Platform Work in the UK 2016-2019

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Summary

An online survey of 2,235 UK residents between the ages of 16 and 75 was carried out 26th April and 1st May 2019 by the University of Hertfordshire with fieldwork and data collection by Ipsos MORI, funded in association with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and UNI Europa. This built on an earlier survey carried out between January 22nd and January 26th. 2016 of 2,238 adults aged 16-75 also by the University of Hertfordshire, with fieldwork carried out by Ipsos MORI and funding from FEPS and UNI Europa. A comparison of the two surveys showed that:

- The number of people working for online platforms at least once a week has doubled from 4.7% of the adult population to 9.6%.
- The majority of people doing this work do it as a top-up to other earnings. For 71.5% it represents less than half of their income (compared with 67.1% in 2016).
- Nearly half (48.1%) of people doing platform work say they are in full-time employment, with 10.7% saying they are self-employed. Platform workers cannot be seen as a distinct and separate category on the labour market but can be found in all categories and form part of a diverse continuum of casual, precarious and on-call work.
- Platform work is only one way that people increasingly derive an income from online activities. Those making money from renting out rooms via online on platforms such as Airbnb more than doubled from 8.2% in 2016 to 18.7% in 2019. The sale of self-made products via platforms such as Etsy went up from 10% in 2016 to 20.2% in 2019.
- Many of the practices of online platforms are spreading across the labour market. In 2016 one person in ten reported using an app or website to be informed of new tasks but by 2019 this had more than doubled to 21.0% of the adult working-age population. In each case, just under half of these workers were not platform workers. The use of apps or websites to record work done rose over the same period from 14.2% to 24.6%. The majority of people

reporting these practices were *not* platform workers. Nearly a quarter (24%) of adults surveyed also reported having their work rated by customers, of whom nearly half (11.7%) were *not* platform workers.

- Men (at 16.5%) are somewhat more likely than women (at 14.1%) to do platform work. Platform workers are found in all age groups but are more likely to be young with 31.5% aged 16-24 and 28.7% aged 25-34.
- Most people who do platform work report doing more than one type of platform work. The most popular category, at 7.8% of the adult population, is online work. This is followed, at 5.4%, by work involving the provision of services in other people's homes. Third in order of importance, at 5.1%, is driving and delivery work, followed, at 3.5%, by running errands.
- A high proportion of the UK population (60.7%) have been users of platform services at some time. Although wealthier households are more likely to do so, more than half (50.9%) of those earning less than £20,000 per year are platform customers, including many who are themselves platform workers. Three quarters (76%) of people who say they provide driving or delivery services via platforms at least weekly are also users of such platforms at least monthly (rising to 92.8% who do so at least yearly), while two thirds (67.2%) of those who provide services in other people's homes at least weekly are also customers for such services at least monthly (89.6% at least yearly).

Survey results point to strong growth in platform work in the UK

Results are now available from an online survey by the University of Hertfordshire with fieldwork and data collection by Ipsos MORI, funded in association with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and UNI Europa, which show strong growth in the participation of UK citizens in the growing online economy.

In an online survey of 2,235 UK residents between the ages of 16 and 75 in 2019, 9.6% of the sample (after weighting) claimed to be doing work (via so-called "gig economy" platforms such as Upwork, Uber or Handy) at least once a week, using the broadest definition of this type of work[1]. This represents a doubling in the size of the platform workforce since 2016, when the proportion claiming to do this type of work at least weekly stood at 4.7% of the adult population.

When the definition was narrowed to those saying that they carried out work that they had found via a website or app and used an 'app' to notify them when work was available, as detailed below, the proportion was reduced to 5.4% (compared with 1.9%

[1] We use the term 'platform work' in a broad sense to refer to paid tasks that are found via a website or 'app' accessed via a laptop, smartphone or other internet-connected device. Other forms of online income generation, such as the renting of rooms via Airbnb (or similar) and buying/selling goods online are excluded.

in 2016) who reported undertaking such work at least once a week and using apps to be informed of its availability at least once a week.

The proportion from the 2019 survey who had ever undertaken such work was 15.3%, equivalent to approximately 7,480,700 people across the working age population of UK (aged 16-75).

