Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2023

WORK IN THE PLANETARY LABOUR MARKET

Fairwork

Executive summary

The *Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2023* assesses and scores basic standards of fairness in working arrangements on 15 web-based digital labour platforms according to the five Fairwork principles: fair pay, conditions, contracts, management, and representation.

The platforms studied in this report were selected based on their *global reach* (such as Freelancer.com, Upwork, Amazon Mechanical Turk, Fiverr and Scale/Remotasks), their *position as regional market leaders* (such as Workana, Terawork, and SoyFreelancer), and *companies focused on specific segments*, for instance, academic research (Prolific). This year, two new platforms were scored: Terawork, which operates in African countries, and Elharefa, which reaches countries from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

This year's scores, show that platforms are still far from safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. Three platforms scored 5 points out of 10. For the other 12 platforms, we were unable to get evidence that they met more than 3 of our 10 thresholds. For four platforms, we could not find evidence that they met any threshold.

In some cases, we found evidence that platforms met Fairwork's thresholds with regard to ensuring workers were paid for completed work (threshold 1.1, six platforms), providing communication channels due process and appeals channels for punitive actions, such as deactivation (threshold 4.1, six platforms), and mitigating precarity and labour oversupply (threshold 2.1, four platforms).

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, contracts were fair and transparent, and did not require workers to waive their rights to reasonable legal recourse, and platforms commit to a process of dispute resolution through which workers have access to an independent advocate who is freely chosen by the worker or by an independent workers' body.

The Fairwork cloudwork research has revealed precarious conditions for workers active in microwork platforms that provide services such as data annotation and labelling, video scoring and model evaluation to artificial intelligence (AI) companies. Microwork platforms were among the lowest scores in our evaluation this year. While the run for AI deployments gets public hype and momentum, workers behind the design, building and testing of these technological solutions, unfortunately, still face enormous challenges and experience unfair working conditions.

Although there is a long way to go to reach a scenario wherein platforms fully complying with minimum standards of fair work, some 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 ensure minimum wage for workers, updated contracts to make them fairer to workers, implemented and enhanced appeal channels and procedures, and introduced new anti-discrimination policies.

KEY FINDINGS

The platforms we scored remain far from safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. Three platforms (ComeUp, Prolific and Terawork) scored 5 points. None of the other 12 platforms scored more than 3 points, and four of them scored no points.
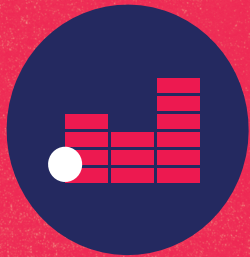
Fair Pay

Six platforms (ComeUp, Clickworker, Prolific, SoyFreelancer, Terawork and Upwork) were able to give evidence that they had systems in place to ensure that workers were paid in a timely manner for all the work they completed.

The point for threshold 1.2, which states all workers should earn at least the local minimum wage, was awarded to two platforms: ComeUp and Terawork, which adopted changes to implement this policy.
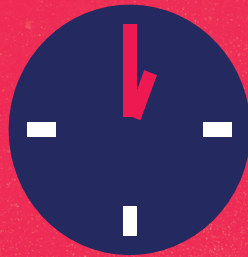
Fair Conditions

Four platforms (Appen, ComeUp, Prolific, and Scale/Remotasks) were awarded points in the first threshold because we found evidence of measures to avoid unreasonable levels of competition between workers, and overwork.

Out of the four platforms that were awarded 2.1, only two received an additional point for 2.2 (health and safety risks are mitigated): Appen and Prolific.

Fair Contracts

Our research found evidence that three platforms (ComeUp, Prolific, and Terawork) met all the bullet points for 3.1 relating to the availability of clear terms and conditions.

From those platforms, two (Prolific, and Terawork) received a further point for threshold 3.2 (contracts are consistent with the workers' terms of engagement on the platform).
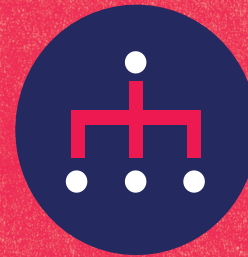
Fair Management

We were able to find evidence that six platforms (ComeUp, Elharefa, Fiverr, PeoplePerHour, SoyFreelancer, and Terawork) met all our criteria for threshold 4.1 (there is a process for decisions affecting workers).

We were unable to award a point for threshold 4.2, to any of the platforms this year (there is equity in the management process).

Fair Representation

Two platforms (Appen and Upwork) were awarded a point for fair representation related to the recognition of, and engagement, with collective workers' bodies.

We were unable to award the second point (there is collective governance or bargaining) to any of the platforms evaluated this year.

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EDITORIAL

The need for international guidelines to platform work

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) governing body's 2025 conference will include an agenda item to discuss standards related to decent work in the platform economy.

This decision is great news for those committed to the assurance of workers' rights in the platform economy. It means the ILO can move forward in analysing, and hopefully approving, an international set of guidelines that ensure parameters of fair work to the millions of workers who provide services through digital labour platforms.

In addition to the government officials and unions who have been supporting this agenda inside the ILO, last October more than 300 professors, lectures, and researchers signed a *Global Manifesto for Fairer Platform Work*, that calls for the approval of an international convention ensuring standards of decent work to platform workers.[1]

The topic has been a focus of attention at the ILO since 2022. In October 2022, a group of experts with representatives from unions, platforms, and academic institutions gathered to map the main challenges, and point out possible ways forward to the ILO. Unfortunately, platform representatives refused to work towards a consensus on the need for an international convention.

Despite this move from platforms, the governing body went ahead and placed this item in its March meeting. The board's members analysed *A Normative Gap Analysis on Decent Work in the Platform Economy*, a document prepared by its team and drawn from the expert group's debate.[2] The document lists gaps in the application of international labour standards, outlining how challenges in the platform economy are still not completely addressed in current standards.

The text lists gaps in areas such as employment relationships, freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labour, elimination of child labour, equality and opportunity of treatment, labour inspection, employment policy, employment security, wages, working time, health and safety, social security, migrant workers, and protection of workers' data.

Next steps

With the decision, the governing body confirmed that the organisation will move forward to address these problems with international guidelines. This now opens a crucial moment in this matter, related to mapping the primary problems to be addressed and the solutions to them. The *Global Manifesto for a Fairer Platform Economy*[3] puts effort into this initiative; listing challenges and guidelines to be considered for a future international convention.

First it highlights the problems caused by the misclassification of workers.

Second it stresses the need to ensure basic standards of payment, with measures to ensure the minimum and preferable living wages.

Third it argues for implementing health and safety measures to avoid and mitigate risks arising from work and provide a safety net, as well as reduce unpaid and overwork.

Fourth the Manifesto calls for better data protection policies.

**Fifth** the document points out that contracts must be accessible and not contain unfair clauses.

Sixth the Manifesto supports the relevance of due process and appeal systems to avoid

unjust disciplinary actions.

Seventh it states that platforms need to adopt anti-discrimination policies.

Eighth it emphasises the crucial right to fair representation and collective bargaining.

