

BACKGROUND PAPER

Mapping Platform Work in *Slovakia*

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About the project

This paper was produced within the framework of *The Platform Revolution*, an eight-partner research initiative funded by **Stiftung Mercator** and coordinated by EUROPEUM. The project seeks to advance fairer conditions for platform workers in the Visegrád Four and Western Balkans regions by examining national contexts, fostering a network of organizations engaged in platform work research, and promoting evidence-based policy change.

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1. Characteristics of platform work

1.1. Features of platform work

In Slovakia, digital platforms and platform work as such have been established for a considerable time. Platforms offering domestic microwork and personal services, such as Domelia.sk have been active since 2009. Generally, workers in the Slovak labor market engage in both on-location platform work, where the digital platform mediates contact between a worker and a customer in an offline economy (e.g. Uber and Wolt), and online platform work (e.g. IT services and graphic design).

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The major digital platforms in Slovakia are international platforms in the field of transportation (Uber, Bolt), food delivery (Wolt, Bolt) or domestic services (Jaspravim.sk, Microjob.sk). Among the domestic platforms, Domelia.sk, which provides personal and domestic services,¹ is the most significant, with around 22,000 registered workers². According to the 2021 European Trade Union Institute for Research (ETUI) Internet and Platform Work Survey, remote platform work is the most common type, accounting for 4.4% of the surveyed working-age population (i.e. aged 18-65). Clickworkers dominate this sector, representing 3.9% of respondents, while professional workers account for 0.4% of them. Transportation and delivery services follow, accounting for 0.6% and 0.5% of respondents. On-location platform work is the least significant type, accounting for 0.4% of respondents.³ Despite these figures, there are few studies on the proportion of different types of work performed by platform workers; hence, their actual distribution is hard to assess reliably.

¹ Domelia.sk offers services such as elderly care, private tutoring and cleaning services.

² Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Online Platforms and Platform Work: Slovakia," 2023, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/20393.pdf>.

³ Agnieszka Piasna, Wouter Zwysen, and Jan Drahokoupil, "The Platform Economy in Europe: Results from the Second ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey," European Trade Union Institute, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4042629>.

1.2. Prevalence of platform work

According to recent data, a minimal fraction of the economically active population performs platform work. Among the 15-64 age group, 2.5 million of the Slovak population were in the labor force in 2021.⁴ Unfortunately, there is no precise data on the exact number of platform workers in Slovakia's economy. However, ETUI research reveals that 2.1% of working-age respondents engage in platform work on a weekly basis.⁵ When extrapolated from census data, counting the economically active population, this is equivalent to 52,500 weekly platform workers in Slovakia.

In contrast, data from the ETUI study reveals that Slovakia has the second highest proportion of platform work among the 14 European countries surveyed (5,7% of respondents have tried platform work in the past 12 months). Remarkably, 4% of respondents have carried out platform work on a monthly basis.⁶

1.3. Platform worker demographics

The demographics of platform workers are also insufficiently researched. However, the 2021 ETUI research found that 5.7% of survey respondents from Slovakia have undertaken platform work in the past 12 months. Among these individuals, 53% were men and 47% were women.⁷ Work in transportation services and food delivery was predominantly carried out by young men living in cities, while childcare or elderly care was largely performed by women past retirement age.⁸ According to research by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Slovakia has achieved "relative gender parity" in platform work. At the general level, this trend is confirmed by the ETUI data. However, a closer look reveals gender disparities across specific sectors. A comparison of relative gender parity with the number of employees in the Slovak labor market reveals an

⁴Štatistický úrad SR, "Sčítanie Obyvateľov, Domov a Bytov 2021: Národná Analytická Správa," 2023, https://www.scitanie.sk/storage/app/media/dokumenty/SODB_Narodna_analyticka_sprava.pdf, p. 182.

⁵ Piasna, Zwysen, and Drahokoupil, "The Platform Economy in Europe," 17.

⁶ Piasna, Zwysen, and Drahokoupil, "The Platform Economy in Europe."

⁷ Wouter Zwysen, Agnieszka Piasna, and Jan Drahokoupil, "The Second ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey: Country Tables," European Trade Union Institute, 2022, https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/The%20second%20ETUI%20Internet%20and%20Platform%20Work%20Survey.%20Country%20tables_2022.pdf.

