

PLATFORM WORKERS' FIGHT FOR RIGHTS & DIGNITY

An explainer

Background

Online platforms like Uber and Deliveroo have exploited gaps in legislation to deny workers their basic rights. Approximately nine million people in the EU get [their main source of income](#) from the so-called 'gig economy', and roughly 36 million derive occasional income from it.

These millions of workers have been denied rights, protections and guarantees common to most salaried workers because they lack status and recognition. Online platforms deny them regular work contracts even though they exercise control over their labour.

This has given rise to degrading work conditions. Platform workers have irregular income, work long hours, are denied collective bargaining and labour representation, and do not have access to paid sick leave or holiday entitlements.

Online platforms emerged with the 2008 financial crisis at a time when governments were aggressively pushing for austerity policies, implementing severe cuts to social services like health and education, and making moves to liberalise the labour market.

The gig economy promised workers autonomy but instead, institutionalised precarious, insecure and underpaid work. For corporations, this became an opportunity to circumvent hard-earned rights of workers to maximize profits.

Workers are resisting this naked exploitation and degradation of their rights. Recognising the problem, the EU is now considering legislation to regulate the sector.

GIG ECONOMY IN BRIEF



RIDERS EARN AS LITTLE AS
9 EURO PER HOUR
on average



9 MILLION
WORKERS IN EUROPE



gig economy worth over
€4 TRILLION



RIDERS WON
35 / 59
COURT CASES



~~SICK LEAVE~~



~~PAID HOLIDAYS~~



~~SOCIAL SECURITY~~



~~INSURANCE~~

What our MEPs say



Leïla Chaibi
(France Insoumise, France)

"Millions of gig economy workers have been left abandoned by companies during the coronavirus outbreak. This has laid bare the work insecurity millions of gig economy workers experience across the EU and beyond. The nature of the relation between digital platforms and riders and drivers must change with legislation that grants them the same rights as any other workers."

Workers mobilise, and win

Between 2016 and 2017 there was a wave of some [40 strikes in 15 countries](#) across Europe in the bicycle meal delivery sector in response to cuts in service rates. These mobilisations were triggered by a drop in rates but made broader demands centred around recognition of their status and rights.

Parallel to this, workers have also challenged online platforms in court. They've won [35 out of 59 court cases in eight EU member states](#) demanding recognition of their status as employees of corporations like Uber and Deliveroo.

These victories culminated in the Spanish government's recent decision to become [the first country](#) in the EU to recognise gig economy workers as salaried staff, forcing corporations to pay up on welfare and to grant statutory rights to workers.

These mobilisations are taking place creatively across borders, resisting the fragmentation and individualisation that is characteristic of gig economy work.

Frontline workers

The Covid-19 pandemic made the plight of platform workers impossible to ignore. Many were on the frontline during the pandemic, risking their health and safety to enable society to continue to function.

Despite this, online platforms continue to resist recognising organised labour and collective bargaining, and lobby governments hard against any form of action to curb abuses.

The gig economy, worth a whopping €4.08 trillion before the pandemic, [has continued to grow exponentially](#), and in fact benefited from the pandemic. Yet, this wealth remains concentrated at the top and with shareholders. [Studies have shown](#) that workers are working longer hours for less pay.

As the EU considers new legislation, corporations are stepping-up their [lobbying to dilute](#) the proposals, similar to what they have done in the US, [with dire consequences](#) for workers there.

The view of the Left

Following a process of engagement with gig-economy workers, trade unions and experts in labour law, the Left group in the European Parliament [presented to the Commission](#) the text for an EU directive on Digital Platform Workers.

The 11-article draft directive would guarantee labour and social rights for digital-platform workers. It would enable predictability in terms of maximum periods of work, minimum rest periods, remuneration, overtime pay, and health and safety. The directive would entail shared EU competence with member states, respecting the principle of proportionality and not preventing member states from instituting stronger protections if they so wished.

A major concern for workers has been the [role of algorithms](#) in the control of labour, which leads to exploitation and affects well-being. Therefore the directive would entitle workers to transparency about the functioning and use of algorithms and the 'right to disconnect'.

We will continue to work closely with platform workers, making their demands heard in the heart of the EU, and will spare no effort until they gain full rights and recognition.