The road to 2025 is an opportunity to deepen the scrutiny of this topic and present solutions that will be a landmark for the platform economy. The international convention will be a powerful ground rule to establish limits to abuses and unfair practices in digital labour platforms. In addition, it will present references to the approval and implementation of national laws dedicated to the platform economy. This is especially relevant, considering such legal initiatives are growing in countries around the globe.
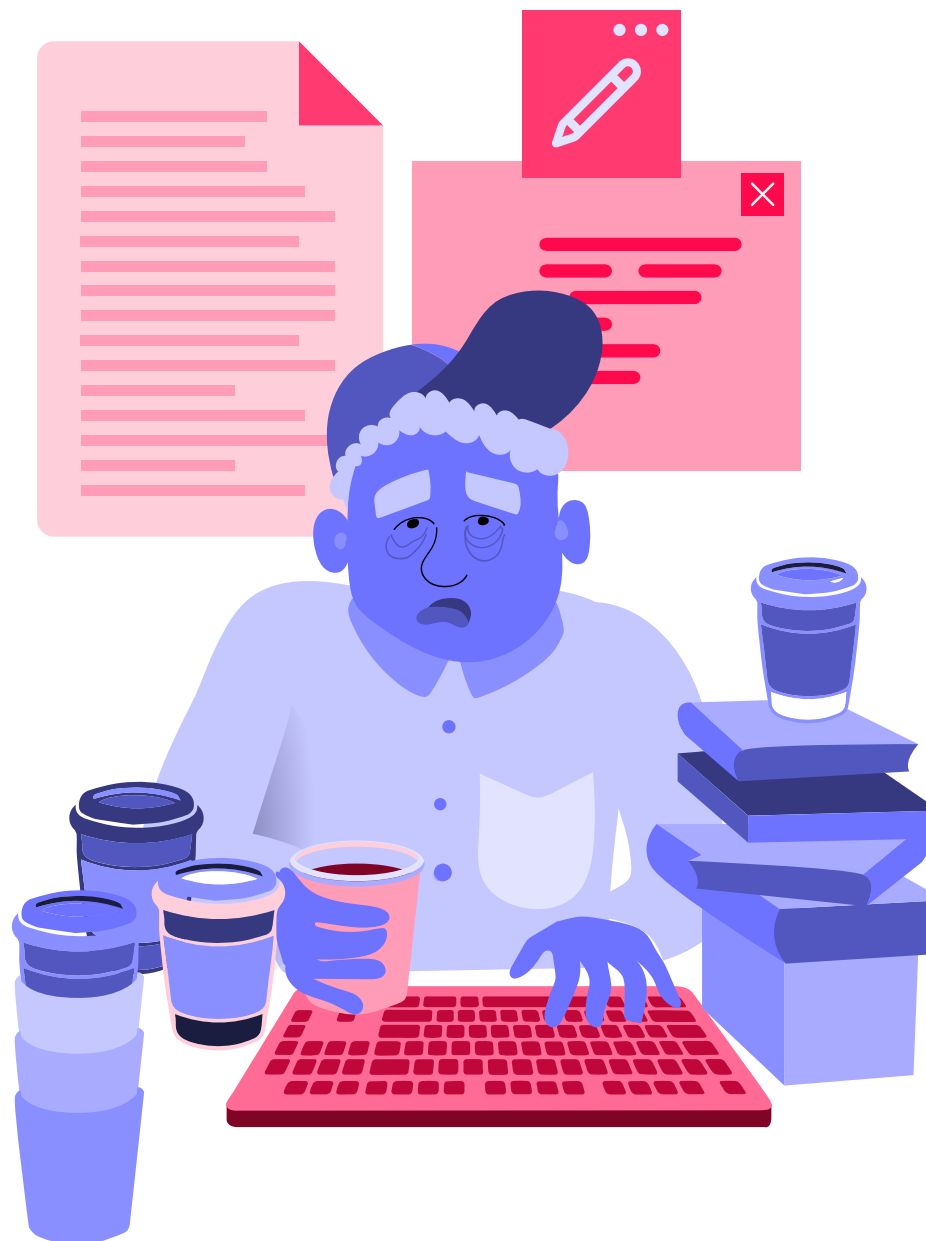
Introduction

Online remote (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.[4]

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.[5]

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

A growing body of research has noted the increasing prominence of this new global labour market, although measuring it can be challenging. Previous research estimated the online workforce in 2020 to be around 163 million, although this number could be higher due to the limits of current measurement efforts.[6] The ILO mapped 283 *web-based platforms* in its 2021 *Work Employment Outlook*,[7] 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*."[8]

There is a high level of concentration in cloudwork, with a few powerful companies dominating the market, and most of these are located in global centres of power – especially the United States.[9] 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.[10] Many of the workers from the Global South, included in our

2021 report,[11] highlighted challenges of discrimination on the basis of geography.[12]

These work arrangements are also characterised by uncertain 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 (for example, tasks involving exposure to distressing and/or violent content), lack of transparency in management systems (usually operated by automated, algorithmic means), and difficult dispute resolution processes, which often shift the balance of power towards clients.[5]

Another major problem is unpaid labour. Our 2022 report[13] revealed that on average, workers spent over 8.5 hours per week on platforms doing 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.

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. For the third yearly report, we present an evaluation of prominent cloudwork platforms – 15 leading web-based platforms were scored on a scale from 1 to 10. This year we added an African platform based in Nigeria called Terawork, and another from the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region called Elharefa. This decision is part of an effort to balance world-leading platforms with a diverse set of regional-leading companies.

The results show that the road towards fairness in cloudwork is still long. For a significant portion of platforms scored, we could not get evidence of basic standards of fairness, such as 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 resources, taking effective measures against discrimination, recognising workers' free association, and more.

In addition to the findings, our report highlights the challenges of workers behind the race for AI systems development. Millions of workers are registered on microworker platforms like Appen, Clickworker, and Amazon

Mechanical Turk, which provide services such as data annotation, labelling, mining, sentiment analysis, and video scoring for AI and tech companies.

This year's platform in focus is ComeUp, a French freelance platform. ComeUp (formerly called 5Euros) was created with a unique operational model wherein workers announce their services and choose among the proposals offered by clients. ComeUp has implemented important changes to meet the Fairwork cloudwork principles, such as a minimum wage policy.

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) through 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, like Uber, Bolt, and DiDi, the food and last-mile delivery sector like Deliveroo, Glovo, and Postmates, and 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 through a digital labour platform we call *cloudwork*.[14]

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. So 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 on 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, AI 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.
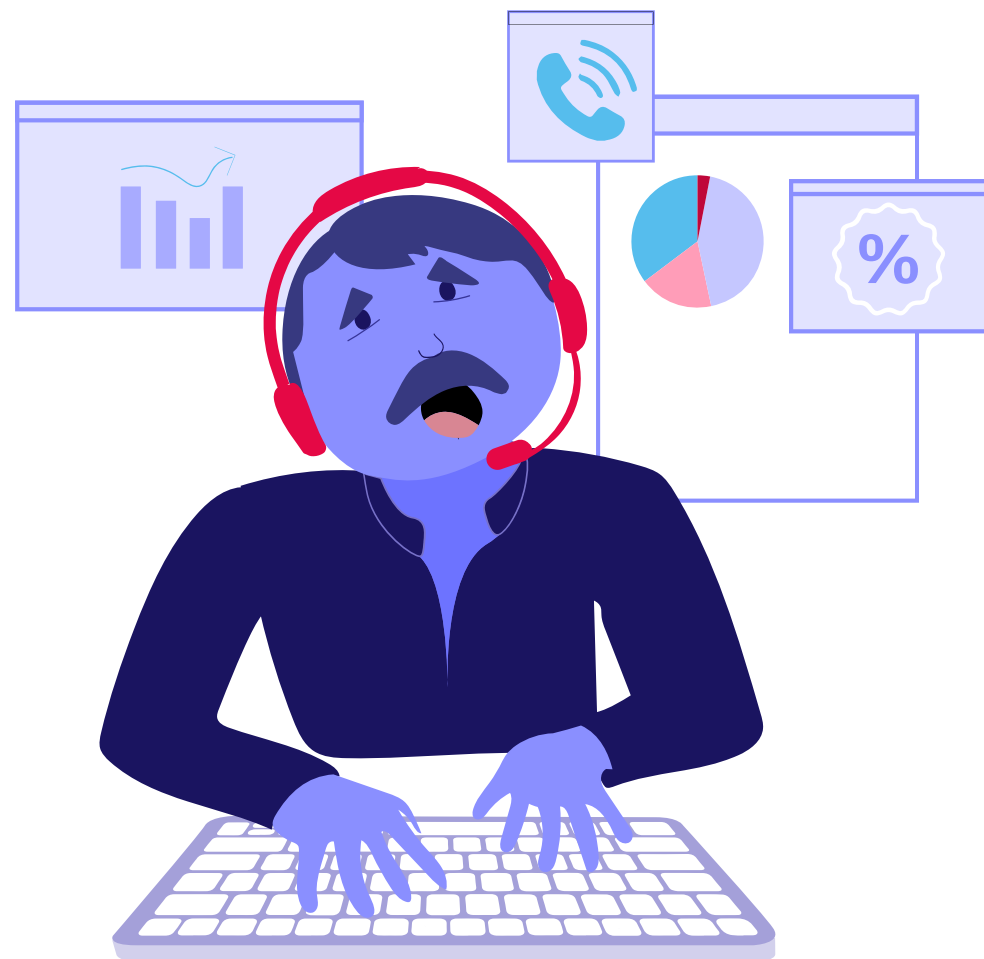
The Fairwork Project

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 in the United Kingdom, and at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center in Germany, and is financed by, among others, 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 multi-stakeholder 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 the Appendix.

