

# Work 4.0, Technology, Labour and Employment in the 21st Century

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**Labour in contemporary capitalism: what next?**

Ursula Huws

Professor of Labour and Globalisation,  
University of Hertfordshire  
*u.huws@herts.ac.uk*

# Some pitfalls facing the futurologist of work

- Assumption that trends are linear (or even teleological)
- Difficulty in seeing beyond the boundaries of the existing industrial landscape
- Zero sum game fallacies
- Focus on disappearing jobs without spotting newly emerging ones - partly related to problems of definition, measurement and quantification (Or sometimes the opposite).
- Failure to take account of the ways in which trends may be shaped by resistance and reaction as well as unexpected new applications (positive or negative) of innovations (few tools to deal with contradictions)
- Tendency towards Utopian/Dystopian polarisations

# The current global context

- A global division of labour (migration of people and migration of jobs)
- Concentration of capital and growing dominance of MNCs
- Global spread of ICTs
- Decline of normative 20th century post-WW2 model of stable employment
- Economic crisis of 2008 followed by austerity and major restructuring
- New waves of commodification based on (*inter alia*): biology, art and culture, commercialisation of public services, sociality
- Restructuring of capital (often using new technologies, eg automation, substitution of goods for services, new forms of work organisation)
- A proliferation of new terminology

# Restructuring both creates and destroys jobs and skills

## Risks of job losses/shifts

- Continuing shift of manufacturing industry to the Global South
- Automation (including 3D printing, drones, use of robots, other AI applications) may displace jobs in many sectors
- Growth of self-service leading to job losses in some service industries
- Threats to traditional retail from online shopping
- Outsourcing from both public and private sector to global companies may be associated with relocation of service jobs to Global South

## Potential job gains

- New manufacturing industries (to make the new means of production: robots, drones, 3D printers etc.)
- New industries based on bio-products
- New service industries related to new manufacturing industries
- Growth in outsourcing – especially from public sector
- Marketisation of household services
- Marketisation of sociality and culture
- Formalisation of the informal economy
- Hidden ‘housework’ of the online economy

# Confusing developments in discourse and the corporate landscape

- Crowdsourcing
- Workforce on demand
- Cloudsourcing
- Human cloud
- Sharing economy
- Digital labour
- Prosumption
- Co-creation
- Digital commons
- Peer-to-peer networking
- Playbour
- Mesh Economy
- Gig economy
- Liquid labour
- Platform capitalism
- Online talent platform
- Just-in-time workforce



# Digital management of work ('platformisation')

A convergence of existing trends, now reaching critical mass

- Use of online platforms for managing work
- Spread of 'just in time' working (including zero hours contracts)
- Standardisation and simplification of tasks ('taskification' of work processes)
- Digitalisation of tasks
- Use of data derived from online activities (including customer ratings) for setting targets and performance monitoring
- Expectation that workers will be available to check messages 24/7
- Multilocational working
- Migration of traditional freelance agencies online
- Migration of telephone directories online (from yellow pages to google)
- Evolution of global outsourcing of digital work – elaboration of value chains; growing role of intermediaries; centralisation of control combined with decentralisation of responsibility