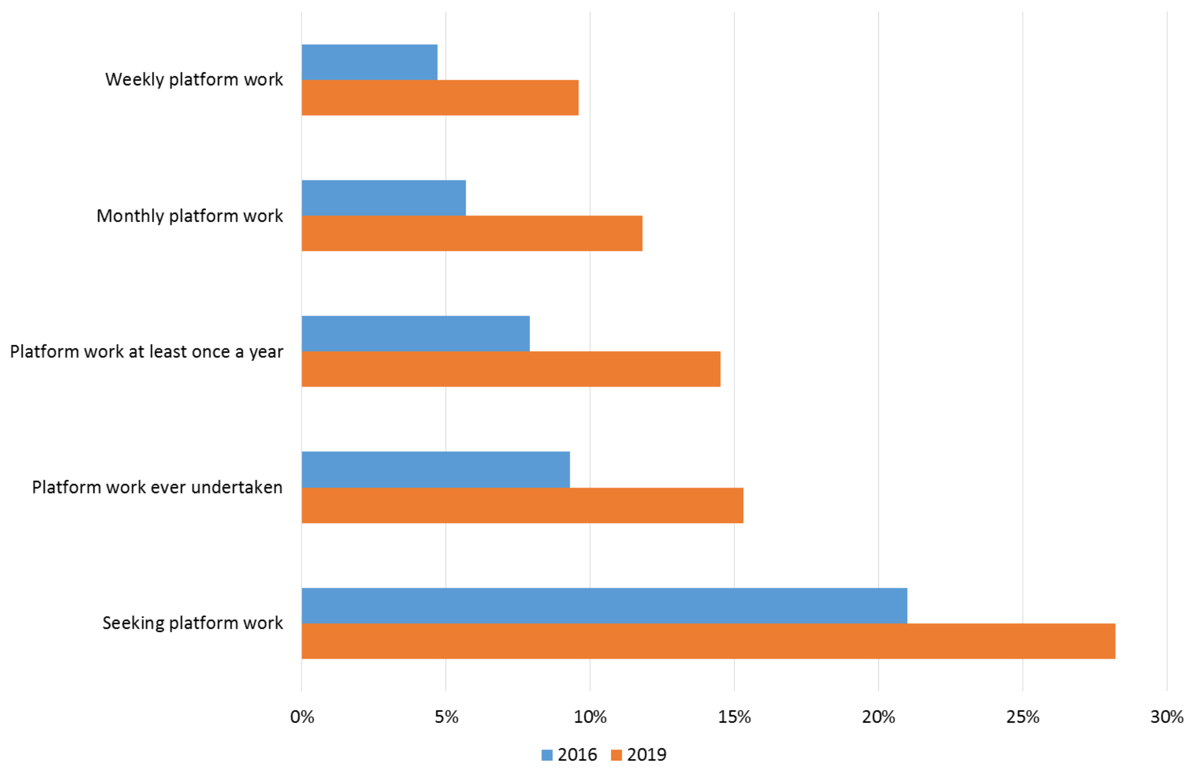


FIGURE 1: UK PLATFORM WORKERS - SUMMARY [Base: 4473 UK citizens aged 16-75: 2238 in 2016, 2235 in 2019 (weighted)]

In 2019, over a quarter (28.2%) of the population said they had tried to find work via online platforms but not all of them succeeded. The numbers of people seeking work in this way greatly exceed those who actually find it. Out of every 2.4 people looking for this kind of work, only one actually found it on a monthly basis, and even fewer on a weekly basis.

Platform work is part of a broader continuum of casual, on-call work

Despite the broad spread of platform work reported in 2019, the majority of platform workers do not do so full time but carry it out as a supplement to other forms of income. For over two-thirds of platform workers (71.5%) it represents less than half their income. But for a substantial minority it is the only or main source of income with 9.4% of platform workers saying it is their only source of income (equivalent to 565,800 people across the working age UK population) and 28.5% saying that it represents at least half of their income (equivalent to 1,725,100 people). A substantial proportion

(25.0%) did not know or did not wish to divulge this information. A comparison of these figures with those from the 2016 survey can be seen in Figure 2.

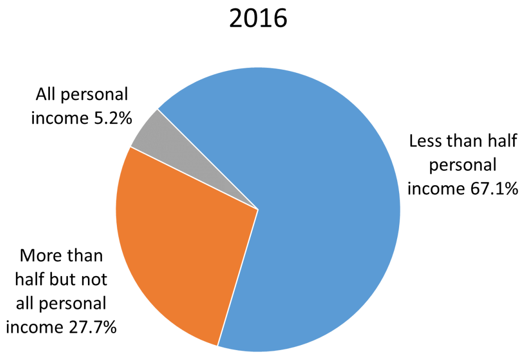


FIGURE 2: PROPORTION OF PERSONAL INCOME FROM PLATFORM WORK [Base: 444 UK platform workers aged 16-75: 168 in 2016, 276 in 2019 (weighted, refusals excluded)]

The role played by platform work as a supplement to other forms of income becomes clearer when we look at the employment and labour market status of platform workers.

Labour market and employment status reported in 2019 survey

Full-time/part-time/self-employed/full-time parents/retired/students

48.1% of platform workers said they were in full-time employment with 12.4% part-time, 10.7% self-employed, 5.7% full-time parents, 3.8% retired and 11.3% students[2].

Amongst intensive platform workers (those who do so at least once a week), the figures are similar with 52.8% saying they were employed full-time, 12.8% part-time, 9.3% self-employed, 3.5% full-time parents, 3.2% retired and 11.4% students.

For those who gain at least half of their income from platform work, the pattern is again similar with 51.9% saying that they are employed full-time, 14.0% part-time, 16.0% self-employed, 7.6% full-time parents, 1.3% retired and 9.9% students.

[2] Percentages do not sum to 100% here and below, as respondents categorising themselves as either unemployed, long-term sick or disabled are not listed.