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 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 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 that 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 that 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 third report, we present data collected between February and May 2023. For the global platforms we sampled up to 60 workers per platform, with a relatively even distribution of workers by continent. For the regional platforms, we sampled at least 30 workers per platform from that region. After cleaning the data, we were left with responses from 752 workers in 94 countries. These responses constituted part of the evidence 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 United Kingdom's minimum wage. For nine platforms, we recruited all participants through the platform interface, implementing measures to ensure confidentiality of participants' responses. For one platform where that was not possible or practicable, the management actively circulated a link to our survey. On another platform, we joined an official worker's forum and circulated our survey there. For three platforms, we recruited via public forums (on social media like Reddit and Facebook). 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 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 were decided collectively by the core Fairwork team and based on all three forms of evidence. The scores were then peer-reviewed by three members of the wider Fairwork team at the University of Oxford, 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 2023

Minimum standards of fair work

Platform	Score											
ComeUp	05/10	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	
Prolific	05/10	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	
Terawork	05/10	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	
Appen	03/10	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
SoyFreelancer	02/10	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Upwork	02/10	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Clickworker	01/10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Elharefa	01/10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Fiverr	01/10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
PeoplePerHour	01/10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Scale/Remotasks	01/10	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Amazon MTurk	00/10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Freelancer	00/10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Microworkers	00/10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Workana	00/10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

How platforms performed on the five principles

As the report's league table shows, the platforms we scored remain far from safeguarding the basic standards of fair work expressed in our five principles. Three platforms (ComeUp, Prolific, and Terawork) scored 5, while none of the other 12 platforms scored more than 3 points, and for four of them we were unable to find sufficient evidence that these companies meet any of our 10 thresholds.

Fair Pay

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

Threshold 1.1 (related to systems in place to ensure that workers were paid in a timely manner for all the work they completed) was the one where the highest number of platforms received a point: six (ComeUp, Clickworker, Prolific, SoyFreelancer, Terawork, and Upwork). The mechanisms assessed included systems and rules to guard against unfair rejections of work by clients, as well as other instances of non-payment. The six platforms adopted escrow systems[15] in which requesters need to make a deposit before the job begins. When a dispute occurs, a platform mediation team will analyse the claims and the platform will, or will not, release the payment depending on the decision of the mediation team.

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

This point was awarded to two platforms: ComeUp and Terawork. As a result of their engagement with our team, these two companies adopted changes to ensure that workers earn a local minimum wage, as well as a time estimate to be provided to workers before the job is accepted that is still uncommon amongst cloudwork platforms. One platform (Workana) also institutionalised a system to ensure workers earn at least their local minimum wage. Unfortunately though, this year we were unable to get evidence that Workana met all the conditions of threshold 1.1, and as such, we were unable to award a point for 1.2. Another platform (Appen) also provided evidence about a minimum wage policy, but we could not award the point since 1.1 was not awarded.

Fair Conditions

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

Four platforms were awarded points in this threshold about measures to avoid unreasonable levels of competition between workers, and overwork. For ComeUp, Appen, Prolific, and Scale/Remotasks, our research was able to find policies and mechanisms in place to promote job availability, for instance by limiting the sign-ups of new workers (Prolific and Workana), and to reduce unpaid time spent searching for tasks (Appen). In Scale/Remotasks, a team monitors workers' profile characteristics and qualifications to suggest new jobs to them.

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

Out of the four platforms awarded 2.1, two received an additional point for threshold 2.2. In the cases of Appen and Prolific, we were able to get evidence that they had measures in place to mitigate risks to workers which arise from the nature of their work (that 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, Prolific's policies prohibit abusive and violent behaviour and guide requesters from adding in their job "anything you think the participant might be uncomfortable doing". Appen has a *Global Ethical Sourcing and Modern Slavery Policy* that addresses aspects related to risks associated with work, such as trafficking, forced labour and safety.

Fair Contracts

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

Three platforms (ComeUp, Prolific, and Terawork) were awarded a point for this threshold. The research found contracts (including 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 get evidence that they provided prior notice to workers of changes to their contracts which would meaningfully affect them. ComeUp and Terawork were exceptions. Following the conversation with our team, both platforms amended their policies to add a 30-day previous notice about contract changes before these come into effect. Prolific had already implemented this policy last year.

In addition, for the majority of platforms studied, we were unable to get evidence that their terms and conditions were free of wording that requires workers to waive their right to reasonable legal recourse against the platform — such as extensive limitations of the platforms' liability or class action waivers.

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

Of the three platforms that met threshold 3.1, two platforms were awarded an additional point (Prolific and Terawork). We were able to verify that they 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 consequences for their standing or reputation on the platform. Terawork adopted changes to guide requesters to inform workers about how the work will be used.

Fair Management

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

We were able to get evidence that six platforms met all our criteria for threshold 4.1. ComeUp, Elharefa, Fiverr, Peopleperhour, SoyFreelancer, and Terawork had policies governing disciplinary actions against their 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. Terawork implemented changes to enhance workers' rights to explanations and appeals in disciplinary actions. For instance, Fiverr's terms present the customer support channel and explain in multiple sections (orders, disputes and resolution) how work rejections can be appealed.

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

We were unable to award points for 4.2 to any of the platforms we studied this year. We were able to get evidence that 11 platforms had anti-discrimination policies: Appen, Clickworker, ComeUp, Fiverr, Freelancer.com, Prolific, SoyFreelancer, Scale/Remotasks, Terawork, Upwork, and Workana. Of those, ComeUp and Terawork included anti-discrimination rules in their policies this year as a result of their engagement with our team.

We were unable to verify that the studied platforms made information available to workers about how work is allocated, including when algorithms are used. Only a few platforms (ComeUp, Fiverr, Terawork, and Workana) disclosed information about these criteria, however, we weren't able to find sufficient evidence to confirm that these platforms would submit substantive changes to worker consultation before they are adopted.

Fair Representation

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

Recognition and engagement with collective workers' bodies is difficult among the platforms we scored as only two platforms this year were awarded this point (Appen, and Upwork). In its *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement,* Upwork platform lists as a principle: "We recognise the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining". Freedom of association is also recognised in Appen's *Global Ethical Sourcing and Modern Slavery Policy*.

Clickworker has subscribed to the *Crowdsourcing/Crowdworking* Code of Conduct, a self-regulated industry standard.[16] Platforms that subscribe to the code commit to engage with workers' associations, among other things. However, the code is not easily available to workers, and we invite platforms to communicate the code to all their workers.

