FoW Global collaboration ILO/JRC
Platformisation of work in logistics and health

Some initial comments from the JRC team

The European Commission’s science and knowledge service
Joint Research Centre
Defining platformisation

- **Platform**: centralised digital networks that coordinate transactions in an algorithmic way. Two key elements:
  - A structured digital “space” where the transactions can take place.
  - A set of algorithms for coordinating those transactions in an automated way.

- **Digital labour platforms**: centralised digital networks that coordinate labour service transactions in an algorithmic way. They mediate (as markets) but also manage (as employers)

- **Platformisation of work**: use of platforms (apps, webs, devices) to coordinate work processes in any kind of organisation.
  - Can apply to any kind of organisation.
  - Key hypothesis: digitisation leads to platformisation. Also: platformisation blurs boundaries between internal and externals, and facilitates further subcontracting.

- **Algorithmic management**: use of computer-programmed procedures for the coordination of work in an organisation. Almost synonymous with platformisation, except for the structured digital “space”.
  - Computer programmes assume some of the functions of management, but not all. (Algorithmically-assisted management?)
  - Some degree of automation in key managerial functions: direction, evaluation and discipline (Kellogg et al. 2020)
Some related concepts

- **Digitisation**: use of sensors and rendering devices to translate parts of the physical production process into digital information (strings of bits), and vice versa
  - Precondition to platformisation and strongly linked, but not synonymous nor necessarily simultaneous.
  - Digitisation is about the collection, processing and storage of information. Platformisation is about the coordination of work.

- **Automation**: replacement of labour input by relatively autonomous machine input for the performance of some types of tasks in production and distribution processes.
  - Platformisation can involve the automation of some low and mid-level managerial functions.
  - Platformisation tends to standardise work processes (especially in services), which historically has preceded automation.

- The focus of this project will be on platformisation, but not strictly. In practice, platformisation tends to be so entangled with digitisation that their implications are difficult to differentiate. But analytically, we should try.
Methodology and scope

● Research design: 2 case studies per country and sector; at least 7 qualitative interviews in each case, complemented with field visits and desk research.
  ○ Each case will be an establishment or workplace (local unit of a firm) in the sectors of logistics (ie, warehouse) and health (ie, hospital).
  ○ The cases should use platform technologies for coordinating work processes (level of implementation can vary).

● Why logistics and health?
  ○ Both work-intensive and requiring complex coordination. Both have long used complex sub-contracting processes, and both are experimenting with platforms for contracting and coordinating work.
  ○ Logistics: manual work with a lower education profile, increasingly digitised.
  ○ Health: social service work with a higher education profile, less digitised but used to complex work processes and subcontracting.

● Country selection: Italy and France in Europe; India and South Africa globally.
What information to be collected from the cases?

- First, mapping of the economic/production process and the use of technology.
- Then, a description of the division of labour and work organisation (and the effects of platformisation)
  - Occupational structure
  - Task contents and work organisation
- Job quality in the workplace (and how platformisation affected it)
  - Wages
  - Employment conditions (contracts, career, training)
  - Working time
  - Health and safety
- The role of industrial relations in the workplace (and in platformisation processes)
Thank you!

Enrique.FERNANDEZ-MACIAS@ec.europa.eu
Sara.BAIOCCHI@ec.europa.eu
Santo.MILASI@ec.europa.eu
Cesira.URZI-BRANCATI@ec.europa.eu