# A survey to measure extent and characteristics of platform work

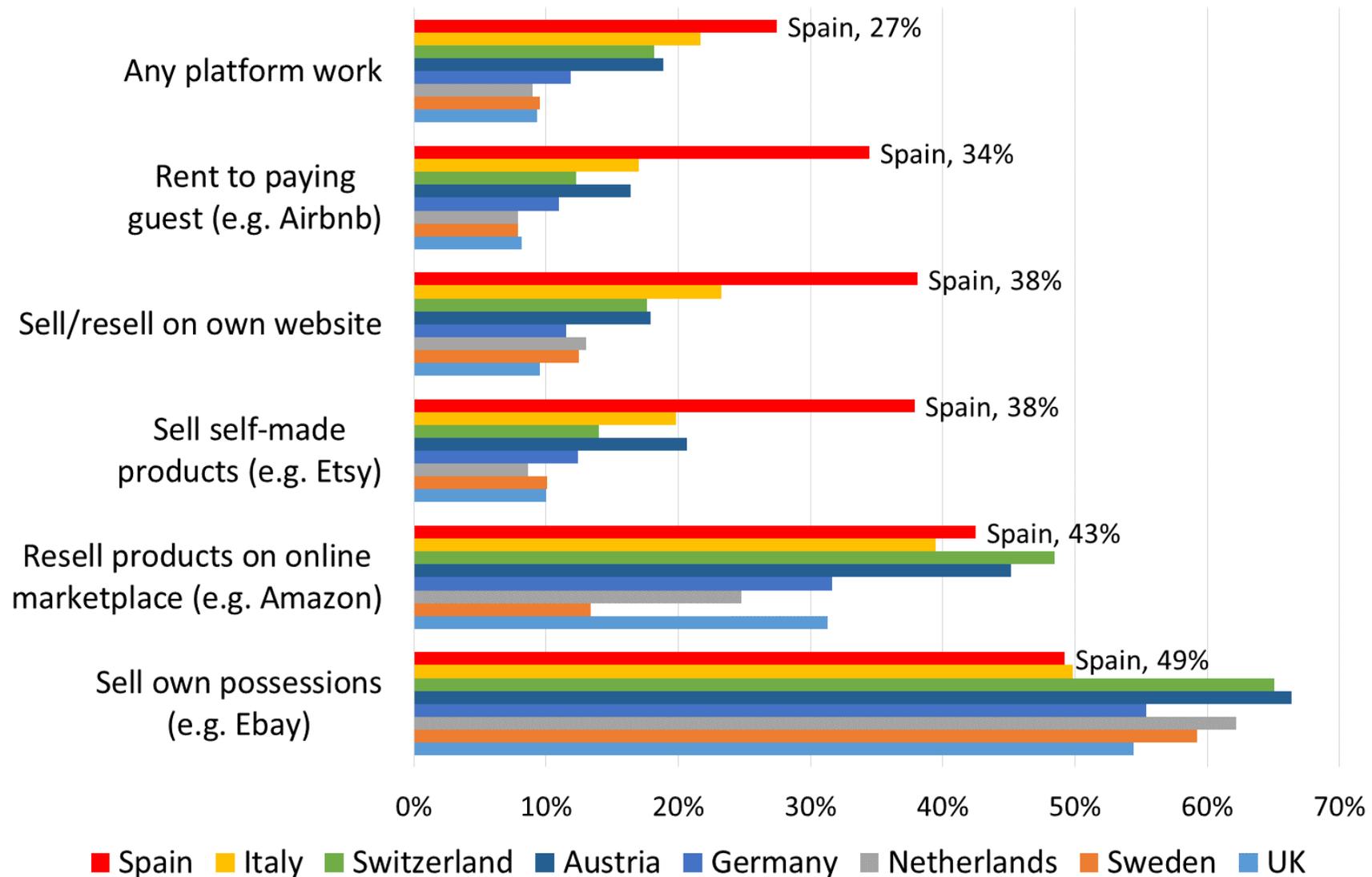
- Funded by FEPS and UNI-Europa with national partners in each of 13 European countries
- Research design and analysis by University of Hertfordshire
- Online survey, carried out by Ipsos MORI as part of omnibus survey
- In Slovenia 2001 adults aged 18-55. Surveyed online between 21<sup>st</sup> February and 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019
- Sample stratified by age, gender, region and working status
- Results weighted to reflect total population
- Survey was originally piloted in UK, then carried out in 12 other European countries
- Additional offline surveys to calibrate results in UK (n=1,800; face-to-face – CAPI) and Switzerland (n=1,200; telephone – CATI)
- Complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews (ongoing)