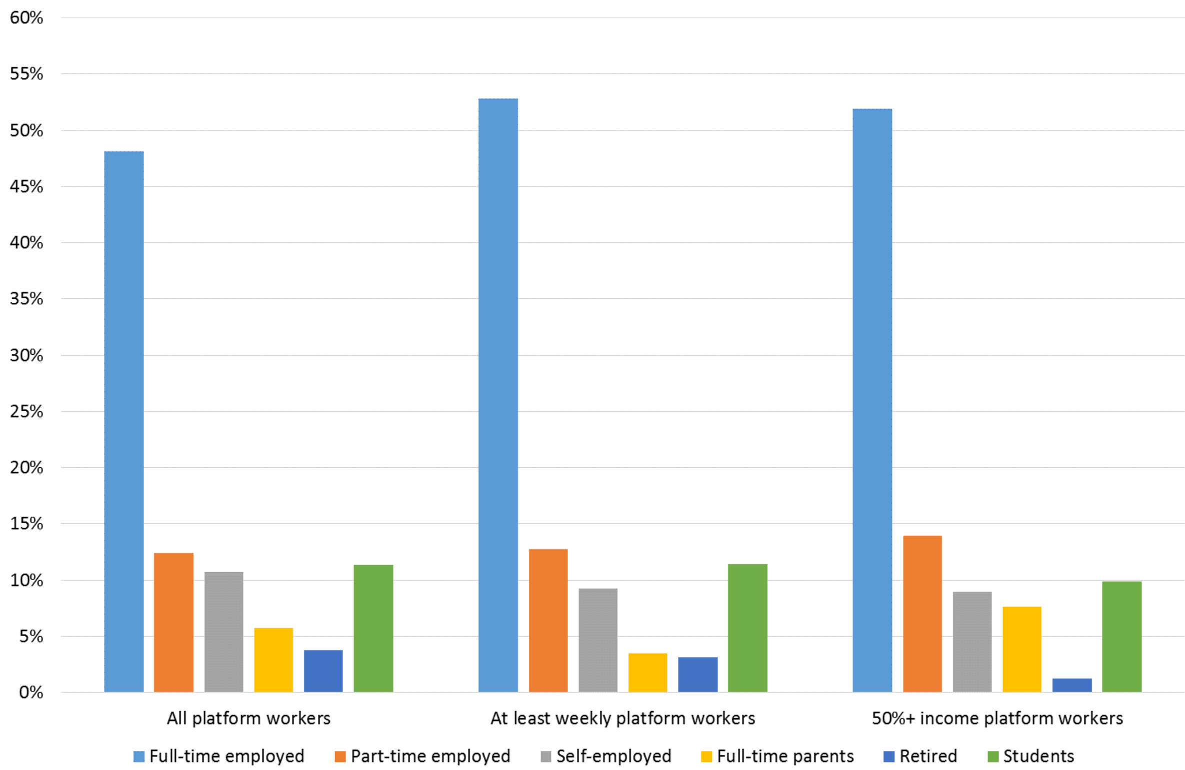


FIGURE 3: EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PLATFORM WORKERS [Base: 349 UK platform workers in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

Temporary Contracts

9.8% of platform workers described themselves as being on temporary contracts with the figure being slightly higher for those undertaking platform work at least weekly (11.9%) and for those who earn at least half of their income from platform work (10.5%).

More than one paid job

13.5% of platform workers say that they have more than one paid job which rises to 16.2% for those undertaking platform work at least weekly and 22.0% for those who earn at least half of their income from platform work.

Benefits or Retirement Income

People that receive benefits or pensions make up 6.3% of platform workers. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure is similar at 9.0% but lower, at 4.8%, for those who get at least half of their income from platform work.

Income from Investments

The proportion who receive income from rents and/or investments is 13.3% of all platform workers, 13.9% of those undertaking platform work at least weekly and 24.2% of platform workers who get at least half of their income from platform work. Those who receive such income were more likely than the general population to use online platforms such as Airbnb to find paying guests for accommodation (33.0% vs 18.7%). This is consistent with a broader picture of platform workers as individuals putting together an income from multiple sources.

Independent Contractors

Given that many online platforms use the term 'independent contractor' to describe the workers who use their services, the survey also investigated the extent to which platform workers characterised themselves as independent contractors. Of all platform workers, 6.9% gave themselves this label. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure was 7.6% and for those who gain at least half of their income from platform work, the figure was 8.8%. It is clear that the majority of platform workers do not identify with this status.

Agency workers

Of all platform workers, 4.8% said they worked for an agency. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure was 5.5% and for those who gain at least half of their income from platform work, the figure was 7.8%.

Self-employed but work for just one person/company

Of all platform workers, 7.2% said they were self-employed but only worked for one person/company. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure was 7.8% and for those who gain at least half of their income from platform work, the figure was 9.4%.

Self-employed and work for multiple companies

Of all platform workers, 5.4% said they were self-employed and worked for multiple companies. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure was 3.1% and for those who gain at least half of their income from platform work, the figure was 4.6%.

Employed on zero hours contract

Of all platform workers, 3.4% said they were on a zero hours contract. For those undertaking platform work at least weekly, the figure was 2.1% and for those who gained at least half of their income from platform work, the figure was 4.8%.