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

We were unable to award this point to any platform in our study this year. We were unable to find any evidence of platforms recognising workers' collective bodies, informing workers of their existence, and bargaining with them. Neither were we able to find evidence of platforms communicating to workers their willingness to recognise or bargain with a collective body, were one to exist.
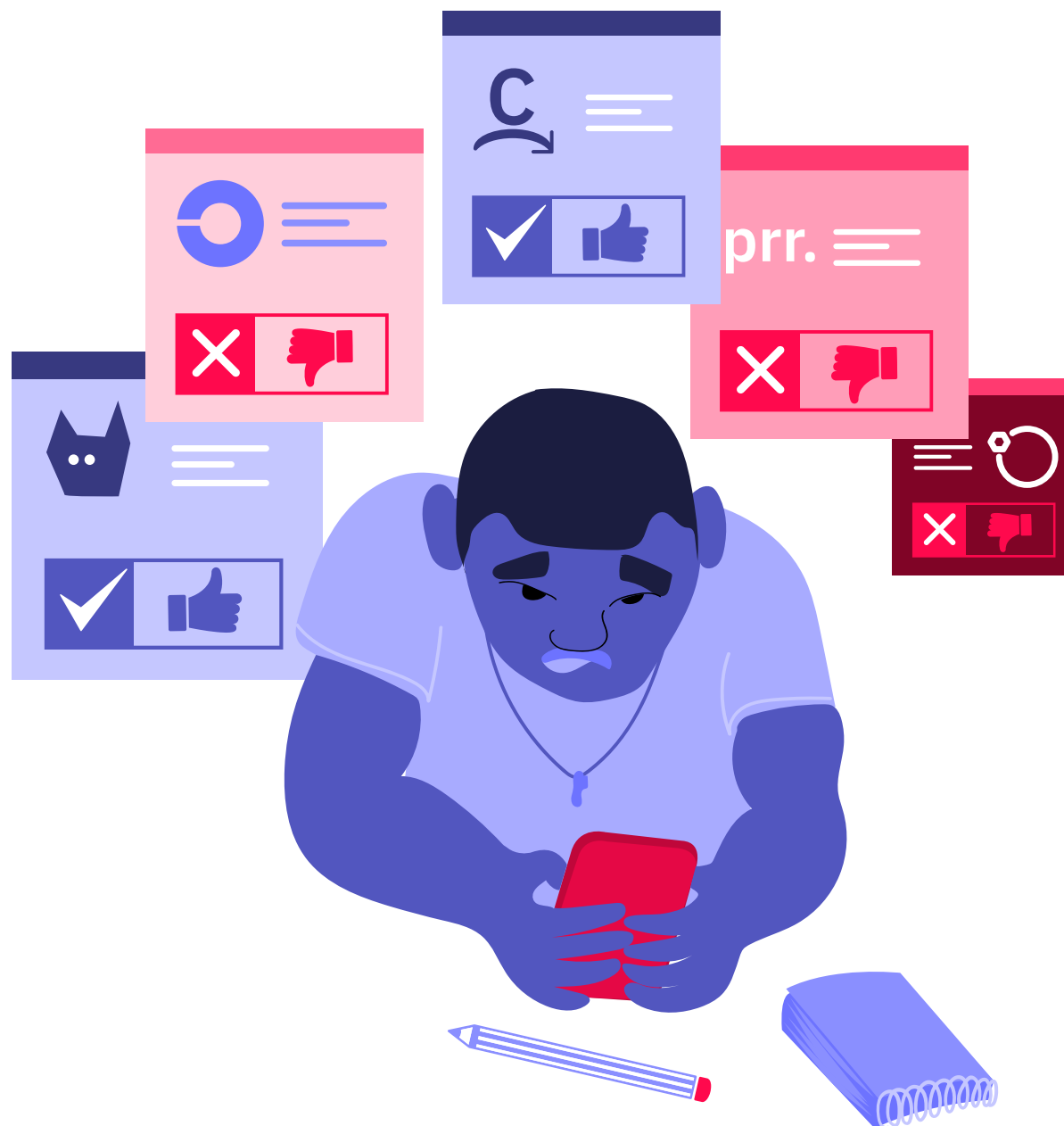
Scores breakdown

Scores awarded to the platforms in this study (further explanations for points awarded are available at: fair.work/cloudwork).

	Appen	Clickworker	ComeUp	Elharefa	Fiverr	Freelancer	Microworkers	MTurk	PeoplePerHour	Prolific	SoyFreelancer	Scale/Remotasks	Terawork	Upwork	Workana
Principle 1: Fair Pay															
1.1 Workers are paid on time and for all completed work (one point)		■	■							■	■		■	■	
1.2 Workers are paid at least the local minimum wage			■										■		
Principle 2: Fair Conditions															
2.1 Precarity and overwork are mitigated (one point)	■		■							■		■			
2.2 Healthy and safety risks are mitigated (one point)	■									■					
Principle 3: Fair Contracts															
3.1 Clear terms and conditions are available (one point)			■							■			■		
3.2 Contracts are consistent with the workers' terms of engagement (one point)										■			■		
Principle 4: Fair Management															
4.1 There is due process for decisions affecting workers (one point)			■	■	■				■		■		■		
4.2 There is equity in the management process (one point)															
Principle 5: Fair Representation															
5.1 Workers have access to representation, and freedom of association (one point)	■													■	
5.2 There is collective governance or bargaining (one point)															

PLATFORM IN FOCUS:
ComeUp

ComeUp is a French digital labour platform founded in 2013, offering a wide range of online services related to graphic design, writing, audio-visual services, web development, social media, business, information technologies, health, and training.

The company was initially named *5Euros*, with a business model characterized by a starting value of EUR 5 to be charged by all workers, for providing at least 1 service. In 2022, the company rebranded, changing its name to *ComeUp*. This year, the company started to operate in English-speaking markets with its new brand.

The company built a model where the freelancer chooses the services they offer, their prices, and deadlines. Clients reach out to them and place orders for services directly.

Last year as 5Euros, the platform received 2/10 in Fairwork's ratings. This year, with its new branding and operational model, the platform received 5/10.

Our research found evidence that ComeUp met the Fairwork criteria for thresholds 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1.

We found evidence of mechanisms to ensure workers are paid on time, and for all completed work. Job availability is promoted by the company's operational model (based on the worker's decision to choose among client offers, rather than searching for jobs), and in actions to give visibility also to newcomers on the platform.

ComeUp implemented several changes this year following conversations with our research team. A very relevant conversation was the institution of a minimum wage policy, translated in a clause in its terms of service and in its FAQ available on the company's website.

In line with Fairwork principle 2, the company added to its terms of service clauses, explicitly listing abusive and threatening behaviour among the conduct subject to sanctions. Moreover, according to the terms,

"any behaviour that may be considered unethical or abusive will be investigated by our moderation team, and dealt with according to their investigation".

An outlier from most platforms scored this year, ComeUp does not have a privacy policy, but specific privacy clauses in its terms of service. These clauses only partially cover data protection issues such as the right to opposition, right to access, security and collections methods.

Our research has accessed clear and available terms, which can be found on the company's website. The terms were also amended to ensure 30 days previous notice of contract changes, one of the threshold 3.1 guidelines. The updates will be shared through notifications, newsletters and the company's discord forum.

The platform has communication channels, a help centre and forums, with workers where claims and demands can be presented. Penalties are documented, and the dispute resolution processes are explained to workers, and can be used by those who have been deactivated.

Following engagement with our research team, the platform added an anti-discrimination policy to its terms "A member agrees not to discriminate against any other user, on the basis of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other basis. Such discrimination can lead to 'deletion of the account and all its affiliated data' and 'banning of the member's IP address' (see article 11, *Sanctions for more information*)".

The platform's FAQ explains the criteria adopted by the algorithm used to exhibit

workers' profiles. But our team could not find evidence that the substantial changes to methods to allocate work are subject to workers' consultation.

Regarding representation, the research could not find evidence that 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, nor could our research identify that the platform publicly and formally recognises an independent collective body of workers, an elected works council or trade union, or that it has not refused to participate in collective representation, or bargaining, with new workers being are advised of the existence of this body, and of how to join.

