in their strategies and engage in public debate on the topic. In 2021, the European Commission launched a consultation of the social partners under Article 154 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on possible action addressing the challenges related to working conditions in platform work. This is

expected to produce some specific legislative action to be proposed at EU level towards the end of 2021.

Across the Member States, initiatives to improve platform workers' working conditions are being piloted. They have different aims, vary in scope and incorporate a variety of mechanisms. A selection of these initiatives is discussed in the section, 'Exploring the evidence'.

Key findings

- Initiatives to improve employment and working conditions in the platform economy most commonly set out to disseminate information and advice, to organise platform workers, to negotiate improvements to their working conditions, and to give them access to insurance and social protection.
- These initiatives target the on-location type of platform work such as food-delivery and taxi-type services. Platform work performed online receives little attention.
- Awareness raising and provision of advice offer guidance to workers and help to establish constructive dialogue among different types of stakeholders. However, the visibility and scope of existing initiatives are limited.
- Organising platform workers to represent their interests increases transparency around working conditions and enhances cooperation between stakeholders. However, the organisations behind such initiatives are often short on resources and limited in their ability to move beyond enhanced dialogue to actually improve working conditions.
- Legal initiatives tackling taxation and undeclared work help to reduce tax evasion among platform workers, but their non-binding character and the insufficiency of resources to enforce compliance challenge their effectiveness.
- Labour law initiatives – in theory – are powerful tools to improve platform workers’ employment and working conditions. In practice, their effectiveness is blunted by their restricted scope and enforceability issues.
- Collective agreements improve working conditions and signal that traditional regulatory instruments can be applied successfully in the platform economy. On the downside, they cover platform workers with employee status only, and the organisations that negotiate and implement the agreements often lack resources.
- Initiatives to secure better insurance coverage and social protection are useful, particularly if they are set up automatically for workers and cost them little or nothing. Weaknesses include a low level of compensation and lack of awareness of such schemes among workers.
- Codes of conduct by which platforms commit to improving working conditions contribute to reducing disputes and, by improving dialogue between the parties, can encourage further actions. They are voluntary, however, and lack mechanisms to monitor compliance.
- Alternative platform business models, such as cooperatives, typically empower workers and result in better working conditions. However, to enhance their effectiveness and likelihood of surviving in a competitive environment, they need support, especially in the start-up and growth phases.



Exploring the evidence

The starting point for this policy brief is a selection of 30 initiatives in the EU and Norway designed to improve platform workers' employment and working conditions, all of which were documented in Eurofound's online Platform economy repository as of January 2021.

While the repository records around 160 such initiatives, 30 were selected for the following reasons.

- They are of longer duration, are well known and are often referred to in policy debates; most were introduced between 2015 and 2018.
- They represent a balance between types as regards purpose, method and the actors involved.

- They are balanced in terms of country coverage, drawn from nine Member States and Norway.
- They address health and safety only marginally; this is to avoid duplication of research that the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has been carrying out in parallel to Eurofound.

Researchers based in the relevant European countries compiled the information available on the selected instruments through desk research (using websites, publications by the organisations, research and policy documents discussing the initiatives, and so on) and supplemented the information with interviews with stakeholders and national experts (for example, labour lawyers, trade union representatives and researchers).

The initiatives and what they do are listed in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Overview of the analysed initiatives

Country	Name	Focus
Austria	Collective agreement for bicycle couriers	Negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection
	Works council in Foodora Austria	Negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers
Austria, Germany	FairCrowdWork	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; codes of conduct, standards; organising platform workers; ratings
Austria, Germany, Norway	SE works council in Delivery Hero	Advice and exchange
Belgium	ACV-CSC United Freelancers	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; COVID-19; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; training
	Programme Act of 1 July 2016	Legislation; taxation
Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands*	Deliveroo and Qover	Provision of insurance and social protection
Denmark	3F trade union support for platform workers	Negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection
	Sharing Economy Council	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision
Estonia	Taxation system and Simplified Business Income Taxation Act 2018	Legislation; provision of insurance and social protection; taxation
France	CoopCycle federation of bicycle delivery cooperatives	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; codes of conduct, standards; organising platform workers; organising platforms; provision of insurance and social protection
	Coursiers Bordelais cooperative	Organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection
	Deliveroo France	COVID-19; provision of insurance and social protection
	Frizbiz household tasks platform	Advice and exchange; training
	Law No. 2016-1088 of 8 August 2016 on labour, the modernisation of social dialogue and the securing of professional careers	Industrial action; legislation; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection; training
	Law No. 2018-898 of 23 October 2018 on the fight against fraud	Legislation; provision of insurance and social protection; taxation
	Law No. 2019-1428 of 24 December 2019 on the orientation of mobility	Legislation; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection; training

