

BACKGROUND PAPER

Mapping platform work in *Montenegro*

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About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

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About the project

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1. Characteristics of platform work

According to Emma Charlton, the gig economy involves the exchange of labor for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms.¹ When it comes to activities developed within the employment area of online platforms, there are two different types—the first involves the provision of services online (web and software development, design and advertising, translation, and copywriting), while the second uses platforms to connect commissioners and workers to provide services that are performed offline, such as food deliveries.² Official data regarding the percentage of total platform work in Montenegro, information regarding the work by profession, or even demographic characteristics doesn't exist. The lack of official information regarding platform work leads also to uncertainty about the percentage of platform workers who are tied to platforms versus those who work outside them, which is the case with some freelance journalists in Montenegro.

Platform work is not a particularly legally regulated area. The area that is regulated by law concerns mostly freelancing, although not all freelancers work exclusively on platforms. Meanwhile, the status of platform workers who work in the field of food delivery, such as Glovo couriers, is not yet specifically regulated by any law.

According to the StartUpMontenegro consultancy,³ being a courier is one of the simplest ways to find a job in Montenegro, emphasizing that agencies generally expect couriers to have a residence permit.⁴ The application for working with Glovo is submitted through the official website⁵. After applying, applicants

¹ Emma Charlton, "What is the Gig Economy and What's the Deal for Gig Workers?" *World Economic Forum*, November 22, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/what-gig-economy-workers/>.

² Vassil Kirov et al., "Is There Decent Work in the Online Food Delivery Business? Case Studies of Bulgaria and Serbia," (2022): 368–383, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1052872>.

³ Startup Montenegro, LinkedIn, https://tr.linkedin.com/company/startupmontenegro?trk=public_profile_topcard-current-company.

⁴ Orçun Eskiyoörük, How to Work as a Glovo Courier in Montenegro: General Information and Application Guide Through Agencies, LinkedIn, <https://tr.linkedin.com/pulse/karada%C4%9Fda-glovo-kuryeli%C4%9Fi-nas%C4%B1-yap%C4%B1l%C4%B1r-genel-ve-or%C3%A7un-eskiy%C3%B6r%C3%B6k-mvn9f>.

⁵ Official site for the application, available at: <https://me.rider.glovoapp.com/>.

receive an email with a list of five agencies that they can contact for job arrangements. Communication in English is usually not possible, so applicants are expected to speak Montenegrin.⁶

Platform work is not a particularly legally regulated area. The area that is regulated by law concerns mostly freelancing, although not all freelancers work.

Couriers are paid per delivered package based on a fixed base rate, with additional earnings during peak times, weather bonuses (e.g. rain increases pay), and multiple deliveries from the same store.⁷ Earnings vary per delivery, but working 8-9 hours a day, with flexible shifts between 08:00 and 01:00, generally ensures a decent income, with more work leading to higher earnings.⁸ Since there is no official registry of freelancers in Montenegro, regardless of whether they work on platforms or not, their exact numbers cannot be confirmed with certainty. Montenegrin journalist

and content creator Dražen Vujović stated for the Kombinat portal that the number of freelancers in Montenegro is constantly growing.⁹ Vujović claimed that almost every household knows at least a few freelancers, which is a clear but imprecise indicator, he acknowledges.¹⁰ A LinkedIn search for the term "freelancer Montenegro" yields nearly 600 results, indicating a significant number of freelancers, although it is not a completely reliable source since it does not include freelancers who do not present themselves as such on the platform.¹¹ On the other hand, Glovo arrived in Montenegro at the beginning of 2021. By the

⁶ Orçun Eskiörük, How to Work as a Glovo Courier in Montenegro: General Information and Application Guide Through Agencies, LinkedIn, <https://tr.linkedin.com/pulse/karada%C4%9Fda-glovo-kuryeli%C4%9Fi-nas%C4%B1-yap%C4%B1r-genele>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dražen Vujović, "Frlenseri u Crnoj Gori: Koga briga?" *Portal Kombinat*, August 9, 2022, <https://portalkombinat.co.me/frilenseri-u-crnoj-gori-koga-briga/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

end of its first year in the country, the company proudly reported 200 employed couriers,¹² with that number doubling by the end of 2021.¹³

