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**The size of European's 'Gig Economy' is revealed for the first time
and justifies a new bill of workers' rights**

Launched by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and UNI Europa, carried out by the University of Hertfordshire and Ipsos MORI, this first Europe-wide study into workers in the Gig Economy reveals millions of under protected workers use online platforms as their main income source. Academics from the University of Hertfordshire are using the publication of the study's findings to call for a fundamental redefinition of work in the digital age and the creation of a new bill of workers' rights to protect millions of workers in the European gig economy.

The findings of a groundbreaking research project to map the scale of the 'gig economy' within Europe are published in a report entitled 'Working in the European Gig Economy'. This report presents the results of an innovative survey revealing, for the first time, the extent and characteristics of workers using online platforms to gain work in Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

Online platforms are used for managing work in a range of sectors across Europe and beyond. The study sought to identify the proportion of the population using online platforms, how much income they derive from this source and the characteristics of these workers.

A high proportion of the population (ranging from 9% in Germany and the UK to a high of 22% in Italy) reported having done some crowd work (working 'virtually' from their own homes via an online platform such as Upwork or Clickworker; providing driving services via a platform like Uber, or working in somebody else's home for a platform like Helpling, Handy or Taskrabbit). In the majority of cases this was a very occasional supplement to other earnings. However, estimates based on percentages of adult populations found that as many as 5.68 million people in these seven European countries could be earning over half of their income from crowd work; this includes over a million people in the UK (1.33m) and Germany (1.45m) and more than two million people in Italy (2.14m).

Academics from the University of Hertfordshire, in collaboration with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), UNI Europa and Ipsos Mori, surveyed more than 17,000 workers to investigate the scale of crowd work taking place in Europe and shed light on the realities of their working lives, including the stresses, fears and health hazards they face.

Further in-depth interviews with crowd workers helped researchers identify the risks facing the gig economy workforce which include long working hours, long and unpredictable unpaid waiting times, sexual harassment and even being asked to take on tasks relating to drug dealing or stolen goods. Crowd workers also discussed the difficulty in communicating with platform personnel, arbitrary terminations, frequent changes to payment systems and the impact of customer ratings, complaining that platforms take the side of clients against workers.

Ursula Huws, Professor of Labour and Globalisation at the University of Hertfordshire and lead author of the report, said: *"One of the most striking findings from our research is the impossibility of drawing a sharp line between gig economy workers and others. What appears to be happening is a move towards a general 'platformisation' of European labour markets, where work for online*



platforms represents part of a broad spectrum of casual, on-call work spreading across diverse industries and occupations in a complex intermingling of the 'old' and the 'new'.

"This suggests the solution to addressing the growing precariousness and disenfranchisement of gig economy workers is not to create a special set of regulations to protect only them, as this risks watering down existing rights of employees. What we desperately need is new bill of rights that clarifies the rights and obligations of all workers and all employers."

Ernst Stetter, Secretary General of FEPS, said *"The transition towards a digitalised economy, largely based on online labour exchanges for paid work, is eroding traditional employment models and weighing heavily on working conditions and labour standards in Europe. Under current legal conditions, the digitalised economy lacks a coherent legal framework, which can result in a deterioration of working conditions and social protection, such as having no income security, no sick pay and no pension contributions."*

Oliver Roethig, Regional Secretary of UNI Europa, the European services union, said: *"The gig economy opens the door to a new world of 'just-in-time' work. Crowd workers are often part of a 'hidden' work force who do not have a stable income, relying on daily or weekly payslips. Employment relationships are also fading and most gig workers often see themselves as 'temporary workers'. We need inclusive EU legal frameworks to ensure that crowd workers get the same protection afforded to all workers. It is essential that the right to unionise and to collectively bargain reaches crowd workers as soon as possible."*

The report *Working in the European Gig Economy: Research Results from UK, Sweden, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy*, is available from the [FEPS website](#)

Notes to Editors

About the University of Hertfordshire:

The University's vision is to be internationally renowned as the UK's leading business-facing university. It is innovative and enterprising and challenges individuals and organisations to excel. It is also one of the region's largest employers with over 2,900 staff and a turnover of over £256 million. With a student community of over 24,600 including more than 3,800 overseas students, the University has a global network of over 210,000 alumni. It is also one of the top 150 universities in the world under 50 years old, according to the Times Higher Education 150 under 50 rankings 2017.

About FEPS:

FEPS is the European progressive political foundation and the only progressive think tank at European level. FEPS establishes an intellectual crossroad between social democracy and the European project, putting fresh thinking at the core of its action. As a platform for ideas and dialogue, FEPS works in close collaboration with social democratic organisations, and in particular national foundations and think tanks across Europe, to tackle the challenges that Europe faces today. Close to the Party of European Socialists (PES), the S&D Group in the European Parliament, the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions, Young European Socialists and PES women, but nevertheless independent. FEPS embodies a new way of thinking on the social democratic, socialist and labour scene in Europe.



About UNI Europa:

UNI Europa is the European trade union federation for skills and services representing 7 million workers, the largest sector of the workforce in Europe. Headquartered in the heart of Brussels, UNI Europa represents 272 national trade unions across 50 countries. Its sectors include: Cleaning and Security; Commerce; Finance; Gaming; Graphical and Packaging; Hair and Beauty; Information, Communication, Technology and Services Industry (ICTS); Media, Entertainment and Arts; Post and Logistics; Sport; Temp and Agency workers; and Professionals and Managers. UNI Europa is European branch of UNI Global Union, a global union federation for skills and services, with more than 900 affiliated unions in 140 countries representing 20 million members.