Country	Name	Focus
Germany	Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct	Codes of conduct, standards
	Delivering at the Limit works council	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; organising platform workers
	Ombuds Office for crowdworking platforms	Arbitration
Italy	Uber Eats COVID-19 support	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; COVID-19; provision of insurance and social protection
	Law No. 128 of 2 November 2019 on the protection of digital platform work	Legislation; negotiation of working conditions; provision of insurance and social protection
	National collective agreement in logistics, freight transport and shipping	Negotiation of working conditions; provision of insurance and social protection
	Riders' municipal information counter	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; COVID-19
	Riders' Union Bologna	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; COVID-19; industrial action; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection; taxation
Netherlands	Riders' Union Netherlands	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; industrial action; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers
Norway	Collective agreement between Foodora and the United Federation of Trade Unions	Industrial action; negotiation of working conditions; organising platform workers
Spain	Asoriders association of courier riders	Advice and exchange; awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; codes of conduct, standards; organising platform workers; provision of insurance and social protection; training
	'Make yourself visible!' campaign	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision
	Sharing Spain	Awareness raising, campaigns, information provision; codes of conduct, standards

**Also applies to nine other countries not included in the current analysis.*

Overview of the initiatives

Each initiative addresses a number of issues concerning platform workers' rights. Around half aim to provide insurance and social protection, and around half aim to organise platform workers. One-third of the initiatives aim to negotiate working conditions, raise awareness and provide information, offer advice, and provide a forum for platform workers to exchange experiences.

All the initiatives address the type of platform work in which the platform, using an algorithm, assigns tasks to workers, who carry it out on location – typified by the platforms that provide food-delivery and taxi-type services. The likely reason for this focus is that this type of platform work is most widely discussed in public debates.

Platform work done online is addressed only as an adjunct to platform work carried out on location, or if the initiative does not explicitly specify a certain type of platform work. Such lack of attention to tackling issues emerging in

online platform work is concerning, considering the particularities of this type of platform work, notably the potential cross-border element.

About half of the initiatives are standalone measures, with no explicit link to wider activities by government or the social partners. However, a few of the initiatives are embedded in wider policy. The Belgian law, for example, is part of the government's digital strategy, and the French laws as well as the Danish Sharing Economy Council are a result of a specific governmental focus on the platform economy. Similarly, some of the involvement of employee organisations is based on a wider strategy to address issues related to platform work.

Below, the initiatives that address working conditions indirectly by awareness raising, providing advice and organising platform workers are examined first. Then those that seek to improve working conditions directly by setting minimum standards are discussed.

Indirect interventions

Awareness raising and advice

To create a better understanding of the particularities of platform work, some initiatives set out to raise awareness about the opportunities and risks of this type of work, to inform platform workers, policymakers and the public about the issues around it, and to provide advice to platform workers themselves.

- In this category of initiatives, the Danish **Sharing Economy Council** aims to facilitate dialogue among the different actors in the platform economy as a basis for providing recommendations to government. The project leads to constructive discussions and generates advice to government drawn from different perspectives. However, to accommodate all perspectives, recommendations tend not to be ambitious, and some important topics, like taxation, have been omitted due to the mandate of the initiative.
- Some projects, especially at regional level, such as the **Riders' municipal information counter** in Milan and the **Riders' Union Bologna**, aim to inform platform workers about the relevant legal frameworks as well as about their rights and entitlements.

This is important as some platform workers (such as young workers and migrants) are not well informed on these subjects. Information is provided through physical information counters or through online material. While information counters are effective at improving workers' understanding of the intricacies of platform work, the initiatives suffer from limited visibility and platform workers' reluctance to approach them due to fear of sanctions by platforms. Against this background, social media can be a useful tool to reach platform workers.

