# Slash Workers and Industrial Relations

swirl
PROJECT

# Introduction

In recent years, the number of people having a second job has increased, a phenomenon that has markedly transformed their professional profiles and has fragmented their career paths, leading to the growth of so-called 'slash workers'.

These workers display a slash (/) in their job title since they are engaged in multiple paid activities that require different skills and are likely to be developed in various sectors. The advent of digital platforms has accelerated this trend, as well as making it more evident. Who are the slash workers in Europe? What are their needs in terms of labor and social protections? Who represent them collectively?

The Swirl project answered these questions by various means: the analysis of Eurostat statistical data; the mapping of digital labor platforms; the secondary analysis of the regulatory systems in the countries under investigation; the interviews and local workshops with experts; the interviews with 100 slash workers; the analysis of 15 case studies of initiatives for the protection and representation of slash workers. What emerged is a picture of the needs of these workers, an analysis of the current responses implemented, and ad hoc policy recommendations.
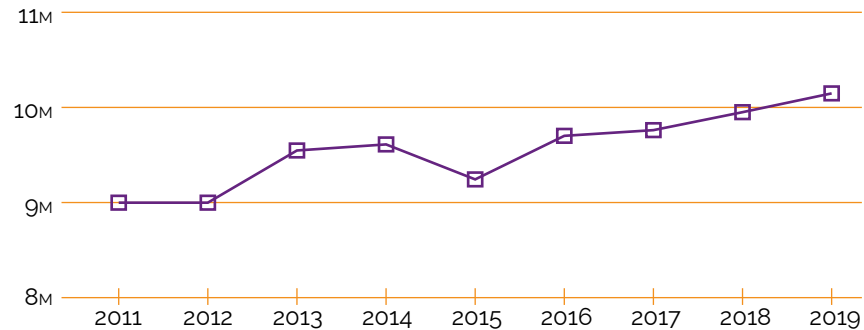
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# Data

## Description

The secondary analysis of Eurostat data from 2011 to 2019 addressed 3 different subgroups of workers, the definitions for which are affected by the availability of the data and variables gathered from the statistical sources (LFS and EU-Silc):

- Alternative work includes freelance professionals without employees and excludes entrepreneurs (self-employed with salaried employees) and traditional self-employed workers (farmers, merchants and craftsmen).
- Contingent workers are those who have short-term jobs (less than 6 months) and/or low-intensity work (working for no more than 15 hours a week); they can be either alternative or traditional workers.
- Slash-workers are those who declared that they had at least one second job.

## Key results

Three important trends can be identified within the overall framework of growth in employment: 1. Significant growth in high-skilled work, consistent with an increase in the level of education of the population. 2. Strong growth in IPs, in contrast to a decline in traditional self-employment. 3. A trend of greater stabilization, due in part to a recovery in permanent employment, in part to a rise in relatively stabler positions, albeit in intrinsically unstable job categories.

Slash workers represent a growing segment in the European labour market: in 2019 they counted for more than 4.2% of total employment. Slash–workers are more frequently:

- Highly-skilled alternative or contingent workers;
- IPs and highly-skilled temporary employees;
- Workers with high levels of education;
- Part-time workers;
- Young, when they are independent professionals, less so if temporary employees;
- Women;
- Widowed or separated.
- Far more present in the service sectors and in the countries of northern and central Europe, while their number is decidedly lower, and essentially stable, in the Mediterranean area.

The employment arrangement for the second job tends to be similar to the first.

# Digital platforms and platform workers

SWIRL platforms map (n = 378):
Active modalities projection on MCA's 1st and 2nd axis
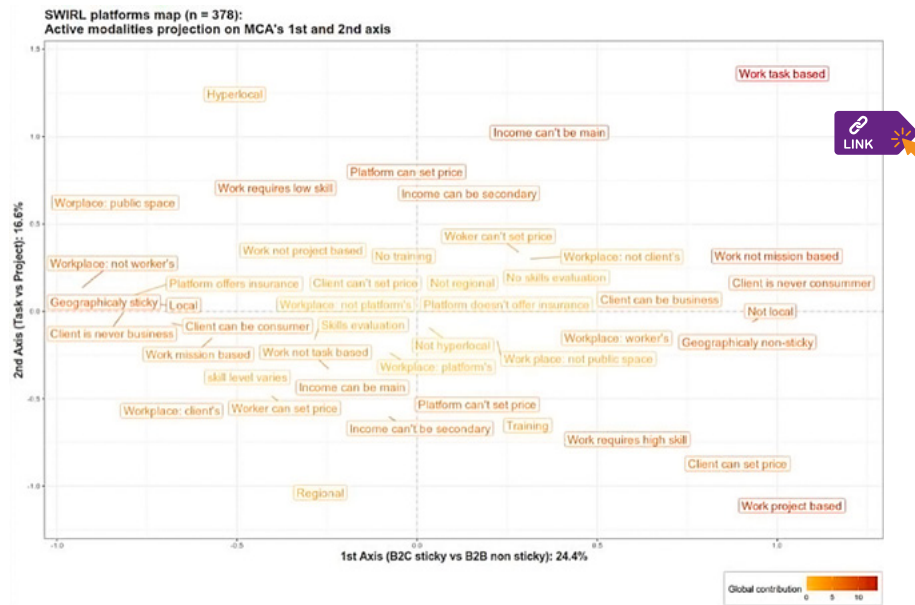
## Description