2. Driving factors

Digital advances have replaced “safe jobs” with flexible work, driving the platform economy, especially in the service sector,¹⁴ which makes up the largest part of the Montenegrin economy.¹⁵ Combined with replacing safe jobs with flexible ones, in Montenegro, youth unemployment remains an intractable issue, which is important since most Montenegrin freelancers are young people.¹⁶

Matt Lambert, one of the founders of the NGO Propeler, which brings together entrepreneurs and freelancers, stated that even though an official register of freelancers does not exist, there are Facebook groups that gather freelancers. This is how we learn that freelancers are mostly students or foreign young people who were unable to find employment in their own country.¹⁷ According to the Statistical Office of Montenegro, the largest group of unemployed individuals was in the 25 to 49 age group, totalling 23.2 thousand.¹⁸ This is a significant number if we know that in the third quarter of 2024, the active population in Montenegro was 323.2 thousand, of which 35.6 thousand, or 11%, were unemployed.¹⁹ On the other hand, Montenegro seems to be very attractive to foreigners since it has very high ratings on one of the most popular freelancer websites nomadist.com, which highlights its low living costs, fast internet, and vibrant nightlife—key

¹² Interview with Bojana Radović, Executive Director of Glovo Montenegro, Bankar.me, December 7, 2021,

<https://bankar.me/intervju-sa-bojanom-radovic-izvrsnom-direktoricom-glovo-montenegra/>.

¹³ Interview with Bojana Radović, Executive Director of Glovo Montenegro, Investitor.me, December 21, 2022,

<https://investitor.me/2022/12/21/radovic-kako-je-glovo-postao-svakodnevna-potreba-crnogorskih-gradjana/>.

¹⁴ Svetlana Duković, "Freelance Resilience in Montenegro," *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience* 3, (2022): 65–68,

<https://jebr.fimek.edu.rs/index.php/jebr/article/view/12/7>.

¹⁵ Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro, "Greater Opportunities for Montenegrin Companies to Export Services," April 30, 2021,

accessed February 12, 2025, <https://komora.me/saopstenja/vece-mogucnosti-za-crnogorska-preduzeca-da-izvoze-usluge>.

¹⁶ Fičer, "Frilenseri, gdje ste da ste..." *PCNEN*, April 30, 2021. Accessed February 12, 2025.

<https://www.pcnen.com/porta1/2021/04/30/frilenseri-gdje-ste-da-ste/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Tanjević, Ivana, and Danijela Vuković, Report on the Labor Force Survey for the Third Quarter of 2024, Statistical Office of Montenegro, December 24, 2024, accessed February 12, 2025,

https://www.monstat.org/uploads/files/ARS/2024/3/ARS%20saopstenje_2024_Q3.pdf.

¹⁹ Ibid.

advantages for remote workers.²⁰ At the request of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, the agency DeFacto Consultancy conducted a qualitative study on the position of freelancers in Montenegro and provided insights into the benefits of freelance engagement as seen by the freelancers included in the research.²¹ Working from home was among the main driving factors mentioned by participants since this is a huge cost-saving arrangement. Other than that, remote work suits them much more than full-time jobs because of the latter's usual requirement to be at a specific location. Students emphasized that during the academic year, they cannot manage to work eight hours a day, so it is convenient for them to do freelancing because of the flexibility and great freedom in organizing their own time. Freelancing journalists emphasized that financial profitability is another factor that "pushed" them into this type of work since it is more financially rewarding for them to work this way than to work anywhere in Montenegro as a journalist for an official media.²² They indicated that freelancing also provides them with freedom in work and writing, independence from editorial policies, and the ability to explore topics that matter to them.²³

Digital advances have replaced 'safe jobs' with flexible work, driving the platform economy, especially in the service sector, which dominates the Montenegrin economy.

²⁰ Svetlana Duković, "Freelance Resilience in Montenegro," *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience* 3, (2022): 65–68, <https://jebr.fimek.edu.rs/index.php/jebr/article/view/12/7>.