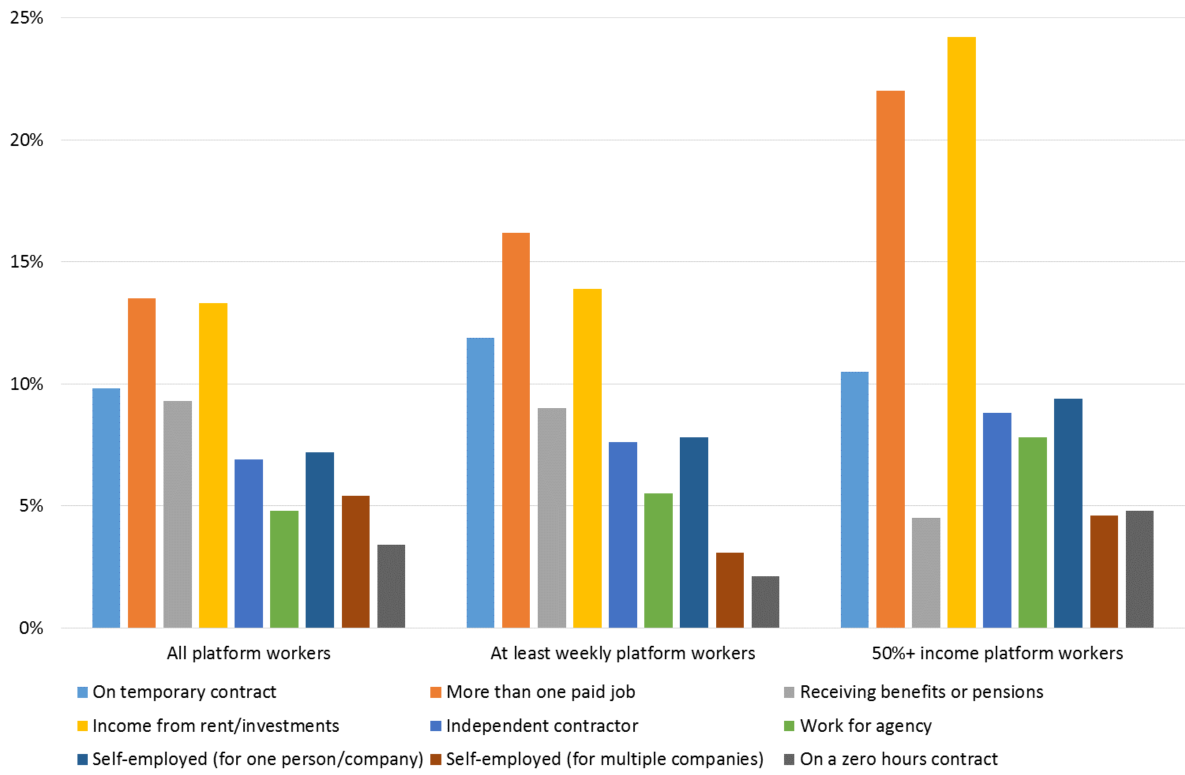


FIGURE 4: OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF PLATFORM WORKERS [Base: 349 UK platform workers in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

To put these figures in perspective, we also look at the spread of these forms of work/income status across the whole UK labour market, bearing in mind that many respondents will have responded yes to more than one question, so that the totals exceed 100%. As can be seen, from Figure 5 platform work represents only part of a strongly variegated labour market with many divergences from standard employment models.

It is therefore not possible regard 'platform workers' as a distinct and separate category on the labour market. People who do platform work can be found in every category of employment and income status. Given that the vast majority of these people are using the platform work to top up their income from other sources, it is therefore more accurate to regard platform work as a source of extra income used by a wide range of workers, whether they are employed full-time or part-time, self-employed, temporary or permanent or working on zero hours contracts.

