3ʳᵈ Newsletter of the Project CrowdWork

Feb. 2021

2ⁿᵈ phase of the project

The 2ⁿᵈ phase of the project focus on the collection of empirical data, which corresponds to Work Package 3 (Fieldwork). Project partners are conducting interviews to actors related to the collective organisation of digital platform workers. Interviews have been made to trade unions, alternative movements/associations and workers of digital platforms in the participating countries. Our main results will be presented in our **1ˢᵗ International Conference on the 4ᵗʰ of March 2021, 9:00h (CET)** (please **register now here** and visit our website for the Agenda and the Zoom link)

In the last Newsletter we informed that the Covid-19 pandemic led us to cancel our 1ˢᵗ international conference in Karlsruhe in April 2020. Field interviews to representatives of workers of digital platforms were also delayed. Meantime, we held several online meetings to decide how to proceed with the project and adjust our procedures, namely with the organization of public events. Most tasks were finished in due time in September 2020, but some are running with small delays. Fieldwork tasks will not be totally accomplished on time, because the pandemic affects the way the platform work and the ability to meet with workers.

Fieldwork

In the 9ᵗʰ meeting in December 2020, we acknowledged that most case studies are in the final development process. The following table identifies the case studies being developed by country:

Project Crowdwork - National case studies				
Número of cases	**Hungary**	**Germany**	**Portugal**	**Spain**
4	Bolt (personal transport)	Personal mobility case	Uber	Uber
4	Wolf (food delivery)	Lieferando	Glovo/Ubereats	Deliveroo
4	Upwork (digital service)	Upwork or similar	Upwork	Upwork
2		Gigwork (nurses or similar)		Cuideo (carework)
1	KlickForWork (similar to TaskRabbit)			
1	Oszkar (personal transport)			
1			Call Centres @ home	
1			AirBnB	
Total	**5**	**4**	**5**	**4**

Notes from Spain

Fieldwork research in Spain has shown the uneven development of collective organisation and representation strategies in the platform economy. The most relevant initiatives have been identified

in those cases where different court proceedings have been determinant in bringing these platforms into the scope of Labour Law, thus paving the way for collective representation of platform workers, such as in the case of the early regulation of ridehailing platforms in Spain. The recent Supreme Court decision against Glovo establishing the recognition of platform-based delivery riders as employees appeared as an achievement of the litigation strategies around which cooperation between trade unions and the "Riders x Rights movement", which is the paradigmatic case of self-organised initiative in the platform economy, had been established. However, social partners still hold different views on the scope and the opportunity on the Governments' proposal for the legal regulation of platform work, which is currently under discussion in Social Dialogue bargaining table. Whatever the outcome may be, the effective collective representation of platform workers is still a challenging issue, not only for the fragmentation of platform workers' interests but also, and most notably, because of the union busting practices from platforms and lack of an employer counterpart with which to enter in negotiations and the anti-union practices. In this regard, the representativeness of Riders x Rights has become questioned by riders' professional interest associations defending the platforms' employment model. On the other hand, the attempts by class trade union organisations for the regulation of the operation of Uber and Cabify platforms through collective bargaining are now confronted with their exit from the employers' associations and the negotiation of what would be the first national collective agreement in a platform-mediated activity is at standstill.

Notes from Portugal

In our five case studies of digital labour platforms in Portugal, we found a significant diversity of collective voices representing these workers. The most relevant initiatives have been identified in those cases where there was a legislative intervention, such as the Uber Law. In this case, the main trade union of the sector used its traditional portfolio of strategies to be recognized as a force therein. In fact, the union initiated recruitment, elaborated claims, established alliances, organized protests, was received by the Uber representative in Portugal, and delivered its claims to political parties, government and agencies.