We have 340 mapped digital labor platforms operating in the SWIRL partners' countries: this data dies not enable to infer a precise quantitative estimation of the European market, but rather to get an overview of the differential occurrences across digital platforms operating in Europe. A factor analysis of the social space where platform labor takes place identified two main axes and three clusters. We assumed that the labor platform landscape was structured along our axes, but we

needed more empirical field data to test our hypothesis. We therefore drew 5 platforms from each cluster to build a more detailed desk analysis of selected platforms.

## Key results

- We obtained three main clusters:
  1. Crowdwork: contains platforms displaying a task-based workflow, and on which the revenue generated is not the worker's main income.
  2. Local consumer-oriented services: contains platforms that display a geographical stickiness, mostly B-to-C mission-based platforms.
  3. Self-employed working remotely: contains platforms that show a project-based workflow where the client sets the job's rate. Moreover, the jobs listed on the platform are considered high-skilled ones.

- The MCA shows a clear division between the platforms, along geographical and client-type lines, as well as regards work division and skills requirements. The main factors differentiating freelancers from crowdworkers seem to be the skill level expected to complete a job, the fact that the platform offers training for workers, and whoever sets the rates of the transaction.

- Overall, the case studies presented suggested that our bottom-up typology displays notable in-cluster and between-cluster variation. Worker-platform mediations thus revolve around each platform's terms of services (ToS). As a result, regardless of the cluster, workers complain about platform pro-client biases in the mediation processes.

- Among remote workers, the divide between crowdworkers and freelancers seems to have more to do with the individual worker's ability to build and leverage a reliable client network, thus mitigating algorithmic influence. This skillset is, in part, also highly dependent on technical choices made by the platforms, as well as on specific modes of platform governance.

- Inequalities among workers are more prominent in big, on-demand, remote-work platforms, where crowdworkers are rendered invisible by informal intermediaries and middle-persons.

# Institutional Framework

## Description

The objective of the WP2 of SWIRL project is to analyze the different in-dustrial relations regimes and the impact they have on protecting and representing slash workers /contingent workers from a comparative European perspective. The main focus is the identification of emerging models and the experiences of organizations that represent, organize and support the interests of these workers.

SWIRL partners have produced two national reports per country. The first set of national reports were based mainly on desk re-search. The second set of reports were based on interviews with key stakeholders. In total, 31 interviews were carried out: 6 in Bulgaria, 7 in France, 5 in Germany, 8 in Italy and 5 in Spain.

## Key results

- A major challenge for regulating contingent and slash work is its great diversity, encompassing low-skilled tasks as well as highly-skilled professional work. It can also involve workers in companies, platforms, offline, online or a mixture of all of these. It is difficult to find regulations that meet the needs of all of these worker types, ranging from basic protections to more specific needs and balancing the benefits of flexibility with the risks of exploitation.

- The actors and institutions in traditional industrial relations systems, such as unions, and the actors involved in collective bargaining processes, experienced a series of difficulties in meeting the challenges of new forms of work, especially contingent and slash work.

- The reasons include shifts in self-employed and free-lance work which now encompass more precarious workers and cannot be adequately represented by professional associations. Furthermore, the lack of place-bound work and thus identifiable employers and negotiation partners also explain such difficulty.

- The initiatives that have been successful in most countries have focused on platform workers with offline tasks such as riders or food couriers which have a place-bound presence. In fact, the successful experiences have mostly occurred thanks to the activism of the workers themselves.

- However, there are still broad differences between countries with regard to the definition and the categorization of self-employed workers. This includes recognizing that some self-employed workers, also many who work on platforms, or who carry out personal services have precarious working conditions and need protections, whereas others who are self-employed are professionals or business owners and have different protection and bargaining needs.

# Slash workers
## Characteristics and needs

### Description

Between June and November 2020, 101 interviews were carried out in five European countries: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The respondents were selected for being slash workers and based on the level of skills required by the (main) job and based on the nature of their two (or more) work activities (both online, both offline and one online and others offline).