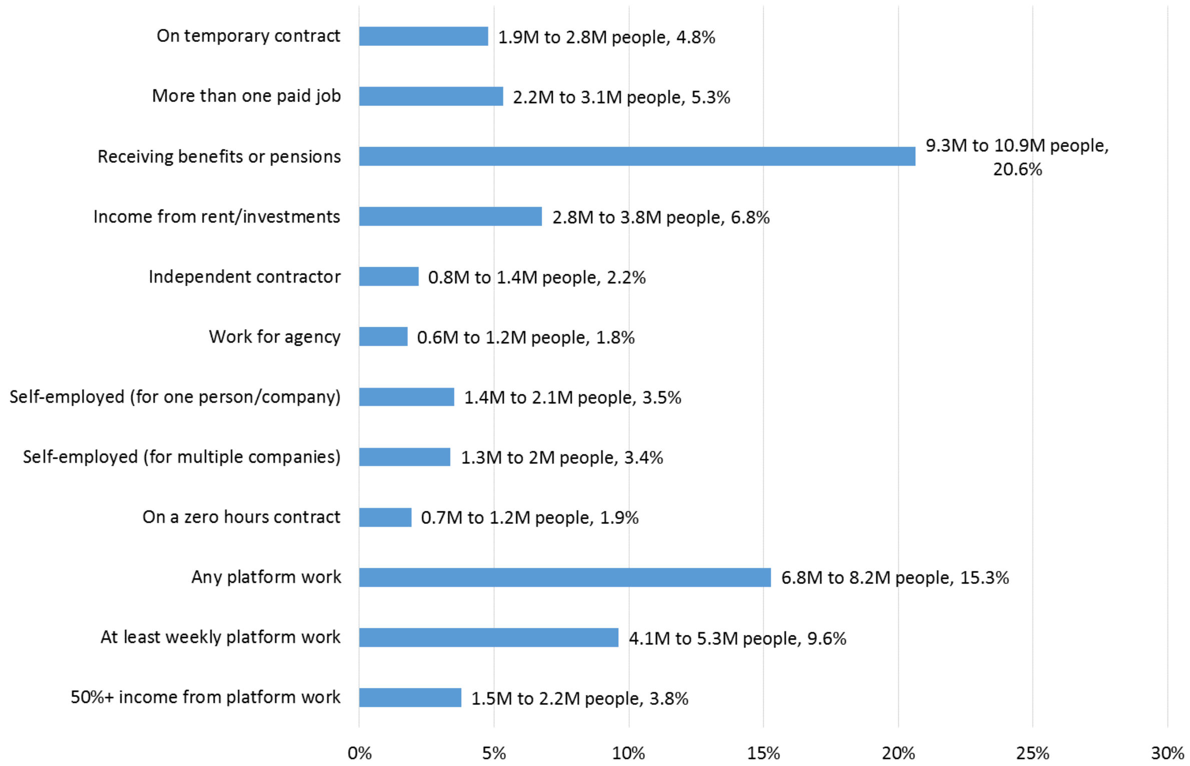


FIGURE 5: FREQUENCY OF TYPES OF INCOME/WORK IN WORKING AGE POPULATION (95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL AND PERCENTAGE) [Base: 2235 UK citizens in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

Platform Labour in the Context of other Types of Online Income Generation

Further evidence from the survey adds to a picture of a UK population increasingly trying to patch an income together from multiple sources, with the Internet playing a growing role in this income generation.

Percentage of people selling goods or services online

Activity	Percentage in 2019 (2016)
Find paying guest via Airbnb or similar	18.7% (8.2%)
Sell products on own website	18.9% (9.5%)
Re-sell products for a profit	36.7% (31.3%)
Sell products you have made yourself	20.2% (10.0%)
Sell your possessions or belongings on a website	55.1% (54.4%)

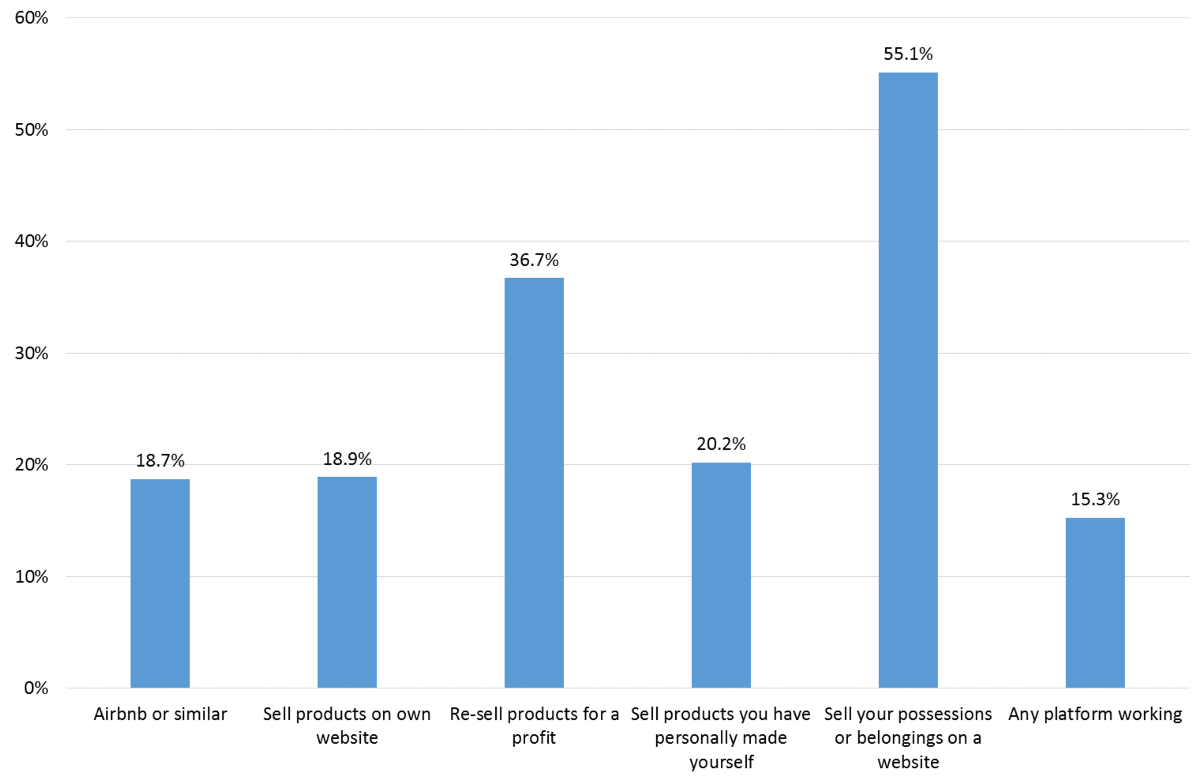


FIGURE 6: PLATFORM WORK IN THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ONLINE ECONOMY AS A SOURCE OF INCOME [Base: 2235 UK citizens in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

As can be seen from Figure 6, set in this context, selling one's labour via an online platform is less important as a source of income than selling one's possessions, selling or reselling products bought for resale, selling personally made craft items or renting out a room via a platform such as Airbnb. All of these have grown in importance since 2016, with the smallest growth (from 54.4% to 55.1%) in the largest-scale activity: selling one's possessions on a site such as eBay.