- The **'Make yourself visible!' campaign** devised by the National Institute for Safety, Health and Wellbeing at Work in Spain was a tailored project to inform bike couriers (not just platform workers) about road safety issues. A pilot to test the approach found it to be effective, and cooperation with a variety of stakeholders was favourable. However, attracting cooperation partners and reaching platform workers (within the wider initiative) was a challenge that had to be overcome through one-to-one contact with the workers; hence it was a rather resource-intensive initiative.

Collective voice

It is difficult for platform workers to organise because of the fragmented nature of the work and the dispersed workforce. However, given the power asymmetries between platforms and workers, overcoming platform workers' isolation is necessary to improve their employment and working conditions. Across the initiatives, different approaches are taken to address this challenge.

- The cross-border initiative **FairCrowdWork** takes a broad approach. Most basically, it enables platform workers to exchange their experiences and rate platforms as regards their working conditions. The initiative has also established the 'Frankfurt declaration on platform-based work', which is an agreement between participating trade unions in different Member States on how they should approach platform work. Joint cross-border efforts by these organisations have improved transparency about working conditions in platform work, increased their visibility as go-to points for platform workers, and accelerated learning about this new labour market phenomenon and how to tackle emerging issues. It should also prove to be a good starting point for further, more operational, efforts to improve working conditions. However, as a rather high-level initiative, it has limited power to actually improve working conditions until the operational follow-up activities are implemented. In addition, constraints on financial and organisational resources in the participating organisations limit its effectiveness.
- **Delivering at the Limit** in Germany and **Asoriders** in Spain are dedicated representative organisations for bike-courier platform workers. Both started as grassroots organisations driven by a group of platform workers, which helped to get the buy-in of fellow workers. Cooperation with other organisations, such as trade unions, has helped increase the visibility and spread of the initiatives (as has the use of social media). Such cooperation is also important for the sustainability and growth of the initiatives, as one weakness of grassroots organisations is their limited capacity to expand.
- The **SE works council¹ in Delivery Hero** (which owns the food-delivery platform Foodora) was set up after nearly six months of 'lengthy, difficult and tough' negotiations between worker representatives and company management. The agreement requires the works council to be provided, on a quarterly basis, with information on the company's strategy, investment plans and any other plans that might impact work organisation and employees. Furthermore, the works council participates in the nomination and election of the members of the supervisory board, which, in turn, appoints and supervises the management board. The works council has helped to develop an informal network among platform workers and their representatives across borders. This facilitates the exchange of information on working conditions and good practices as regards the establishment of local works councils and negotiating working conditions. At the same time, the geographic spread of these platform workers, with different languages and working under different business models, makes it more difficult to share information and capitalise on lessons learnt in other countries.

¹ An SE (Societas Europaea) works council is a European-level works council.

Direct interventions

Legislation

As of mid-2021, very few legal initiatives addressing the employment and working conditions of platform workers existed across the Member States. Among those that are operational, two broad strands can be identified: one tackles taxation of platform workers (and thereby undeclared work) while the other tackles working conditions.

Tackling taxation

Belgium, Estonia and France have introduced taxation measures with the aim of encouraging the proper declaration of income from platform work. Making compliance with tax obligations easier was the preferred pathway rather than rigid regulations or coercive policy measures.

- In **Estonia**, an automatic earnings declaration system for self-employed people working through platforms was established in 2015 in cooperation with the major platforms active in the country. Platform functionality allows workers to notify the tax authority directly of the income they have generated through the platforms, which adds this income automatically to the tax declaration and withholds tax payments. For platform workers, the system is optional.

In addition, the Simplified Business Income Taxation Act, introduced in 2018, enables individuals to open an entrepreneur account in a bank from which payable tax is transferred to the tax authority on a monthly basis. Platform workers can participate in this scheme. Up to a certain income threshold, the tax rate is more beneficial than for other self-employed activities.

- Belgium's** Programme Act exempts platform workers affiliated to government-accredited platforms from value added tax (VAT) as long as the total income from platform work remains below a maximum annual level and the workers do not act through the platform in the context of their professional activity. It also provides for a lower income tax rate up to a certain income threshold and automatic transfer of the payable tax by the platform to the tax authority.
- The 2018 law on the fight against fraud in **France** focuses on platforms providing taxi-type and food-delivery services. It obliges platforms to inform workers about their tax and social security obligations, to send them an annual summary of the transactions carried out through the platform and to send an annual document summarising the workers' information (particularly the income received) to the tax authority, which automatically transfers the information to the social security body.