²¹ Research on the Position of Freelancers in Montenegro, De Facto Consultancy, November 2023, <https://ceisi.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/4.-Istrazivanje-o-polozaju-frilensera-u-Crnoj-Gori.pdf>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

3. Country-specific impact: benefits and challenges

The possibility of higher earnings, working while studying and the flexibility of choosing working hours are the primary drivers of engaging in this kind of work, but the challenges in this area should not be overlooked. There is a high demand for government intervention coming from the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro in forming a systematic approach to this increasingly prevalent form of work and the creation of policies that would contribute to a dignified life and work for platform workers in Montenegro.²⁴ The Union organized a round table discussion on this topic,²⁵ after which it expressed that a call would be made to the Government of Montenegro to establish an interdepartmental body with social partners and civil society representatives to address issues in platform work and create an appropriate legislative and institutional framework.²⁶

Platforms mainly present themselves as intermediaries rather than employers, which exempts them from offering rights such as sick leave, maternity leave or union organization.

According to the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, practice shows that platforms mainly present themselves as intermediaries between supply and demand rather than employers, which leads to platform workers being considered self-employed rather than employees. This exempts the employer from offering the rights owed to employees, such as payment of contributions, sick leave, maternity, parental and family leave, the right to union organization, limited working hours, and occupational health and safety.²⁷

²⁴ Ivan Ivanović, The gig economy – workers' rights are not protected?, Vijesti, 08/06/2022, available at: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/607782/gig-ekonomija-ne-stite-se-prava-radnika>

²⁵ Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, UFTUM Conference: New Forms of Work, New Challenges, UFTUM, June 9, 2022, <https://usscg.me/2022/06/09/konferencija-usscg-novi-oblici-rada-novi-izazovi/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ivan Ivanović, The gig economy – workers' rights are not protected?, Vijesti, 08/06/2022, available at: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/607782/gig-ekonomija-ne-stite-se-prava-radnika>.

Significant issues for freelancers in Montenegro are related to their legal status, the contracts they work under, payment methods, insurance, and the perception of the Montenegrin business sector regarding freelance work and service quality.²⁸ DeFacto Consultancy stated that freelancers most often work under service contracts or without any contract at all, effectively making them part of the informal labor market.²⁹ This issue leads to uncertainty regarding payment for their services and concerns about insurance coverage. Most of the respondents in DeFacto's research have insurance only if they have a regular job or are students, which grants them coverage. However, freelancers who rely solely on their freelance work are uninsured, and private insurance is not always accessible or affordable for everyone.³⁰

One of the challenges freelancers working on platforms face has to do with the fair payment for their work. Foreign employers, as per established practice, prefer to pay this way. This makes it difficult for Montenegrin freelancers to work and often costs them well-paid jobs³¹ due to the fact that banks tax international payments differently, depending on the sender's country and the type of transaction.³² In NLB Bank, the fee is 0.5% if the sender does not cover the costs. CKB and Erste Bank have not responded to inquiries about taxation.³³ Freelancers report that banks sometimes ask them about the origin and frequency of their payments.

To be precise, the PayPal company has been present in the Montenegrin market for nine years already, but users in Montenegro can only send money through the platform, not receive it.³⁴ The Central Bank of Montenegro (CBCG) believes that nothing prevents the full implementation of the PayPal system in Montenegro and

²⁸ Research on the Position of Freelancers in Montenegro, De Facto Consultancy, November 2023, <https://ceisi.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/4.-Istrazivanje-o-polozaju-frilensera-u-Crnoj-Gori.pdf>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bankar.me, Will PayPal unlock options for Montenegro: The Regional Cooperation Council has taken over the negotiations., *Bankar.me*, October 31, 2024, <https://bankar.me/hoce-li-paypal-otkljucati-opcije-za-crnu-goru-vijece-za-regionalnu-saradnju-preuzelo-pregovore/>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

says that it is solely a business decision of the private American company.³⁵ The inability to receive payments through this platform creates difficulties for the local IT industry, start-up companies, freelancers, and anyone looking to work with foreign clients.³⁶

4. Current national regulatory landscape and EU criteria

The state started taking steps in freelancing regulation in August 2020, with the adoption of a Law on Innovation Activity,³⁷ which recognized freelancers working in innovation for local and foreign firms.³⁸ Others, like freelance journalists, who work outside of platforms, are not recognized by any media law.³⁹ The Media Trade Union of Montenegro has warned that freelancers work without contracts, social protection, or insurance and that the existing legal framework⁴⁰ links their work exclusively to research and innovative activities.⁴¹

The Law on Innovation Activities⁴² and Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovation⁴³ define a freelancer as a domestic or foreign individual residing in Montenegro who independently engages in innovative activities by providing intellectual services to domestic and foreign legal or natural persons.⁴⁴ To incentivize this type of employment, according to

³⁵ Bankar.me, Will PayPal unlock options for Montenegro: The Regional Cooperation Council has taken over the negotiations., *Bankar.me*, October 31, 2024, <https://bankar.me/hoce-li-paypal-otkljucati-opcije-za-crnu-goru-vijece-za-regionalnu-saradnju-preuzelo-pregovore/>.

