

Platform Economy - Opportunities and Risks for Good Work and the Common Good



EPSU supports webinar of Verdi on digitalisation, 17 November 2021

(19 November 2021) Platforms are established in many areas of the economy. Some of these have a profound impact and provide important infrastructures. To discuss the general interest elements and what platform do for pay and conditions and work security EPSU supported a webinar of Verdi. It allowed union representatives from many countries to join. Some key points:

We need to create a totally new regulatory framework which matches the business model of platform companies.

In his opening remarks, ver.di president Frank Werneke referred to the remarkable success of platform companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, or Uber. Just 30 years ago, none of the big platforms we know today existed. Without even owning means of production, they have become an almost unavoidable part of our everyday lives. This does not automatically ensure good working conditions. What we need is a regulatory framework and workers' protections which matches the novel business models of platform companies.

Platforms have become infrastructures of general interest. This obliges us to ensure equal access to their services.

The rise of platform companies is not only a market power concern, as Christoph Busch, lawyer from the University of Osnabrück/Germany, argued. Instead, we need to understand it more as a power struggle between platforms and public authorities. On the one hand, this is reflected in the platformization of traditional services and their monopolisation. On the other hand, we also need to discuss to which extent existing platforms have by now become services of general interest. Busch went as far as to claim the need for a platform infrastructure law, ensuring that states are constitutionally required to provide platform infrastructures and to ensure equal access to them.

We need an update on data protection and security.

User data is the currency of platforms businesses, but users are often left in the dark about the kind of data which is collected and the purpose of data collection. Marit Hansen, State Commissioner for Data Protection of Schleswig-Holstein, stressed that the public service sector benefits from many services provided by big tech companies. According to her, the sector thus carries a certain responsibility. If data should not be the currency anymore, we need to be willing to pay for the services we use in other ways.

There is potential for a new platform economy, which provides public services of general interest through “platform communalism”.

Right now, public services of general interest are highly dependent on private platform companies and private software providers. Philipp Staab, Humboldt-University of Berlin and Einstein Center Digital Future, made clear that we need to expand capacities in the public sector, formulate a strategic data policy, ensure data protection, and design a framework for platform work. This could result in a new platform business model of “platform communalism”. The European cloud project Gaia X was conceived as given Europe its protected cloud services. It is captured by industry and no longer services the public sector. The public sector should build its expertise.

We need to make a distinction between different platform companies in order to identify needs for trade union action.

Nadine Müller, Head of Innovation and Good Work at ver.di National Office, finally rose awareness for the diversity of platforms and the problems connected to them. Google, for example, might not be paying low salaries, or Book a Tiger might not pose problems in terms of employment status. Only tailor-made actions which address existing needs will bring real improvement. However, for this it is crucial that platform workers must be allowed to organize. This must be ensured on an EU level, as ver.di president Frank Werneke concluded. Trade unions expect from the European Commission a proposal to legislate on the protection of platform workers to end their exploitation.

For more information

On the [webinar](#)

[Regulation of Digital Platform as public service infrastructures](#) – Christoph Busch

[Machtverschiebungen der Plattformökonomie - Herausforderung für Gute digitale Arbeit und Gemeinwohl?](#) Prof. Dr. Philipp Staab

For [the work of EPSU on digitalisation](#)

[The position of ETUC](#) on working conditions for platform workers (consultation)

[The European Union's Digital Decade – the implications for workers and public services](#)

The recording of the streams in German and English as well as the presentations (*in the German version*) can be found here:

English: [Platform Economy - Opportunities and Risks for Good Work and the Common Good – ver.di \(verdi.de\)](#)

German: [Plattformökonomie - Chancen und Risiken für Gute Arbeit und Gemeinwohl – ver.di \(verdi.de\)](#)

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