THEME IN FOCUS

Poor conditions and the work behind AI development

The adoption of AI in organisations more than doubled in

2022

compared to 2017

The development of AI technologies and the discussion about its consequences, exploded in the last years.[34] AI can be characterised as a set of technologies that "seeks to make computers do the sorts of things that minds can do".[35] AI systems are machine-based systems "that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments".[36]

From academic institutions to governments and public debate, AI has become a hot topic, with multiple analyses on how this field can impact society. Some authors propose the idea of AI "springs"[17] to highlight upsizing cycles of development. Others discuss what would be an "AI Hype"[18] to reflect on the possibilities and limits of AI social transformations.

The gained momentum also mobilised governments and parliaments across the globe to adopt strategies, policies and regulations to tackle problems related to the phenomenon,[19] such as in the United States, Europe, China, Japan and Brazil. International organisations have launched reports and guidelines recommendations about the theme.[20]

The adoption of AI in organisations more than doubled in 2022, compared with 2017. In a corporate survey, half of executives reported adopting AI in at least one business unit.[21] Last year, the most common uses of AI in companies were for service optimisation, the creation of new AI products and customer service analytics.

The repercussions of AI are also subject to controversies when it comes to the workplace. More pessimistic views point out the risks of significant job post substitution with automation and AI[22]. Other authors are more cautious about this impact and advocate for a more incremental and qualitative change.[23]

The concerns over the negative impacts of AI have been resulting in several approaches to deal with the phenomenon. One example is the growth of the "AI ethics" field[24]. Other are debates calling for a "human-centred AI[25] or "digital well-being".[26] The organisation Algorithm Watch mapped more than 170 sets of principles. But questions related to work still lack attention in most of these approaches and guidelines. Additionally, a significant part of these efforts has important limitations regarding their motives, approaches and effectiveness.[27]

Drawing from this concern, several initiatives arose to investigate and discuss solutions to the perils of AI in the workplace, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s programme on AI in work, innovation, productivity and skills.[28]

The Fairwork for AI principles, created by the Fairwork project, propose a set of principles to assess fairness in how these technologies are employed in the workplace.[29]

However, while automation, bias and other problems and the workplace have attained public attention, the massive work behind AI development is still subject to little scrutiny and public awareness. It has mainly been studied by platform work scholars as the labour modality defined as "microwork"[30] and related terms (such as crowdwork[31] or ghost work[32]), that can be defined as "small tasks performed on crowd work platforms".[33]

The *Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2023* assessed world-lead companies which offer
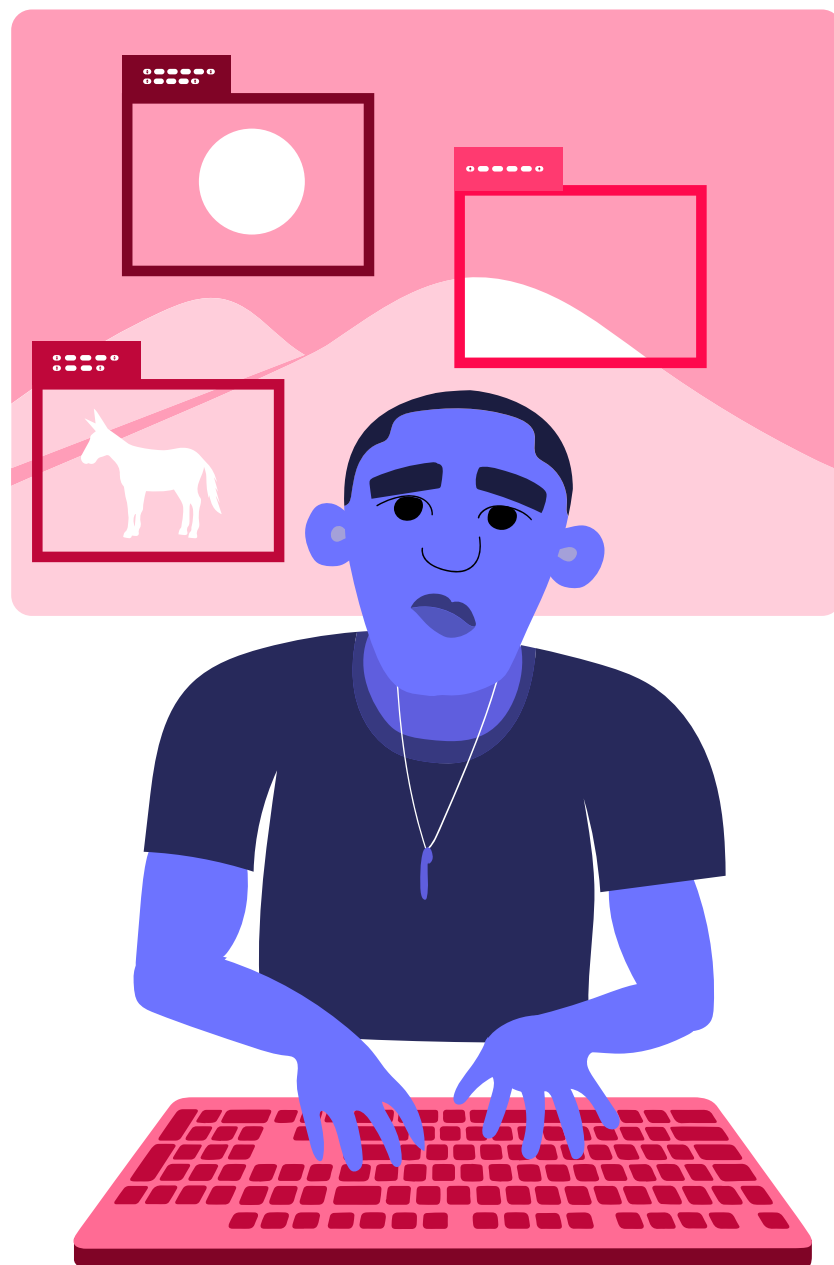
their workforce to a wide variety of clients, including prominent AI firms. Platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk, Appen, Clickworker, Microworkers, and ScaleAI (and its digital labour branch Remotasks) gather millions of workers available, or, as AMT defines it, "a global on-demand, 24×7 workforce".

Those platforms offer multiple services, such as data annotation, labelling, mining and validation, image tagging, sentiment analysis, model evaluation, video scoring, and content moderation, among others. Among its clients are the world's leading AI companies, such as Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Nvidia. In addition, traditional freelancer platforms also started to offer data services, used in AI development, such as Upwork, Freelancer. com, and Fiverr.

This year's report shows that microworkers keep facing precarious conditions and challenges related to multiple aspects covered by our principles and thresholds. As our league table shows, microwork platforms have some of the worst results: Appen (3), Clickworker (1), Scale/Ramotasks (1), Microworkers (0), and MTurk (0).

For instance, for only one of those platforms (Clickworker), we found evidence that workers are paid on time and for all completed work (threshold 1.1). Still, regarding pay, the research team found no evidence on these companies about minimum wage policies.

Surveyed microworkers earned on average more than doubled in

$2.15

USD an hour

Furthermore, none of the microwork platforms received any points for relevant principles such as fair contracts, fair management and fair representation.

Considering the 250 workers surveyed that work for these platforms, the report's survey found that they spent, on average, 23 hours and 30 minutes on the platforms. Out of this time, workers dedicated 17 hours and 12 minutes to paid tasks and 6 hours and 18 minutes to unpaid tasks (26.85%). These unpaid activities were, primarily, looking for clients or jobs (38.4%), taking unpaid qualifying tests (28%) and applying for jobs (12.4%).

Workers made an average of $50.30 USD per week on these platforms. Considering the average working hours reported, this group of surveyed workers earned an average of $2.15 USD an hour. It is important to stress that our pool of respondents for microwork platforms included 51 countries, and that currencies and costs vary significantly between these. Still, the findings shed light on the persistent problem of low pay on the platforms.

