Fairwork

WORK IN THE PLANETARY LABOUR MARKET

Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2022

Executive Summary

The Fairwork Cloudwork Report 2022 assesses and scores basic standards of fairness in working arrangements on 15 online remote digital labour platforms, according to our five Fairwork principles — pay, conditions, contracts, management, and representation.

The platforms studied in this report were selected based on their global reach (such as Upwork, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and Scale/Remotasks), their position as market leaders (such as Workana), and companies focused on specific segments, for instance, design (99designs) or academic research (Prolific).

As this year's scores show, in general, platforms are still not close to safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. One platform scored seven points out of 10, one scored five, and one scored four. For the other 12 platforms, we were unable to evidence that they met more than three of our ten thresholds. For four platforms, we could not find evidence that they met any threshold.

In some cases, we found evidence that platforms met our minimum thresholds with regards to ensuring workers were paid for completed work, mitigating precarity and labour oversupply,

as well as risks and harms to workers, and the provision of due process and appeals channels for punitive actions such as deactivation.

On the other hand, for almost all the platforms studied in this report, we were unable to find evidence of policies to ensure that all workers earned at least their local minimum wage, that contracts were fair and transparent and did not require workers to waive their rights to reasonable legal recourse, and that workers were provided with information in advance about how the data or other work they produced would be used.

In addition, for most platforms we were unable to evidence that workers were not negatively impacted for refusing tasks (for instance through their rating or status on the platform), or that there were policies in place which affirmed and promoted workers' right to free association and representation.

Our survey revealed that, on average, workers spent over 8.5 hours per week on platforms on unpaid tasks. These include searching for clients or tasks, applying for jobs, building or curating online profiles, submitting work to competitions, taking unpaid qualification tests, and dealing with overly demanding clients. In addition, around a third of our respondents reported the experience of completing a task that they were not then compensated for.

Although there is a long way to go to reach

a scenario of platforms fully complying with minimum standards of fair work, many platforms have been adopting changes to improve working conditions, in dialogue with the Fairwork cloudwork research and scoring process. Some platforms have taken action to lower the chance of non-payment by clients, updated contracts to make them fairer to workers, implemented and enhanced appeals channels and procedures, and introduced new rules regarding reduction of risks and harms.

KEY FINDINGS

As the report's league table of scores shows, the platforms we scored remain far from safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. One platform (Prolific) scored seven, Jovoto scored five, and Workana four. None of the other 12 platforms scored more than three points, and four of them scored zero, meaning we couldn't find any evidence that they meet even one of our 10 thresholds.
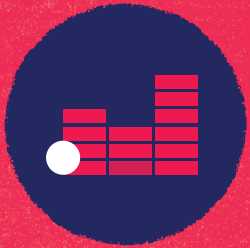
Fair Pay

Only four platforms, Prolific, SoyFreelancer, 5 Euros and Upwork, were able to evidence that they had systems in place to ensure that workers were paid in a timely manner for all the work they completed. The threshold 1.2, that states all workers should earn at least the local minimum wage, was not awarded to any platform.
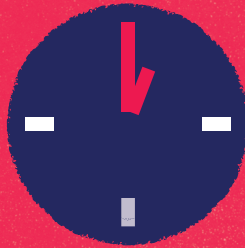
Fair Conditions

Six platforms (5 Euros, Appen, Jovoto, Prolific, Scale/Remotasks, and Workana) were awarded points in the first threshold, as they evidenced measures to avoid unreasonable levels of competition between workers, and overwork. Out of the six platforms that were awarded 2.1, five received an additional point for 2.2 (health and safety risks are mitigated).

Fair Contracts

Only two platforms, Prolific and Fiverr, were awarded a point for the first threshold (3.1), related to the availability of clear terms and conditions. Of the two platforms that received a point for 3.1, only Prolific was awarded an additional point for this threshold (contracts are consistent with the workers' terms of engagement on the platform).
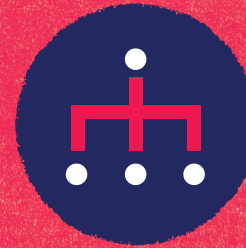
Fair Management

We were able to evidence that seven platforms (99designs, Appen, Clickworker, Jovoto, Prolific, Scale/ Remotasks, Workana) met all our criteria for threshold 4.1 (there is due process for decisions affecting workers). Of the seven platforms that satisfied 4.1, three received an additional point for 4.2 (there is equity in the management process).

Fair Representation

Two platforms, Clickworker and Jovoto, were awarded a point for fair representation, related to the recognition of and engagement with collective workers' bodies. Unfortunately, we were unable to award the second point (there is collective governance or bargaining) to any of the platforms evaluated this year.

Authors

Kelle Howson

Jonas C L Valente

Hannah Johnston

Pablo Aguera

Funda Ustek-Spilda

Daniel Arubayi

Patrick Feuerstein

Matthew Cole

Srujana Katta

Tatiana López

Giulia Varaschin

Mark Graham

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Assessing fairness in cloudwork platforms

Online remote platforms (or "cloudwork platforms") have gained momentum in recent years as alternatives for workers, especially those who are marginalised in formal labour markets due to geography, discrimination, disability, care responsibilities, and other factors.[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the importance of platforms as sources of income for workers around the world, in particular attracting those who have lost their normal income as a result of the public health emergency.[2]

Other factors have contributed to the expansion of cloudwork, including expanding global connectivity, the declining ability of formal waged work to meet living costs, the growth of data-intensive industries, and demand for data commodities.

An increasing body of research has noted the growing prominence of this new global labour market, although measuring it can be challenging. Previous research estimated the online workforce be around 163 million in 2020[3], although this number could be higher due to the limits of current measurement efforts. The ILO mapped 283 "web-based platforms" in its 2021 Work Employment Outlook[4], comprising 181 freelance platforms, 46 dedicated to microtasks, 37 based on content creation and circulation, and 19 focused on competitive programming.

Because much of the labour on cloudwork platforms can be performed by workers anywhere in the world, as long as they have access to the internet, cloudwork platforms effectively create what has been called a "planetary labour market."[5] However, despite operating at a planetary scale, this market is shaped by geographically contingent features like language, time zone, and internet access — and as such, a key feature of cloudwork is the uneven geographies and regional inequalities that permeate these new work arrangements. There is a high level of concentration in cloudwork, with a few powerful companies dominating the market, and most of these located in global centres of power — especially the United States[6]. In addition, most of the demand is from clients located in the Global North, while the vast majority of the available workforce is located in the Global South[7]. Many of the workers from the Global South included in our study highlighted challenges of discrimination on the basis of geography.

These work arrangements are also characterised by precarious relations, including problems of low and non-payment; fierce competition resulting from an oversupply of labour; long working hours; risks and harm resulting from dangerous tasks (e.g. tasks involving exposure to distressing and/ or violent content); lack of transparency in management systems (usually operated by automated, algorithmic means); and arduous dispute resolution processes which often shift the balance of power towards clients.

The Fairwork project evaluates basic standards of fairness in working arrangements on digital labour platforms according to five principles, concerning payment, conditions, contracts, management, and representation. In this report, we present for the second year an evaluation of prominent cloudwork platforms. Fifteen leading web-based platforms were scored on a scale from 1 to 10. The results show that the road towards fairness in cloudwork is still long. A significant part of our sample can't evidence basic conditions like guaranteeing a minimum compensation for workers (proportional to a minimum wage), ensuring that risks and harms are flagged and avoided, providing transparent contracts, respecting workers' rights to legal recourses, taking effective measures against discrimination, and recognising workers' free association, among others.

Some platforms' scores were lower this year than last year, which can partly be explained by the update of our principles, which raised the bar in certain thresholds. This year's study also got new inputs from desk research, a survey of workers, and evidence provided by
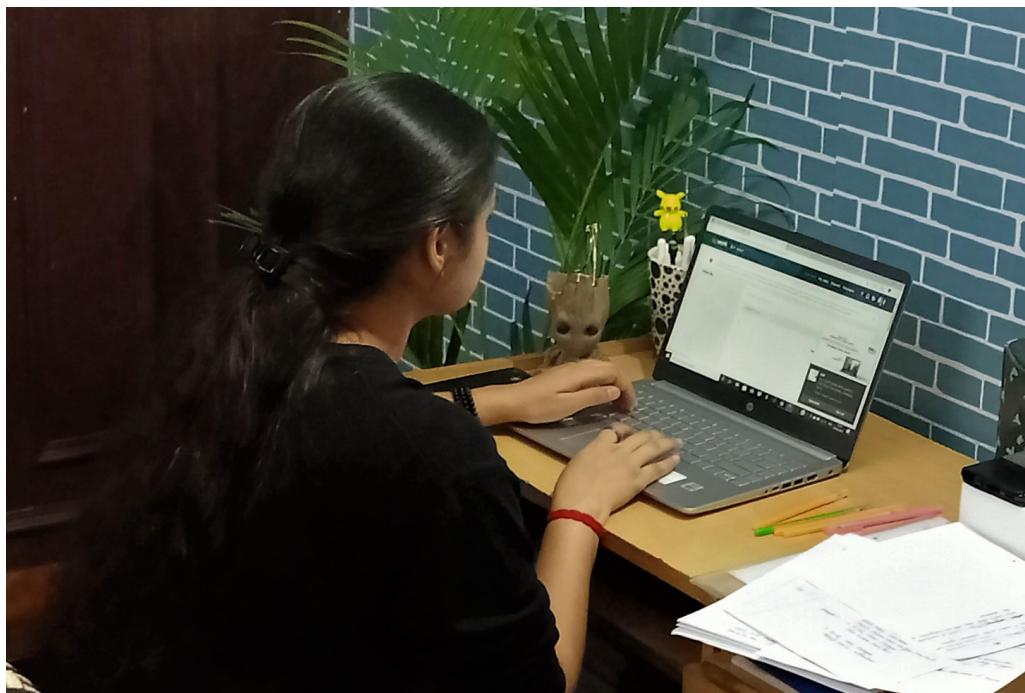
platform managers.

