OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH RISKS OF HANDIWORK PROVIDED THROUGH DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS
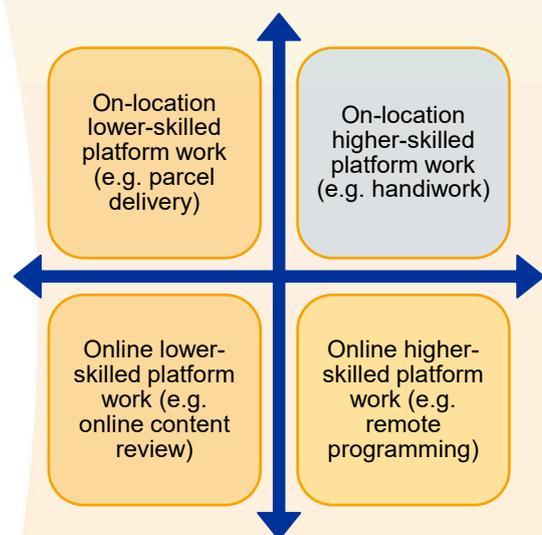
Introduction

This case study examines **handiwork provided through digital labour platforms.** It explores the occupational safety and health (OSH) risks this type of work presents to platform workers, as well as whether and how such risks are prevented and managed, highlighting practices and actions introduced by platforms.

For the purposes of this case study, digital platform work is defined as all paid labour provided through, on, or mediated by a digital labour platform, which functions as an online marketplace and matches the demand and supply of labour. The main characteristics of platform work include the use of algorithmic management to allocate, monitor and evaluate the work performed and the behaviour and performance of the platform workers, triangular work relationships, and a prevalence of non-standard working arrangements. This case study is part of a project on platform work and OSH, which aims at providing an overview of OSH policies, research and practices in the context of digital platform work, through the review of the literature and available data and fieldwork.

Methodologically, the case study is based on a review of recent academic and grey literature on platform work (including resources published on Eurofound's platform economy repository), focusing in particular on literature covering professional and household services, as a form of on-location higher-skilled work. Note that domestic services, such as cooking, cleaning, babysitting, and so on, are outside the scope of this case study. Besides a literature review, the case study is based on three interviews with platform workers and three platforms intermediating handiwork. Where possible and relevant, comparisons are made with similar work activities executed outside of the platform economy.

Handiwork

This case example will focus on digital platforms intermediating a range of professional and household tasks, such as plumbing, painting, electrical repairs, other small repairs, gardening, etc. For instance, according to the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classification, 'electrical and electronic trades workers' are defined as workers who 'install, fit and maintain electrical wiring systems and machinery and other electrical apparatus, electrical transmission and supply lines and cables, and electronic and telecommunications equipment and systems'.[1] The tasks are usually executed in private individuals' homes, involving a number of OSH-related challenges, and rely on the use of equipment, materials and protective gear. As these work activities have been carried out already long before the rise of the platform economy, the analysis of OSH risks in this type of platform work bears many similarities with comparable jobs outside of the platform economy. Nonetheless, due to the specific features of platform work, these risks may in some cases be aggravated, in in particular in relation to the management of these risks. These aspects are further elaborated on in the following sections.

On-location lower-skilled platform work (e.g. parcel delivery)

On-location higher-skilled platform work (e.g. handiwork)

Online lower-skilled platform work (e.g. online content review)

Online higher-skilled platform work (e.g. remote programming)

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[1] For more information see: https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/occupation

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As laid out extensively in the literature review and assessment of OSH challenges and opportunities in the context of platform of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA, 2021), a distinction is made between: (i) lower-skilled on-location work (such as parcel delivery); **(ii) higher-skilled on-location work (**such as **handiwork)**; (iii) lower-skilled online work (such as content review); and (iv) higher-skilled online work (such as programming). Additionally, following the Eurofound typology, this type of work can be categorised as 'on-location worker-initiated moderately skilled work' or 'on-location client-determined moderately skilled work'.