This challenge was mentioned by workers. A microworker based in the United Kingdom commented: "I like to complete the tasks on the platform that pay well for my responses and time, but the majority of the time, the tasks are very poorly paid for my time and effort. So it's a bit discouraging."

Workers shared their claims for better pay on the platforms, revealing frustration with their current earnings situation. A South African microworker said: "I would be more satisfied if I were paid fairly given the number of hours I work on it daily." A Serbian respondent added: "I would be happy if I can have some kind of hourly wage."

Another critique shared was related to the platform's fees, not only per task but also for other transactions such as payment withdrawals. "The platform takes a big percentage of pay from jobs for themselves, in my opinion", complained a microworker from Croatia.

Some workers mentioned difficulties in finding jobs. "The experience is becoming frustrating due to fewer and fewer job opportunities, especially since the change in the platform strategies and subscription plans", declared a microworker from Morocco. "People rarely accept proposals. I send out proposals but people don't respond to them", complained a Pakistan microworker.

Some platforms have requirements to access some tasks, which are normally used by the same platforms in their data services adopted in AI development. These requirements were seen as a barrier by some workers, such as one microworker based in the United States: "Finding work is very difficult and qualifications are difficult to understand and get." An Indonesian microworker stated: "Qualifications are really strict and hard sometimes, so it often consumes more time."

The increase in competition in recent years was also flagged in the survey responses. "The number of projects has been steadily going down on this platform, along with compensation rates", declared one microworker from India.

Our survey also found reports of satisfactory experiences on these platforms. Usually, flexibility and the ability to make money from home were highlighted by microworkers as motives for their choice to join these digital labour platforms.

However, our findings and worker evidence suggest that there is a long road ahead to ensure basic standards of fair work for these millions of workers who are essential to the evolution of AI but remain mostly invisible to companies, policymakers, and society.
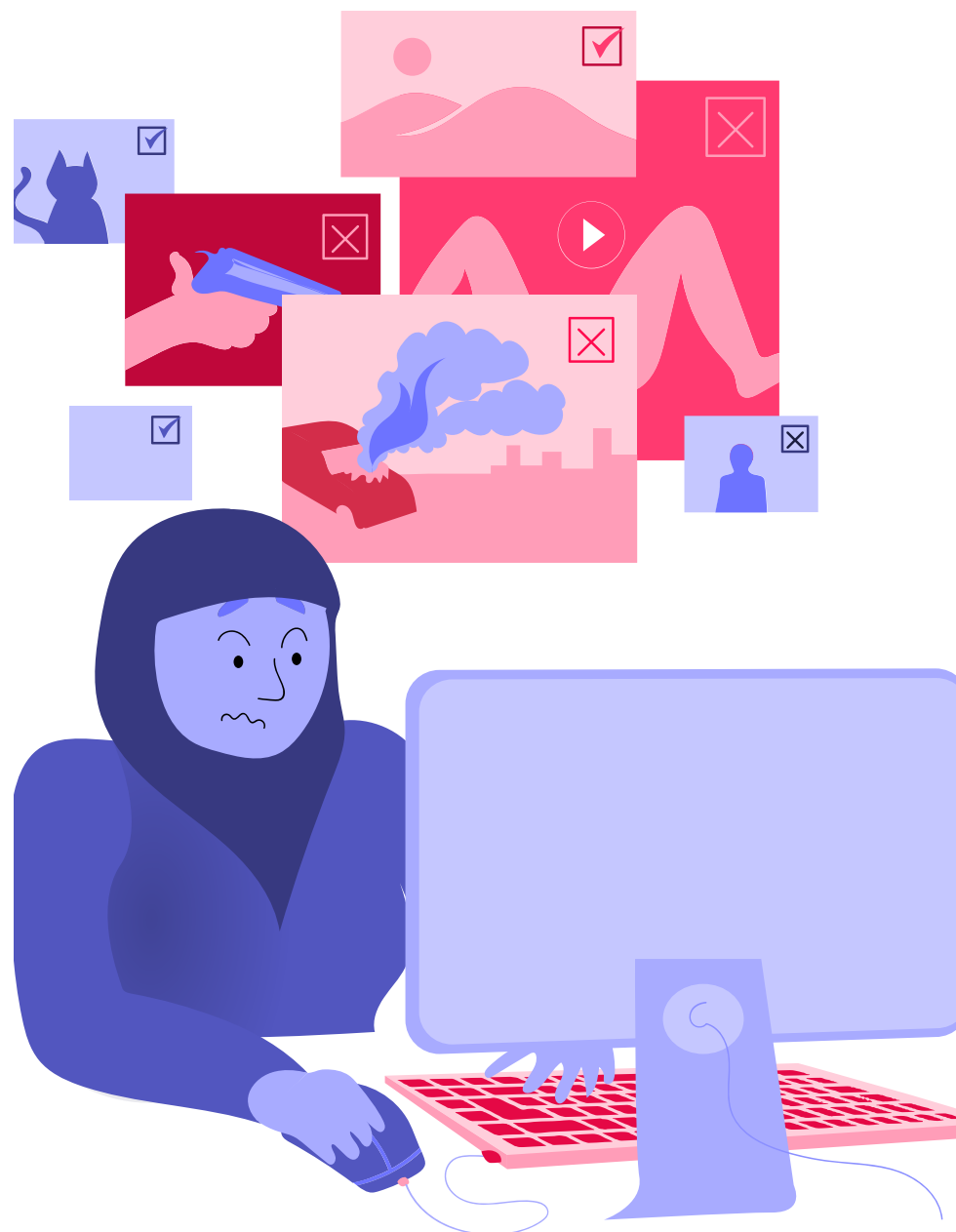
WORKERS' STORIES

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 disassemble and disconnect the work from its origin, that is, the worker — supporting the illusion that tasks are completed automatically. This lack of clarity can make it more difficult for solidarities to form among workers in the face of unfair working conditions; or for clients to relate to the conditions workers experience on the platforms. Making space for cloudworkers to tell their experiences is an important project for challenging unfairness. These stories are based on follow-up interviews with workers who completed our surveys. They are summaries of their words, but names and personal details have been changed to preserve the interviewees' anonymity.
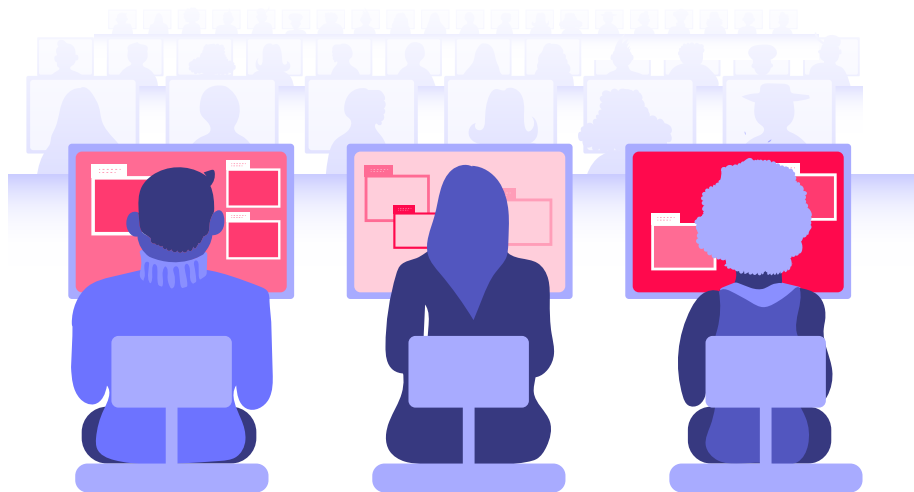
Isabella*, 28 years

Spain

Freelancer, Fiverr

I'm a freelance illustrator. I have a bachelor's degree in visual arts and I've done a two-year course on digital painting. I first started working as a freelancer during the summer of 2020. I got my degree during the pandemic, and since I couldn't start my internship, I decided to start freelance working during that period of time. The first platforms I started using were Fiverr and Freelancer – that I'm still using today – with Fiverr being my main source of income.