³⁶ Research on the Position of Freelancers in Montenegro, De Facto Consultancy, November 2023, <https://ceisi.me/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/4.-Istrazivanje-o-polozaju-frilensera-u-Crnoj-Gori.pdf>.

³⁷ Law on Innovation Activity. 2020. Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 082/20, Article X, Accessed February 12, 2025 <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e4de3d3b-f1cf-4a14-9bd8-20c39b570536>.

³⁸ Svetlana Duković, "Freelance Resilience in Montenegro," *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience* 3, (2022): 65–68, <https://jebr.fimek.edu.rs/index.php/jebr/article/view/12/7>.

³⁹ Andrea Jelić, "Novinare frilensere u Crnoj Gori ne prepoznaje nijedan medijski zakon – strani i nezaštićeni," *Monitor*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.monitor.co.me/novinare-frilensere-u-crnoj-gori-ne-prepoznaje-nijedan-medijski-zakon-strani-i-nezasticeni/>.

⁴⁰ Law on Innovation Activity. 2020. Official Gazette of Montenegro, 082/20, Article X, Accessed February 12, 2025 <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e4de3d3b-f1cf-4a14-9bd8-20c39b570536>; The Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovation, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 082/20, published on August 1, 2020.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Law on Innovation Activity. 2020. Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 082/20, Article X, Accessed February 18, 2025 <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e4de3d3b-f1cf-4a14-9bd8-20c39b570536>.

⁴³ Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovation, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 082/20, Article V, Accessed February 18, 2025 <https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/c78f2ba7-875e-4274-9264-515588392a81?version=1.0>.

⁴⁴ Both laws above mentioned offer the same definition.

the Law on Incentive Measures, freelancers are able to benefit from an 80% reduction⁴⁵ in personal income tax, surtax, and mandatory social security contributions.⁴⁶ A 100% reduction is offered only to startups and spin-offs for a period of up to five years from the date of establishment.⁴⁷

Back in 2021, the Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro initiated the procedure for applying the Register of Innovation Activities in accordance with the Law on Innovation Activities⁴⁸ and the Regulation on the Register of Innovation Activities.⁴⁹ The portal www.inovacije.gov.me was used for applications in 2021, with the documents necessary.⁵⁰ Currently, it appears to be not operational since it contains no data.⁵¹

On the other hand, the work of platform workers, such as Glovo couriers, is not specifically regulated by any law. According to the Law on Labor, an employment relationship is based on an employment contract between the employee and the employer.⁵² However, Glovo couriers in Montenegro often collaborate with the

⁴⁵ According to the Law on Incentive measures, in order to be eligible for reduction, some conditions have to be fulfilled. Both natural and legal persons engaged in innovation activities may obtain the status of an incentive measure beneficiary if they are registered in the Central Register of Business Entities, have settled their tax and contribution obligations by the date of submitting the application for acquiring the status, are not founders or co-founders of a scientific research institution or an innovation entity, nor related persons that have already exercised the right to incentive measures under this law. Additionally, in the case of legal persons only, no bankruptcy or liquidation proceedings may be initiated against them, and the scientific research or innovation program or project must have a minimum value of 25,000 euros. An extra condition for natural persons only is that they may obtain the status of an incentive measure beneficiary if they are the holder of intellectual property rights and/or have a contract for the provision of intellectual services on an innovative project based on which they generate income.

⁴⁶ Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovation, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 082/20, Article XXI, Accessed February 18, 2025 <https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/c78f2ba7-875e-4274-9264-515588392a81?version=1.0>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Law on Innovation Activity. 2020. Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 082/20, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e4de3d3b-f1cf-4a14-9bd8-20c39b570536>.

⁴⁹ Regulation on the Register of Innovation Activities, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 100/21, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/25b5bd83-38be-4f46-a9cf-4b40d79b6463>.

