





Dutch study on crowdworking shows growing individualisation and fragmentation in the digital economy

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Joint study by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), UNI Europa and TNO, designed by University of Hertfordshire, with fieldwork by Ipsos MORI, indicates the true size of the 'gig economy' in the Netherlands. Almost one in eight survey respondent (the equivalent of around 1.4 million across the whole population), have made money through so-called digital platforms that offer paid services and/or products such as Werkspot, Marktplaats, Refreshments Over or Amazon Mechanical Turk.

The Dutch study is part of a wider research project on Europe's digital economy, currently including UK, Sweden, Germany and Austria. FEPS senior economist Catalin Dragomirescu-Gaina said that: "these surveys will hopefully contribute to the current European debate around the Digital Single Market strategy".

The results show the significant share of crowd-working (also called the platform/ sharing or gig economy) in the Netherlands, and underline the growing individualisation of work and the increasingly fragmented nature of the tasks carried out. The Dutch crowd-workers operate on many platforms. In addition to the many who work on platforms already, 18 percent tried to find work via such platforms. "The magnitude of this kind of short-term work is much greater than previously thought," said TNO researcher Prof. Steven Dhondt.

The platform economy offers many workers an important supplement to their regular income, for a substantial minority being even the only or the main source of income. A striking feature is the fact that a significant proportion of people doing some form of crowd-work are not only working for one platform, but many different types – both on- and offline. The typical kinds of work they do is short-term, one-off tasks and click-work, but also all kinds of services such as maintenance, cleaning or transport.

An increasing number of workers are now piecing together a livelihood from a range of different tasks. This challenges the whole notion of the working environment: in addition to not having one fixed place of work in an office or a shop, crowd workers can have a wide range of employers or platforms they work through but also a similarly broad range of tasks they carry out and skills they need to do so. This fragmentation and individualisation of work might have unprecedented societal effects that mainly arise from precarious working conditions.







Oliver Roethig, Regional Secretary of UNI Europa said: 'The trends we could see in the previous survey results from Sweden and UK are confirmed when we look at the Dutch ones – the platform economy is on the rise. Europe must act now, and ensure the inclusion of all workers. Most of these workers are self-employed and often fall outside of social security systems. This must change— we need European legal frameworks to ensure fair and equal treatment of, and security for all workers, those in more traditional jobs as well as those in the new jobs of the digital age.'

Ursula Huws, Professor of Labour and Globalisation at the University of Hertfordshire, who designed the survey said, 'Previous surveys have looked only at users of particular platforms. This representative sample gives us a comprehensive view of the reality of crowd work across a whole economy'.

FEPS senior economist Catalin Dragomirescu-Gaina added: "The findings of this study could serve as a basis for further research on the size of employment outside traditional economic sectors, with implications on how to design better policies to address these new socio-economic challenges".

Note to editors

The research was conducted by the University of Hertfordshire and Ipsos Mori, in cooperation with TNO Netherlands, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and UNI Europa. 2,125 Dutch adults aged 16-70 participated.

The year-long research underlines the fundamental changes the so-called sharing economy is causing in labour markets in Europe and across the world. Data has been released on the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands, with Germany and Austria to follow. Other European countries are being considered for inclusion in the survey.