Since the beginning of my online career, I've tried to focus on offering small services that are a bit on the cheaper side but are quicker to complete. Currently, I've tried to diversify my offers to get as many customers as possible, focusing on creating content for social media. I create illustrations for YouTube and Twitch banners, icons, emotes, and so on, and these are the content that usually gets the most attention.

It has always been very challenging to get noticed on this kind of platform because there's a lot of competition and keeping your work at the top of the search engine without having to pay the site has always been very difficult. I tried my best to use some marketing tactics to better promote my gigs, but unfortunately, as a small artist, I've never been able to make a living just out of this. Lately, I've also noticed a very drastic decrease in the number of customers after the recent boom of AI technologies and such.

For the earnings, the site keeps 20% of every commission plus a $2.00[37] flat rate for every order (paid by the customer). I have never had a problem getting paid, but I did have a problem with conversion: the site automatically converted dollars into euros when sending them to my PayPal account, and very often, the exchange rate was much worse than the current one. It was very difficult to deactivate this function, I had to actually contact support to do it.

The site handles disputes very poorly, unfortunately; a customer scammed me once by claiming that the order was not how he wanted it and refused to pay after receiving the finished piece. I contacted support, sending them the screenshots where the customer had greenlighted the final rendering, but they replied by simply stating that they would not get involved, and my

I think this kind of policy is very dehumanising because it really feels like creators are disposable for Fiverr, despite being the ones that keep the site alive. I think a 20% fee should be more than enough to ask for a bit of protection from the site, especially in cases where I have solid proof of everything (agreed with the client).

Other than that, I like the freedom that this platform has given me, and I like how straightforward everything is. I get to talk directly with my customers about the work and I can follow them throughout the entire process, making everything much more transparent and simpler.

My main problem with the platform is that, as shown from my experience with customer support, I really hold no power at all: the site could even decide to randomly ban my account and I would just lose three years of work without being able to do anything about it.

> " **My main problem with the platform is that, as shown from my experience with customer support, I really hold no power at all: the site could even decide to randomly ban my account and I would just lose three years of work without being able to do anything about it.**

As to what to improve or change, I would feel much better if I had an actual support system in place that would give me the opportunity to advocate for myself in a dispute and give me a fair chance of getting at least a partial compensation out of it.

choices were to either negotiate with the customer or delete the order, which meant receiving no money at all. In the end, I had no other choice but to accept the latter since the person refused to communicate, which meant I lost a significant amount of money and the customer still stole my work.

Other policies I quite dislike are the censorship function in the customer's chat (words such as pay, cost, for example, get you an automatic reminder about company policies) and the fact that the orders get started automatically whenever the customer clicks on it, and I have no way to review it or decide to accept it or not.

Amanda*, 26 years

Brazil

Microworker, Amazon Mechanical Turk

I was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I graduated from high school and have technical training in nursing, but I do not work in the area. I currently work on the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform, where I started in mid-2019. I remember that I got to know the platform through YouTube. At the time, I was having trouble finding work in my area of training. So, I started researching ways to make money online. I learned about how the platform worked and since then I continued to work on it.

Most of the jobs available on the platform are research from academic institutions, but there are several types of jobs available as well, like visiting a growing company's website or assessing the quality of some text or image. It has microtasks that consist of simple things like typing a few words or numbers. Overall, the platform has multiple forms of earnings.

Lately, the platform has been a little bad at having good jobs. Because many of the applicants who offer jobs on the platform are disappearing. This year in 2023, many clients left the platform because they are having problems with the new platform guidelines. So, the job demand is pretty low.

Regarding my earnings on the platform, it is very practical. It has a panel where it shows all the work carried out. It shows how much each job pays; it also shows the amount of time I worked on it. I never had difficulties with the payment. I can program the days I prefer to receive, and the payment method as well. There is a gift card available to use on the website or receive money directly to my personal bank account.

I rarely contact platform support. But I've heard they're not great at solving other workers' issues. There is a job qualification called master's qualification on the platform, but I don't know how to get it. Most high-paying jobs require this qualification, and I have no idea how to earn this qualification. No one knows exactly why it exists and why the platform doesn't release it to platform workers, and that bothers a lot.

Another aspect that causes me great discomfort is the fact that most jobs are not available to people from my home country of Brazil. It's a significant amount of work that is only available to other countries. And by the looks of it, those other workers who have the opportunity to work in these services, don't do it, because they say they pay too little, or it's too much work for low pay. It pisses me off so much because I wanted to have the same opportunity to work on these tasks and my country is not available to do them. I believe that this is even a bit of prejudice with countries in South America.

Apart from all these conflicts that unfortunately exist on the platform, I think it is still the best online independent work platform out there. The ease and practicality of working on it after understanding how it works is wonderful. It has several tools available that help to have more productivity and commitment to the platform.

One of my biggest issues on the platform is the lack of communication with platform support. I feel like the platform doesn't care much about their workers. I often think that the company itself, Amazon, does not aim to improve the platform, and this affects my productivity and earnings. They lack empathy.

The platform urgently needs new updates. A new design and new jobs available, mainly for the countries of South America. They could also make new work tools available to increase the earnings and productivity of each worker. They could remove this mysterious Master's qualification, since its existence on the platform only gets in the way. Increasing the value of some jobs available would be a good idea too because these jobs come every day and only pay $0.02 USD and are usually complex jobs that require effort to be carried out. I think these are the main improvements Amazon Mechanical Turk could make, the quality of work would be great for me and many other workers.

Maitha*, 31 years

Lebanon

Freelancer, Upwork

I was born and raised as an expatriate. After completing my bachelor's in engineering, I moved to the United Kingdom for about three years, where I pursued my Master's in engineering management. Around the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, I decided to move to another city to be with my family due to the peaking cases everywhere. It was during this time that I came across Upwork.

While I signed up on the platform, I eventually got placed in a permanent job and got busy with work. It was only in late 2021 when I was looking to start earning a side income, outside of my full-time 9–5, that I recollected my profile on Upwork. I immediately logged in to my account, completed my profile and started applying for gigs.

My first job on the platform involved working with a team to edit and publish a book. I take up jobs related to virtual assistance on the platform. My activities range from client communication, account management, proofreading, and transcription to document formatting, research, Canva support and so on. You name it, and I'll get it done in the best possible way.

In terms of the process, freelancers generally buy Connects and submit proposals (in exchange for a certain number of *Connects*) to jobs posted by clients on Upwork. Clients then go through submitted proposals, evaluate cover letters, profiles, and rates and then get in touch with shortlisted freelancers for an interview.

Back when I started 18 months ago, the entire proposal process was comparatively simpler with the average competition. It was easier to submit proposals and get selected by clients. However, at present, the competition has increased multifold and it's honestly been next to impossible for me to even go through the initial selection stage.

I attribute this humongous competition to the inflow of more freelancers into Upwork and the bidding process wherein freelancers can boost proposals for additional Connects, and so placing their profiles on the top of the candidate list. About the earnings, I initially started with a $5.00 USD hourly rate on the platform and have now gone up to charging about $8.00 USD for an hour of work. I believe this is good progress in 18 months.

With respect to clients, I particularly submit and work with people only after doing extensive research on their profiles. I usually go through their previous reviews and hiring rates to ensure they have a verified payment method beforehand. This effort from my side has allowed me to have no major issues with any client. I also ensure to discuss deliverables and timelines prior to starting work on any project. Upwork does have a process whereby either party can raise a dispute about any issue, followed by the platform looking into it. Thankfully, I haven't had to deal with any such dispute on the platform.