While the initiatives in Estonia and Belgium aim to reduce the administrative burden of tax returns for platform workers and to lessen tax evasion and undeclared work, no reliable data are available to indicate that these goals have been achieved. As it is voluntary to opt into either system, it is questionable whether all taxable income generated through platforms is actually declared.

As regards the French legislation, around 120 out of an estimated 280 platforms based in France have filed declarations for income received in 2019, which raises questions about the effectiveness of the regulation. At the same time, experts interviewed for this study observed that the major platforms are cooperating with the legislation, cognisant of the reputational benefit of being able to reject accusations of contributing to undeclared work.

Tackling working conditions

The French and Italian governments have introduced labour legislation to provide platform workers with minimum social rights, with the aim of increasing the acceptability of this new employment form while ensuring the sustainability of the social model.

- **The French law of 2016 on labour, the modernisation of social dialogue and the securing of professional careers** establishes that self-employed platform workers are entitled to have occupational accident and professional training contributions paid for by platforms if they earn a certain minimum income from platform work. Furthermore, it entitles platform workers to form or join a trade union and to assert their collective interests (through industrial action, for instance) without fear of the termination of the contractual relationship by the platform. Platforms are subject to the legislation only if they determine the characteristics of the service provided and set the price.

While the regulation sends a positive signal, on its own, it is not likely to significantly improve the working conditions of platform workers. The training aspect, for example, only became relevant in combination with a sectoral law requiring taxi drivers to pass a certain exam for which training is required. The social insurance aspect is felt to be insufficient, given the income threshold, the initiative required by the worker and the level of coverage of group contracts. Furthermore, the right to unionise was not a breakthrough as trade union activities had already been happening among platform workers before the law was enacted. Furthermore, obstacles remain in organising and mobilising platform workers and are linked to the structural features of platform work. These obstacles cannot be overcome by the law.

The **French law of 2019 on the orientation of mobility** extends the training aspects of the 2016 law, entitles self-employed platform workers to access and share data on their platform activities (which should facilitate the portability of client ratings), and obliges platforms to negotiate with worker representatives. Under the legislation, platforms may introduce a ‘social responsibility charter’ addressing different aspects of working conditions and work organisation, such as prohibition of exclusivity clauses, workers’ right to disconnect, health and safety measures, and opportunities for skills acquisition and career development as well as information-sharing and social dialogue practices.

- **The Italian law of 2019 on the protection of digital platform work** covers self-employed people working through the type of platform where the platform sets the rate of pay and defines how tasks are performed. It envisages applying the same protections as for subordinate employment, including some elements of social protection, and allows for collective agreements for self-employed platform workers. In contrast to the French experience, the Italian law enabled the establishment of the sectoral employer association AssoDelivery, which is now an important actor in multi-employer collective bargaining.

All the regulations analysed here lack detail about enforcement of their provisions and sanctions for non-compliance. Furthermore, the limited resources of public authorities that audit compliance have been identified as a weakness in the regulations.

Spain's Riders' Law protecting food-delivery riders

Very recent regulations addressing the working conditions of platform workers in the Member States were disqualified from the analysis because they have been operational for a very short period of time. Nevertheless, one example is briefly presented here.

After lengthy negotiations and following a tripartite social dialogue agreement between most representative social partners and the government, the **Spanish Riders' Law** (Royal Decree-Law No. 9/2021) was published in May 2021, to come into force in August 2021.

The new law recognises food-delivery riders working through digital platforms as employees if the platform exercises direction and control through algorithmic management. Furthermore, it obliges platforms to disclose to workers how algorithms and artificial intelligence affect working conditions, hiring decisions and layoffs.

Court cases on platform workers' employment status

As national legal frameworks do not clearly define the employment status of platform workers, around 100 court cases have already investigated the matter. These cases are clustered in about one-third of the Member States and deal with delivery and taxi-type platform work. While the decisions of different courts vary, the more recent rulings establish that platform workers are employees.