The food delivery platforms UberEATS and Glovo are in turmoil. Shop stewards and a leader of a traditional trade union reported human and labour violations in the North of the country, where we found fear among stewards and workers. The platform workers of UberEATS and Glovo are not unionized yet, despite information campaigns in Porto, self-initiative to contact the local union, strong visibility in urban streets and at the doors of major restaurants, significant media presence, and, as the pandemic develops, being viewed by some as front line workers. The leaderships of unions in the restaurant sector are in standby, and couriers' unions simply ignore the phenomenon. In the Lisbon area, we found reports of initial steps to recruit and organize, as well as evidence of self-organized protests including strikes. There are also a few associations related to precariousness and immigration may press policymakers and could potentially provide collective voice but lack resources to act now.

We found trade union representation already established in the case of CallCentres@Home. Independent and traditional trade unions led a long wave of new claims, protests and strikes, without detectable alliances, even during the Covid19 pandemic. The impact was mostly felt in the media, as these unions still strive to mobilize and fight for employers' recognition and effective collective bargaining.

By contrast, Airbnb workers do not see themselves as traditional workers but rather as entrepreneurs, which makes unionization problematic. We found that the collective voice was channelled through new business associations dedicated to small and local accommodation. Research detected significant dynamics of representation in national and regional business associations. Organization efforts, elaboration of claims and media presence were powerful weapons to access governmental support

during the pandemic crisis that hit hard the tourism sector. The traditional employers' associations pretend to represent the sector, and trade unions avoid platform workers as they have lower standards, and their existence compromises their collective bargaining.

The Upwork case revealed the existence of collective voices of freelancers mainly on the internet. There are several alternative movements that tend to aggregate freelancers (Digital nomads, Remote Portugal, etc), but their representativeness is unclear. They exist mainly through digital media and some function as digital companies that gather small informal networks of freelancers. These workers collaborate according to the size and requirements of projects controlled through Upwork and, after being commissioned and gained trust, directly through the clients to avoid fees. Their significant online presence and company informality appears to be an alternative form of collective representation, where communication exists among members providing some voice to freelancers. Our interviewees indicated that the first-wave lockdown led many to a sudden crisis, but swiftly returned to pre-pandemic levels by July.

These cases were heterogeneous in terms of workers' profiles but mostly of collective representation. Most workers labour outside the formal world of employment, where traditional structures feel uncomfortable representing new members. These workers represent more than 80 000 workers in the country, though. Can we still think about an atypical form of work? Or are we witnessing the "casualisation" of work expanding and endangering our national social contract? Furthermore, we found that digital platforms generated a plethora of forms of collective representation, from traditional trade unionism, independent unions and business associations to informal networks on the internet. Are traditional forms of representation at stake? Last, the pandemic stimulated organizations to show their cards (or the lack thereof) to protect their members' interests. Will the post-Covid era change the way platform workers are represented?

Notes from Germany

In Germany, platform work as well as platform work income seem very heterogeneous. As the German literature about platform work describes, most platform workers earn only a supplemental income and a large proportion of platform workers usually have a job outside of the gig economy. As a result, many platform workers may benefit (partially) from social and labour protection in their (main) job outside the platform economy. This is the reason why the German situation differs partly from other European countries where many workers depend to platform work.

The results of the German case studies in the project "Crowdwork" provide in a certain way the remarkable diversity of platform work in Germany. Specifically with regard to the type and the organization of the platforms, the qualification of the "worker" as well as of the degree of the unionization of the workers, it is difficult to identify a unique pattern of this type of work in Germany.

With regard to working conditions, there can be observed two trends in the project:

First, the quality of platform work fields as in logistics are similar to the platform work in other countries. However, from the very beginning, labour protection plays a crucial role and has led to a broad debate about institutional settings of social security contributions in politics and economy.

Second, platform work may offer a broad range of work options for different social groups, which do (still) not belong to formal labour markets like students, migrants or citizens out of engagement. Here, this type of work (may) provides a certain chance of work integration, which is highly appreciated by the workers themselves. In the case of care work, platform work provides even better working conditions for qualified care workers than in the public health care sector. This belongs to income as well as to time flexibility according to the first results.

