

Gig Economy at a Crossroads: Labour Market Distortions and Regulatory Challenges in Slovenia

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a mixed-methods empirical study examining the state of platform work in Slovenia in the context of the EU Platform Work Directive (2024/2831), which member states must transpose into national law by December 2026. Drawing on in-depth interviews with platform workers and digital labour platforms, complemented by a structured questionnaire survey, the study maps the actual conditions of platform work in the Slovenian labour market prior to the Directive's transposition. The research is guided by four interconnected questions. First, to what extent are platform workers in Slovenia genuinely independent contractors, or does the reality of algorithmic direction and control point to a concealed employment relationship — and what are the economic consequences of this misclassification for workers' income security and legal protection? Second, how do algorithmic management systems shape task allocation, pricing, income stability and working conditions, and are workers sufficiently informed about how these systems operate? Third, what is the true cost of flexibility for platform workers in terms of income volatility and economic dependency on platforms as a primary or supplementary source of income? Fourth, how significant are the gaps in social protection coverage arising from the predominance of self-employment arrangements, and who bears the associated economic risk? The study accounts for the significant heterogeneity of platform work — both across different platform business models and across the diverse profiles of workers, including students, retirees, and full-time solo self-employed individuals. While grounded in the Slovenian context, the findings speak to broader international debates on platform labour regulation. As many of the platforms operating in Slovenia are headquartered abroad, and as the core tensions around worker misclassification and algorithmic management are being actively contested in legislatures and courts across the world, this study offers comparative empirical evidence relevant to researchers and policymakers well beyond the EU. The findings provide an empirical baseline for policymakers and social partners engaged in the national transposition of the Directive. The paper contributes to the literature in three ways. It adds to the still limited stock of empirical evidence on platform work in small EU member states, where institutional and labour market conditions differ meaningfully from the large economies that dominate existing research. It advances the comparative regulation literature by providing a pre-transposition baseline that enables future assessment of the Directive's actual impact on worker welfare and market outcomes. Finally, by combining worker-side and platform-side perspectives through a triangulated mixed-methods design, it responds to calls in the literature for more comprehensive empirical approaches to studying the political economy of platform labour markets.

Keywords: platform work, EU platform work directive, algorithmic management, working conditions, mixed-methods research, labour market regulation

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