The literature has observed that the working conditions for this type of platform work are rather satisfying compared to other forms of low-skilled on-location platform work, although there may be considerable differences across platforms (Eurofound, 2018, 2019). The main motivations identified in the literature relate to the flexibility and autonomy offered, the additional income it generates and the potential to build and extend a client base (Eurofound, 2018, 2019; European Commission, 2020). One platform worker interviewed mentioned explicitly how platform work enabled him to find other professional opportunities. Indeed, it seems that this type of work tends to give more scope for flexibility compared to other forms of low-skilled platform work, allowing workers to choose tasks and clients, set their own rates and determine their own hours. Although the majority of workers use the platform part time as a way to earn additional income next to other sources, for some workers, this type of platform work constitutes a full-time job (Eurofound, 2018, 2019; European Commission, 2020). Finally, platforms intermediating handiwork may present an excellent way to reduce the prevalence of undeclared work, concerning both underreporting of the self-employed and the 'formalisation' of non-professionals performing handiwork. In that way, it may also provide opportunities for improved OSH and working conditions for those previously working in the grey economy.

For this type of platform work, we can find a combination of both local (e.g. Ring Twice (BE); Oferia (PL)) and global platforms. In contrast to platforms intermediating low-skilled on-location work (such as food-delivery and personal transportation), which are dominated by a small number of international platforms operating on a standardised basis, platforms intermediating handiwork account for a higher number of country-specific platforms (ECE, 2021). In comparison to the global platforms, it seems that, in practice, country-specific platforms' business models take different forms. For instance, TaskRabbit operates in multiple countries under the same name and follows the same procedures, whereas the platforms MyHammer (DE), Travaux (FR), Werkspot (NL), Instapro (IT) are all part of the Instapro Group, all of which are independent and autonomous in their organisation.[2] Interestingly, there is also some evidence that service offers of large traditional businesses are increasingly being connected to these existing platforms (Eurofound, 2020a). For instance, TaskRabbit has partnered with IKEA, allowing clients to book platform workers to help assemble their IKEA furniture for a flat price depending on the size of the item.[3] And recently, Ring Twice (formerly ListMinut) has partnered with Hubo, a large hardware-store chain.[4]

As a final note, it must be mentioned that **the COVID-19 pandemic** has severely impacted this type of platform work (ETUI, 2020; Eurofound, 2020b; 2021; Rani and Dhir, 2020; Roquelaure, 2021). At the height of the pandemic, on-location work in people's homes could no longer be performed due to restrictions. For instance, the Belgian platform Ring Twice saw its revenues decrease by 80%.[5] Platform workers experienced severe income losses, which was particularly problematic for those platform workers without access to social protection and/or other sources of income through their working arrangements in the traditional labour market. As restrictions loosened, platforms implemented several safety measures and social distancing rules, in line with government regulations, with the aim of protecting clients and platform workers. For example, on TaskRabbit this includes the option of cancelling a task because of illness, without repercussions on the platform workers' business metrics.[6]

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[2] The representative of InstaPro (IT) interviewed for this case study did mention that operations are being streamlined in the near future for all subsidiaries.

[3] See: https://www.taskrabbit.com/ikea ; https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/13/ikea-rolls-out-nationwide-assembly-services-with-taskrabbit.html

[4] https://www.hubo.be/nl/diensten/ringtwice.html

[5] Available at: https://www.intotheminds.com/blog/nl/listminut-wordt-ring-twice-wat-zit-er-achter-deze-rebranding/

[6] Available at: https://support.taskrabbit.com/hc/en-us/articles/360040752692-COVID-19-Updates

Work-related safety and health aspects of handiwork

Workers performing handiwork (such as plumbers or electricians) are exposed to significant health and safety risks when performing their work. To gain further insight into these OSH risks, as well as how OSH risks can be prevented and managed, this section first describes the OSH risks that are directly related to these tasks, and then shows why and how these risks may be increased in the case of handiwork services performed through digital labour platforms. This section also describes practices used to prevent and manage these risks.

OSH challenges and risks related to work activities

The tasks performed through platform work are **very similar to those carried out in the traditional labour market** (see Huws, 2015; Huws et al., 2017; Tran and Sokas, 2017; EU-OSHA, 2017; Samant, 2019; European Parliament, 2020; European Commission, 2020). In this sense, the related OSH risks are also comparable to those that a non-platform worker performing similar tasks in the same job would be exposed to (see Table 1) (European Commission, 2020). Many of the tasks performed in these jobs involve an increased level of physical risk, increased exposure to chemical agents and other hazardous substances, leading to higher rates of (occasionally severe) occupational accidents, work-related injuries and illnesses (EU-OSHA, 2021).

