

<b>Institution:</b> University of Hertfordshire		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17 – Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Platform Economy: shaping international policy, legislative and public responses to rising precarity in the labour market		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Ursula Huws Neil Spencer	Professor of Labour and Globalisation Professor of Applied Statistics	2011 – 2021 1997 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 – 31 December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The proliferation of increasingly precarious forms of work managed by online platforms like Uber and Deliveroo has challenged labour standards and employment rights, leaving policymakers struggling to keep pace. Studies led by Professor Ursula Huws at Hertfordshire Business School provided the first evidence of the scale, nature and social implications of the growth of the platform economy in Europe. Over five years from 2015, her research guided policy responses across the three EU institutions: the European Commission (EC), the Council and European Parliament. This led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Landmark legislative decisions by the EC to strengthen the rights of platform workers.</li> <li>- Several EU parliamentary motions passed by MEPs to increase labour protections.</li> <li>- 122 citations of the research across 20 policy papers published by EC Directorate-Generals and EU agencies on responding to the rise of platform work.</li> <li>- New labour market data collection approaches by EU statistical agencies.</li> <li>- High-level calls by UK policy actors for government action to protect platform workers.</li> <li>- Increased public awareness via media coverage that reached 18m people globally.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>There has been an enormous increase in the number of people carrying out pieces of paid work, or 'gigs', managed by online platforms. While this has opened opportunities for flexible working, a growing number of self-employed freelancers are competing for work at diminishing rates of pay, at irregular hours and without the statutory benefits that come with stable employment. Research by Huws has explored how digital technology transforms the world of work. Huws identified an early trend towards casualised labour characterised by 'crowdworking', where people source small jobs on a pay-per-piece basis through online platforms [3.1]. People found themselves competing in a digitalised labour market with similarly qualified workers across the globe, reducing their bargaining power. In 2012 Huws began chairing the EU COST Action: <i>Dynamics of Virtual Work</i> [G1], bringing together researchers from 31 countries to study the societal implications of new types of digital labour, such as online platforms. This led to research commissioned by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) [3.2], in which Huws identified the physical health and psychosocial risks associated with working conditions typical of crowdsourced employment. She demonstrated that the rise in platform work could result in the evasion of regulations designed to protect workers and consumers.</p> <p>Concurrently, funded by thinktank Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and European service workers' union UNI Europa, Huws embarked on the Digital Footprint project [G2] to provide the first comprehensive picture of the scale and nature of the gig economy across Europe and identify its policy implications. Working with Spencer and research assistants Syrdal, Coates, Holts and Joyce, Huws provided novel insights into the gig economies in the UK, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Italy, Netherlands and Switzerland through online and offline surveys and interviews. Early findings led to published research that interrogated the concept of 'logged labour' as a new paradigm of work organisation [3.3]. Work is 'logged' in three senses: cut up into standard, quantifiable components; subject to continuous surveillance and monitoring; requires a connection to an online platform. Huws argued that because workers</p>		

were required to resubmit themselves repeatedly for employment and respond at short notice to unpredictable work demand, this was compromising labour regulations and welfare systems.

Huws published her preliminary findings as a FEPS research report to inform debates among policymakers over how to act [3.4]. The Digital Footprint project was extended to France, Spain, Finland, Estonia, Slovenia and Czechia in 2018 and 2019. The research concluded that 'gig' work involved a high proportion of working adults across these 13 countries (e.g. 28.5% in Czechia carried out platform work at least weekly). In most cases platform work represented a 'top up' to a worker's main source of income. However, for a small but important minority, platform work constituted the majority of their income. Huws found that many features of gig work (e.g. apps to notify of waiting tasks and using customer ratings to discipline workers) were spreading across the labour market, a process she termed 'platformisation'. Huws found that crowd work was seen as a means to accumulate an adequate income rather than as an active career choice, a conclusion borne out by qualitative findings [3.5].

