

FEPS-UNI Europa event:

Afternoon session: Platforms for the public good

Chairs: Aileen Körfer (Director Services & Digitalisation, UNI Europa)

@Aileen_Koerfer

Venue: FEPS offices, Rue Montoyer 40, 1040 Brussels

Date: Wednesday 10 July 13:00-14:30

Speakers:

- Ursula Huws (University Hertfordshire)
- Dimitrios Birmpas (Committee of the Regions)
- Nadia El-Imam (Edgeryders) | @ladyniasan
- Florian Ranft (Das Progressive Zentrum) | @FloRanft
- Greet Vermeylen (European Commission)
- Marije Ottervanger (FNV) | @MarijeOtter

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****Please note that this event is being recorded and the audio will be posted on the FEPS website****

Timetable:

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like any further information about the session. The chair will introduce you, ensure the timetable is followed, and facilitate the panel discussion and Q&A session.

13:00	Introduction by Justin Nogarede (4 minutes)	Please stick to time allotted (shorter is fine); there will be an informed audience, so Q&A should be rewarding for all. We advise against using PowerPoint (ideally short & punchy remarks), but we do have technical support for it.
13:03	Intro chair Aileen Körfer (2 minutes)	
13:06	Slide presentation Professor Ursula Huws (4 minutes)	
13:10	Remarks Dimitrios Birmpas (3 minutes)	
13:13	Remarks Nadia El-Imam (3 minutes)	
13:16	Remarks Florian Ranft (3 minutes)	
13:19	Remarks Greet Vermeylen (3 minutes)	
13:22	Remarks Marije Ottervanger (3 minutes)	
13:25	Discussion among panellists (25 min)	
13:50	Open floor for Q&A (28 min)	
14:18	Closing remarks from chair Aileen Körfer (2 minutes)	

About the event

Whereas the morning session looked into problems created by the current model of platform work, and possible policies to address them, in the afternoon session in which you will speak, the focus will be more positive and forward-looking. How can we use platform technology in a way that empowers workers and furthers the public good?

The session will start with a short introduction by Justin Nogarede from FEPS, and the moderator for this session Aileen Körfer from UNI Europa. Then Professor Huws share her thought on the topic, also based on the findings of the research on platform work in Europe that will be presented in the morning session. Please find attached a draft of the report attached (under embargo, not final version). You will find under the header “A general trend towards the ‘platformisation of work’ (starting on page 19), a section on the potential positive uses of platform technologies (page 24), which will serve as a starting point for the discussions.

Challenges

Our population is ageing, which increases the demand for care and other household services. At the same time, people have less time to do household work, as they work longer, and the number of households in which all adults work is increasing. On top of that, it is a fact that women still do much more unpaid domestic labour than men, and this impacts their ability to compete equally in the labour market.

Of course, in Europe, the state provides many social services, but they have been cut back after the financial crisis (austerity), and the pressure to cut costs is still very much present. As a result, households increasingly turn to the market to make – including using the informal economy and platform labour. Most of the labour involved in providing these household services is precarious, poorly rewarded and unprotected. And of course, the online platforms that are used generally make little contribution to the local economies in which they operate.

Platforms to the rescue?

Given those challenges, can we envisage and implement different models that use the benefits of platform technology (efficient matching demand & supply, decentred, flexible), without the exploitative business model that is prevalent at the moment and which only exacerbates inequalities? The discussion is exploratory: we do not have the answers and do not want to frame the discussion too much in advance. But it is important to start discussing these issues, and to start outlining a positive agenda for the platform society, and not just reacting to models imposed by others.

Indicative questions

Can platforms deliver or be integrated with existing public services on for example elderly care and childcare, to make them more efficient and responsive to citizens needs?

The fully commercial platform model is failing our society. What organisational models would provide the best balance between democratic accountability, good employment standards and efficiency? Is it public/private partnerships, worker co-operatives, social enterprises, or municipal control?

On the implementation side, how could new and responsible platform practices and work be introduced without threatening the rights and work standards of traditional workers?

Would it be possible to develop charging structures that make it possible to combine the provision of services according to social need with services paid for in the market?

What forms of training, accreditation, professional development and management would be appropriate in such new forms of work?

Your role

Given your experience with Edgeryders, and specifically your involvement in the opencare project, we would be very interested to hear your views on how to harness platform technology for the provision of public services. What works? Is it difficult to cooperate with municipalities on this? What policy hurdles are there, and alternatively what policy can foster the emergence of such non-profit platforms (especially, but not exclusively, EU policy?).

Speaker Biographies

Ursula Huws

Ursula Huws is Professor of Labour and Globalisation at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK. She has been carrying out pioneering research on the economic and social impacts of technological change, the restructuring of employment and the changing international division of labour for many years. She edits the international interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* and co-edits the Palgrave Macmillan/Springer *Dynamics of Virtual Work* book series. Apart from the research on platform work with FEPS and UNI Europa, she is also carrying out research for the PLUS (Platform Labour in Urban Spaces) project, funded by the European Commission under its Horizon 2020 Programme. Her latest book, "Labour in Contemporary Capitalism: What Next" has just been published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Dimitrios Birmpas

Mr Birmpas is Mayor of the city of Aigaleo in Greece. He is the Rapporteur for the upcoming opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on Platform work – local and regulatory challenges.

Nadia El-Imam | @ladyniasan

Nadia El-Imam is an engineer and designer. Most of her time is dedicated to building Edgeryders, a company living in symbiosis with an online community of about 3000 hackers, activists, radical thinkers and doers, and just normal people that want to make a difference. The company serves the community and uses its collective smarts to power its own activities. Edgeryders is involved in 'opencare', a project funded within the Horizon 2020 framework programme for Research & Innovation, which aims to use platform technology to help rethink how we provide care.

Florian Ranft | @FloRanft

Florian is a Policy Fellow at Das Progressive Zentrum where he works within the Programme Structural Change with a focus on inclusive growth and the future of work. He is the former Head of Policy and International at Policy Network, and a former Senior Research Analyst at the Centre for Progressive Policy, both think tanks based in London. Previously, he was a researcher and lecturer in political sociology and international relations at the Universities of Frankfurt and Greifswald.

Greet Vermeylen

Greet Vermeylen is policy officer at the Gender Unit of the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, at the European Commission. She focuses on policy measures to reconcile work and private life, and ways to address the gender pay gap. Before, she worked as research manager in the working conditions and industrial relations unit in the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). There she worked on the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), a European-wide survey of workers dealing with many aspects related to working conditions. Throughout her time in Eurofound, she has been working on many aspects of working conditions, for instance related to working time, work-life balance, and work organisation. Apart from the work on the surveys, she has been involved in projects such as the network of European observatories (European Working Conditions Observatory), projects on working poor, flexicurity and case studies on attractive workplaces for all.

Marije Ottervanger | @MarijeOtter

Marije Ottervanger is Director at FNV since 2009, with a special focus on platform work. FNV is a federation of trade unions in the Netherlands. Prior to FNV, she worked at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. She recently presented research to the Dutch Parliament that details the precarious situation for many working via food delivery platforms as well as the cost to society associated with the platforms' business model.

Aileen Körfer | @Aileen_Koerfer

Aileen Körfer is the Director for Services Policy & Digitalisation at UNI Europa, the European trade union federation uniting 7 million European service workers. Prior to UNI Europa, she worked at the European Parliament, at the German Bundestag and as a consultant to the United Services Union (ver.di) in Germany. She is a graduate of Maastricht University (BA in European Studies) and of the College of Europe (MA in European Political and Administrative Studies - Voltaire Promotion).