This report moves forward in an effort to trace web-based platform trajectories and point out how they are advancing, stagnating, or even going backwards in terms of ensuring basic standards of fair work. In particular, we consider the troubling reality of unpaid labour in cloudwork platforms. Our research reveals high levels of time spent in a range of non-compensated activities, including searching and applying for jobs, not getting paid for completed tasks, preparing and updating profiles, dealing with over-demanding clients, and taking tests and qualification exams.

We highlight two platforms this year. The first is Prolific, which was the highest scoring company in our league table, achieving a score of seven out of ten. Focused on academic studies, the platform connects researchers to respondents for their surveys. We address the positive features of the platform and the actions they have taken to meet minimum thresholds of fair working conditions and management.

We also analyse the particular arrangement of Scale and Remotasks — two platforms in one — with different companies dedicated to each end of the multi-sided nature of cloudwork platforms: Scale is the client-facing platform, which offers services such as data annotation to predominantly corporate clients, while Remotasks is the worker-facing platform, where workers sign up to contribute to carrying out projects which are contracted through Scale. This architecture can potentially pose risks to fair labour management and workers' rights by reducing the visibility of workers. We also present stories based on worker accounts of their work on different platforms. These experiences are helpful in understanding how positive and negative aspects of cloudwork are perceived concretely by its subjects.

Defining cloudwork

Digital labour platforms mediate the supply and demand of labour power (as opposed to allowing users to rent an asset or sell a product) via an online interface. Not all work intermediated by digital labour platforms can be performed remotely over the internet—indeed, digital labour platforms are prominent in the taxi industry (Uber, Bolt, DiDi), the food and last-mile delivery sector (Deliveroo, Glovo, Postmates), in personal shopping, home cleaning, beauty services, and more. We call this category of location-specific platform work "geographically tethered" work. By contrast, work that can be performed remotely via a digital labour platform, we call "cloudwork"[8].

Both cloudwork and geographically-tethered platform work are often characterised by the organisation of work into short-term, on-demand tasks mediated by the platform. Platform workers are usually paid per task (known as piece-rate pay), as opposed to receiving an hourly wage or salary. Thus, cloudwork is platform work that can be performed from anywhere on the planet with an internet connection, and cloudworkers are generally classified as self-employed or independent workers, and paid piece rates.

Cloudwork can be further categorised based on the duration of the task typically performed on a platform. Some cloudwork platforms facilitate work such as data labelling and processing, Artificial Intelligence training, and image categorisation. Such tasks can take a matter of seconds or minutes to complete, and are often referred to as microwork. By contrast, the second category of cloudwork platforms involves tasks (sometimes called freelance) that are longer in duration and that usually require a higher level of specialist training. These can include translation, design, illustration, web development, and writing.

The Fairwork Project

The Fairwork project studies working conditions on digital labour platforms and rates individual platforms based on their fairness to workers.

Its goal is to highlight the best and worst practices in the platform economy and to show that better and fairer platform jobs are possible. Fairwork, at its essence, is a way of imagining a different and fairer, platform economy than the one we have today. By evaluating platforms against measures of fairness, we hope to not just show what the platform economy is, but also what it can be.

The project is based at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, and at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center (Germany), and is financed, among others, by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), commissioned by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Fairwork has developed a set of five principles of fair gig work, coalescing around the pillars of Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation. The five principles were initially developed in 2018 at a multistakeholder workshop at the International Labour Organisation.

The Fairwork Framework

The project has developed slightly different benchmarks of fairness criteria for geographically tethered work and cloudwork, in acknowledgment of small variations in the risks and harms facing workers in these two categories of work. The cloudwork principles were developed in 2020, and submitted to a process of further consultation with stakeholders, including platform workers, trade union representatives, and researchers. The principles are periodically updated through a democratic process of revision within the Fairwork network to ensure they remain attuned to the key challenges facing platform workers. One of these renewal processes occurred in 2021, resulting in updated standards for this year's report. Further details on the thresholds for each principle, and the criteria used to assess the evidence we collect to score platforms, can be found in Appendix I.

Methods

The Fairwork project uses three approaches to effectively measure fairness of working conditions at digital labour platforms: desk research, worker interviews and surveys, and interviews with platform management.

Through these three methods, we seek evidence on whether platforms act in accordance with the five Fairwork Principles.

We recognise that not all platforms use a business model that allows them to impose certain contractual terms on service users and/or workers in such a way that meets the thresholds of the Fairwork principles. However, all platforms have the ability to influence the way in which users interact on the platform. Therefore, for platforms that do not set the terms on which workers are retained by service users, we look at a number of other factors including published policies and/or procedures, public statements, and website/app functionality to establish whether the platform has taken appropriate steps to ensure they meet the criteria for a point to be awarded against the relevant principle.

Desk research

The team scrapes publicly available information in order to establish the range and types of the platforms that will be rated. Platforms are selected on the basis of several different criteria, but we prioritise platforms which a) are especially large or prominent, and/or b) have made public commitments to voluntary regulation mechanisms or claims about fair treatment of workers. We also aim to include some geographical diversity in our platform sample. While we have not included every prominent cloudwork platform in this second cloudwork league table, we intend to further expand our selection in the ratings we release over the coming years. Desk research also serves to identify any public information that could be used to score a platform, for instance documented platform policies, the provision of particular services to workers, or ongoing disputes. Through desk research we also review all available contractual terms between platforms and workers, which most platforms host on their interfaces.

Platform manager evidence

The second method involves approaching platforms for evidence. Platform managers are interviewed and evidence is requested for each of the Fairwork principles. This step provides insights into the operation and business models of the platforms, and opens up a dialogue through which platforms can agree to implement changes. In cases where platform managers do not agree to engage with Fairwork, scoring is limited to evidence obtained through desk research and worker surveys.

Worker surveys

The third method involves platform workers completing an online survey. For this second report, we present data collected between January and July, 2022. For the global platforms we sampled up to 60 workers per platform, with a relatively even distribution of workers by continent, and for the regional platforms, we sampled at least 15 workers per platform from that region. After cleaning the data, we were left with responses from 613 workers in 84 countries. These responses provide the basis for the findings presented in this report.

Survey participation was limited to workers with a reasonable amount of experience or time on the platform, with the threshold being set at one month. We aimed to sample a range of experience and skill types where possible. Depending on the time spent completing the survey, all respondents were compensated at a rate that at least matched and usually exceeded the UK minimum wage. For 10 platforms, we recruited all participants through the platform interface, implementing measures to ensure confidentiality of participants' responses. For the two platforms where that was not possible or practicable, the management actively circulated a link to our survey, and we also recruited via public forums (such as Reddit). On one platform, we recruited using a blend of on-platform and off-platform recruitment methods.

These surveys do not aim to build a representative set of experiences, but instead seek to understand the work processes and how they are carried out and managed, as well as to identify and probe key emerging themes for digital labour platform research. The survey responses allow the project team to understand the recurring challenges faced by workers, identify patterns and common experiences, and to verify the platform policies and practices that are in place.

Putting it all together

This threefold approach to our research provides a way to cross-check the claims made by platforms, while also providing the opportunity to collect evidence from multiple sources.

Final fairness scores are decided collectively by the core Fairwork team based on all three forms of evidence. The scores are then peer reviewed by members of the wider Oxford Fairwork team, and two reviewers from Fairwork's country teams. This provides consistency and rigour to the scoring process. Points are only awarded if clear evidence exists for each threshold examined.

How we score

Each Fairwork principle is broken down into two points: a first and a second point. The second can only be awarded if the first point has been fulfilled. Every platform receives a score out of 10. Platforms are only given a point if we have reliable evidence that they meet our principles. Failing to achieve a point does not necessarily mean that a platform does not comply with the principle in question; it simply means that the research team did not find any evidence and/or they were unable to prove its compliance.

Fairwork Cloudwork Scores 2022

Minimum standards of fair work

Platform	Score										
Prolific	07 /10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Jovoto	05 /10	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Workana	04 /10	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Appen	03 /10	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5 euros	02 /10	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Clickworker	02 /10	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Scale / Remotasks	02 /10	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
99designs	01 /10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fiverr	01 /10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Soy Freelancer	01 /10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Upwork	01 /10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Amazon Mechanical Turk	0 /10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Freelancer	0 /10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Microworkers	0 /10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
PeoplePerHour	0 /10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

How platforms performed on the five principles

As the report's league table of scores shows, the platforms we scored remain far from safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. One platform (Prolific) scored seven, Jovoto scored five, and Workana four. None of the other 12 platforms scored more than three points, and four of them scored zero, meaning we couldn't find any evidence that these companies meet even one of our 10 thresholds.

Fair Pay

Threshold 1.1 - Workers are paid on time and for all completed work (one point)

Only four platforms — Prolific, SoyFreelancer, 5 Euros and Upwork were able to evidence that they had systems in place to ensure that workers were paid in a timely manner for all the work they completed, which was not disputed by evidence from workers. This included systems to guard against unfair rejections of work by clients, and other instances of non-payment.