From 2017 Palgrave Macmillan published the *Dynamics of Virtual Work* series (Huws co-editor), a key output of G1. Huws wrote a chapter on policy challenges posed by online platforms [3.6], highlighting the need to define the legal status of platforms to allow for effective regulation. Her research continued in a Horizon 2020 project [G3] exploring the impact of the platform economy in urban areas. She highlighted 'the vicious cycle of platform work' in the context of housework [3.7]. Workers who need extra income work longer hours, leaving less time for housework, resulting in the purchase of cheap domestic labour through online platforms. Online platforms grow, low-paid precarious work increases, workers need extra income – and the cycle continues.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Huws U. Labor in the global digital economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014. *This book was translated into Chinese, Korean & Portuguese.*
- 3.2 Huws U. Online labour exchanges, or 'crowdsourcing': implications for occupational safety and health. European Occupational Safety and Health Agency, 2015. *Commissioned research report, awarded via tender, forming the basis of EU-OSHA's approach to online platforms in its 'Digitalisation and occupational safety and health' research programme.*
- 3.3 Huws U. Logged labour: a new paradigm of work organisation? work organisation, labour and globalisation. 2016 May 30;10(1):7-26. <https://doi.org/fxqz>
- 3.4 Huws U, Spencer N, Coates M, Holts K. The Platformisation Of Work In Europe: Results from research in 13 European countries. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2019. *Findings in this research report cited in multiple EU-level policy papers: see section 4.*
- 3.5 Huws U, Spencer N, Syrdal DS. Online, on call: the spread of digitally-organised just-in-time working and its implications for standard employment models. New Technology, Work and Employment. 2018 Jul 10;33(2):113-129. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12111>
- 3.6 Huws U. Where Did Online Platforms Come From? The Virtualization of Work Organization and the New Policy Challenges it Raises. In: Meil P, Kirov V, editors. Policy Implications of Virtual Work. Palgrave Macmillan; 2017.
- 3.7 Huws U. The Hassle of Housework: Digitalisation and the Commodification of Domestic Labour. Feminist Review. 2019 Dec 10;123:8-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919879725> *Translated into German and published by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, and the basis of an invited essay for the DG Justice (EC) publication: New Visions for Gender Equality, 2019.*

### Key underpinning grants

- G1** Dynamics of Virtual Work. EU COST Action, £124,615, 2012-2016.
- G2** A Digital Footprint: Addressing Labour Market Issues and Revenue Foregone Specific to Digitalised Labour. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, £48,465, 2016-2018.
- G3** Platform Labour in Urban Spaces (PLUS). European Union Horizon 2020 Research Programme (H2020-SC6-TRANSFORMATIONS-2018), £315,344 to UH, 2018-2021.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Offering novel evidence and insights into the size, shape and social repercussions of the emerging platform economy, Huws was invited to address a wide network of policy actors across Europe and the UK, including MEPs and MPs, EC and Whitehall officials, and EU agencies. Sustained engagement over five years resulted in Huws's research exerting a deep level of influence over parliamentary motions, EC Opinions and impact assessments, data collection by EU agencies, and, ultimately, landmark EC decisions to legislate for fairer working conditions.

### **Influencing EU parliamentary motions to increase protections for platform workers**

In October 2015, the European Parliament's Socialists & Democrats (S&D) group invited Huws to present her research on the challenges posed by the platform economy [5.1]. Huws was then asked to write an article for the S&D's *Journal for a Progressive Economy*. The resulting article, 'Platform Labour: Sharing Economy or Virtual Wild West?', was based on 3.1-3.3. This led to Huws drafting key parts of the position statements submitted by S&D and UNI Europa to the parliamentary Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) [5.1]. Reflecting Huws's input, EMPL published an 'Opinion' highlighting how *"the digital revolution is changing the ways of working, which leads to an increase in atypical and flexible employment relationships"*. The Committee called on *"the Commission and the Member States to assess the need for the modernisation of social and employment legislation to stay abreast of such changes"* [5.2]. This Opinion was reflected directly in the 'Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on Towards a Digital Single Market Act' proposed in December 2015 by the Industry, Research & Energy (ITRE) and Internal Market & Consumer Protection (IMCO) Committees. The Motion reproduced EMPL's call and the European Parliament voted to pass this resolution in January 2016 [5.3].

In October 2016 the European Parliament's economic policy department published an analysis: 'The situation of workers in the collaborative economy'. It cited Huws's article in the S&D journal five times, highlighting issues around the inadequacy of social security protections for platform workers [5.4]. A month later, as a result of the 5.4 analysis and the EU-OSHA report [3.2], Huws was invited to present her findings to EMPL which led to EMPL proposing a 'Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on the European Pillar of Social Rights' [5.1, 5.5]. In line with Huws's recommendation, it called for *"EU-wide rules on decent working conditions to apply to all forms of employment, including new forms, such as on-demand work or work intermediated by digital platforms"* [5.1, 5.6]. The motion explicitly highlighted the need for new health and safety protections for platform-based work, again based on Huws's work [5.5]. The resolution was passed on 19 January 2017 by 396 votes to 180. Bloomberg reported this under the headline 'Europe Will Defend Its Gig Economy Workers', citing Huws's research [5.14].

The Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU asked, in January 2016, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which advises EU lawmakers, to draw up an Opinion on the changing nature of employment relationships and its impact on maintaining a living wage. The EESC asked Huws to act as the 'principal expert to the rapporteur' and her research conclusions shaped eight of its 12 main recommendations [5.1, 5.7]. It was adopted by the EESC on 25 May 2016: 94 votes in favour, none against. A year later, on 15 June 2017, the EU Parliament passed a resolution for *"fair working conditions and adequate legal and social protection for all workers"* in the gig economy. It stated the resolution had drawn upon the EESC, EMPL, ITRE and IMCO Opinions (all highlighted above), which were informed by Huws's research [5.8].

### **Shaping high-level policy responses by EC Directorate-Generals (DGs) and EU agencies**

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) provides research evidence on which the EC bases its policy directives. The JRC relied upon Huws's research for its policy reports on platform work between 2016 and 2020 [5.1] citing Huws's findings 30 times across eight reports [5.9]. Its 2016 report 'The Future of Work in the Sharing Economy' referred to Huws's initial FEPS-funded research on the gig economy in the UK and Sweden as *"the only two reliable sources available for Europe"* [5.9]. Its 2018 report 'Platform Workers in Europe' explored the size and nature of the gig economy, having sought advice from Huws on the methodological approach. The report cited Huws's work 13 times, including [3.1] and [3.4], and noted that the results of its COLLEEM

survey were in line with Huws's data [5.9]. It said the COLLEEM results called for "*harmonisation of the conditions of platform workers towards those of regular employees*", saying that "*these are also clear policy implications from the Hertfordshire study*" [5.9].

Huws's research was cited 37 times across four reports by DG for Economic and Financial Affairs, DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Centre for European Policy Studies (commissioned by the EC) and DG for Internal Policies [5.9]. The latter, published in September 2020 as '*The platform economy and precarious work*', was formally requested by the EMPL Committee and referred to Huws's research data throughout [5.9]. DG Justice invited Huws to author a policy essay based on 3.7 for its EC publication: *New visions for gender equality 2019* [5.9]; it described her contribution as "*of excellent quality and truly inspiring*" and as having informed the EC's new flagship Gender Equality Strategy (March 2020) [5.9]. Huws and Spencer carried out further analysis of their research data for the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The research was cited nine times in EIGE's *Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work*; the index is the EU's official monitoring tool for gender equality [5.9].

In 2016 Eurostat (the EU's statistical office) coordinated its first data collection on platform work. They requested the methodology underpinning Huws's crowdwork surveys and used it to inform their data collection. A Eurostat analyst said Huws's input had "*provided a necessary impulse to improve information flows and optimise our efforts in addressing needs for data on digital work*" [5.9]. In 2018 Huws advised Eurofound, an EU agency for employment policies, in the update of its European Working Conditions Survey to include platform working. Four subsequent Eurofound reports cited Huws's research 34 times [5.9]. Huws's 3.2 and 3.4 reports were cited 10 times in its 2017 report: *Protecting Workers in the Online Platform Economy* [5.9]. This report, together with 3.2, was the basis of EU-OSHA's call to tender, in 2020, for a four-year work programme responding to the impact of digital platform work [5.9].

### **Influencing new EU legislation to strengthen working conditions in the platform economy**

The parliamentary activity and policy formulation set out above informed significant legislative decisions by the EC. In December 2017, the EC adopted a directive to create new minimum employment standards for millions of workers on 'atypical contracts'. The EC's accompanying impact assessment cited Huws's data [3.4] on the size of the gig economy [5.10]. This directive culminated in a widely reported vote by MEPs on 16 April 2019 in which they enshrined in law minimum rights for workers with on-demand or platform jobs. This included greater transparency around working conditions, more predictable hours and compensation for cancelled work. It marked the first EU legislation for setting minimum workers' rights for 20 years [5.1].