Further research would be required to explore the extent to which this large growth in online income-seeking behaviour is linked to a drop or stagnation in income from wages and/or benefits. It is, however, entirely consistent with a picture of platform work as part of a strategy for piecing together an income from as many sources as possible by people who would struggle to survive from their main or only source of earnings.

A general trend towards the platformisation of work?

As we have seen, platform work represents just one component of a spectrum of casual on-call types of work and diverse forms of income generation that increasingly characterise the UK labour force. The growing use of the Internet for gaining access to these forms of work and income in combination with the fact that most platform workers are combining several different forms makes for generally fuzzy boundaries between them: not only is it difficult to distinguish between a 'platform' and some other form of employment that can be found via a website; workers themselves may be switching seamlessly between forms of work found online and others found by other means, such as word-of-mouth contacts.

To make matters even more complicated it is clear from these survey results that many of the digital practices used by online platforms for the organisation and management of work are widespread across the labour market, including among 'traditional' employers. We look first at the use of these digital practices among platform workers before turning our attention to the broader working population.

Use of digital 'apps'/websites

Many of the tasks now carried out by platform workers are not new in themselves but have been carried out in the past by casually-employed or self-employed people, both inside and outside the formal economy. It is therefore necessary to ask to what extent these survey findings represent new developments related to digitalisation and the development of online platforms. Further detailed research will be required to investigate this, but it was possible in this survey to isolate those workers who reported using this technology on their smartphone, tablet or computer to notify them when work is available.

Narrowing our definition of 'platform workers' only to those using such technology for this purpose risks excluding some platform workers, for instance those working on high-skill online platforms such as Upwork, who may rely on this kind of work for their income but may not use such technology to find work. However it is a useful way of focusing on those platform workers whose work organisation is digitally enabled.

Looking at people who report ever having carried out platform work (who comprise 15.3% of the total UK working age population in the 2019 survey), applying this definition reduces the proportion to 11.2% of the working age population (an estimated 5,494,200 people, as compared with 7,480,700). However it is interesting to note that the more intensive the platform work is, the greater the propensity to use this technology to be notified of the availability of work.

As can be seen from Figure 7, 80.4% of those who report platform working at least every week have, at some time, been notified of work via such technology, and for those who say that platform work constitutes at least half of their income, the percentage is 87.0%. Amongst non-platform workers, 11.6% report that they also use such 'apps'/websites to be notified of work availability.

Turning to the logging of work via an 'app'/website, we see that 73.1% of platform workers have, at some time, done so, with higher proportions for those who undertake platform work every week (81.9%) and those for whom platform work is at least half their income (87.9%). However, this is not restricted just to platform workers, with 15.8% of non-platform workers also reporting that they have, at some time, logged work via this technology. Although in percentage terms, the use of 'apps'/websites is lower among non-platform workers, because they represent a higher proportion of the population this usage is numerically very significant. On the basis of these results, we estimate that 5,522,200 platform workers have used such technology but 6,526,200 non-platform workers have done so. In other words for every platform worker who has used an 'app'/website to log work, there are 1.2 non-platform workers who have done so.

The digital management practices associated with the 'gig economy' are therefore widespread across the UK labour market.