# Towards a working definition of 'platform work'

- Defined as paid work managed via online platforms (in recognition that dimensions may be blurred) e.g.
  - Fuzzy distinction between paid and unpaid work
  - Unclear definition of 'online platform'
  - Fuzzy boundary between work found via platforms and work found by other means in the informal economy
- A functional typology
  1. 'Online' work carried out remotely from own home e.g. graphic design, translation, coding, or 'click work' found via online platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr or Clickworker
  2. 'Offline' work carried out in public spaces such as driving and delivery, found via platforms such as Uber, Foodora or Deliveroo
  3. 'Offline' work carried out in other people's premises such as cleaning, household maintenance, repairing appliances or care work, found via platforms such as Taskrabbit, Myhammer or Helping

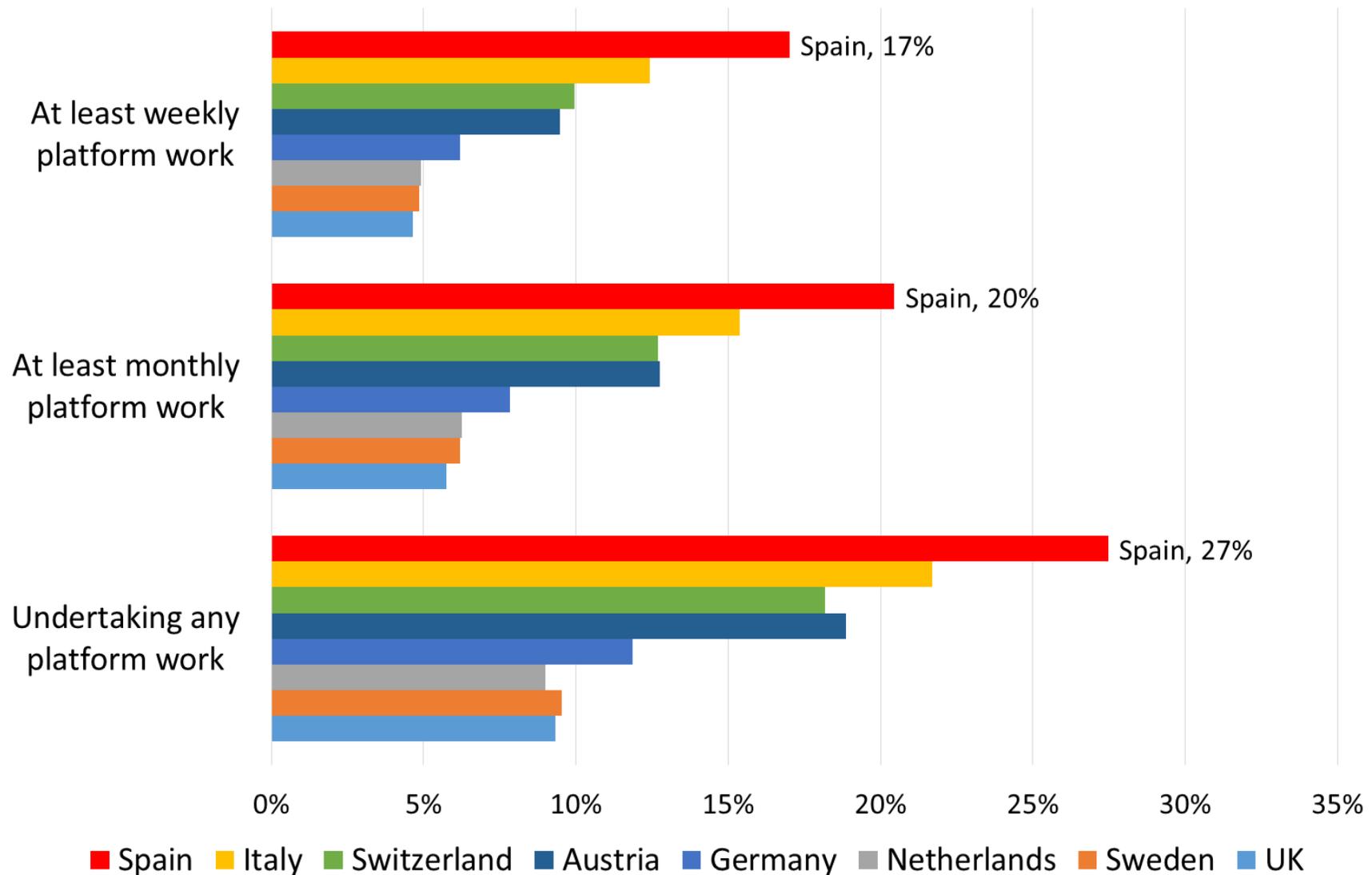
# The broader context – the Internet is widely used as a source of income – selling one's labour is only of many income sources

