

Power to the gig-workers: guarantee the socio-economic protections of gig-workers

With this resolution, the European Green Party outlines the social and economic consequences of platform work and recognizes gig-workers as workers, demands adequate and decent working conditions that enable access to social protection, lifelong learning and right to unionise. Gig work has been around for a long time predominantly in the creative sector this must be acknowledged as the creative sector still faces enormous challenges around representation, welfare and rights.

Technology offers new ways to put workers and customers in contact with each other through online platforms. Work is broken down into its smallest constituent parts and is then distributed to workers using algorithms. These workers are paid for each completed task (gig) rather than employed through regular work contracts which include social protections. Although the EU lacks a clear definition of gig-work, it is estimated that up to 36 million EU workers have participated in gig-work, including through platforms such as Uber or Deliveroo. Considering the impact of the gig-economy on workers and the likely increase and spread to more traditional sectors of the economy, measures must be taken to limit the negative consequences.

While the gig-economy can offer autonomy, flexibility and opportunity to some, it also holds power over workers, forcing them to provide the availability that employers and customers demand. Some gig-workers are completely dependent on what on-demand tasks the algorithm assigns them. Many platforms use a strict surveillance system which includes customer ratings, time constraints, response rates and GPS features. It puts gig workers under pressure and creates a vicious cycle as they must be continually available and take risks to complete tasks quickly in order to keep up with the system, to get good reviews and be assigned enough profitable tasks. This blurs the work-life balance, particularly for the workers who have gig-working as their main source of income.

Gig-work often puts workers in very precarious situations. Many struggle to earn a sufficient income even when working full-time causing financial insecurity and instability. As they are not employed through regular contracts, basic social security as well as health and safety controls are lacking. Gig-workers are denied pensions, parental benefits, health and work-related accident insurance, meaning workers are either obliged to work when sick, or must receive no income during the illness. Many platforms and other gig-worker's hirers are also unwilling to provide training as they are afraid that granting this will lead to gig-workers being recognized as employees.

Platforms take advantage of existing discriminations, gender roles and of the failure of social security systems to provide adequate support and protection for vulnerable groups. Gig-workers are often not protected by workplace equalities legislation which is mostly written for formally employed workers. These groups make up a large proportion of gig-workers. Women* who undertake caring responsibilities, for example single mothers, often take up gig-work to allow them to work irregular hours and balance with their responsibilities at home. In many countries self-employment legislation does not extend parental benefits and leave to parents if they are both self-employed. This forces caring responsibilities on one parent rather than sharing the burden. But in some cases, single parents are forced to take their child with them to work, leave them at home or turn down work, thus leading to fewer tasks. The lack of a screening process by platforms and the unsocial hours that gig-workers sometimes undertake

also leads to an increased risk of violence and abuse. Unregulated gig-work therefore contributes to increased socio-economic inequalities.

As gig-workers are isolated or can easily be replaced by others, they lack bargaining power towards the platform and face difficulty when they have to defend their rights. Due to various reasons, gig-workers cannot easily unionise. Entertainment unions can provide possible models of collective bargaining for gig-work that currently has no trade union support.

Lack of regulation across Europe allows platform companies to exploit gig-workers who work for them by labelling them as self-employed. By denying that their workers are their employees they deny them social protections. In several countries, courts have ruled that gig-workers should be recognised as employees. False self-employment can be determined when the gig-worker lacks control or autonomy over the organisation of their work, lacks their own resources and equipment, or has been engaged with a single platform for a long time.

This exploitation of workers is only a part of some of these companies' strategy to avoid taxes, taking responsibility over their workers, and contributing to social protection schemes. They often take advantage of the gaps in fiscal legislation and the existence of fiscal paradises inside the EU itself to pay the smallest taxes and concentrate wealth, while also relying on EU member states to bail them out in economic downturn.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has laid bare the dependence society has on gig-workers, yet they are not provided with workplace or welfare protections. There are also many gig-workers who have lost sources of employment overnight and are not able to qualify for government support schemes. The resulting economic crisis which we are witnessing will impact livelihoods in the next years, and all workers including those in precarious circumstances must have support.

In order to ensure that no worker is forced into precarious and intolerable working conditions without social and financial protection, European Greens demand that the EU and national governments:

- Ensure that companies operating within the platform economy (maybe use gig), for example by distributing tasks via mobile apps, are paying salary, tax and costs in line with other actors, as well as tariff agreements, and do not contribute to false freelance practices;
- Ensure that gig-workers have equal social protections, including health and work-related accident insurance, equality protections, parental benefits and rights, and pensions provided by the platform companies and governments in accordance with and with national labour market negotiation models;
- Ensure gig-workers the right to collective bargaining over working rights, and to form unions and workers' cooperatives;
- Grant gig-workers access to training and professional development schemes from appropriate providers;
- Implement a minimum or living income, with respect to national security systems; suggest a limit on working hours per week for workers under false self-employment; prevent forced over-time and support a work-life balance;

- Require platform and other companies to properly employ those gig-workers under false self-employment who ask for it, while maintaining flexibility of work;
- Introduce a proper regulation and taxation of platform companies and reinforce the fight against tax evasion;
- Guarantee the transparency of the algorithm and the criteria that are used to determine the distribution of tasks and the price being paid for them and give gig-worker representatives the right of co-determination regarding those algorithms;
- Provide protection for gig-workers against pre-existing societal biases embedded in algorithms, for example based on gender or race and ethnicity;
- Commission an EU-wide study on legal and insurance statuses of gig-workers;
- Ensure adequate resources for control and compliance with the aim to of increasing the effectiveness of the inspection action to guarantee labor right.