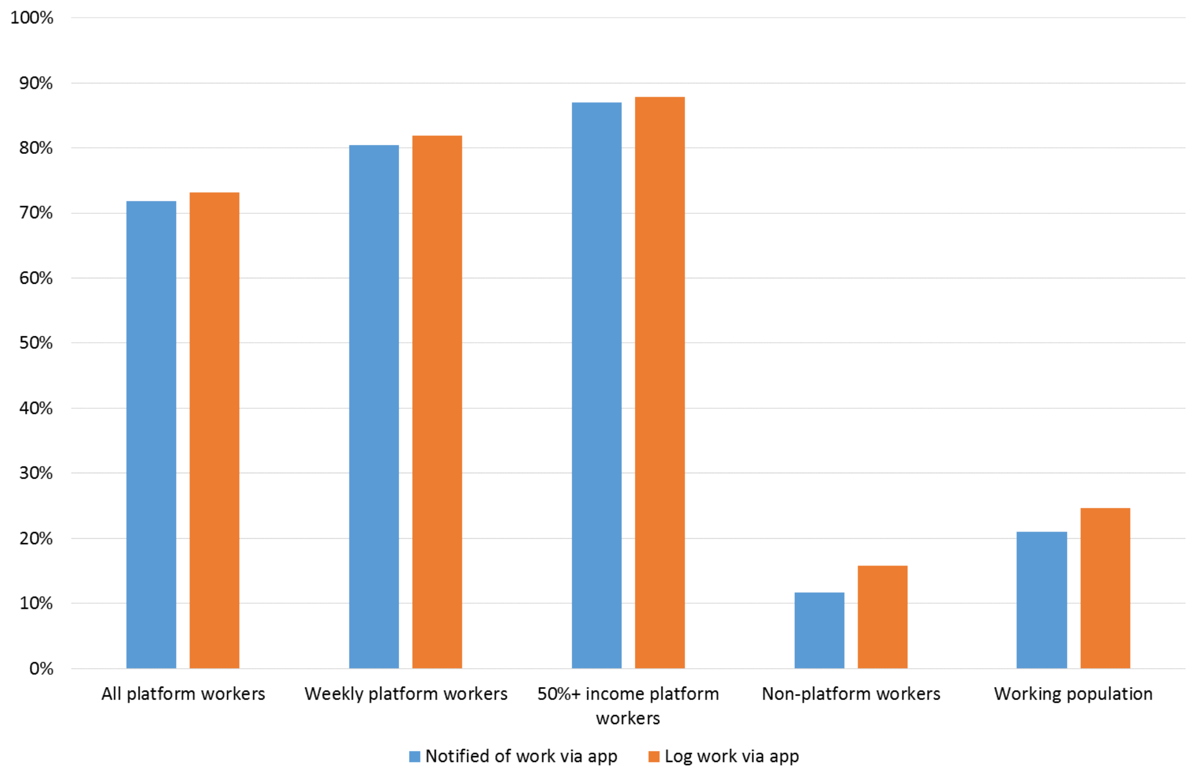


FIGURE 7: PROPORTIONS USING AN APP/WEBSITE TO BE NOTIFIED WHEN WORK IS AVAILABLE OR LOGGING WORK VIA AN APP/WEBSITE [Base: 2235 UK citizens in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

Use of customer ratings

Another important feature of platform work is the use of ratings by customers, enabling the quality of each worker's work to be assessed. Such ratings can play an important role on some platforms in determining what earnings a platform worker can command. Some platforms drop workers whose ratings fall below a certain level.

Amongst all platform workers in the 2019 survey, the proportion who have ever done work that can be rated by customers/clients is 78.9% (84.3% for males, 72.7% for females). Amongst non-platform workers, this figure is not insignificant at 13.9% (14.4% for males, 13.4% for females). Figure 8 below shows that more frequent platform working is associated with greater chances of being rated.

Turning to the giving of ratings, we see that in the working age population, 6.6% give ratings at least weekly, 14.4% at least monthly, 43.8% at least yearly and 57.9% have ever given ratings.

Like the use of apps, the use of customer ratings is not restricted to platform workers but is spread more broadly across the working age population. Indeed, almost a third of those who are *not* platform workers report having their work rated by customers or clients. Overall, half of the UK working age population report being rated in this way.

Once again, it is apparent that the practices of the 'gig economy' are widespread across the UK labour market, and not restricted to platform workers.

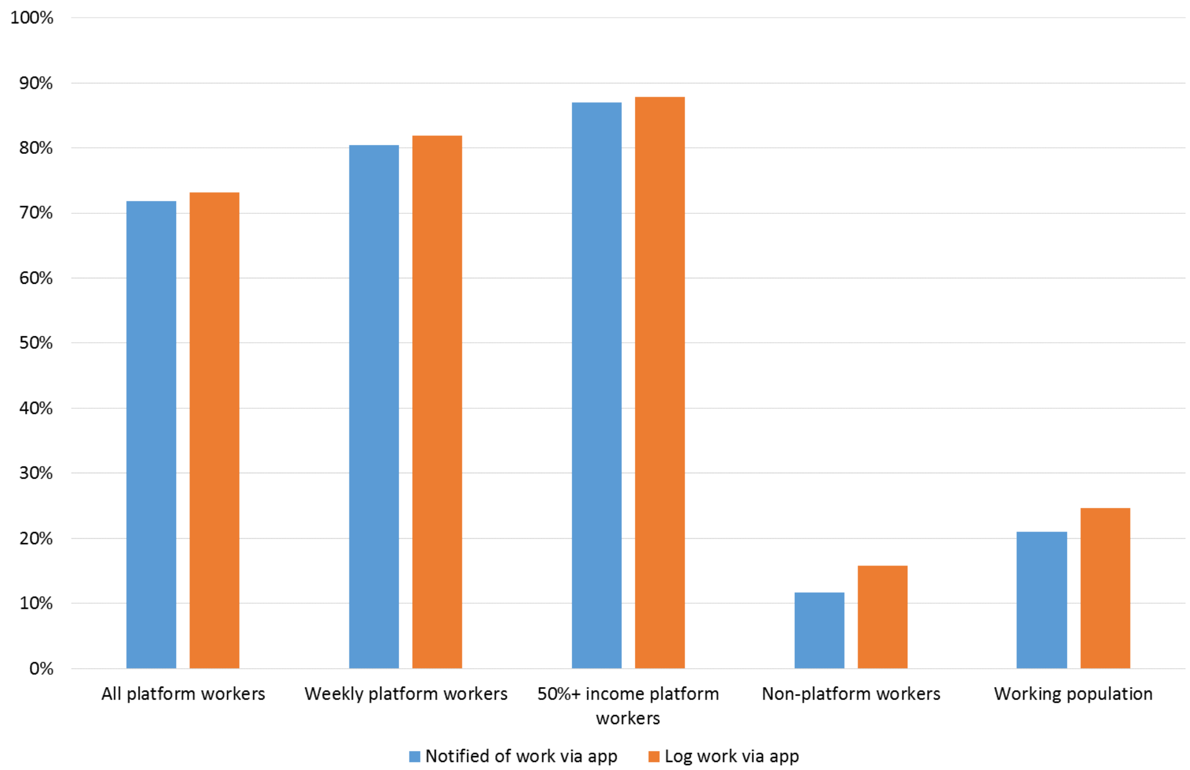


FIGURE 8: PROPORTIONS HAVING WORK RATED BY CUSTOMERS [Base: 2235 UK citizens in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

We do not have data for customer ratings from 2016, but do have such information for other digital practices, making it possible to see how they have grown between January 2016 and April 2019. Figure 9 shows graphically not only the extent to which these digital practices extend across the economy but also how they have grown since 2016.