Arguments and criteria commonly used by courts as a basis for their decisions include the following:

- workers' integration in the platform organisation; this includes considerations on subordination, autonomy (as regards time and place of work), control and monitoring, sanctions and disciplinary measures, and the obligation of the platform to offer work and of the worker to accept assigned tasks
- whether it is the platform or the worker who establishes market relationships; whether the worker has a business model; and whether the worker is registered as self-employed and has discretion in providing services
- whether workers are obliged to personally provide services or whether it can be done by a substitute worker
- whether the tools for service provision are possessed by the platform or the worker

The observation that the courts come to different rulings based on similar criteria illustrates the variety of individual relationships in platform work, as well as in national legal and economic and labour market frameworks.

Negotiating working conditions

Negotiation on the working conditions of platform workers can take place at different levels. The sample of initiatives in this study includes both general sectoral collective agreements and efforts to secure agreements for platform workers specifically.

Sectoral collective agreements

- Examples of general sectoral collective agreements that also cover platform workers include the **Austrian collective agreement for bicycle couriers** and the **Italian collective agreement in logistics, freight transport and shipping**. The aim of these collective agreements is to create a level playing field between the platform economy and the traditional economy, in terms of competition and working conditions. Both agreements regulate typical areas such as working time, pay, and accident and sickness entitlements as well as the provision of equipment.

Both collective agreements have been highlighted as important signals that the traditional tools of industrial relations can also cover platform work. Furthermore, they might be a driver for the establishment of platform-specific collective agreements. On the negative side, the collective agreements cover platform workers only if they have employee status, and the agreed minimum pay levels are deemed low.

Agreements specific to platform workers

- Initiatives to improve the working conditions of platform workers specifically have been set up by traditional trade unions, such as the **United Freelancers** team set up by the ACV-CSC trade union in Belgium and the efforts of the Danish **3F** trade union. However, this work is also being undertaken by organisations exclusively representing platform workers,

such as the **Riders' Union Netherlands** (which, nevertheless, worked in close cooperation with an established trade union).

All engage in a variety of activities, including lobbying government and policymakers, collective bargaining with several platforms, providing model contracts for and checking individual contracts of platform workers, and providing legal support to platform workers. This provision of a wide range of services tailor-made to the needs of the target group is an important strength of these initiatives, although it puts the organisations' resources under pressure. The use of social media is another asset, to improve the visibility of initiatives and to mobilise platform workers.

- Two initiatives involve the platform Foodora specifically, which mediates food delivery: the establishment of a **works council in Foodora Austria** and the **collective agreement between Foodora and the United Federation of Trade Unions** in Norway. These initiatives were driven by workers' expressed dissatisfaction with their working conditions.

Platform-specific activities help to equalise working conditions across workers affiliated to the same platform, offer better opportunities to negotiate on working conditions, and improve the transparency of business decisions. The fact that they cover only those platform workers who have employee status is a weakness. Some of the interviewees mentioned that, for platforms acting in several countries, business decisions tend not to be taken at local or national level, which makes the possibility of influencing working conditions through a specific works council or collective agreement difficult.

Industrial action

In a broad sense, industrial action could be considered a mechanism for ‘negotiating’ working conditions. Europe has seen a growing number of strikes by platform workers. Most often, these are organised or supported by traditional trade unions. In some cases, they go beyond the local level and take place in parallel in different cities or across borders. More recent examples also aim to involve the clients of platforms by giving them information on workers’ working conditions and encouraging them not to use the platform for the duration of the strike.

In Italy, the **Riders’ Union Bologna** has launched a series of strikes since 2017. The purpose of one was to highlight delivery riders’ working conditions on hot days, during which demand for deliveries tends to peak. The last two nationwide strikes on 30 October 2020 and 26 March 2021 were accompanied by a Facebook appeal to clients to boycott delivery platforms by avoiding ordering through them on those days.

Provision of insurance and social protection

The lack of insurance and social protection coverage for platform workers is one of the issues that has received most prominence in the public debate. This issue arises due to the employment status of platform workers, their limited awareness about occupational risks and need for protection, and the high cost of private insurance.

- Some individual platforms have offered specific insurance packages to their workers. For instance, **Deliveroo and the insurer Qover** have collaborated to provide private insurance for food-delivery couriers in the countries where Deliveroo operates. The platforms' main motivation for introducing such schemes is to maintain their flexibility to hire self-employed workers while providing them with better security as regards liability towards third parties. Furthermore, it can give companies a competitive edge over comparable platforms, by attracting 'the best' workers.