## Participation in the online economy as a source of income (% of working-age population)



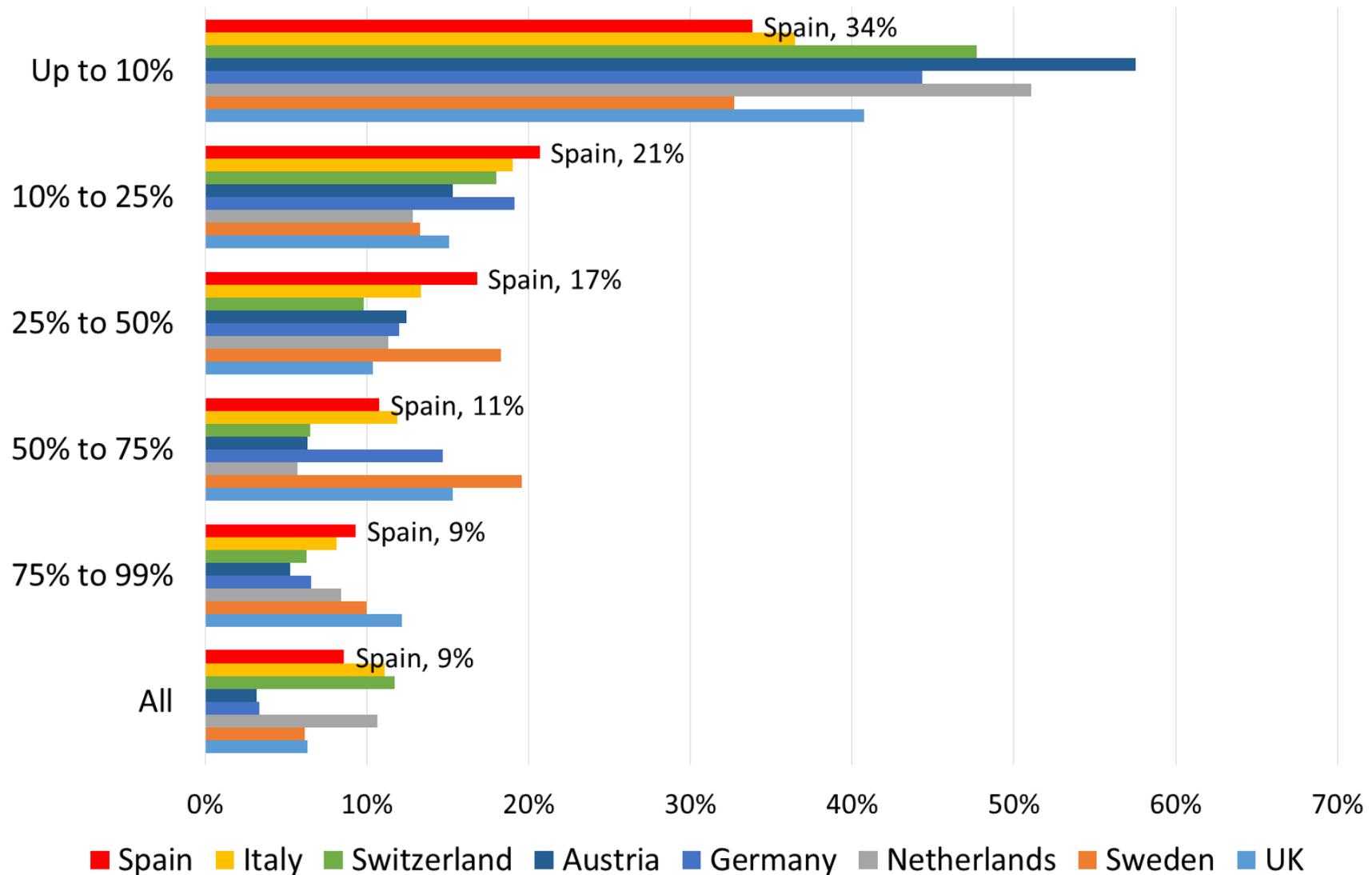
Surveys carried out by University of Hertfordshire for FEPS/UNI, 2016-19

# Work found via online platforms is often occasional and generally supplements other forms of work



*Surveys carried out by University of Hertfordshire for FEPS/UNI, 2016-19*

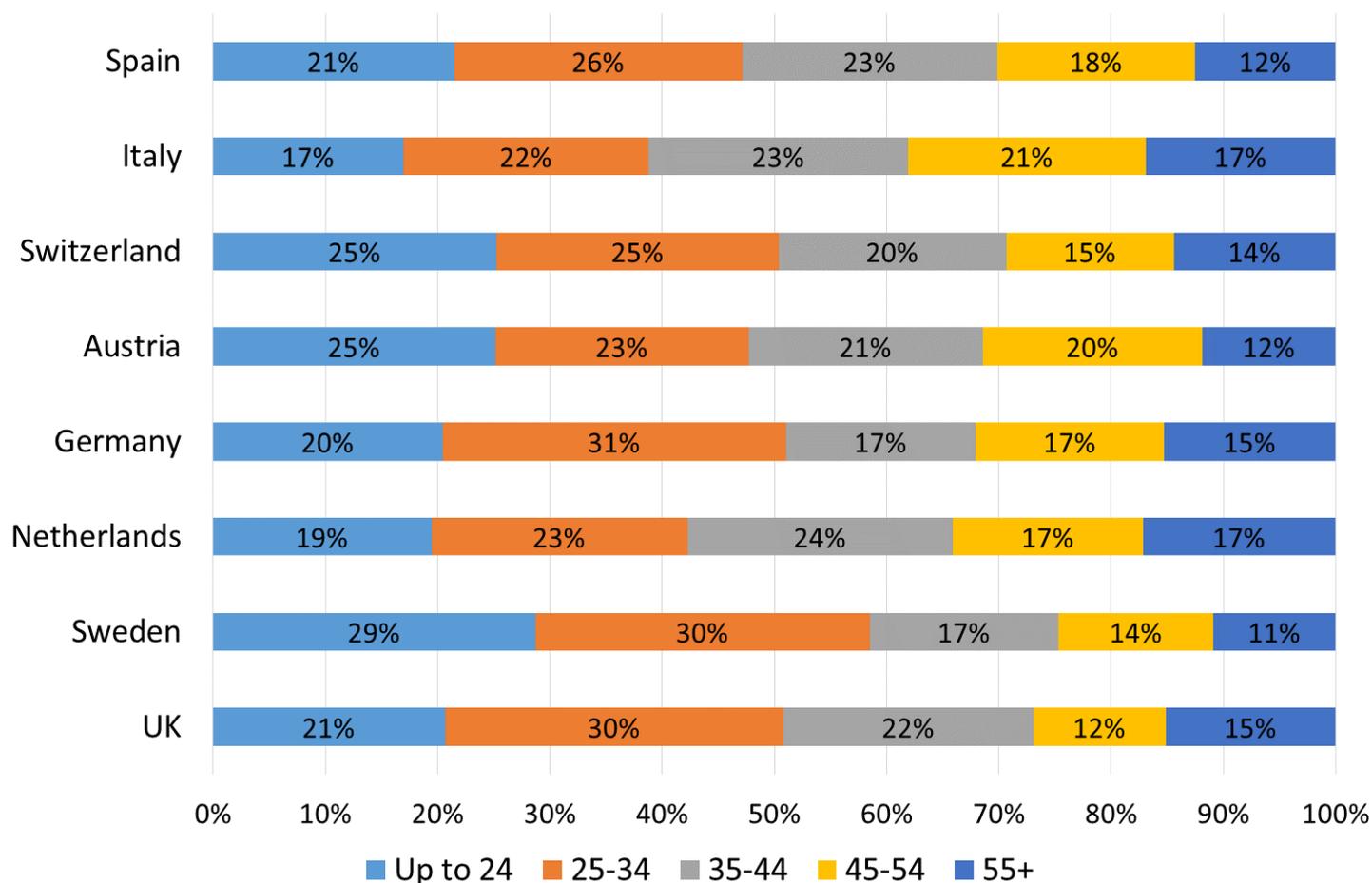
# Platform work is rarely the main source of income