In sum, in order to assess and to evaluate the working conditions of crowdwork in Germany, it seems important to contextualize the data in order to respond adequately to these different phenomena.

Notes from Hungary

The relationship between trade unions and platform workers is a complex one, they hardly find the route to each other for several reasons. First, the trade unions are rather weak in Hungary, especially since the 1990s when the social and economic transformation took place. Second, the Hungarian labour relations' system is based on the individual plant level collective bargaining and as the platform companies deny that they would be the employers of the platform workers, it is difficult reach them. Third, trade unions are only starting to recognise the importance of platform workers they do not see a potential for recruiting new members among them and thus they usually do not have any plan how to organise them. In short, the Hungarian trade unions lack of both basic financial, human and knowledge sources to be successful among these employees or quasi-employees. To create a tailor-made and successful trade union strategy to organise platform workers is a daunting task to achieve also because they constitute a heterogeneous group of workers with different self-identities, bargaining positions, and differing needs. For example, to organise low-skilled, low-paid platform workers executing micro works and representing the digital Taylorism or digital precariat require quite another approach from traditional trade unions than those medium- or high-skilled, better paid freelancers (often calling themselves as self-entrepreneurs and representing middle class individuals) who execute complex, knowledge-intensive medium or highly specialised intellectual works. These more skilled workers have a much better bargaining position and do not care much about trade unions. Digital precariat, in contrast, represent the other extreme of the spectrum: their bargaining position is so weak that they often do not recognise how an interest representation organisation could help their everyday life. The slowly emerging online forums may be an important tool to articulate the collective voice of platforms workers who are often geographically dispersed and working alone. These 'community spaces' are supported by IT infrastructures of the platforms and 'external' forums, such as Facebook groups or work blogs informing others of grievances and other issues related to platform work. These forums may challenge and offer substitution of the existing (offline) institutions of collective voice.

Present status

Presently, most interviews were done, and all partners are preparing their national reports based on the fieldwork.
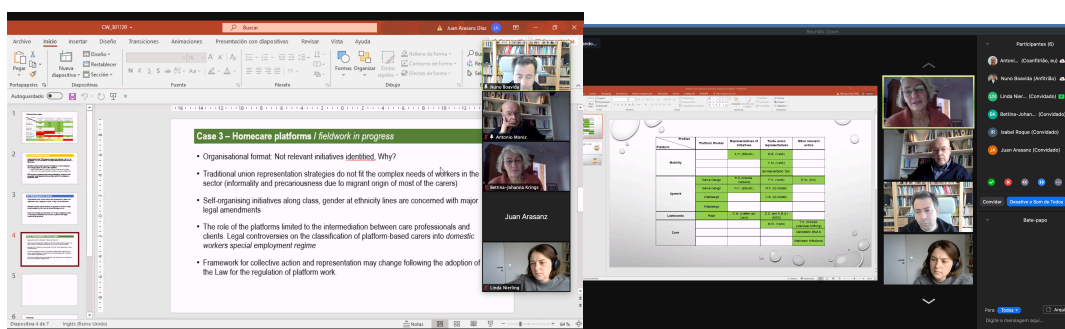
We also raised new hypotheses on variable relations considering the different case studies results. The pandemics in all partner countries went into worse situation, with emerging 2nd waves, and a stronger economic impact. For this reason, it was accepted to have the Budapest conference on late February or early March 2021.
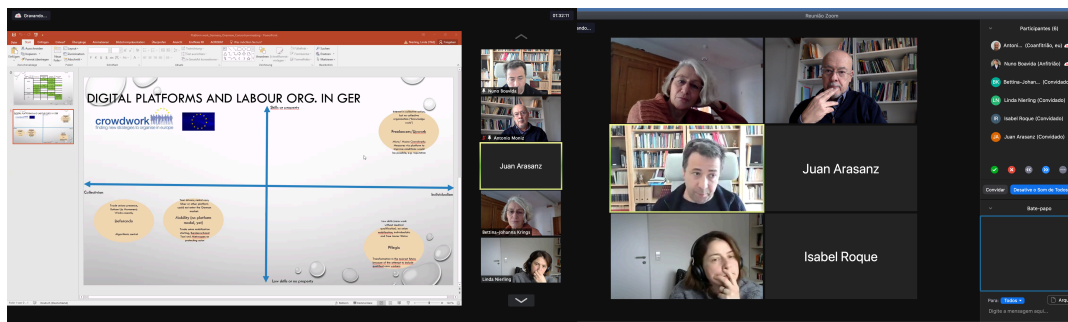
New publications