Threshold 1.2 - Workers are paid at least the local minimum wage (one additional point)

This point was not awarded to any platform. Unfortunately, ensuring that workers earn their local minimum wage, as well as that a time estimate will be provided before the job is done is still uncommon amongst cloudwork platforms. Even in cases in which there are some guidelines about the obligation to ensure a minimum wage, it is not mandatory or does not cover all workers on the platform. That said, one platform — Appen — has made progress towards institutionalising a system to ensure workers earn at least their local minimum wage. Unfortunately though, this year we were unable to evidence that Appen met all the conditions of principle 1.1, and as such we were unable to award a point for 1.2.

Fair Conditions

Threshold 2.1 - Precarity and overwork are mitigated (one point)

Six platforms were awarded points in this threshold, relating to measures to avoid unreasonable levels of competition between workers, and overwork. 5 Euros, Appen, Jovoto, Prolific, Scale/Remotasks and Workana were all able to evidence that they had policies and mechanisms in place to promote job availability, for instance by limiting the sign-ups of new workers, and to reduce unpaid time spent searching for tasks.

Threshold 2.2 - Health and safety risks are mitigated (one additional point)

Out of the six platforms who were awarded 2.1, five received an additional point for 2.2. 5 Euros, Appen, Jovoto, Prolific and Workana were all able to evidence that they had measures in place to mitigate risks to workers which arise from the nature of their work (which was not disputed by worker survey evidence) — in cloudwork, this can include exposure to harmful or distressing content, data security risks, and the risk of scams. For instance, Workana enables workers to report projects that violate their protection policies, and Jovoto has a Code of Conduct and channels for reporting violations of their Code.

Fair Contracts

Threshold 3.1 - Clear terms and conditions are available (one point)

Only two platforms (Prolific and Fiverr) were awarded a point for this threshold. The research found contracts (for instance, terms of use and other policies) mostly understandable and available to workers, and in most cases were published on the platform's website. However, for most platforms we were unable to evidence that in practice they provided prior notice to workers of changes to their contracts which would meaningfully affect them. In addition, for the majority of platforms studied, we were unable to evidence that their terms and conditions were free of wording which required workers to waive their right to reasonable legal recourse against the platform — such as binding arbitration clauses, and extensive limitations of the platforms' liability. Notably, Prolific has introduced a 30-day notice period for contract changes, and it has also made an effort to make its terms more accessible and understandable, with a quick explainer version.

Threshold 3.2 - Contracts are consistent with the workers' terms of engagement on the platform (one additional point)

Of the two platforms that received a point for 3.1, only one platform was awarded an additional point for this threshold. We were able to verify that Prolific met all our criteria including not imposing non-compete clauses on workers, encouraging clients to give workers information about how their work will be used, and ensuring that workers can refuse tasks without and consequences for their standing or reputation on the platform — and this was not disputed by worker evidence.

Fair Management

Threshold 4.1 - There is due process for decisions affecting workers (one point)

We were able to evidence that seven platforms met all our criteria for principle 4.1. 99Designs, Appen, Clickworker, Jovoto, Prolific, Scale/Remotasks and Workana all had policies governing disciplinary actions against its workers, including how these can be contested and appealed. In addition, these platforms had channels whereby workers can communicate with a human representative of the platform.

Threshold 4.2 - There is equity in the management process (one additional point)

Of the seven platforms that satisfied 4.1, three received an additional point for 4.2. We were able to evidence that Jovoto, Prolific and Workana had anti-discrimination policies, with accompanying reporting channels and penalties for clients who discriminated against workers. We were also able to verify that these platforms made information available to workers about how work is allocated, including where algorithms are used. For instance, Workana provides workers with information about their ranking algorithm. Algorithmic transparency is an important component of equity in the management process.

Fair Representation

Threshold 5.1 - Workers have access to representation, and freedom of association (one point)

Recognition of and engagement with collective workers' bodies is difficult to evidence among the platforms we scored, and only two platforms were awarded this point. Clickworker and Jovoto have both subscribed to the "Crowdsourcing/Crowdworking Code of Conduct", a self-regulated industry standard[9]. Platforms that subscribe to the Code commit to engage with workers' associations, among other things. According to this Code, the signees "regard themselves as the mouthpiece of self-obligating platforms towards and in constant exchange with politics, science and other social groups such as unions or associations." Once platforms sign the Code, their workers (regardless of location) can also present their demands to the German Ombudsman's Office, a body that can act as a vehicle for worker representation, mediation and dialogue.

Threshold 5.2 - There is collective governance or bargaining (one additional point)

Unfortunately, we were unable to award this point to any platform in our study this year. We found no evidence of platforms recognising workers' collective bodies, informing workers of their existence, and bargaining with them. Neither did we find evidence of platforms communicating to workers their willingness to recognise or bargain with a collective body, were one to exist.

PLATFORM IN FOCUS: PROLIFIC

Prolific is a UK-based platform focused on academic and market research, helping researchers to recruit survey participants from all over the world.

According to the platform's website[10], it has already been used by more than 25,000 researchers from over 3,000 research institutions and companies, including Google, Kickstarter, and PSI Online. The pool of respondents includes more than 130,000 workers, and the company states that a survey-based study can be completed in two hours, with researchers posting their survey link, and defining their sample using more than 250 demographic screeners.

Prolific was placed at the top of the Fairwork 2022 Cloudwork league table, with seven points awarded out of a possible 10. The company has been implementing policies and measures to foster fairer working relations, and has engaged with the Fairwork team to improve their management practices and mitigate the risks and negative aspects of cloudwork.

In 2022 the platform demonstrated to Fairwork that they had introduced measures to reduce the incidence of researchers unfairly rejecting survey respondents' submissions — a common practice across cloudwork which

results in non-payment of completed work. The platform has adopted a clear formal system for sanctioning clients who unfairly reject submissions. This shows a commitment to progressively realising principles of fair work by Prolific, and we were able to factor this into our scoring decisions.

In addition to this, Prolific increased its earning floor for work undertaken on its platform, and has adopted a public commitment to fair rewards[11]. It provides a cost calculator to clients which guides them on fair remuneration. Although this commitment does not meet all the criteria for Fairwork principle 1.2 — as it is not differentiated based on a workers' local minimum wage, it still represents a positive step towards fairer pay, compared to many other platforms in our study.

The platform was also able to evidence progressively strengthened efforts to provide due process for workers including in disputes with clients. A clear mediation process exists to address is usually workers' demands regarding underpayment for studies, unfair rejections when a participant was timed out when trying

to respond to a survey, and the collection of personally identifiable information.

To mitigate the oversupply of workers and overwork, the platform implemented a waitlist in October 2021 to manage participant sign-ups to the platform. This is a good example of action against the Fairwork Cloudwork 2.1 threshold — to avoid the negative outcomes of an excessively large workforce competing for jobs.

To build greater fairness towards workers into its contracts, and following engagement with the Fairwork Cloudwork research, Prolific adopted a 30-day notice period for changes to their Participant Terms. Many cloudwork platforms make material changes to their contracts without prior notice — which can negatively impact workers without warning. The Fairwork Cloudwork principles require that changes to the contract should not reverse workers' reasonable expectations or existing benefits (like pay levels, profile or ratings). This gives greater certainty and security to workers. In addition, Prolifichas made an effort to make its terms more accessible and

understandable, providing workers with a quick explainer version.

These commitments and improvements show that it is possible for existing cloudwork platforms to progressively institutionalise minimum standards of fair work. Prolific's model is similar in many respects to most of the platforms represented on our league table. While the platform has more work to do in order to fully comply with the Fairwork Cloudwork principles, it provides an example for other platforms of actionable policies and practices that can help to ensure fairness towards workers.

PROLIFIC HAS INCREASED ITS EARNING FLOOR

FOR WORK UNDERTAKEN ON ITS PLATFORM.

PLATFORM IN FOCUS: SCALE/REMOTASKS

Scale and Remotasks at first glance appear to be separate cloudwork platforms with distinctive business models.

That is, instead of intermediating a "multi-sided market"[12] (in the sense of linking workers with clients on a single platform), Remotasks is a dedicated worker-only interface, whilst Scale interfaces only with clients to provide AI products.

While the link between these two platforms is not immediately clear, Remotasks is actually owned by the same company as Scale. Through our research we were able to confirm that projects contracted through Scale are distributed to more than 240,000 workers in over 90 countries on Remotasks[13].

While this type of business model is not unique in cloudwork, it is certainly unusual. The typical platform model represented on our league table is one which interfaces with both workers and clients, and in most cases facilitates interactions between workers and clients. However, it is possible that the cloudwork market could evolve more towards this model in the future for a number of reasons, which we discuss in this section.

Scale appears to predominantly contract with large corporate clients, for large-scale AI-development projects. Many of the clients listed on Scale's website develop autonomous systems for vehicles, vessels, drones, and other machines — their listed clients include Skydio, Toyota, General Motors, Nuro, Voyage, Embark, Otto, Sea Machines, Optimus Ride, as well as the United States Army and Air Force[14]. Some of the services Scale provides require large volumes of data in order to develop and refine, and there can be a lot of human labour involved in creating, annotating, labelling and otherwise processing this data, which is one of the services offered by Scale/Remotasks.

These projects are likely to carry a high degree of commercial sensitivity, as well as various other risks. It may be in both Scale and the clients' interest to have even greater oversight and control over the completion of these projects compared to other cloudwork platforms, to manage quality and consistency. This is more likely to be possible for platforms with larger-scale projects as opposed to small-scale projects and many corporate and individual clients. Indeed, this aspect of the business strategy is captured in Scale's name.