The initiatives analysed offer accident insurance that entitles workers to a certain percentage of income replacement for a certain number of days if they are unable to work after an accident at work. Damage to the riders' own property, such as their bike or mobile phone, is not covered.

The fact that riders are automatically insured free of charge is the main strength of these initiatives. Furthermore, such schemes contribute to raising workers' awareness of the need to have insurance. However, the amount of compensation offered by the schemes is low. Nevertheless, the experts interviewed for this study noted that this level is probably the best that can be offered without challenging the self-employed employment status. In addition, although

the platforms inform workers about the insurance, there is some indication that workers lack knowledge about the terms and conditions and do not submit claims as a result. Another challenge is that the insurance is limited to a specific platform, while riders might work through several of them. Even if all platforms offered similar packages, their terms and conditions might differ, making it difficult for workers to keep track of their entitlements and the procedures to be followed.

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased the risks to the health and well-being of platform workers who work on location. Food delivery in particular, which surged during the lockdowns across Europe, requires physical interaction and hence increases exposure to infection. In response to this situation, several platforms made efforts to raise awareness among their workers, clients and the public generally about infection risks and how they could be avoided, and to provide workers with protective equipment. Beyond such steps, some platforms offered enhanced social protection. **Uber Eats**, in cooperation with a private insurance company, provided financial assistance for 14 days to workers diagnosed with COVID-19 or quarantined by public health authorities. To be eligible, workers had to have completed at least one delivery for the platform in the preceding 30 days. The support amounted to the workers' average weekly earnings during the three months before the application.

The experts consulted in this study assessed this initiative positively, as it provided a safety net for workers in an emergency situation. At the same time, they criticised the limited generosity and the rigid eligibility criteria.

Alternative business models – cooperatives

Depending on national legislation, workers affiliated to a platform that is run as a cooperative can have employee status, which gives them access to all the rights and protections guaranteed by labour law. Furthermore, in favouring a stakeholder-value model over a shareholder-value model, cooperatives tend to place greater emphasis on their workers' interests and to empower them to influence their working conditions.

- **CoopCycle** is an international federation of bike-courier cooperatives. It supplies backend software for bike-courier cooperatives to organise the matching of delivery tasks with couriers as well as to handle payments. It also provides legal and business consultancy services, especially to help such cooperatives in their start-up phase. It furthermore coordinates advocacy efforts to promote better working conditions for platform workers in cooperation with local administrations and national trade unions. As of mid-2021, CoopCycle covered 200–300 platform workers in about 70 cooperatives in nine countries. The assistance it provided in setting up platform cooperatives contributed to scaling up their number. However, the

activities of CoopCycle are constrained by its limited financial resources, and the visibility of the organisation is questionable, especially if compared to the large platforms that offer bike couriership.

- The French **Coursiers Bordelais** is a platform run as a cooperative, mediating bike-courier services, mainly between professionals and platform workers, meaning that items such as parcels and flowers are dispatched rather than food. As of mid-2021, only seven platform workers were affiliated to the cooperative. While small in scale, the initiative has a positive impact by hiring workers as employees, involving them in business decisions, and giving them access to a regular and predictable minimum wage plus financial participation in the platform's revenue. The nature of the cooperative – which must ensure a sufficient workload for the affiliated workers on a permanent basis – challenges the growth of the platform, as does its limited access to finance. Furthermore, if associates move on to other jobs (as is likely to happen, given the rather high turnover rates among platform workers), the sustainability of the cooperative is at risk, as it cannot be transferred or sold like other business entities.

Codes of conduct and standards

A 'soft tool' to improve the working conditions of platform workers is the voluntary self-commitment of platforms to do so, by establishing and enforcing codes of conduct or standards. These tend to be set up in response to the increasing criticism of platforms and are an attempt by platforms to improve the reputation of the business model.

- The **German Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct** defines 10 principles that relate to conformity with the law, interaction with workers, work organisation and working conditions. The tool is a substantial step towards setting standards in the platform economy. The dialogue between platforms and trade unions on the further development of the code of conduct also helps to establish better understanding around platform work and developments in it. Furthermore, it allows for further activities, like the establishment of an ombuds office, which monitors

potential breaches of the standards. This is deemed important as the voluntary character of the code does not guarantee that the standards are implemented in practice.