Table 1: Various physical health and safety issues in selected examples of professional services

Plumbers	Gardeners
• **Exposure to hazardous substances (e.g., lead, asbestos, etc.)** • **Working in awkward positions or performing awkward manual tasks, increasing the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)** • **Lifting heavy or awkward objects** • **Exposure to electricity, extreme temperatures or noise** • **Working at heights** • **Slips, trips and falls** • **Working with various tools** • **…**	• **Exposure to pesticides and other hazardous products** • **Lifting and carrying heavy objects** • **Exposure to extreme temperatures, weather and noise** • **Working with various tools** • **Working in awkward positions or performing awkward manual tasks, increasing the risk of MSDs** • **…**
Electricians	**Mechanics (in residential setting)**
• **Risk of electrical shocks and burns** • **Exposure to hazardous substances (e.g., lead, solvents, solder, asbestos, etc.)** • **Lifting heavy or awkward objects** • **Working at heights** • **Slips, trips and falls,** • **Working with various tools** • **…**	• Exposure to hazardous substances (e.g., solvents, gasoline, etc.) • Risk of electrical shocks and burns • Extreme temperatures • Working at heights • Lifting heavy or awkward objects • Working in awkward positions • Working with various tools • …

Source: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS). Available at: https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/occup_workplace/

Nonetheless, the available literature highlights that platform workers in these sectors are largely aware of potential health and safety risks, especially in comparison with lower-skilled platform workers (EU-OSHA, 2017; Pesole et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2018; Eurofound, 2019). At the same, they are also more likely to take measures to prevent OSH injuries (EU-OSHA, 2017; Eurofound 2018, 2019). This assessment was confirmed by all platform workers interviewed for this case study. A likely explanation for this observation may lie in the fact that these platform workers tend to be older and more educated compared to low-skilled platform workers. Additionally, several platform workers active in these types of tasks own businesses or are active in the traditional labour market as employees with similar or identical job descriptions as those performed as a platform worker, and from which they learned the necessary skills, knowledge, and manual abilities, including how to manage potential OSH challenges (Eurofound, 2019).

> **Platform worker:**
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> *'I know that there are always risks and dangers (in this kind of work) so I try to choose jobs that do not put me in too much danger. For example, I do not climb roofs, I avoid ladders. However, there are cases where the risk is inherent, for example with electricity. […] Let's say that I am very careful, and nothing has ever happened to me […].'*
>
> **Platform worker:**
>
> *'My work should in general be quite safe. However, there are always risks. Let's say it happens that I have to move televisions, check sockets, even though these are things I should not do for my […] task, for which I have been paid. Usually, I do not like to say no, so I accept to move televisions or check plugs, sockets, but this can be dangerous'.*

Exposure to both psychosocial and physical OSH risks such as interpersonal violence, verbal abuse, bullying or harassment is also reported by this type of worker, as they often provide services in the homes of clients (Huws, 2017). One platform worker working on TaskRabbit explicitly mentioned a number of tricky situations that may occur while being in a clients' home, in particular for women that may find themselves in unpleasant situations without the possibility of a quick reaction by the platform. In that regard, a representative from TaskRabbit mentioned that they did have a discriminatory and harassment policy in place for platform workers in case they find themselves in a risky situation. However, the platform worker (working for TaskRabbit) interviewed for this case study was unaware of this, leading to doubts as to the effectiveness of said policy.

> **Platform worker:**
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> *'I was kidnapped by a client and taken out by the police. The client had shown me the work to be done, a double-decker bed had to be assembled. Unfortunately, the bed had been left out on the balcony for three days, and the rain had made it wet. When I saw the damage, I said: "I can't do anything here, the bed is damaged, and I can't assemble it […]. The client told me: "no, it's not possible, you have to put it up, you will not leave until it's assembled". The client started shouting and I told myself it was better to leave. But when I tried to leave the house, she blocked my way and called the neighbour (who is 6'4") and locked the door. Eventually the police pulled me out'.*

Factors influencing OSH challenges and risks in platform work and/or complicating the management of those risks

The risks and hazards related to the work activities correspond largely to the ones identified in the traditional labour market. However, the specific characteristics of digital platform work may influence these challenges and complicate the implementation of a sound health and safety policy. Three dimensions will be considered here: a) employment status; b) algorithmic management; c) professional isolation, work-life balance and job or income insecurity.