Scale and Remotasks do not clearly publicise their link. Scale offers products to clients, but their site only makes very minor mention of the fact that these products are produced by people — or "taskers", with little explanation of who these taskers are, their location, or working arrangements. Similarly, Remotasks' public website provides little detail about the nature of the work or purposes of the projects that workers will be involved with. On cloudwork platforms, the separation of users can potentially have the effect of obscuring the labour process and the workers, from the clients and end users of the AI products. For instance, if we interact with AI in our daily lives, we are unlikely to be aware of the human labour involved in producing and maintaining it. Some have referred to this phenomenon in cloudwork as "hidden labour"[15] or "ghost work"[16]. However, Scale notes that the dedicated worker interface can create greater clarity for workers and the organisation

This obfuscation of the labour process within AI production can contribute to workers' vulnerability to exploitation, as clients may not have much information about working conditions. In addition, workers may be even less visible to, or protected by, regulators in their local jurisdiction compared to other cloudworkers (who already have minimal protections if any). They are also unlikely to be covered by statutory labour protections such as minimum wage, health and safety, and due process and grievance procedures, especially because Remotasks' Terms of Use require workers to agree that their status is that of independent contractors[17]. Finally, under this model of especially close platform management it may be more difficult for workers to identify, and communicate with, each other independently of the platform — limiting their ability to share experiences, or to collectively organise. Although Remotasks

SOME OF SCALE'S CLIENTS DEVELOP AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS FOR VEHICLES, VESSELS, DRONES, AND OTHER MACHINES

AMONG SCALE'S CLIENTS ARE THE US ARMY AND AIR FORCE

has managed forums where workers can communicate with each other within the platform.

In our research on Scale and Remotasks, we were unable to evidence that workers are paid an amount specified up front, and for each completed task, that the platform ensures workers earn at least their local minimum wage, that it adopts measures to mitigate risks and harms, that methods used to manage and allocate work (including when algorithms are used) are specified, or that the platform affirms workers' right to collectively organise and bargain.

One topic assessed was the payment methods. Remotasks FAQs note that workers will be paid via PayPal, and must have a PayPal account to receive remuneration[18]. While this is a common and valid method of paying cloudworkers, we note from Scale's website that PayPal is listed amongst the platform's customers[19]. This is an interesting example of what we might see as integration and enclosure within digital value networks[20].

We were also unable to verify whether workers were informed about the purpose of the tasks they contribute to. The Fairwork Cloudwork principles (principle 3.2), require that platforms encourage clients to inform workers about the purpose of the tasks they are completing. This is intended to guard against

situations where workers may, for example, be unknowingly contributing to projects that violate their personal ethics or beliefs — for instance the development of autonomous weapons systems.

It is interesting to note that Scale/Remotasks provide services to other companies which we would classify as digital labour platforms — listing among their clients Lyft and Instacart.

This is certainly not unique among cloudwork platforms, but from an academic perspective it raises interesting questions about layered relations of digital labour and value.

While we do not know the kind of tasks that workers on Remotasks might perform as part of developing products for Lyft and Instacart, workers on Lyft and Instacart have raised issues of unfair and exploitative working conditions[21] which stem from the nature of the digital labour platform model — including their classification as independent contractors, and algorithmic management. Understanding the ways in which similarly classified remote workers on Remotasks might contribute to the management of other platform workers would help us to shed light on the workings of longer digital value chains, and the complex and protracted geographies of digital labour.

THEME IN FOCUS

Unpaid labour in Cloudwork

Cloudwork can provide workers with new occupational opportunities and a chance to expand their professional networks and clientele. Such affordances may be particularly attractive to workers who have limited opportunities in the local labour market or who require working time flexibility.

While workers partake in these activities with the expectation of earning a wage, we also find that unpaid labour constitutes a significant portion of time that cloudworkers spend online, undermining their earning capabilities and highlighting the power inequalities present on digital labour platforms.

A number of researchers, including members of our team, have mapped various types of unpaid labour, including wage theft resulting from non-payment for completed tasks, engaging in contests, job searching and applications, extra tasks demanded by clients, reputation building through frequent client networking and profile updating, and sending free samples to requesters[22].

On average, the workers in our 2022 sample spent over 8.5 hours per week on platforms on unpaid tasks, including looking for clients or tasks, applying for jobs, building or curating online profiles, submitting work to competitions, taking unpaid qualification tests, and dealing with overly demanding clients. Almost a third of our respondents (186 of 613) reported the experience of completing a task and not being paid for it.

Previous research suggests that there is a structural oversupply of workers on platforms[23] — ensuring that clients can easily find workers, but also leading to high levels of unpaid time spent looking for clients or tasks, or time spent waiting for the next job. Around 40 percent of the workers sampled in this study noted this as the largest driver of unpaid time spent on platforms, with another 16.5 percent indicating that applying for jobs is the main source of unpaid time.

Many workers are unsuccessful in applying for jobs. "I've really been trying to get jobs here on the platform, but I don't seem to find any", said one respondent (Female, 21, Nigeria). The algorithmic management system that plays a crucial role in work allocation makes it hard to get tasks: "I applied for jobs in the platform, but I have never got a job", said one respondent (Female, 30, Venezuela), and "I consider my past work for the platform successful enough, but I am not invited to work on projects anymore" (Female, 40, Ukraine).

In some cases, clients withdraw their requests: "There are many jobs that don't hire anyone in the end, so you lose time applying only to see that the job is closed without hiring anyone" (Female, 47, Serbia).

The uneven geographies and different impacts on workers according to their countries, a persistent problem in cloudwork platforms,

Workers on cloudwork platforms spend, on average

8.5
HOURS/WEEK

on unpaid tasks like looking or applying for jobs

also permeate this phenomenon. Workers from the Global South have been shown to be subject to higher rates of unpaid labour than their counterparts in the Global North[24]. In our survey, Global South workers noted difficulties in getting jobs[25]: "Nearly all of the higher paying hits [tasks] are only available to US citizens. Even when there's no reason for it" (Female, 26, South Africa). "I have found that where English writing jobs are concerned, clients tend to prefer workers from the US, UK, and Canada, although there are equally qualified and capable workers in other English-speaking countries" (Female, 25, Trinidad and Tobago).

30%
OF RESPONDENTS

have experienced not being paid for a job on cloudwork platforms

Ranging from an incidence of 5 to 10 percent of the respondent pool indicated that dealing with overly demanding clients, curating profiles, and submitting work to competitions were the most common sources of unpaid work: "I update my profile constantly, adding all the information possible, jobs I have done and my background" (Female, 34, Colombia).

These factors tended to be more common among freelance workers. Meanwhile, spending time taking unpaid qualification tests was reported by around 10 percent of the respondent pool – and more often by microtask workers. A survey respondent listed his crucial strategy in a microwork platform as "to take and pass as many unpaid qualification tests as possible" (Male, 66, US).

Whereas microtask workers are often expected to preemptively take qualification tests to obtain access to an increased range of jobs, freelance workers (such as designers,

consultants, software developers, voice artists etc). tend to be vetted directly by clients and often feel that the demands of unpaid work are either a prerequisite for endearing themselves to particular clients (in the case of extensive proposal submissions) or, if a client proves to be demanding after a contract has already been initiated, workers may feel obliged to meet demands that exceed the initial agreement. In this latter case, workers are often compelled to do additional work in order to secure a positive client review.

But while workers turn to a range of strategies to keep clients, clients themselves can simply abandon contracts: "Freelancers should be protected from abrupt contract termination when performing longer contracts for clients. There should be some form of compensation for sudden contract termination when it is the client's fault" (Male, 24, Kenya).

Problems of work rejection and non-payment can be exacerbated if platforms lack adequate dispute resolution systems. The survey answers pointed to a feeling that these mechanisms are designed to favour clients: "For the platform, the client's always right, and it has made me work for free several times" (Male, 32, Uruguay). "Right now the sellers are always right, then the agents have full power to do anything they want without any justifications, and sellers are the sheep among the wolves" (Male, 29, Senegal).

While there is a short-term cost in terms of a worker's time and unpaid labour, workers frequently feel that positive reviews are essential to secure future work on the platform. Workers are thus prone to discounting their own time for future gains. The demand to maintain high rates thus reinforces the asymmetric relationships inside the platform and pressures workers to avoid rejections, maximises unpaid labour cases, and can have consequences for workers' mental health: "It started as a game but became somewhat stressful. Especially the importance of having a 99% approval rating is really mentally challenging (especially since I've experienced

several unfair rejections)" (Male, 32, Italy).

In all cases, unpaid work on the platform reduces workers' effective hourly wages. These findings are consistent with previous research, including research from the ILO, which found that when hourly wages were calculated using paid and unpaid time spent on the platform, wages were 25% lower than when just workers' paid time was considered. [26]Unpaid time also requires workers to forgo other earning opportunities and can negatively impact psychosocial well-being by undermining worker motivation and mental health.

WORKERS' STORIES

The labour process on cloudwork platforms can often be depersonalised and hidden. When a worker is on the other side of the world and represented only by a profile on a platform interface, their stories and experiences become obscured.

Sometimes, no information about a worker is revealed to a client. The relative ease of soliciting work on cloudwork platforms can help to disembed and disconnect the work from its origin, that is, the worker — supporting the illusion that tasks are completed automatically. This obfuscation can make it more difficult for solidarities to form in the face of unfair working conditions. Making space for cloudworkers to tell their experiences is an important project for challenging unfairnesses. These stories are based on follow-up interviews with workers who completed our surveys. They are summaries of their words, and names and personal details have been changed to preserve the interviewees' anonymity.

Meet Arham[27]

Arham, Age 40

Pakistan

Graphic Designer, 99designs

I have been working as a freelance computer technician since 2008. As I spent most of my time at home waiting for work, I came across freelance graphic design platforms in 2011. I have always loved working in Photoshop, so I decided to give it a try. After working for six months, I won my first contest. My first earning was $175, equal to one-third of my monthly expenses. So I started working on freelance platforms.

How does it usually work? You can get direct projects from customers or join contests. The client posts a contest on the freelance platform. The contest has a fixed amount which will be paid to the designer who wins the contest. All designers are free to join the contests. Once the client sees the design them love, he will select this design as a winner. After the designer sends them the source files, his payment is released. The rest of the designers can withdraw their designs and use them for any later contest because these designs are still their intellectual property until a client chooses their design as a winning entry.

I work for almost 8-12 hours per day in contests. As I have been working for the last 11 years, I have a lot of designs that no client has ever chosen so that I can use them for my future contests. Because of this, I spent more time reading the brief and participating in the contest rather than working on new designs, which is not ideal for me. Because I don't have any direct clients the only option I have for now is to participate in the contests so whether I like the procedure or not, I have to follow it. I want to spend more time working on new designs to improve my skills.

The experience on the platform has ups and downs. When I started working, the minimum reward for a logo design contest was $200, and

now the minimum reward is $190. The contest reward has decreased by 5-7% in the last 4-5 years. In terms of my monthly expenses, it meets my needs. But I want to increase my savings, which is sometimes very hard for me. I want to do that because if I don't find work for a month, I have to use my savings for my other business. I hardly have savings equivalent to one or two months' worth of expenses. I also

your monthly expenses. And if you are lucky enough to find direct, loyal clients who engage you in working on new projects, it not only shines your skills but also makes you strong financially.

But there are many bad parts. You become lazy if you work from home. You can't distinguish between your working and relaxing hours. Your

than the usual 9-5 office.

One challenge I have is getting clients' attention and their feedback. No matter how hard I work on a contest and explain my designs, 95% of clients don't bother to rate and give feedback on my designs. Because of this, I mostly use

my previous unsold work on the new contests rather than creating new designs. I know that no matter how hard I work on this contest, there is only a 5% chance of getting feedback and not being eliminated from the contest. I would rather have direct clients than have platforms mediating as a third party.

> **You can't distinguish between your working and relaxing hours. Your whole routine becomes disturbed. You may have health issues because of no commute and disturbed sleep hours.**

need extra savings to buy a home...that looks difficult to achieve in the current scenario.

The good part of working on the freelance platform is that I can run my cafe business as well. So if you are not comfortable getting up early in the morning and spending your time in the traffic going to the office, then you can use your skills to work as a freelancer to meet

whole routine becomes disturbed. You may have health issues because of no commute and disturbed sleep hours. After working a few years as a freelancer, you find doing a job 9-5 in any office challenging. Your social life shrinks the more time you spend as a freelancer. You might think you are giving more time to your family as you can be at home 24 hours, but it is not true. Your home office engages you more

Meet Luisa

Luisa, Age 60

Venezuela

Freelancer, Workana

I emigrated from my home country in 2015, and although I have an engineering background, I couldn't enter the job market in my host country. I had been exposed to information about people working as freelancers for a long time. I made a few forays without success. I was not convinced that it would be possible for me. In April 2018, after buying an online course about online platforms, I decided to create accounts on some of them and start applying.

On the platform, I look for potential clients and send them my proposals. The acceptance rate for proposals is low, so I send a lot of proposals. Overall, I spend more than 20 hours per week on the platform, ten paid and more than ten unpaid. I don't pay to have priority access. Since March 2022, winning proposals has become more complicated.

I see challenges like finding good projects, winning the first project, and being rated five stars. Another one is having the patience and listening skills to help the potential client define what they are looking for. Also, it is getting paid, and well-paid, for your work. Many potential clients are looking for freelancers who charge cheaply.

The benefits of working on freelance platforms are that I can manage my time, choose which jobs I want to do, keep myself updated within my niche competencies, and meet people. Working with online platforms gives me geographical freedom: I can work from anywhere in the world with good internet service.

On the other hand, the income is uncertain. I can spend long periods without any earnings. Also, there is a lack of security, neither social nor in terms of revenue. I have to foresee social benefits such as health insurance, holidays, retirement, year-end bonus, etc. if I want to have something similar to them.

Moreover, If I spend time without winning projects, I lose visibility and access to projects, almost as if I had disappeared. Another challenge is the dependence on platforms' rules. On the platform, last year, I was in the top Hero position; this year, I've dropped three levels, and if I don't win a project soon, I'll continue to drop and disappear. Platforms can, as they have done, change their rules and destroy your reputation as a freelancer.

> **The income is uncertain. I can spend long periods without any earnings. Also, there is a lack of security, neither social nor in terms of revenue. I have to foresee social benefits such as health insurance, holidays, retirement, year-end bonus, etc. if I want to have something similar to formal employees.**

Meet Sibongile

Sibongile, Age 24

South Africa

Microworker, Amazon Mechanical Turk

I decided to start working on the platform in early 2020. I was not attending university or working full-time, so I decided to try working on the platform to make some money from home, mainly to have something productive to do with my time, and also, I needed the money.

In the platform, a competition runs in the "first come, first served" model. The tasks are usually spread over a significant amount of time, so you don't get constant work, which is frustrating, especially when you want to work. It's a very big demotivator. I most certainly do not think I have fair access to tasks. I constantly see suitable tasks that pay much better than the tasks I do geo-locked

or qualification locked as I'm not from a first-world country.

Work is not consistently available. Bad requesters can ruin your acceptance rate, damaging your ability to do more work in the future. Some people use technologies and softwares that help them to get more tasks, but that's open to everyone, so it's really not a gripe I have. I'd be happier if more US-only hits were available to others, as I am more than capable of doing them well.

The hours I spend on the platform largely depend on my workday. I do have a job during the morning hours. But from the afternoon until I go to sleep, I'm constantly monitoring to see if any hits are available for me to do that

would be worth my time. I'd say roughly four hours a day, and about two of that would be unpaid.

The experience never meets the expectations. You go in expecting to find constant and well-paying work. But that is hardly ever the case. The user interface and reliability of the platform are unrivalled. Yet, when I first started, I was barely making $0.30 per day. The pay rate, in the beginning, was a large demotivator. I thought I'd never make enough to get by or even have enough to supplement my income.

I usually get paid between $0.01 to $0.05 per task. That roughly works out to between $2 to (at best) $5 per hour. It's not very high paying.

Some would consider it a borderline slave wage. But it's better than nothing. And I've gotten faster and more accurate at regularly completing my tasks. The pay is better now if tasks are available, which is not always the case as task availability has dropped considerably over the last year. Sometimes it seems as if the requestors are deliberately taking advantage of people in need of money to get their work done at a less than minimum wage.

The good part is that I can work at my own pace, set my hours, don't report to anyone, and work from anywhere. There is no cost of travel involved to get to the office. Good days make me really happy that it's been a productive day. Especially when you find requestors that understand the importance that the work holds for you. I plan on working on the platform on and off when my full-time job permits.

> " Sometimes it seems as if the requestors are deliberately taking advantage of people in need of money to get their work done at a less than minimum wage.

Meet Lijana

Lijana, Age 38

Macedonia

Freelancer, Upwork

I started working on digital platforms at the beginning of 2022, mainly as a means to earn additional income as the projects that I worked on before got into financial difficulties, there were delays in payments, and there is overall financial insecurity for freelancers in my country. Platforms were a way to do some work for foreign clients/companies and earn some extra money, make new contacts and potentially work on some exciting projects in the long term.

It ended up being quite challenging to find work for the fees I had proposed or asked for (which is well below what is paid in Europe). Most clients want cheap work and have high expectations of the deliverables they wish for the very little money they are willing to pay. The payments are meagre. I had one client who paid extremely well but was only for a limited-time project.

Other than that, the other four clients paid very little, and I only did the jobs to complete more projects and get good reviews. This is important to increase the number of new jobs I can get on the platform. Overall, I would say it's tough to break through as a 'new' freelancer on these platforms, at least until you make contacts with some better and more professional clients. I used to work 2-3 hours/day on the platform, but in the last two months, it's been more like 2-3 hours a week since I decided not to do any more projects to get some good reviews (and minimal fees). I would say roughly a third of the hours spent are unpaid.

It is hard to find well-paid jobs and professional clients, get fair contracts, and have good working conditions. Several times I've had to do extra work because clients are somewhat in a more privileged position and won't complete the contract/payment until they get everything

> **Several times I've had to do extra work because clients are somewhat in a more privileged position and won't complete the contract/ payment until they get everything they ask for, even when that is far more than the contract stipulated.**

they ask for, even when that is far more than the contract stipulated.

These platforms are designed in a way that favours clients, and freelancers are put in a position to adapt to clients' conditions, sometimes in the grey area of 'legality.' Usually, clients delay payments or are unresponsive; they often change their request or the terms of the contract, and objecting to that only would lead to a tiresome dispute resolution process or a bad review. That is why I think it's better to swallow the problem and move on.

The pandemic affected me in a way that created a crisis in the cultural field in all countries, budgets were slashed, and financing for creative projects became scarce, which put freelancers in a precarious position.

On the other hand, you get access to clients and jobs from all over the world, you can make extra income, the application process is relatively straightforward, and it's also a learning opportunity as you can attain new skills by working with different clients or areas that you hadn't worked in before.

I continue to work, but more like a hobby than considering it a source of 'high' livable income. I now apply only to projects I would like to do, usually one project a week, and generally reject offers for low-paid jobs or such that seem tiresome. My work on the platform is more like working for pocket money than an income. If I run into a good client that I would like to work with, I would allot more time and effort, but for now, I am keeping my hours at a minimum.