### Key results

- The slash workers create their own "employment ecosystem" using their educational, personal, and professional backgrounds, interests and talents.
- We have identified between two main types of reasoning behind the decision to become slash workers: financial motivations and "passionate" justifications.
- There is a bidirectional relationship between platforms and slash work: platforms generate job opportunities that enable workers to diversify their paid activities and, at the same time, the proliferation of slash workers helps create the social conditions for the sustainability of the work platforms.
- Country reports describe a complex and diversified network of contractual arrangements leading to a multifaceted scenario in terms of rights and access to social protection and labor related benefits. Nevertheless, none of our interviewees have expressed specific requirements for social protection or collective representation as slash workers.
- Still, there is an apparent demand for forms of representation that fit slash workers' specific needs. On the one hand, they are interested in protecting matters such as labor law compliance, disagreement and conflicts with the employer/client, job security issues, working

hours arrangements, or labor conflicts. On the other hand, they demand alternative organizations that allow them to have contacts with colleagues, training, and help with fiscal and administrative issues.

## The most frequent profiles of slash workers

**Teachers**

High skilled workers, usually mostly women (except in university teaching); but SW prevalent in men and in permanent and temporary employees (except other teaching professionals, where SW also in IPs ) Second job is generally in the education sector, but also in professional activities if university teachers, in PA if other teaching professionals.

**Sports workers**

Highly skilled workers, SW are frequent among permanent employees, but usually they are temporary employees or independent professionals. Also second job is in sports and education.

**Artists**

High skilled workers sw prevalent among employees (also part timer permanent) and independent professionals. also second job in arts or in education.

**Medical doctors**

High skilled, permanent employees. SW prevalent among men. Second job in the same sector.
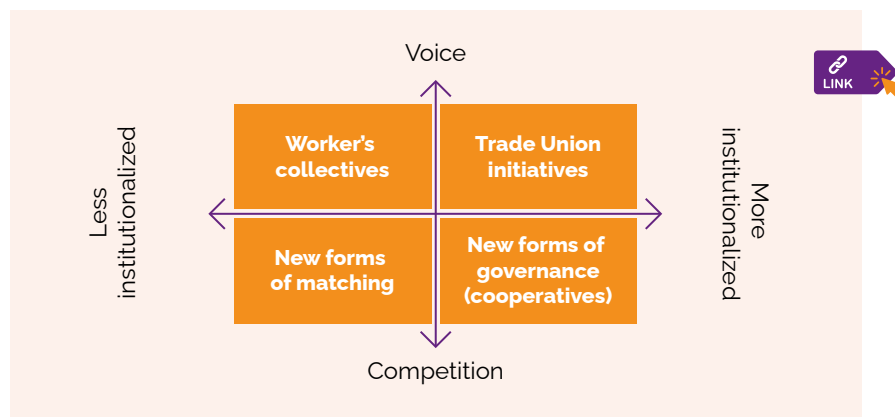
**Domestic cleaners**

Low skilled employees, mostly women Second job in the same sector and in hotel restaurants.

# Policy recommendations

Source: Arcidiacono D., Manzo C., Mori A., Pais I., 2021, "Intervention and policy recommendations – Section 1".



## Description

This WP aims at identifying models of collective representation trans-versal across the countries included in the project and, possibly, trans-ferable to other contexts.

We clustered the 15 case studies analyzed in WP3 along two main axes: the first distinguishing between more voice-oriented actions vs. entrepreneurial practices aimed at building alternative economic models; the second distinguishing between more or less consolidated and institutionalized experiences. Local workshops were carried out in the 5 countries under investigation to discuss the strengths and the weaknesses of the four models in a perspective of transferability and effectiveness of the practices identified.

## Key results

- Four main models of industrial relations emerged: workers' collec-tive (voice, less institutionalized); trade union initiatives (voice, more institutionalized); new forms of matching (alternative businesses, less institutionalized); new forms of governance – cooperatives (al-ternative businesses, more institutionalized).

- The cases analyzed should be considered as institutional experi-ments showing both elements of success and of criticism.

- The analysis highlights interesting initial forms of alliance and con-flict between the different actors involved in the various initiatives considered.

- The present analysis of slash workers focused on the quality of working life. These experiences clearly show the tensions between work and consumption on the one side, and between workers and consumers on the other side, and their impact on the logic of pro-tection and representation of workers.

- Policy recommendations involve: a reformulation of the boundaries of the concept of the worker, expanding it to take into consideration additional categories of non-standard workers; to introduce a uni-versal basic income; enforcing the legal minimum wage; removing existing obstacles that prevent the solo self-employed from utiliz-ing collective bargaining; social welfare expansion, by broadening the system of protections, so that all forms of work are provided with certain basic protections, including income-support policies; to ensure ongoing access to assistance during transitions from one system of protection to another, in addition to provision of full pro-tection to workers engaged in several jobs falling under different protection systems.

**Visit our website and discover more about SWIRL's research on slash workers.**

**swirlproject.eu**

## Partners



# SWIRL– Slash Workers and Industrial ReLations PROJECT