- In Italy, the Charter of fundamental rights for digital workers in the urban setting was signed by the **Riders' Union Bologna**, the mayor of Bologna, several trade unions and two food-delivery platforms. Under the charter, the signatory platforms commit to providing a fixed hourly pay rate of at least the minimum wage in the sector, accident and illness insurance, and compensation for bike maintenance. They also accept workers' freedom of association and right to strike. The experts consulted in this study assessed the charter as an important symbolic step and a contribution to dialogue among the various stakeholders; however, as of mid-2021, it had not (yet) resulted in any tangible outcomes.

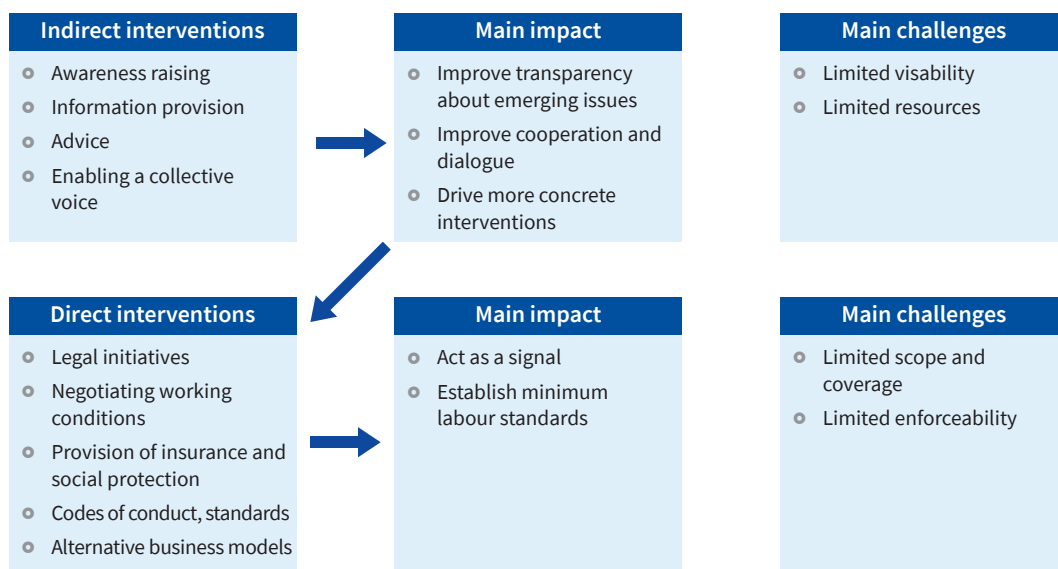
Conclusions on the logic and effectiveness of initiatives

The initiatives examined in the previous pages are varied, and they are illustrative rather than representative, so any general assessment of them must be made with caution. That said, the current exercise highlights that the initiatives that indirectly address the improvement of employment and working conditions of platform workers tend to trigger further and more operational actions. They are effective in increasing the transparency around the issues at stake and in promoting dialogue

among different types of stakeholders. The main challenges that they come up against are their limited visibility among the envisaged target groups (workers and policymakers) and the resource constraints of the organisations involved (Figure 1).

Direct interventions to improve employment and working conditions at present show limited operational impact, too, due to their newness. Nevertheless, they are important signals and set minimum labour standards. If the challenges they currently experience – limited scope and coverage, generosity and enforceability – are overcome, they could be powerful means to improve the circumstances of platform workers.

Figure 1: Intervention logic and impact of initiatives





Policy pointers

Structural issues

- Initiatives to improve the working conditions of platform workers are distributed unevenly across the EU, and few exist in eastern Europe. Innovative ways to raise awareness, build capacity and enable the exchange of lessons learnt across different types of actors and Member States could contribute to better dissemination of platform work initiatives.
- Initiatives embedded in wider policy activities tend to have better visibility (and hence potential take-up) and organisational backing. As strategies to enhance digitalisation in the economy and the labour market are gaining importance, policymakers could consider how to include initiatives targeting platform work. In this framework, a means should be found to design platform work initiatives so that they provide adequate protection for workers while not hindering innovation and technological progress.
- Wider strategies and individual initiatives could both benefit from enhanced cooperation among different types of stakeholders. Joint activities by established trade unions and grassroots organisations might enable both to benefit from each other's strengths. Awareness raising, support of networking activities and capacity-building exercises could be useful in this context.
- New and innovative approaches to tackling the employment and working conditions of platform workers tend to be restricted by limited financial and organisational resources in the institutions backing them. Among the examples analysed, this was particularly a problem for grassroots organisations, trade unions and enforcement bodies. While cooperation could to some degree contribute to solving this issue, further financial and human resources might be necessary to ensure projects are implemented effectively.
- Several of the initiatives benefit from the use of social media to reach platform workers and to raise awareness about their work. These experiences could be shared among the different actors and across Member States using existing or newly established tools for capacity building and exchange of good practices.