*Surveys carried out by University of Hertfordshire for FEPS/UNI, 2016-19*

# Who are the platform workers?

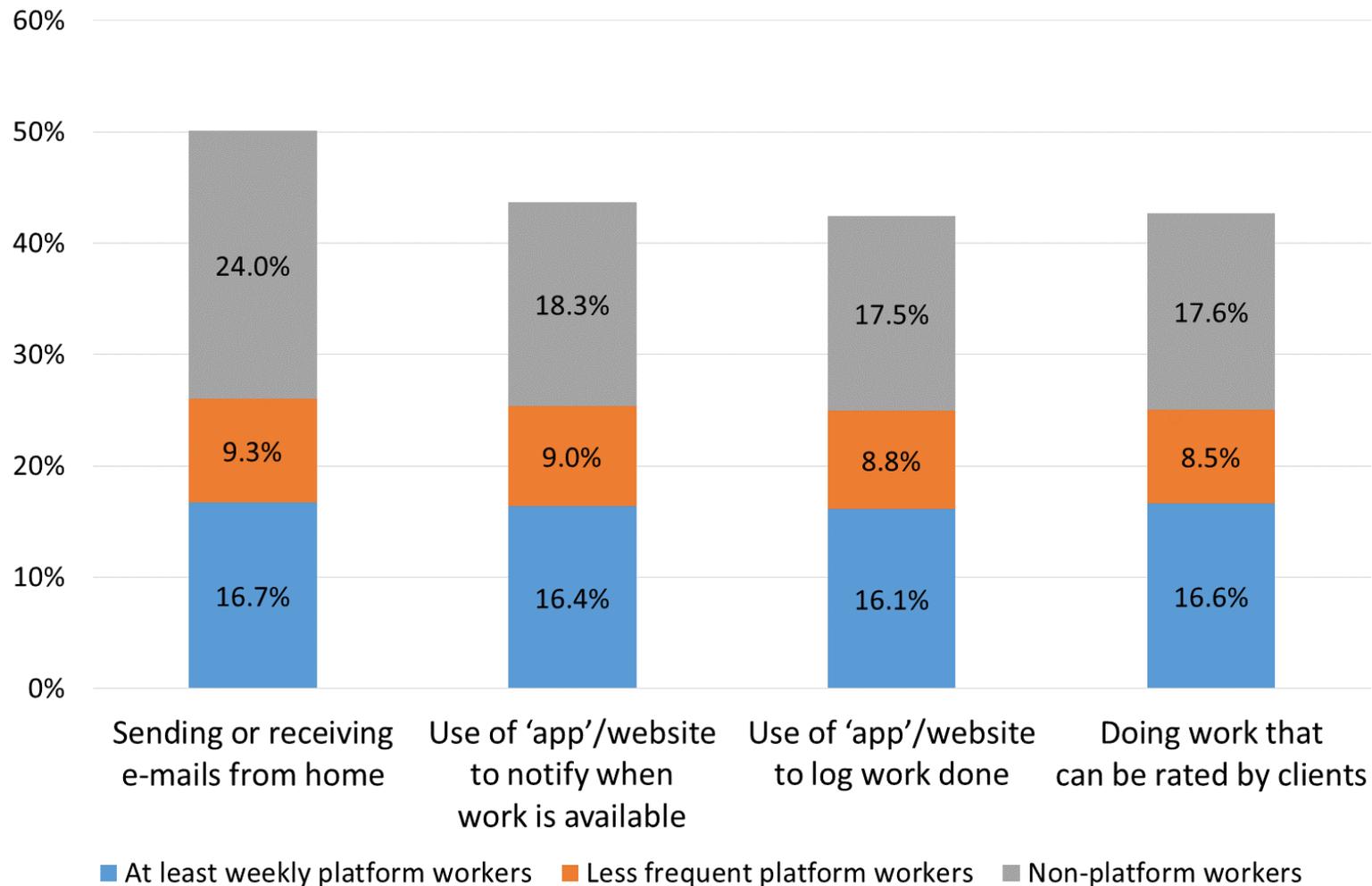
- Proportion of women varies between 41% (Spain) and 52% (UK & Italy)
- Somewhat more likely to be young – but found in all age groups