⁸ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Online Platforms and Platform Work: Slovakia."

insignificant difference in the proportion of employed men and women, 50.19% and 49.81%, respectively, according to the 2021 census.⁹ This is noteworthy in light of the evidence that men constitute a minority gender in Slovakia, a fact that is not reflected in the aforementioned ratio. The disparity may be attributed to the fact that women in Slovakia are more likely to engage in unpaid domestic work or face higher rates of unemployment.¹⁰ Women also tend to work in sectors that are lower paid, such as health or social work.¹¹

In terms of age distribution, according to ETUI data, the largest group of people doing platform work was those aged between 18-24 years, representing 31.1% of the total, followed by 25–34-year-olds with 28.1% and 35-44 year-olds with 15.7%. The 45-54 age group accounted for 13.5% of platform workers, while the 55-65 age group represented the smallest proportion at 11.6%¹². Consequently, the age distribution of platform workers in Slovakia does not constitute an unexpected demographic aspect and aligns with the prevailing trend in the population,

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where younger people predominantly undertake platform work, which is further amplified by the fact that students often engage in platform work.¹³ Migrants are typically overrepresented among platform workers in European countries, and this applies also to the case of Slovakia, where approximately 10% of people born outside the country perform platform work.¹⁴

⁹ “Komplexná analýza zamestnanosti zo Sčítania, obyvateľov, domov a bytov v roku 2021 v podrobných členeniach podľa odvetví, zamestnaní, vzdelania a regiónov,” Štatistický úrad SR, October 2023, https://www.scitanie.sk/storage/app/media/dokumenty/analiza_zamestnanosti.pdf.; The limitation of the census is that it takes into account only employees and omits the category of self-employed people.

¹⁰ Európsky parlament, “Rozdiely v odmeňovaní mužov a žien: definície a príčiny,” January 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/sk/article/20200109STO69925/preco-zeny-zarabaju-menej-ako-muzi>.

¹¹ Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny, “Tlačová správa ku dňu rovnosti v odmeňovaní žien a mužov 2023,” October 2023, <https://ivpr.gov.sk/tlacova-sprava-ku-dnu-rovnosti-v-odmenovani-zien-a-muzov-2023/>.

¹² Zwysen, Piasna, and Drahokoupil, “The Second ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey: Country Tables.”

¹³ Zwysen, Piasna, and Drahokoupil, “The Second ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey: Country Tables.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

2. Driving factors

According to the World Bank, Slovakia is a high-income country.¹⁵ However, platform work is typically a secondary occupation, and the earnings made are often a secondary source of income.¹⁶ This suggests that individuals who engage in platform work are motivated by the opportunity or necessity to earn additional income. This applies to a wide range of people, including students, adults with full-time jobs, and retirees who need to earn an additional income on top of their pensions. A 2018 study found some taxi drivers earned more through digital platforms than through licensed taxi services.¹⁷

Beyond economic reasons, flexibility in working hours was found to be the most significant benefit for platform workers. The respondents in the above-mentioned 2018 study also revealed that the ease of registration on the platform and the immediate initiation of service provision were significant advantages¹⁸. It must be taken into account that the sampling method of the interpreted study has some limitations. The author interviewed 12 respondents who were contacted through social media, friends or family; therefore, it was a non-random sample. The respondents included four male taxi drivers and three female microwork workers, and for five respondents, platform work constituted a secondary source of income alongside their main job.

¹⁵ Nada Hamadeh, Catherine Van Rompaey, and Eric Metreau, "World Bank Group Country Classifications by Income Level for FY24," World Bank Blogs, June 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/new-world-bank-group-country-classifications-income-level-fy24>.

¹⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Online Platforms and Platform Work: Slovakia."

¹⁷ Mária Sedláková, "Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in the Age of Collaborative Economy: National Report: Slovakia," CELSI, December 2018. https://celsi.sk/media/research_reports/RR28.pdf.

¹⁸ Ibid.

3. Country-specific impact: benefits and challenges

The absence of legal regulation prevents social dialogue.

Trade union representatives, who have yet to include digital platform workers among their members, highlight the challenges of unregulated platform work, leading to precarious employment.¹⁹ Platform workers have no direct relationship with their employer, as they are not aware of the employer's identity and they also lack the capacity to engage in collective bargaining. Moreover, other challenges include inadequate remuneration or the impossibility of career development.²⁰ The incorrect legal categorization of individuals employed by platforms carries profound socio-legal ramifications, particularly with regard to the capacity of platform workers to claim their social rights.²¹ The absence of legal regulation also prevents social dialogue.²²

In 2018, Uber became the only digital platform to enter the National Union of Employers (Republiková únia zamestnávateľov), a unique occurrence within the Slovak context. This Slovak specificity is complemented by the fact that in Slovakia, it has been observed that the platforms (e.g. Uber) seek to organize themselves into such structures. In other Member States, on the other hand, it was more typical for platform workers to lead initiatives to form or join an umbrella trade union.²³

¹⁹ Monika Uhlerová, "Budúcnosť práce v 21. storočí," Pravda.sk, May 2023, <https://nazory.pravda.sk/analyzy-a-postrehy/clanok/665760-buducnost-prace-v-21-storoci/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Helena Barancová, "Status Issues of Platform Work," *Societas et Iurisprudentia* 11, no. 3 (October 2023): 34–55, <https://doi.org/10.31262/1339-5467/2023/11/3/34-55>.

²² Mária Sedláková, "Pracovnoprávne vzťahy a sociálny dialóg v dobe zdieľanej ekonomiky," CELSI, November 2018, https://www.celsi.sk/media/datasource/IRSDACE_press_release_SK.pdf.

²³ Sedláková, "Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in the Age of Collaborative Economy: National Report: Slovakia."

4. Current national regulatory landscape and EU criteria

Digital platform workers in Slovakia typically are self-employed individuals, a principle that applies to all forms of platform work. Some, especially in irregular micro-work, may have one-time employment contracts, also referred to as "contracts for work" (Zmluva o dielo).²⁴ In the long term, the Slovak labor environment is witnessing a trend towards a greater proportion of self-employed individuals. This shift is primarily driven by potential savings on taxes and mandatory insurance contributions.²⁵ Platform workers benefit financially, while platforms have minimal obligations.

The legal framework governing the regulation of digital platforms, platform work and platform workers is inadequate. There is no official register of digital platforms in Slovakia, nor is there any regulation that covers digital platforms. Digital platforms are not legally considered employers, and their workers are

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not legally considered their employees.²⁶ Platform workers find the lack of legal underpinnings and framework concerning.²⁷ At present, the legislative framework which applies to online platforms is the Income Tax Act - 595/2003, where "digital platforms are defined as hardware platforms or software platforms necessary to create and maintain applications through which transport and accommodation platforms offer their services".²⁸ Since 2018, Slovakia has required platforms in these sectors to register for taxation. If non-resident providers fail to comply, the income tax obligation shifts to platform workers.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Karolína Červená and Mária Sabayová, "Sharing Economy in the Slovak Republic (Selected Aspects)," *Financial Law Review*, no. 24 (4) (December 30, 2021): 163–77, <https://doi.org/10.4467/22996834flr.21.038.15405>.

²⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Online Platforms and Platform Work: Slovakia."

²⁷ Sedláková, "Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in the Age of Collaborative Economy: National Report: Slovakia."

²⁸ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Online Platforms and Platform Work: Slovakia."

Although there is no particular regulatory framework dedicated to platform work, labor authorities have been advocating for the need to create such regulation. In 2020, the Association of Towns and Municipalities (Zväz miest a obcí Slovenska) called for rules on the sharing economy, citing risks to local governments and the rise of the “gray economy”.²⁹

4.1. Recent court cases

In 2018, the Slovak court case between the Civic Association of Licensed Taxi Drivers and Uber centered on the latter's noncompliance with the same conditions that apply to traditional taxi services. The court ruled that Uber must comply with the same conditions as traditional taxi services, including valid taxi licenses for drivers and clearly marking cars as a taxi service.³⁰ Consequently, the Uber service in Slovakia was suspended from March 2018 until April 2019, when it resumed operations. During this period, competitors such as Bolt and Hopin strengthened their foothold in the modern taxi sector.³¹

4.2. EU level

The European Union has taken a significant step toward improving working conditions for platform workers with the adoption of the Platform Work Directive in October 2024. Slovakia expressed a supportive stance towards the establishment of a European legislative framework on platform work. It was crucial for Slovakia, though, that the Directive stipulate solely minimum standards within this domain. Consequently, Member States retained the prerogative to make adjustments to the specifics via national legislation, thereby safeguarding their sovereignty in this policy area.³²

²⁹ Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska, “Zdieľaná ekonomika potrebuje jasné pravidlá,” August 2020, <https://nppmodmus.zmos.sk/zdielana-ekonomika-potrebuje-jasne-pravidla-clanok/mid/364693/.html>.

³⁰ Matej Dugovič, “Uber po rozhodnutí súdu pozastavuje prevádzku na Slovensku,” Denník N, March 27, 2018, <https://dennikn.sk/1078077/uber-jazdi-v-bratislave-aj-po-zakaze-nevedia-mu-dorucit-rozhodnutie-sudu/>.

³¹ Marián Biel, “Uber sa po roku vrátil na Slovensko,” TREND, April 25, 2019, <https://www.trend.sk/biznis/uber-roku-vratil-slovensko>.

³² MPSVR SR, “Slovensko Na Zasadnutí EPSCO: Podporujeme Zlepšenie Pracovných Podmienok Pre Platformových Pracovníkov,” June 13, 2023, <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/uvodna-stranka/informacie-media/aktuality/slovensko-zasadnuti-epsco-podporujeme-zlepsenie-pracovnych-podmienok-platformovych-pracovnikov.html>.

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EUROPEUM and its activities are co-funded by the European Union within the Operating grants to framework partners active in the area of Union values under the "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme" (CERV).



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