FEPS lobbied S&D to take forward Huws's policy recommendations set out in 3.4; at the launch of the research in July 2019, S&D MEP Brando Benifei gave the keynote and pledged to take the findings "*from Ursula to Ursula*", referring to Huws and von der Leyen, President of the Commission [5.1]. In February 2020, S&D adopted its position paper: *Our Inclusive Digital Europe*. The opening chapter was entirely based on Huws's FEPS-funded research, demanding fair working conditions for platform workers and a level-playing field for the platform economy in terms of employment and social security protections [5.1, 5.11]. It referred directly to a concept created by Huws through her research: "*The 'platformisation' of work is taking place across vast swaths of the labour market, of which platform workers form only one part. The EU should therefore take a more holistic approach towards the future of work and atypical forms of work*" [5.11]. This was key to a decision by the EC, published in October 2020, to formally commit to new legislation to "*improve the working conditions of platform workers*" within its official work programme [5.1, 5.12]. It commissioned a study to support the impact assessment of this new legislation; the technical specifications repeatedly cited the Eurofound and JRC reports detailed in [5.9] that drew extensively on Huws's research data [5.9]. This was the culmination of five years of lobbying by FEPS via S&D MEPs and committees like EMPL, combined with the policy formulation by EC DGs outlined above, for which Huws's research was the evidence base [5.1].

**Informing UK policy responses to the growth of the gig economy and increasing public understanding internationally of this new world of work**



From 2016-2017, the debate over how the UK Government should act to protect gig economy workers intensified and Huws's findings fed directly into discussions. The UK data from the **G2** project was featured in the Guardian in February 2016 [5.13]. It was shared 5,137 times on social media and The Independent based an editorial leader on the findings to warn of the risks posed by the gig economy [5.13]. The Intergenerational Foundation cited the research to support its call to address inequality [5.13]. The Work Foundation, the Recruitment and Employment Confederation and think tank Policy Network cited it in reports on the gig economy [5.13] and the Green Party passed an emergency conference motion for the government to strengthen workers' rights legislation in the platform economy [5.13]. The shadow minister for the digital economy cited Huws's findings in a speech arguing for a "*digital economy that worked for everyone*" [5.13]. Mounting calls for government action resulted in the Prime Minister commissioning the Taylor Modern Employment Review. Huws was invited by the Labour Market Directorate at BEIS to provide oral evidence to the Review in Cardiff on 12 April 2017 [5.13]. The Review's final report advocated greater social security protections for platform workers.

From 2016 to 2020, sustained media coverage of Huws's research ensured it made a significant contribution to raising public awareness of the socioeconomic impact of the gig economy [5.14]. It included BBC Radio 4's Thinking Allowed ('Platform Capitalism'); an interview with BBC Five Live; a feature by Vice on the pressures facing freelancers; a feature by the Guardian on whether platform working was a "*new model for the working poor*"; widespread coverage of the gig economy data across Germany, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands and Italy; interviews with magazines in Slovenia, Germany, Austria and Brazil; interviews for a three-part documentary on the future of work for Canadian National Radio. Over this period, Huws's work was featured in 80 media items, reaching an estimated audience of 18 million people internationally [5.14]. In June 2019 further research by Huws under **G2** found that the UK gig economy had doubled in size in three years. The findings, covered widely, were used by the TUC and the Shadow Chancellor to call on the Government to strengthen the rights of platform workers [5.14].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**5.1** Corroborating statement from the Digital Policy Advisor, FEPS.

**5.2** Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on Towards a Digital Market Act (p.39, para 35 for EMPL opinion; p. 21, para 81 ITRE and IMCO opinion): <https://tinyurl.com/ybmwvsbh>

**5.3** Approved European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2016 on Towards a Digital Single Market (para 3.3.2.81): <https://tinyurl.com/yb5uobw7>

**5.4** 'Employment and social affairs: The situation of workers in the collaborative economy'. An in-depth analysis authored by Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy: <https://tinyurl.com/yacs6n9w> (Huws cited pages 1, 16, 17, 22, 23).

**5.5** Corroborating statement from the Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

**5.6** EMPL news release leading on the digital platform element of its Motion for a European Parliament resolution on a European Pillar of Social Rights: <https://tinyurl.com/y76lt6jx>

**5.7** EESC Opinion for Dutch Presidency of the European Council: <https://tinyurl.com/yc9q57o5>

**5.8** European Parliament resolution of 15 June 2017 on a European Agenda for the Collaborative Economy: <https://tinyurl.com/ycp9lql6> (p. 2).

**5.9** Compilation report detailing 20 EU-level policy papers from 2015 to 2020 that cited Huws's research findings a combined 122 times – and corroborating statements from EU agencies.

**5.10** EC impact assessment accompanying the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU. <https://tinyurl.com/ya4p288v> (Huws's research data cited p. 121)

**5.11** Our Inclusive Digital Europe, S&D Position Paper, Feb 5, 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/y8sus4yl>

**5.12** Commission Work Programme, October 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/ya74ah44> (p.2, point 9)

**5.13** Compilation report of outcomes from Huws's research-led engagement with UK policy.

**5.14** Compilation report of key media coverage of Huws's research.