Worker Resources: Useful tools and links

While work on cloudwork platforms is often characterised as isolated and anonymous, cloudworkers have found ways to collaborate with one another and, in some instances, organise to improve their earnings and conditions.

In fact, we are seeing a growing number of unions and workers' associations, especially for freelance work, such as the Freelancers Union in the US. Still, the most common way for cloudworkers to collaborate is through online forums and communities, either hosted by the platform or by workers themselves. Furthermore, cloudworkers, and advocacy organisations, have developed a series of tools to support each other and circumvent some of the challenges faced by workers on these platforms.

Turkopticon [28]

Perhaps the most notable example of worker-led organising in the cloudwork economy, Turkopticon is a plugin that allows Amazon Mechanical Turk workers to rate their relationships with employers, helping other workers to avoid negative experiences. Turkopticon operates as a mutual aid tool by which 'turkers' can report exploitative practices by employers, as well as an activist group advocating for better working conditions on the platform.

Fair Crowd Work [29]

This website provides ratings of working conditions on different cloudwork platforms based on a 2017 survey with workers.

Unions defending crowdworkers [30]

This website lists unions that represent platform workers in several European countries, as well as in the United States.

Crowdsource Wage Pledge [31]

The project lets crowdsourcing requesters publicly commit to paying at least a certain wage level and lets workers inquire about issues they have had completing tasks posted by requesters who have signed the pledge.

Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct – Ombuds Office [32]

The code of conduct is a voluntary guideline for cloudwork companies that sets minimum standards with respect to working conditions and relations between workers, clients, and platforms. Workers on platforms that have signed the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct (including Jovoto and Clickworker in this study), have access to independent representation and dispute mediation through an Ombuds office provided by the initiative.

IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

Platform changes

Since Fairwork started to score and engage with cloudwork platforms in 2020, some important changes have been promoted by these companies to improve working conditions and strengthen the work standards.

Appen

- Clarified the scope of a key worker protection policy ('Ethical Sourcing and Modern Slavery Policy') to state that the platform is bound by its provisions, and that it applies to all workers on the platform.

Clickworker

- Added to the General Terms and Conditions for Clickworkers that the platform will not "post any project descriptions in the Workplace whose processing is necessarily associated with special risks."

- Updated the FAQ with information about the workers' support channels.

Clarified the scope of their dispute resolution process to make clear that an independent Ombuds office was available to all workers to resolve disputes with the platform.

Jovoto

- The platform abandoned the contest model (in which workers have to compete to produce work in response to a brief, and may or may not have their work selected by the client, and thus compensated. Although they still have some projects which provide non-monetary prizes, they have committed to increasing the proportion of projects with guaranteed monetary payments.

- Added wording in job invitations stating

that refusal of jobs/tasks will not impact future work opportunities on the platform.

Prolific

- Adopted a mediation system for researchers who are consistently reported to the management team. Researchers are warned that if they repeatedly breach the platforms' rules, their accounts will be put on hold until the issue is resolved, and can be permanently banned as a final measure.

- Updated the wording of the participant contract to include a 30-day notice period for modifications to the contract.

- Implemented an appeals system for disciplinary actions that are perceived to be unfair.

- Added wording in their Terms and Conditions stating that discrimination or abuse will not be tolerated on Prolific, and will result in the termination of the client's account.

Pathways of change

For workers, cloudwork in general has lower barriers to entry than conventional employment. For clients, it is usually less expensive to use a cloudwork platform than to hire a geographically proximate worker or contractor.

With a staggering range of tasks and services now available through cloudwork platforms, and the increasing normalisation of remote and online working enabled by technological infrastructure, the cloudwork economy is certain to continue to grow. However, on most cloudwork platforms, costs are externalised and risks devolved to workers — saving clients money, but also rendering workers more precarious and vulnerable.

As more and more workers from a large variety of sectors and professions become subsumed into the planetary labour market, it is becoming increasingly difficult to apply and enforce national labour protections that include their right to a minimum wage, to collective voice and representation, to protection from discrimination and unfair dismissal, and to health and safety at work. As a result, our scores show that unfair and insecure work is the norm on most cloudwork platforms — a situation that calls for regulatory responses at national and supranational levels.

Some national policy proposals, including legislation on global supply chains, may provide a point of regulatory leverage to consider and improve cloudworkers' pay and conditions. For example, Germany's cabinet has recently approved a law on due diligence to enforce the protection of human rights and environmental standards along global supply chains[33]. Although cloudworkers are embedded in global supply chains, they are not yet an integral part of such regulatory proposals. It is time to change that status quo. On the supranational level, an International Labour Organization policy paper suggested that an international governance system could be commissioned with defining minimum standards for workers on cloudwork platforms. This idea is based on the model of the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention for the global shipping industry[34]. However, there remains a mismatch between globally-operating cloudwork platforms — like the platforms included in our study — and comprehensive global policy responses to this new digital world of work.

This study has presented a snapshot of selected cloudwork platforms, building upon our previous baseline scores published in 2021. Ever more professions are undergoing platformisation, especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, including some that might not have obviously lent themselves to remote working — such as medical consultation and sex work. In this context of accelerating platformisation, there is an urgent need to establish conventions of fairness for cloudwork, to expand and enforce labour protections for cloudworkers, and to hold platforms responsible and accountable for the working conditions they impose.

These second Fairwork cloudwork ratings provide a resource for workers, consumers and policymakers to do just that. They establish benchmark standards of fairness in cloudwork, which we can collectively advocate for and strive towards. They also detail where and how prominent platforms are falling short of these benchmarks, and set out a roadmap for positive change to be implemented. Finally and importantly, they highlight where platforms are in fact stepping up to their responsibilities to workers, meeting standards of fairness, and taking steps to improve workers' experiences.

> **"**
>
> **As more and more workers from a large variety of sectors and professions become subsumed into the planetary labour market, it is becoming increasingly difficult to apply and enforce national labour protections that include their right to a minimum wage, to collective voice and representation, to protection from discrimination and unfair dismissal, and to health and safety at work.**

This finding is a powerful reminder that precarity and insecurity isn't an inevitable outcome of technological advancement, nor a necessary tradeoff for flexible work. Some of the platforms in our study have chosen to provide fairer work. The platforms who are not meeting minimum standards of fairness are also choosing to do so.

Fairwork reached out to every platform in this study, and suggested clear changes they could make in order to improve their fairness towards workers. Following constructive dialogue with our researchers, six platforms implemented positive changes. In turn these actions strengthened their Fairwork score, an outcome that will help to differentiate these platforms to clients and workers, as examples of better practice in the cloudwork economy. While most of the changes implemented are relatively minor, involving the codification of practices into public-facing policies, they each represent a step towards a more equitable balance of power between workers and platforms. They give workers bases on which to hold platforms to account. Both smaller and larger platforms implemented changes.

We find fault with the common characterisation of platforms as 'disruptors' of the status quo, due in part to the fact that precarious piece-rate work has a long legacy and is not especially innovative or historically distinct. However, one hopeful takeaway from these

> **Fairwork reached out to every platform in this study, and suggested clear changes they could make in order to improve their fairness towards workers. Following constructive dialogue with our researchers, six platforms implemented positive changes.**

Figure 1: Fairwork's Pathways to Change
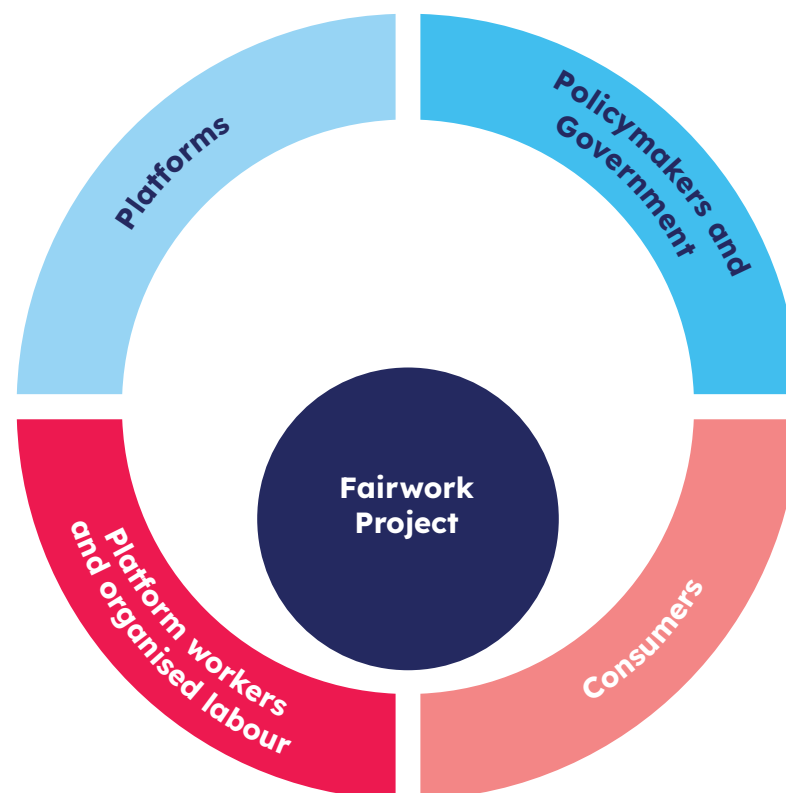
particular platforms' willingness to listen to feedback and improve, is that we are still in a moment of possibility in the development of the cloudwork economy, and that these institutions are not yet characterised by high levels of inertia and path dependency. Just as cloudwork platforms can nimbly enter and exit markets, and can nimbly evade regulations, they can also easily do better. It will take a broad coalition of actors, including platforms, workers, and legislators, to bring about a fairer future of platform work, but the actions taken by platforms in response to Fairwork scoring shows that it remains within reach. We commend those companies who are choosing to step up to their moral obligations to their workers. However, the low scores in our study also demonstrate what happens when an industry is left to regulate itself, and underscore the urgent need for governments to step in to find ways to protect workers in the planetary labour market.