⁵⁰ Registration in the Register of Innovation Activities, 04/10/2021, upis-u-registar-inovacione-djelatnosti.

⁵¹ Register of Innovation Activities, Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation, 02.08.2024, registar-inovacione-djelatnosti.

⁵² Law on Labor, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no. 086/24, article V, Accessed February 18, 2025 <https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/adf2208f-f45a-4cdc-8b21-db7db1978119?version=1.0>.

company through partner agencies and are not directly employed by Glovo.⁵³ The responsibility for so-called platform workers, such as Glovo couriers, has not yet been assumed by any ministry. Given that both foreign nationals and Montenegrin citizens work on the app in our country, a portal named Vijesti⁵⁴ asked several ministries about their status.⁵⁵ In 2022, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed that regulating this area does not fall under their jurisdiction.⁵⁶

The responsibility for so-called platform workers, such as Glovo couriers, has not yet been assumed by any ministry. Several Montenegrin ministries have shifted the issue among themselves, leaving these workers without clear legal status or protection.

The above-mentioned ministries shifted the responsibility for addressing these issues among themselves. Ultimately, the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that the Law on Foreigners⁵⁷ regulates the conditions for the entry, exit, movement, residence, and work of foreigners in Montenegro.⁵⁸ This law stipulates that a foreigner in Montenegro can work based on a temporary residence and work permit or a work registration certificate, and only in jobs for which the permit or certificate is issued.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the Law on Foreigners does not recognize the category of foreigners working in Montenegro through platforms within the platform economy.⁶⁰ As they stated for Vijesti, the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not keep official records of this category of foreigners, so it is impossible to

⁵³ Interview with Bojana Radović, Executive Director of Glovo Montenegro, Investitor.me, December 21, 2022, <https://investitor.me/2022/12/21/radovic-kako-je-glovo-postao-svakodnevnna-potreba-crnogorskih-gradjana/>.

⁵⁴ "About Us," *Vijesti.me*, [about-us](https://www.vijesti.me/about-us)

⁵⁵ Ivan Ivanović, "No One is Responsible for Gig Workers," *Vijesti.me*, November 7, 2022, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/629563/niko-nije-nadlezan-za-gig-radnike>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Law on Foreigners, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no.86/2022, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/3b9a4e2a-e47f-483a-b599-fb311737f6a7>.

⁵⁸ Law on Foreigners, Official Gazette of Montenegro, no.86/2022, article I, Accessed February 18, 2025, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/3b9a4e2a-e47f-483a-b599-fb311737f6a7>.

⁵⁹ Ivan Ivanović, "No One is Responsible for Gig Workers," *Vijesti.me*, November 7, 2022, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/629563/niko-nije-nadlezan-za-gig-radnike>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

estimate how many people in Montenegro work as platform workers, especially considering that Montenegrin citizens also work as platform workers.⁶¹

When it comes to the EU's accession criteria, the EU wants new rules to improve the conditions of workers in the gig economy. The EU's Platform Work Directive went into effect on December 1, 2024, imposing significant new requirements on companies that facilitate work in the platform economy.⁶² Montenegro, as a candidate country, is not legally bound by the EU's Platform Work Directive.⁶³ However, the EU often encourages candidate countries to align their national legislation with EU standards as part of the accession process. While there is no specific information indicating that the EU has directly influenced Montenegro's policies regarding platform work, the broader EU enlargement strategy emphasizes economic reforms and alignment with EU regulations.

The rise of freelancing and platform work in Montenegro presents both opportunities and challenges. While platforms like Glovo offer flexible work options and the potential for higher earnings, the lack of legal protections for workers remains a significant issue. The absence of clear regulations, fair implementation when the regulations exist, and official statistics highlight the need for greater government intervention to ensure the rights and security of platform workers. As the economy continues to evolve, addressing these gaps will be crucial to safeguarding the interests of those engaged in the platform economy.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Patty Shapiro, It's Official: The EU Platform Work Directive Is Here, Ogletree Deakins, January 3, 2025, <https://ogletree.com/insights-resources/blog-posts/its-official-the-eu-platform-work-directive-is-here/>.

⁶³ Directive PE-CONS 89/24 on improving working conditions in platform work, October 2, 2024, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-89-2024-INIT/en/pdf>.

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