- Csaba Makó and Miklós Illéssy published the paper related to CrowdWork project named "Platform Work in Hungary: A Preliminary Overview (Innovation in the Age of the 4th Industrial Revolution)" in the 1st National Research report by the University of Public Service, Institute of Information Society (p. 265-302).

- József Pap and Csaba Makó published a paper related to CrowdWork project named "Emerging Digital Labor: Literature Review and Research Design" in the The Academic Journal of Széchenyi István University, Kautz Gyula Faculty of Business and Economics (p. 9-25).

- Nuno Boavida – Youtube Presentation of Preliminary results from Portugal (Jan 2021).

Online meetings of partners

We keep frequent meetings to follow development in the fieldwork throughout the pandemic period.

7th Online meeting (September 9th, 2020)
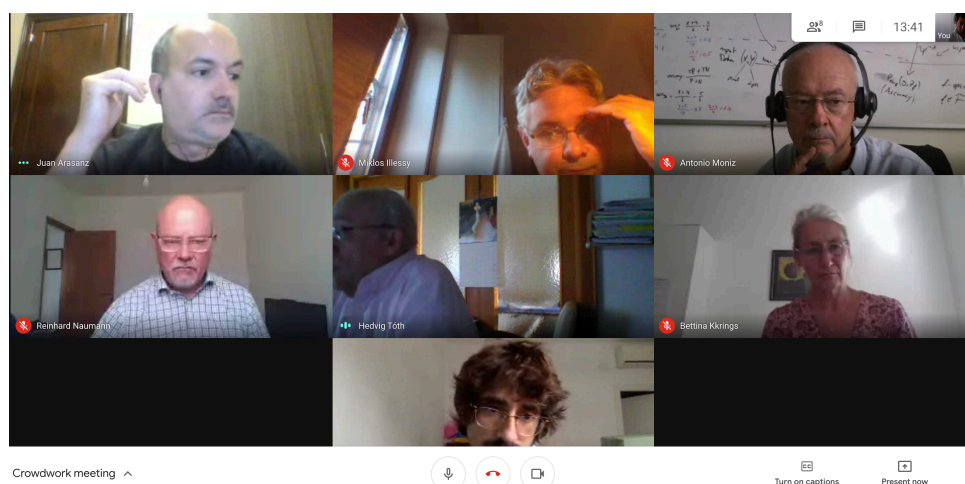
9th Online meeting (December 17th, 2020)

Our **1ˢᵗ International Conference** will be on the 4ᵗʰ of March of 2021.

Please **register now here** and visit our website for the Agenda and the Zoom link

New details will be announced in the project webpage: crowd-work.eu

Project leader:

CICS.NOVA
CENTRO INTERDISCIPLINAR
DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS

Research partners

notus
recerca social aplicada
investigación social aplicada
applied social research
recherche sociale appliquée

ITAS
Institut für
Technikfolgenabschätzung
und Systemanalyse

mtatkszi

Financed:

European Commission | EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

EC Reference: VP/2018/004 Improving expertise in the field of industrial relations

Links: