



New survey provides further evidence of seismic shift in Europe's digital economy

A joint study by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and UNI Europa, with the support of several UNI Europa affiliates including Unionen in Sweden, carried out by University of Hertfordshire, with fieldwork by Ipsos MORI, was revealed today at the opening of the UNI Europa Regional Conference in Rome. It is further evidence of the seismic shift in Europe's digital economy and the explosion of the crowd working model.

The year-long research underlines the fundamental changes the so-called sharing economy is causing in labour markets in Europe and across the world. The UK and Sweden are the first of a number of countries to release data from the survey. The analysis released today relates to Sweden, the UK data was made public last month. Austria and Germany will follow in April, with others including Spain and Netherlands under consideration.

Susanna Camusso, Secretary-General, CGIL, who addressed almost 1000 union leaders at the UNI Europa Regional Conference this morning said:

"The report released today refers to Sweden but the findings are representative for the whole of Europe, including Italy. The growing crowd working economy is part of the new world of work. This new world of work has potential to be a positive development for society, but right now we're mainly seeing the downside to what an almost entirely unregulated labour market may cause on social cohesion and sustainable growth. This demonstrates the need to change our development model and to fight for truly fair jobs."

Elva Bova, Senior Economist of the [Foundation for European Progressive Studies](#), a European progressive political think tank, said:

"Online platforms undoubtedly open up many new opportunities. They make it easier for workers to find work in new fields, and for customers to find someone to do odd jobs or other work for them. But their increasing dominance could be driving genuinely independent workers out of business, forcing down the cost of labour and pushing people into insecure working conditions without benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay, pension contributions or minimum wage guarantees."

Frank Bsirske, who is the head of ver.di, the giant services union in Germany as well as UNI Europa president said:

"The Conference is an ideal opportunity for unions across Europe to come together and share research on the effects of the digital revolution in the workplace. This new data on crowd working in the UK and Sweden is an indicator of how great a shift we are already experiencing. The figures from Sweden indicate almost a quarter of the working population is trying to find work in this way and the trend looks set to continue. There must be social and economic safeguards for this evolving workforce. Unions must adapt to the requirements of this new world of work, so that they truly represent these workers."

The Swedish data shows that 12% of the population (around 737,000 people) are already working in the "gig", or platform-based economy, and 24% are trying to find work this way. In the UK five million people are being paid through these online platforms, with more than three million of them regularly engaged in various forms of crowd work. These platforms offer several different types of



work ranging from tasks that can be carried out from home on online platforms such as office work, short tasks and “click work”, to work that can be done offline such as providing a range of services in other people’s homes’ or work as drivers.

Crowd working in Sweden is currently being carried out under much legal uncertainty. Peter Hellberg, Vice President of Unionen, Sweden’s largest private sector union, thinks that regulating the platforms via collective agreements is the best way forward. “Proponents of the platform based economy stress the value of self-regulation. The Swedish labour market is already self-regulated via the rules set by the social partners. Extending this dialogue to the platform-based labour market means we can ensure there’s neutrality of competition between more traditional firms and the platforms, avoid social dumping, and setting negotiable rules that will benefit both workers and platforms in the short and long run.”

The UK survey found that the benefits of crowd working for workers are massively outweighed by the disadvantages, namely precarious work without social benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay, pensions or minimum wage guarantees.

The UNI Europa Regional Conference is being held in Rome from 14-16 March. The Regional Secretary of UNI Europa, Oliver Roethig said, “The theme of our conference is Changing Europe Together. Europe is changing, with us or without us. So rather than being afraid of change, I urge us to be excited, even to be exhilarated. Europe is changing, regardless. The difference we can make is how it changes.”

Mario Petitto, Vice President, UNI Europa added, “We are delighted to welcome our European colleagues here in Rome – to discuss the challenges at hand and to take ambitious decisions on the way we want to address them as a movement in Europe. The challenges workers face nowadays don’t stop at national borders – we therefore have to work together across Europe to have a positive impact.”