The Fairwork Pledge

As part of this process of change, we have introduced the Fairwork Pledge. This pledge leverages the power of organisations' procurement, investment, and partnership policies to support fairer platform work.

Organisations like universities, schools, businesses, and charities who make use of platform labour can make a difference by supporting the best labour practices, guided by our five principles of fair work.

The pledge constitutes two levels. This first is as an official Fairwork Supporter, which entails publicly demonstrating support for fairer platform work, and making resources available to staff and members to help them in deciding which platforms to engage with. A second level of the pledge entails organisations committing to concrete and meaningful changes in their own practices as official Fairwork Partners, for example by committing to using better-rated platforms where there is a choice.

A diverse range of stakeholders can promote actions to support the Fairwork Pledge. NGOs and charities can help committing to only using platforms scoring at least 7/10 in the most recent applicable Fairwork ratings or other platforms that comply with the Fairwork principles. Government and administrative bodies can create policies that favour well-rated platforms in public funding or licensing agreements. Companies can make Fairwork principles and ratings a criterion when contracting services (e.g. translation, transcription or data entry and cleaning services) via digital platforms. For academic institutions, research ethics bodies, in particular, may increasingly be involved in decisions around research involving cloudworkers.

Fairwork
Official Partner
Together for Fair Platform Work

MORE INFORMATION ON THE PLEDGE, AND HOW TO SIGN UP, IS AVAILABLE HERE:

FAIR.WORK/PLEDGE

APPENDIX

Fairwork Scoring System

The five Principles of Fairwork were developed through an extensive literature review of published research on job quality, stakeholder meetings at UNCTAD and the ILO in Geneva (involving platform operators, policymakers, trade unions, and academics), and in-country stakeholder meetings held in India (Bangalore and Ahmedabad), South Africa (Cape Town and Johannesburg) and Germany (Berlin).

These principles have been adapted to the realities of Cloudwork and fine-tuned through a process of further consultation with stakeholders including worker representatives, researchers, and labour lawyers. The criteria for each principle was voted on and finalised by the Fairwork team.

This document explains the Fairwork Scoring System for Cloudwork Platforms. Each Fairwork principle is divided into two thresholds. Accordingly, for each principle, the scoring system allows one 'basic point' to be awarded corresponding to the first threshold, and an additional 'advanced point' to be awarded corresponding to the second

threshold (see Table 1). The advanced point under each principle can only be awarded if the basic point for that principle has been awarded. The thresholds specify the evidence required for a platform to receive a given point. Where no verifiable evidence is available that meets a given threshold, the platform is not awarded that point.

A platform can therefore receive a maximum Fairwork Score of 10 points.

Principle 1: Fair Pay

Threshold 1.1 – Workers are paid on time and for all completed work (one point)

Workers must have full confidence that they will be paid for the work they do. Workers can sometimes face the risk of a client not paying for work that has been completed. To achieve this point platforms must guarantee that this is not possible. Where a client considers that work is not completed satisfactorily, there must be a clear and reasonable process for rejection decisions. Additionally, timeliness and regularity of payment are crucial to evidencing fair pay.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- There is a mechanism to ensure workers are paid.
- Non-payment for completed work is not an option for clients[35].
- Payments are made within an agreed timeframe.
- Workers can choose to be paid in a recognised national currency.
- Workers can request funds from their account on a regular basis with reasonable withdrawal thresholds.

Threshold 1.2 – Workers are paid at least the local minimum wage (one additional point)

The rate of pay after costs (like platform fees) must meet the minimum legal threshold in the place where the worker works, regardless of whether the worker earns an hourly wage, or engages in piece-rate work.

The platform must satisfy EITHER 1) or 2) depending on their payment model:

1. For hourly-paid work, workers earn at least their local minimum wage after costs.
2. For piece-rate work:
   - The vast majority of workers earn at least their local minimum wage after costs[36], and
   - A reasonable estimate of the time it takes to complete each task is provided to each worker before they accept the work.

Principle 2: Fair Conditions

Threshold 2.1 - Precarity and overwork are mitigated (one point)

Workers may spend a significant amount of their working day applying for jobs, especially if they are competing with a lot of other workers. This can include sending credentials to prospective clients, or developing pitches. This constitutes working time, but it is time that the

worker is not being paid for. In order to reduce this unpaid working time, platforms should ensure that jobs are available to workers on the platform, and there is not an unmitigated oversupply of labour.

The platform must satisfy the following:

- The allocation of work and/or supply of new workers is managed to promote job availability, and reduce unpaid work and overwork[37].

Threshold 2.2 - Healthy and safety risks are mitigated (one additional point)

Health and safety risks to workers can include amongst other things exposure to psychologically harmful material, financial scams, and breaches of data privacy and security. To achieve this point the platform must demonstrate policies and processes that minimise risks to workers.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- There are policies to protect workers from risks that arise from the processes of work.

- There are processes for job-related health and safety risks (including psychological risks) to be identified and addressed.

- Risks related to a specific job are flagged to workers before they accept the job (such

as indicating that they might be exposed to violent content).

- There are clear reporting channels and documented penalties for clients who jeopardise workers' health and safety.

- There are adequate and ethical data privacy and security measures applicable to workers, laid out in a documented policy[38].

Principle 3: Fair Contracts

Threshold 3.1 – Clear terms and conditions are available (one point)

The terms and conditions governing platform work are not always clear and accessible to workers. To achieve this point the platform must demonstrate that workers are able to understand, agree to, and access the conditions of their work, and that they have legal recourse if the platform breaches those conditions.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- The contract is written in clear and comprehensible language that the worker could be expected to understand.

- The contract is available for workers to access at all times.

- Workers are notified of proposed changes in a reasonable timeframe before changes come into effect.

- Changes should not reverse existing accrued benefits and reasonable expectations on which workers have relied.

- The contract does not require workers to waive rights to reasonable legal recourse against the platform.

Threshold 3.2 – Contracts are consistent with the workers' terms of engagement on the platform (one additional point)

Platforms mediate the contact and the transaction between workers and clients. Therefore they have a responsibility for oversight of the relationship between workers and clients, and to protect workers' interests. This also includes a duty of care in ensuring that direct contracts (such as NDAs) raised between clients and workers do not unfairly disadvantage the worker or reduce the worker's labour market prospects. Additionally, where workers are self-employed, contracts should allow for freedom to choose their own working schedules, and the jobs they accept or refuse on the platform.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- Clients are encouraged to inform workers about how their work will be

used.

- The worker is not subject to non-compete clauses.

EXCEPT, in cases where the worker is in a standard employment relationship the platform makes clear to workers that:

- Working schedules cannot be imposed upon workers[39].

- The worker retains the freedom to choose which tasks to accept or refuse.

- Refusal of offered tasks by workers does not punitively impact a workers' rating or reputation.

Principle 4: Fair Management

Threshold 4.1 – There is due process for decisions affecting workers (one point).

Platform workers can experience deactivation; being barred from accessing the platform, sometimes without due process, and losing their income. Workers may be subject to other penalties or disciplinary decisions without the ability to contact the platform to challenge or appeal them if they believe they are unfair. To achieve this point, platforms must demonstrate an ability for workers to meaningfully appeal disciplinary actions.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- There is a channel for workers to communicate with a human representative of the platform. This channel is documented in policies that are easily accessible to workers, and communications are responded to within a reasonable timeframe.

- Workers receive an explanation for all punitive actions including reductions in their rating/platform standing, non-payment, work rejections, penalties, account blocks, deactivation and any other disciplinary actions.

- Explanations for punitive actions and work rejections include information on how they can be appealed.

- The process for workers to appeal punitive actions and work rejections is non-arduous, documented in the contract, and available to workers who no longer have access to the platform.

Threshold 4.2 There is equity in the management process (one additional point)

The majority of platforms do not actively discriminate against particular groups of workers. However, they may inadvertently exacerbate already existing inequalities through their design and management. To achieve this point, platforms must show that they have policies against discrimination that can occur between different user groups, and that workers are assured that they will not be disadvantaged through management processes.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- There is a policy which guarantees that the platform will not discriminate against persons on the grounds of racial, ethnic, social or minority background, caste, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, language, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, geographical location, or any other status.

- There are mechanisms to reduce the risk of clients discriminating against workers on any basis listed above.

- The platform specifies the methods used to manage and allocate work (including when algorithms are used). Substantive changes to methods of managing and allocating work are preceded by a worker consultation.

Principle 5: Fair Representation

Threshold 5.1 – Workers have access to representation, and freedom of association (one point)

To observe workers' right to fair representation, platforms must ensure that workers have information about their options for representation in a dispute, as well as ensuring they have access to an independent advocate. Platforms must also guarantee that workers have freedom of association, as enshrined in the constitution of the International Labour Organisation and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The platform must satisfy ALL of the following:

- The platform commits to a process of dispute resolution in which workers have access to an independent advocate who is freely chosen by the worker, or by an independent workers' body[40] [41].

- Freedom of association is not inhibited and groups of workers are not disadvantaged in any way for communicating their concerns, demands and wishes to management.

Threshold 5.2 – There is collective governance or bargaining (one additional point)

The ability for workers to organise and collectively express their voice is an important prerequisite for fair working conditions. Workers must be able to assert their demands through a representational body which is free from any influence by platform management. Where such a body does not exist, it is incumbent on platforms to ensure workers' voices can be represented by encouraging its formation.

The platform must satisfy EITHER 1), 2) or 3):

1. It is democratically governed by workers.

2. It publicly and formally recognises an independent collective body of workers, an elected works council or trade union, and has not refused to participate in collective representation or bargaining. New workers are advised of the existence of this body, and of how to join.

3. If such a body does not exist, it formally communicates to workers its willingness to recognise, or bargain with, a representative body of workers or trade union.

CREDITS AND FUNDING

Appendix.

Creative Design: One Ltd. and Fairwork (Communications)

Images: The images in this report were sourced from cloudworkers in the study.

Conflict of interest statement: None of the researchers have any connection with any of the platforms and the work undertaken received no funding or support in kind from any platform or any other company, and we declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ENDNOTES

1   Woodcock, J., & Graham, M. (2020). The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction. Polity Press.

2   Howson, K., Spilda, F.U., Bertolini, A., Heeks, R., Ferrari, F., Katta, S., Cole, M., Reneses, P.A., Salem, N., Sutcliffe, D., Steward, S. and Graham, M. 2021. Stripping back the mask: Working conditions on digital labour platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. International Labour Review. Accepted Author Manuscript. DOI: 10.1111/ilr.12222.

3   Kässi, O., Lehdonvirta, V., & Stephany, F. (2021). How many online workers are there in the world? A data-driven assessment. arXiv preprint arXiv:2103.12648.

4   Rani, U., Kumar Dhir, R., Furrer, M., Gőbel, N., Moraiti, A., & Cooney, S. (2021). World employment and social outlook: the role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work. Geneva: International Labour Organisation.

5   Fairwork (2021). Work in the Planetary Labour Market: Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2021. Oxford, United Kingdom.

6   Rani et al. (2021).

7   Graham, M., & Anwar, M. (2019). The global gig economy: Towards a planetary labour market?. First Monday, 24(4).

8   It is also known inter alia as cloud sourcing, crowdwork, crowdsourcing, clickwork, virtual labour, microwork and online work (see Heeks, R. 2017. Digital Economy and Digital Labour Terminology: Making Sense of the 'Gig Economy','Online Labour','Crowd Work','Microwork','Platform Labour', Etc. Development Informatics Working Paper, (70).

9   The Crowdsourcing/Crowdwork Code of Conduct is a self-imposed set of guidelines of fair labour standards. The subscribers have to respect the principles entailed in the document. The German Ombudsman's Office acts as a body to mediate workers' claims regarding the Code's principles with the signees. Available at: https://www.crowd-sourcing-code.com/. Retrieved on 15 August, 2022.

10   Prolific. (2022). Homepage. https://www.prolific.co/. Accessed 17 August 2022.

11   Prolific. (2022). Pricing. https://www.prolific.co/pricing. Accessed 17 August 2022.

12   Langley, P., & Leyshon, A. (2017). Platform capitalism: the intermediation and capitalization of digital economic circulation. Finance and society, 3(1), 11-31.

13   https://www.remotasks.com/en, Accessed 1 August 2022

14   https://scale.com/customers, Accessed 1 August 2022

15   Altenried, M. (2020). The platform as factory: Crowdwork and the hidden labour behind artificial intelligence. Capital & Class, 44(2), 145-158.

16   Gray, M. L., & Suri, S. (2019). Ghost work: How to stop Silicon Valley from building a new global underclass. Eamon Dolan Books.

17   https://www.remotasks.com/en/legal/terms, Accessed 1 August 2022

18   https://www.remotasks.com/en#faq, Accessed 1 August 2022

19   https://scale.com/customers, Accessed 1 August 2022

20   Howson, K., Ferrari, F., Ustek-Spilda, F., Salem, N., Johnston, H., Katta, S.,... & Graham, M. (2021). Driving the digital value network: economic geographies of global platform capitalism. Global Networks.

21   Howson K, Ferrari H, Cole F, et al. (forthcoming) Unpaid labour and territorial extraction in digital value networks. Global Networks n/a(n/a). Pulignano, V., Piasna, A., Domecka, M., Muszyński, K., & Vermeerbergen, L. (2022). Does it pay to work? Unpaid labour in the platform economy. Rani, U., & Furrer, M. (2021). Digital labour platforms and new forms of flexible work in developing countries: Algorithmic management of work and workers. Competition & Change, 25(2), 212-236.

22   Gig Workers' Collective. (2021, October 22). Open Letter to Fidji Simo. Medium. https://gigworkerscollective.medium.com/open-letter-to-fidji-simo-970f863104fd.
Paul, K., (2021, July 22). Uber and Lyft drivers join a day-long strike over working conditions. The Guardian.

23   Graham, M., Hjorth, I., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. Transfer: European review of labour and research, 23(2), 135-162. Schmidt, F. (2022). The Planetary Stacking Order of Multilayered Crowd-AI Systems. In: Graham, M., & Ferrari, F. Digital work in the planetary market. MIT Press.

24   Howson K, Ferrari H, Cole F, et al. (forthcoming) Unpaid labour and territorial extraction in digital value networks. Global Networks n/a(n/a). Pulignano, V., Piasna, A., Domecka, M., Muszyński, K., & Vermeerbergen, L. (2022). Does it pay to work?

25   Anwar, M. A., and Graham, M. 2022. The Digital Continent: Placing Africa in Planetary Networks of Work. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

26   Berg, J., Furrer, M., Harmon, E., Rani, U., & Silberman, M. S. (2018). Digital labour platforms and the future of work. Towards Decent Work in the Online World. Rapport de l'OIT.

27   Workers' names have been pseudonymised to preserve confidentiality.

28   Turkopticon. (n.d.). Homepage. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from https://turkopticon.ucsd.edu/

29   Faircrowd. (n.d.). Homepage. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from http://faircrowd.work/

30   Fair Crowd Work (n.d) Homepage. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from http://faircrowd.work/unions-for-platform-workers/

31   Crowdsource Wage Pledge. Homepage. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from https://wagepledge.org/index.php.

32   Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct - Ombuds Office. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2022, from https://ombudsstelle.crowdwork-igmetall.de/en.html

33   Solomon, E. (2021, March 3). German cabinet backs law to protect human rights in global supply chain. The Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/2b969d2c-ad1e-48c2-b318-2dd20bb1662f

34   International Labour Organization. (2019). Policy responses to new forms of work: International governance of digital labour platforms. Paper prepared for the 2nd Meeting of the G20 Employment Working Group under Japan's Presidency 2019, 22-24 April, Tokyo. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_713378.pdf

35   As a guideline for ensuring non-payment is not an option, see criteria developed by Harmon and Silberman in their 2018 'Rating working conditions on digital labour platforms', as follows:

In cases where rejection mechanisms exist for delivered work:

- Workers should be able to contest rejection decisions.

- Workers receive a clear and reasonable explanation for any rejections

- Workers may attempt to redo rejected work at least once

- If the worker contests the rejection decision, the case is reviewed (a second time) by a neutral third party, who makes a binding decision; the platform agrees not to punish the worker in any way if the third party decides in favor of the worker

- If the work is rejected it is not able to be used by the client.

36   This can be evidenced either through a policy, or by provision of aggregated earnings data. The 'vast majority' of workers is understood as 85% or more of all workers engaged on the platform. This is in recognition of the fact that all the time

between when a worker starts and submits a task may not necessarily be working time.We compare worker's piece-work earnings against minimum wages based on UK government guidelines. The calculation is as follows:

- Number of tasks of a given kind completed by workers on average per hour = A

  - This number is divided by 1.2 to calculate A*, an estimated average number of tasks completed per hour that accounts for the disadvantage that relatively inexperienced workers face.

  - Therefore, A* = 0.83A

- Local minimum hourly wage = M,

  - This figure varies across jurisdictions.

  - Where a jurisdiction's laws do not specify a minimum wage, a reasonable alternative can be used.

- Fair piece rate corresponding to the minimum wage = F = (M ÷ 0.83A).

This calculation must be repeated across task types. To receive this point, platforms operating on a piece-work model must demonstrate that 85% or more of workers on their platform earn more than F per hour in each task type.

37   This could include regular guaranteed hours, managed supply and demand, or minimum and maximum hours.

38   To fulfil this criterion, platforms must have clear policies about what kind of data is collected from workers, when it is collected, how long it is kept, and how it is processed. They must take responsibility of data handling, storing and management processes, and ensure that personal data is kept safe and secure and is not sold or shared with third parties, without workers' specific consent.

39   The platform shall encourage clients to adopt working time arrangements that are consistent with the contractual terms of the worker-client relationship. While workers may be required to meet project deadlines or to attend meetings, in

the absence of an employment relationship, the platform shall discourage clients from unreasonably interfering with a worker's ability to choose their own working time schedule.

40   Some platforms have committed to using the following text in their contracts: "[company] will support any effort by its workers to collectively organise or form a trade union. Collective bargaining through trade unions can often bring about more favourable working conditions". Platforms are also required to provide a directory of local labour unions and advocates to workers on request.

41   An example is the German Trade Union IG Metall's Ombuds Office, which arbitrates disputes between workers and platforms that have signed up to the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct.

Fairwork

How to find us

🔍 **fair.work**

✉️ **info@fair.work**

f **@TowardsFairWork**

🐦 **@TowardsFairWork**

📷 **Towards_Fairwork**

in **/towardsfairwork**