Employment status and contractual arrangements

Workers performing handiwork through platforms are generally classified as either non-professional or self-employed freelancers (Huws, 2017; Eurofound, 2018; Prassl and Risak, 2016; European Commission, 2020). As a result, these platform workers are not covered by the OSH regulatory framework in most Member States. In this way, platforms can externalise all costs, risks and responsibilities regarding OSH management onto the platform workers (EU-OSHA, 2017). Indeed, platforms generally lack any comprehensive health and safety policy. Representatives from all three platform representatives interviewed for this case study corroborated this finding, stating that they do not take a proactive role in the prevention of health and safety risks. One platform worker working on a local platform did mention that during the orientation meeting, the platform urged him to be very cautious during the performance of his tasks. Although anecdotal, another platform worker interviewed for this case study mentioned that when he first subscribed to the platform, he received warnings to ensure the

clients' health and safety, yet nothing regarding his own health and safety. However, one platform representative mentioned explicitly that they are willing to do more, but they fear reclassification as an employer if they do so, an argument which is often heard by platforms intermediating other types of tasks as well (for example, see case study on parcel delivery: EU-OSHA (2022a)).

Platform:

'We do what we can to ensure the safety of our taskers, within the limits of knowing that they are autonomous. Once they are properly registered on the platform, the taskers have the possibility of accessing the information they need through the website or the communication groups we have set up'.

Platform:

'We do not consider risks because they are borne by the craftsmen or the [client] company. [...] In the creation of [the platform], there wasn't any question of creating a uniform procedure that takes into account the health and safety risks, which should continue to be borne by the company or the craftsman'.

In many Member States, the exercise of certain professional tasks is conditioned on the attainment of licenses or certifications (for example, plumbers, electricians, and so on). Only workers possessing the necessary (certified) technical skills can execute this kind of job, which at the same time forms an important buffer against potential occupational safety and health risks. In the context of platform work, the question arises as to what extent platforms are responsible for checking these credentials, particularly considering the activities performed which are in and of themselves dangerous and accident-prone. Two platform representatives interviewed for this case study mentioned that they conducted introductory interviews after a platform worker subscribed, although it cannot be determined whether this is an effective barrier. Overall, it seems that platforms usually externalise the assessment of necessary qualifications to the platform workers and clients, in line with their own estimation as being purely an online intermediary (e.g., see Figure 1).

Figure 1: TaskRabbit Terms of Services

23. Licensing

Taskers alone are responsible for identifying and obtaining any required licenses, permits, or registrations before offering services and undertaking Tasks. Indeed, certain types of Tasks and services may be prohibited altogether, and it is the responsibility of Taskers to avoid such prohibited Tasks and services. Penalties may include fines or other law enforcement. If you have questions about how national/ state/ provincial/ territorial and local laws apply to your Tasks and services on the TaskRabbit Platform, you should first seek appropriate legal guidance.

Because TaskRabbit does not supervise, scope, direct, control, or monitor a Tasker's work or performance of Tasks, Clients must determine for themselves whether a Tasker has the skills and qualifications necessary to perform the specific Task at hand. Clients may wish to consult their national/state/provincial/territorial or local requirements to determine whether certain Tasks are required to be performed by a licensed or otherwise registered professional. Clients may also wish to discuss with their Tasker any specific hazards, obstacles, or impediments in the Task location (both visible and concealed) that may impact the performance of the Task.

Source: https://www.taskrabbit.com/terms

On the other hand, the OECD (2019) highlights the fact that reputation rating mechanisms, as seen below, can to some extent act as alternatives to formal qualifications and occupational licenses to signal quality of providers. Nevertheless, a good practice[7] in this regard can be found on the Australian-based platform Airtasker, where so-called 'Licence Badges' have been introduced, which is a visual representation on the platform workers' profile page, once their existing licence has been verified by a third-party verification provider. This initiative came after initial criticism by the unions when it appeared that many unlicensed operators were taking on risky jobs, such as asbestos removal, at low costs (Gregory, 2018).