*Surveys carried out by University of Hertfordshire for FEPS/UNI, 2016-19*

# The general platformisation of work organisation and management (the example of Spain)

Percentage of working population reporting of use of digital technologies by platform worker category, Spain 2018



# Is a new normative model of work organisation emerging?

- Managed via online platforms
- Standardised tasks
- Direct communication with managers replaced by digital interfaces
- Standardised performance measures (and reputation scores)
- Use of customer ratings for quality assessment
- Monitored indirectly – including GPS tracking
- Unpredictable demands
- Repeated requirements to ‘pitch’ for each job/promotion
- Expectation that skills will be upgraded constantly
- Available 24/7
- Formalised yet precarious

# The grooming of 'logged labour'

- Underlying logic of standardisation, fragmentation and 'mixing and matching' of standard ingredients permeates many aspects of social and economic life
- Self-presentation for job search (and also other social purposes such as online dating or flat-share hunting) require self-classification in relation to standard categories. Habituation to box-ticking and acceptance of algorithmic decisions. (being 'shopped for')
- Social media encourage a situation where self-worth is defined by 'likes', 'swipes' and 'favourites'
- Unpaid internships and 'work experience' make it difficult to retain a sense of the value of one's own labour time – a disconnect which is exacerbated by tax credit benefit models.
- Competition is normalised and seen as fair (as in reality TV shows where there can be 'only one winner') - leading to individualisation and atomisation and devaluing solidarity and collectivity
- Expectation that workers will 'go the extra mile' and exhibit 'passion' and 'commitment' (ie go beyond the terms of their job description)
- Erosion of clear temporal and spatial boundaries between work and non-work
- Digital communication is favoured
- Experience of customer rating as consumer leads to normalisation of deprofessionalisation

# How can this be addressed by policymakers?

- An alternative approach must be based in universal coverage of any regulations and universal rights:
  - Clarification of the definition of **self-employment** – for employment, tax and social protection purposes
  - Clarification of the definition of **subordinate employment**. All workers not deemed self-employed to be regarded as subordinate workers with the onus of proof on the employer.
  - Workers' rights to be clearly (re) specified in relation to *inter alia*: Health and safety – including rights to call in inspectors; Insurance and legal liability; Data protection; Communications with employers/platforms, including rights to challenge arbitrary suspensions, customer ratings etc.; Freedom of association, collective bargaining and trade union rights; Other national statutory rights eg minimum wages, holiday pay, sick pay etc.
  - Clarification of the definition of **private employment agencies** and **temporary work agencies**. Online platforms to be regarded as such by default with the onus proof on the platform.
  - Need for inspection and compliance, with clear reporting procedures and realistic penalties for failure to comply.
- Reform of social security and tax systems to fit the new labour market realities
- An education system that values solidarity and mutual support and encourages self-esteem

For further information on the surveys: [www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu)

## WORK IN THE EUROPEAN GIG ECONOMY

Ursula Huws  
Neil H. Spencer  
Dag. S. Syrdal  
Kaire Holts



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES  
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE  
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



University of  
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