- The establishment of structural and systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is important to gain a better understanding of what works and what does not, in which context and for which type of platform work. Such data would not only allow for adaptation and further development of the support structures for platform workers but also facilitate exchange of knowledge on the subject.

Orientation and design of initiatives

- There is a lack of initiatives specifically tackling the particular problems of online platform work, such as undeclared work and tax evasion, lack of social protection, and unfavourable pay rates and working time. Such initiatives could, for example, set up a system to monitor online platform work, especially across borders, and investigate details on the platforms, workers, clients and tasks. They could facilitate cross-border exchange of tax and social security data (with an explicit focus on platform work) or seek to inform platform workers about their rights and obligations when working through platforms in different countries.
- **Legal initiatives** lack definitions of ‘platform work’ or ‘platform worker’. Their scope and coverage is also inadequate or unclear.
 - The legislation related to labour law covers only those platform workers who have employee status. While the employment status of platform workers remains unclear, some enhanced protection of those platform workers who are in precarious circumstances and vulnerable self-employed workers should be established.
 - Attempts to cover all platform work might fail due to the variety of types of platform work, while initiatives addressing one or a few specific types leave platform workers involved in the other types unprotected or underprotected. The establishment of general frameworks allowing for and encouraging more tailored regulation might be a possible way forward.
- **Collective agreements**, if well designed, are effective in improving platform workers’ employment conditions. However, existing agreements cover only platform workers with employee status. Furthermore, as some platforms operate in several countries, cross-border agreements or mechanisms for information exchange between worker representatives across borders (as seen in some of the initiatives analysed) are useful.
- The use of **stakeholder-value business models**, such as cooperatives, by platforms is beneficial for the working conditions of platform workers. Public support for the start-up and growth of such types of platforms, notably legal advice and financial support, would be useful.
- The limited **social protection** of platform workers needs to be tackled, particularly for those for whom platform work is their main job. They need better coverage at low or no cost and with a low administrative burden. Measures to inform platform workers on the need for, benefits of and procedures for establishing coverage and submitting claims would be beneficial.
- **Insurance** should also cover liability towards third parties and damage to platform workers’ own equipment.
- **Voluntary activities** by platforms, such as self-commitment to codes of conduct or social responsibility charters, should be encouraged and supported further and linked to monitoring mechanisms.
- **Awareness raising and provision of information and advice** to platform workers, especially related to legal issues, as well as to their rights and obligations, is important. Such initiatives need to be highly visible and accessible to platform workers.



Resources

All Eurofound publications are available online at www.eurofound.europa.eu

Eurofound's Platform economy repository, 'Platform economy initiatives': <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/platform-economy/initiatives> (Note that the description of each initiative draws on a variety of sources, highlighted in the individual entry.)

Eurofound topic 'Platform work': <http://eurofound.link/platformwork>

Eurofound (2018), *Employment and working conditions of selected types of platform work*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2019), *Platform work: Maximising the potential while safeguarding standards?*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Eurofound (2020), *New forms of employment: 2020 update*, New forms of employment series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Urzi Brancati, M. C., Pesole, A. and Fernández-Macías, E. (2020), *New evidence on platform workers in Europe: Results from the second COLLEEM survey*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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The rapid rise of the platform economy has led to a marked transformation of European labour markets, and existing regulatory frameworks and voluntary initiatives have yet to catch up. While platform work offers opportunities for workers and employers and potentially contributes to innovation, economic growth and competitiveness in the EU, it has been criticised from the beginning because of the poor employment and working conditions often experienced by workers. Accordingly, across the EU, governments, social partners, grassroots organisations and platforms have started to introduce initiatives to tackle the negative aspects of platform work. This policy brief assesses some such initiatives in the Member States and offers recommendations for further action.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