The platform representatives interviewed also did not offer any safety-related training, which is in line with the conclusions of other studies (Huws, 2017; Eurofound, 2018; European Commission, 2020).

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[7] Available at: https://support.airtasker.com/hc/en-au/articles/360001621807-Airtasker-Badges

Nonetheless, it seems that a portion of the platform workers in this sector had formal safety training due to their trade association membership outside the context of platform work (Eurofound, 2019). Other interviewees indicated that their safety training was merely informal, coming from practical experience doing handiwork (Eurofound, 2019). A good practice in this regard is the Denmark-based local platform Pinploy, which mediates handiwork services as well. The platform provides workers with educational documentation related to the performance of tasks as well as guidelines on conduct.[8] Another good-practice example is the France-based platform Frizbiz, which organises trainings free of charge for its platform workers, through online webinars or in-person training sessions.[9]

Platform workers are also expected to bring their own equipment and tools or rely on those of the client, which carries the risk of not being up to the necessary standards. At the same time, platforms are increasingly offering liability insurance policies, as well as accident and injuries insurance. For instance, TaskRabbit is currently in the process of implementing insurance protections (for example, accident and injury, accidental death, and disability protection) to so-called Elite Taskers, free of charge. Elite Taskers are those platform workers who: a) have completed a certain number of tasks in a single category; b) have very positive reviews; c) are responsive to client invitations; d) have few cancellations. Once a platform worker loses their elite-status in a given month, they have the option to maintain access to the insurance, however, at a cost. This last observation is particularly perverse, also from an OSH-perspective. As explained above, many tasks performed are already considered dangerous with high incidence rates of occupational incidents that are occasionally severe. The conditions to be eligible to 'free' insurance may pressure platform workers to work faster, to take on more tasks, and so on, leading to situations where risks may become even higher. The other platform representatives interviewed for this study also offer insurance, with one platform worker mentioning that to fund the insurance, part of his earnings were deducted directly by the platform.

> **Platform worker:**
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> *'I have been working on these platforms for quite some time, and I can say with certainty that the only thing they ask for is to always have care and attention towards the clients. I do not want to say that they do not care about us, but let's say that they do not give too many directives or suggestions. They leave the situation to us [...]. No platform has ever explained to me how to do the job or given me tips on how to do it safely'.*
>
> **Platform worker:**
>
> *'The platform did not give me anything, it did not give me a screwdriver, it did not give me a backpack, nothing that could be useful for doing the job. [...] I have to bring everything from home, or I have to ask the client. [...] I did not receive any kind of explicit health and safety guidelines or documentation; at most at the beginning I received some information on safety, between communications, via email, but I do not remember their content at all because they were not the main object of the communication'.*

Algorithmic management and digital surveillance

Möhlmann and Zalmanson (2017) define algorithmic management as the **oversight, governance and control practices conducted by software algorithms over many remote workers**. Particularly digital platforms intermediating lower-skilled online, or on-location platform work tend to deploy a high level of control through algorithmic management and (semi)-automated decision making (European Parliament, 2020). This does not seem to be the case for platforms intermediating handiwork, for which workers tend to have a large degree of autonomy in their work organisation (European Commission, 2020). Because of the nature of handiwork, which involves more subjective measures of service quality, the forms of surveillance and monitoring used to track such workers are naturally more limited (Mateescu et al., 2019).

On the other hand, also in this type of platform work, a central role is played by rating or reputation mechanisms. After completion of a task, platform workers receive feedback from clients, which are then

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[8] See: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/platform-economy/initiatives/pinploy
[9] See : https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/platform-economy/initiatives/frizbiz

fed into their online profiles, affecting their future work opportunities (Martin et al., 2016; European Commission, 2020). For instance, on Ring Twice, when a client requests a task, a limited number of platform workers are notified that they have been selected as candidates for the task. This selection is based on their reputational score, with the highest reputational scores on top of the list (De Groen et al., 2016). Albeit slightly different, TaskRabbit follows the same logic: when a client requests a task, the algorithm will produce a list of platform workers based on their availability, their reputational score as well as the percentage of their previous refusals and whether they have experience with the task listed. Unlike Ring Twice, TaskRabbit penalises platform workers for declining a task, which was confirmed during interviews with platform workers active on TaskRabbit and Ring Twice, as well as in other studies (Kaldahl, 2020). Another platform mentioned that when a platform worker receives three negative reviews one after the other, they might be blacklisted if no reasonable explanation can be offered.