Something I particularly like about Upwork is the Time Tracker that takes screenshots of freelancers' work every 10 minutes. This is very helpful for clients to monitor freelancers and is helpful at the time of disputes. What I personally have not been a fan of is the bidding system. It doesn't make too much sense to me. I've come across proposals where freelancers spam the system and bid a large number of Connects to win jobs. Another thing I don't like are the fake jobs that get posted on the platform. With experience, it becomes easy to spot fake jobs, and I hope freelancers don't end up wasting their Connects on fake or scam jobs. Sometimes despite reporting these types of jobs, Upwork doesn't end up removing them. I only hope the platform figures out a better way to avoid such fake/scam jobs from being posted in the future.

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 United States. 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.

Gigpedia[38]

Gigpedia provides an overview of available information about the global platform economy. You will find information about existing legislation, court cases and ratings of labour standards for specific platforms.

Wage Indicator[39]

The WageIndicator Foundation is a global non-profit organisation working with different other organisations to gather and disclose information on actual wages, minimum wages, living wages, labour laws, gig and platform work, and collective agreements. The organisation provides labour market information for 206 countries through more than 200 websites in more than 50 languages.

Turkopticon[40]

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[41]

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

Unions defending crowdworkers[42]

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

Crowdsource Wage Pledge[43]

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[44]

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 cloud-work platforms in 2020, some important changes have been promoted by these companies to improve working conditions and strengthen the work standards.

This year, several platforms implemented changes to different principles and thresholds. Two platforms implemented minimum wage policies and other measures were adopted to address issues related to health and safety, contracts, management, and discrimination. In total, platforms adopted 17 changes in the last 12 months.

ComeUp

1.2 – The company implemented a minimum wage policy in its terms of service, introducing a guideline where the service prices must be above the minimum wage where the worker resides. The policy was added to the company's FAQ and to its training materials.

2.2 – The company amended its terms of use with clauses prohibiting abusive behaviour. Practices such as "sending threatening, insulting, or discriminatory messages to sellers" are now subject to penalties such as account deletion or members' IP address ban.

3.1 – ComeUp edited its terms, adding a 30-day previous notice to contract changes, in line with the threshold. The changes will be informed by multiple channels used by managers to communicate with workers.

4.2 – ComeUp added an anti-discrimination policy making it explicitly forbidden this kind of behaviour on the basis of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other basis.

Terawork

1.2 – Terawork implemented a minimum wage policy. The company introduced a guideline according to which payments must be equal or higher than the "minimum hourly, daily, weekly or monthly rate after deductions of relevant expenses incurred while delivering their jobs".

3.1 – The platform amended its terms of service to insert the provision of a 30-day notice before a contract change comes into effect.

3.2 – The platform updated the FAQ section with a guideline to encourage clients to inform workers how their work will be used.

4.1 – The platform had updated its terms of service, to avoid summary sanctions at its own discretion and added new procedures with an explanation of when disciplinary actions are taken and a period for workers to adjust or correct the content published or action taken to comply with the policies and avoid the penalty.

4.2 – The platform has amended its terms of service with an anti-discrimination policy. In addition, Terawork also updated its FAQ specifying the methods to allocate work.

Appen

2.1 – Appen reported improvements to manage job availability, including a revamped job board and features to limit the number of applicants when project rosters are filling up. In addition, workers have information on how they can access new projects if they update their profiles. Appen has also launched a mechanism that limits the number of tasks for workers. According to the company, the goal is to ensure task availability to a broad range of individuals. In addition, the platform informed that it checks data and invoices to assess if workers may be "overworking".

4.1 – Appen reported the introduction of new clauses in its policies, to make the appeal process less arduous. Workers will be able to join arbitration in the country closest to the worker and in other places if mutually agreed, and the company will pay initial costs (up to $500 USD) for this procedure.

5.1 – Appen informed a change in its terms to narrow rules on indemnification in a way that they do not restrict workers' rights to present claims that could configure a barrier to present demands to the platform.

SoyFreelancer

3.2 – The platform implemented project cancellation rules adding rights and guarantees to workers when they cancel their participation in a job for certain motives and in specific situations (such as bad working conditions, problems in communication with the client, tasks not agreed upon initially, or compelling circumstances).

4.1 – The company documented the appeal process in its general terms and conditions, explaining how workers can appeal different situations related to pay or other problems in the platform. An email channel is provided for workers to submit their claims.

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, certainly the cloudwork economy will continue to grow. However, on most cloudwork platforms, costs are externalised and risks transferred to workers — saving clients money but leaving workers vulnerable.

As more and more workers from a large variety of sectors and professions become absorbed 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.[45] 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, the ILO approved the discussion of minimum standards for workers on digital labour platforms in its 2025 conference (see Editorial). 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.

The *Fairwork Cloudwork Ratings 2023* 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.

This finding is a powerful reminder that precarity and insecurity aren'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. Platforms that 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 working conditions on their platforms. Following constructive dialogue with our researchers, four 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 will hopeful takeaway from the

> **"**
> **Legislation on global supply chains, may provide a point of regulatory leverage to consider and improve cloudworkers' pay and conditions.**

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Figure 1: Fairwork's Pathways to Change
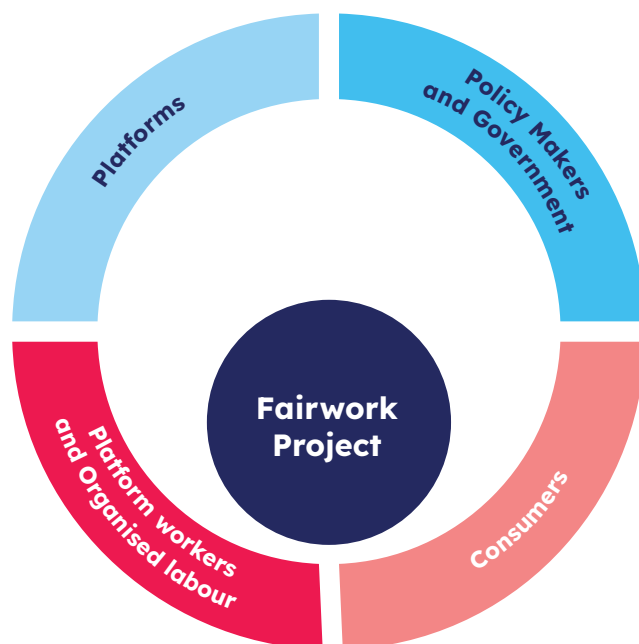
aforementioned platforms' willingness to listen to feedback and improve and recognise that we are still in a moment of possibility in the development of the cloudwork economy, and that these institutions are not yet characterised by high levels of inertia and path dependency. Just as cloudwork platforms can nimbly enter and exit markets, and can nimbly evade regulations, they can also 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 show 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 out of 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 (for example, translation, transcription or data entry and cleaning services) through digital platforms. For academic institutions, research ethics bodies, in particular, may increasingly be involved in decisions around research involving cloudworkers.

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

FAIR.WORK/PLEDGE

Fairwork
Official Partner
Together for Fair Platform Work

> **"**
> **The Fairwork pledge covers more than 500,000 workers around the world.**

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 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and the ILO (International Labour Organization) 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.[46]

- 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. For piece-rate work: The vast majority of workers earn at least their local minimum wage after costs[47], and

2. 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.[48]

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.[49]

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.[50]

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

- Refusal of offered tasks by workers does not badly 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 actions, including reductions in their rating/platform standing, non-payment, work rejections, penalties, account blocks, deactivation and any other disciplinary actions.

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

- The process for workers to appeal 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[51,52]

- 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

notably the Fairwork Framework, parts of the Impact and Pathway to Change section, and the Appendix.

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.

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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 favour of the worker.

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

47 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 United Kingdom 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 = $F = (M \div 0.83A)$.

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.

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

49 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.

50 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.

51 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.

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

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