> **Platform Worker:**
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> *"Let's say that we have a sort of "obligation to accept" with TaskRabbit, because if we refuse, we are penalised by the acceptance counting system* [rating mechanism]*".*
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> **Platform worker:**
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> *"Profile seniority […] is important and having good reviews [as well]. If a client sees that I have applied for the job he has asked for, he is much more likely to take me and not the latest kid on the block. Clearly this mechanism is not the best because the little guy will have difficulty entering the market [...] the only way at a certain point is to put a price a little lower than a colleague".*

Another issue that may arise is the fact that clients' feedback may be unfair, arbitrary or inaccurate (EU-OSHA, 2021). Although most platform workers have positive interactions with clients, several surveys show that platform workers have encountered difficulties in getting wrong or unfair ratings corrected (Eurofound, 2018; 2019; Kaldahl, 2020). This may lead to a breakdown in organisational trust[10], which is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction and decreased levels of mental and physical health (Bérastégui, 2021; EU-OSHA, 2021). The platform representatives interviewed for this case study did indicate the availability of a support team that workers can reach out to in case of disputes. On the other hand, one platform worker interviewed expressed the feeling that the platform always prefers helping the client first instead of him. In sum, the pressure to maintain high ratings and to have a continually service-based mentality to appease clients can become a major source of stress and raises the emotional demands of digital platform work, particularly when compared with their counterparts in the traditional labour market (EU-OSHA, 2017; European Commission, 2020).

Additionally, the idea that reputational mechanisms are objective and bias-free is not realistic (De Stefano, 2018; Hauben and Waeyaert, 2020; Kullmann, 2018). Although ratings and online profiles might to some extent reduce discrimination by concealing parts of their identity, social science research has already established that racial and gender bias often creeps into ratings of all sorts (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016; Rosenblat et al., 2016; Eurofound, 2018; Hauben and Waeyaert, 2020). For instance, Thebault-Spieker et al. (2017) revealed how the socioeconomic status affects task selection on TaskRabbit. Moreover, Hannák et al. (2017) demonstrate how feedback on TaskRabbit has a significant statistical relationship with perceived gender and race.

Professional isolation, work-life balance and job/income insecurity

All types of platform work are characterised by an **individualisation of work** and **work-related physical and social isolation, also known as 'professional isolation'** (Durward et al., 2016; Bérastégui, 2021). Existing evidence shows that this constitutes a large determinant in terms of psychosocial risks (EU-OSHA, 2017; Bérastégui, 2021). Regarding the relationship with the platform itself, it seems that platform workers generally lack a well-developed relationship with the platform (Eurofound, 2018; 2019). Moreover, platform workers do not seem to build up relationships with each other, nor are they particularly interested in doing so (Schmidt and Kathmann, 2017; Eurofound,

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[10] Organisational trust can be understood as the feeling of confidence workers have that the organisation will perform actions that are beneficial or at least not detrimental to them (Bérastégui, 2021).

2019). Again, some notable efforts are noteworthy in this regard. For instance, the platform worker interviewed for Ring Twice mentioned that the platform organised some online video calls to meet him. During these meetings, other platform workers were also present and the interviewee stated that he felt motivated to start applying for new tasks again. TaskRabbit has also set up Facebook Groups for each country, on which platform workers can communicate with each other and share tips and tricks. Nonetheless, the issue of professional isolation and its OSH implications seem less pronounced in this type of work compared to online platform work (e.g., see case study on remote programmers, EU-OSHA (2022b)). Next to the fact that platform workers typically interact with clients physically, this may partly be explained given that although limited, platforms may provide more support than would be the case for non-professional or self-employed workers performing these jobs outside the platform economy (Eurofound, 2018). Indeed, isolation as such is very specific to this type of job, regardless of whether they are working for themselves or on a platform.

Moreover, workers on these platforms seem generally pleased with their working time and work-life balance (Eurofound, 2018; European Parliament, 2020). This is common for types of platform work where the skills requirements are higher, and the platform has less influence on the work organisation (Eurofound, 2018).

Platform worker:

'I really love to do handiwork, so I wanted to do this service through the platform, [...] in addition Listminut [Ring Twice] allows you to work when you feel like it. You have no particular obligations, if you are available, you go. Otherwise, you stay at home'.

Platform worker:

'I immediately liked the fact that you can choose your work schedule and the workplace'.

Finally, as it relates to job and income security, issues appear to be less pertinent here as well. Overall, the pay received for this type of platform work is generally high, compared to other forms of low-skilled platform work. At the same time, OECD (2019) concludes that the hourly pay for physically provided services is not lower for platform workers than non-platform workers carrying out comparable jobs. Eurofound (2019) also reports how pay rates seemed to be near those in the general labour market or even higher. Moreover, findings from De Groen et al. (2016) suggest that the average earnings per hour on Ring Twice are in most cases above the minimum wage and even the median wage in the offline market. Platform workers can set their own prices, although this is strongly correlated to the ratings they acquire (European Parliament, 2020). This also implies that it is often difficult for new platform workers to compete for tasks, which was echoed by one platform worker interviewed (Martin, 2016; Eurofound (2019); European Parliament, 2020). Outside of fees owed to the platform after the completion of a task, platform workers for this type of task are often subject to unpaid time, which includes time spent looking for tasks, as well as travel expenses between locations (European Parliament, 2020).

Conclusions

This case study focused on the OSH-challenges facing platform workers performing handiwork. Platform workers themselves indicate that they are generally pleased with the working conditions, allowing a wide margin of flexibility and autonomy in their work organisation (for example, setting their own prices). As the tasks performed by these platform workers are highly similar to those performed in the traditional labour market, it is argued that the OSH risks related to those tasks is highly similar as well. Common health and safety risk factors observed relate to working in awkward positions or performing awkward manual tasks; lifting heavy objects; exposure to hazardous substances; exposure to electricity; slips, trips and falls; working at heights; and working with various tools. Additionally, risks of interpersonal violence or harassment are also present, as this type of platform workers often provide services in the homes of clients, which creates both physical and psychosocial challenges.

The question then arises as to how these risks are managed in the context of platform work. From the available evidence, it seems that this responsibility is fully externalised to the platform workers, as they are classified as non-professionals or self-employed. The available literature also highlights that platform workers in handiwork jobs are largely aware of potential health and safety risks, especially in comparison with lower-skilled platform workers. At the same time, they are more likely to take measures to prevent OSH injuries. Several reasons can be found for this assertion. Overall, platform workers in handiwork jobs tend to be older and more educated compared to low-skilled platform workers. Additionally, several platform workers active in these types of jobs own businesses or are active in the traditional labour market as employees with similar or identical job descriptions as those performed as a platform worker, and from which they learned the necessary skills, knowledge, and manual abilities, including how to manage potential OSH challenges.

Outside some fragmented health and safety initiatives (for example, insurance, training sessions, and so on), none of the platforms have implemented a comprehensive safety and health policy, although they find themselves in an excellent position to do so in many regards. The most likely explanation lies in the fact that these platform workers are qualified as non-professionals or self-employed and therefore are responsible for OSH themselves. One platform interviewed for this case study mentioned directly that their efforts are limited to avoid a requalification of the employment status. An interesting yet still limited step forward in this regard would be to implement a comprehensive system to check whether platform workers have the necessary licenses or qualifications to perform certain tasks, which is not only interesting from a quality perspective but also from an OSH-perspective. At this moment, only few platforms ask platform workers to provide formal evidence of their qualifications or skills when setting up a profile (European Commission, 2020).

The key difference in the context of platform work compared to the traditional labour market is the central role played by rating or reputation mechanism. After a task is completed, platform workers receive feedback from clients, which are then fed into their online profiles, affecting future work allocation. The pressure to maintain high ratings and to have a continually service-based mentality to appease clients can become a major source of stress and raises the emotional demands of digital platform work, particularly when compared with their counterparts in the traditional labour market.

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