As might be expected, a very high proportion of the population has, at some point, sent or received emails from an employer of client from home, rising from 39.3% in 2016 to 43.8% in 2019, with the growth coming from platform workers (up from 7.7% to 13.7%), although these are greatly outnumbered by non-platform workers. Perhaps less expected has been the sharp rise in the use of digital means (apps or websites) for notifying workers when new tasks are waiting for them. In 2016 one person in ten was reporting this practice, but by 2019 this had more than doubled to 21.0% of the adult working-age population. In each case, just under half of these workers were *not* platform workers. The use of apps or websites to record work done rose over the same period from 14.2% to 24.6% (nearly a quarter of the working-age population). Here, the majority of affected workers were *not* platform workers in both cases. This suggests a significant spread of digital management practices across the UK workforce. Finally, we looked at the use of customer ratings to evaluate workers' performance. We do not have data on this practice from 2016 but it is clear from the 2019 results that this is also widespread, with 24.0% of respondents reporting it, of whom nearly half (11.7%) were *not* platform workers.

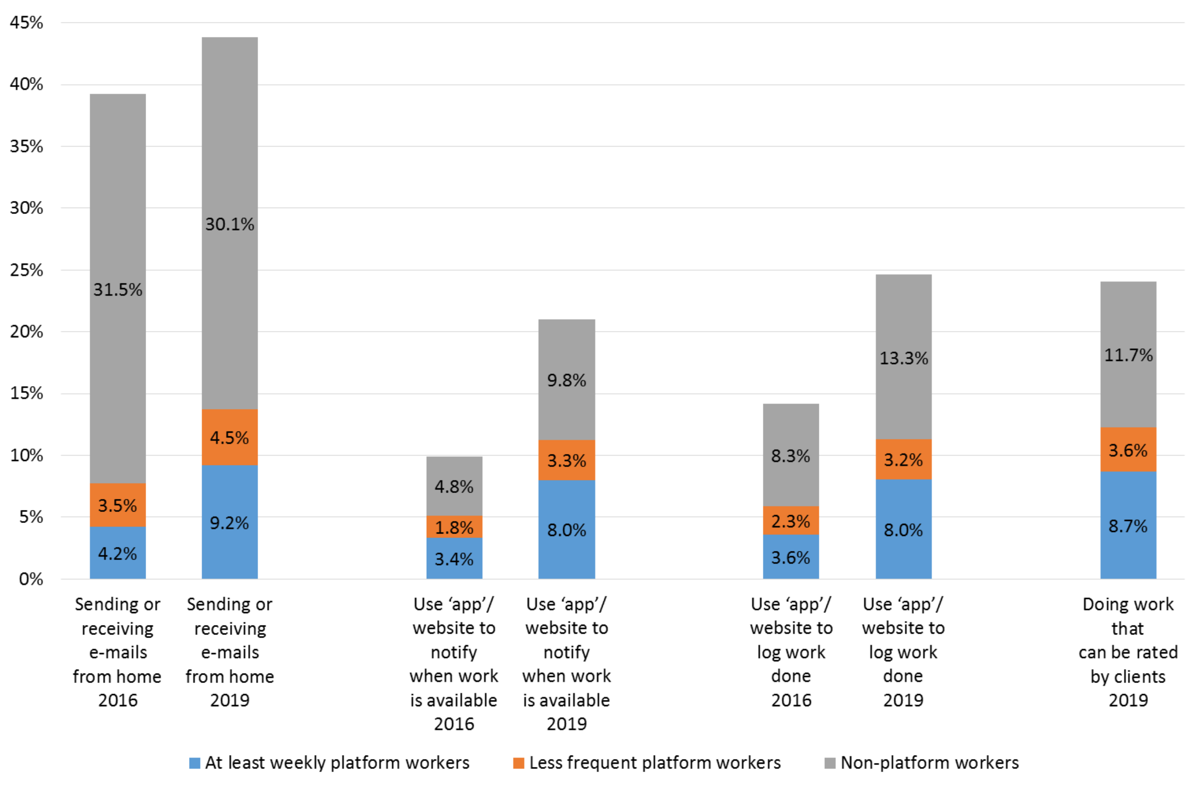


FIGURE 9: USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY BY UK WORKERS [Base: 4473 UK citizens aged 16-75: 2238 in 2016, 2235 in 2019 (weighted)]. Note: the 2016 survey did not include a question about customer ratings.

Who are the platform workers?

Gender

Looking at all those who had ever carried out platform work, men were more likely to do so (at 16.5%) than women (at 14.1%), a reversal of the situation in 2016 when women (at 9.7%) were somewhat more likely than men (at 8.9%) to be doing some sort of platform work although in both surveys, the margins of error are such that these differences between genders are not statistically significant.

Among all platform workers in the 2019 survey, women therefore represented 46.5%, a proportion which was almost unchanged at 46.3% among those doing platform work at least monthly and 44.2% among those doing so at least weekly.

Female platform workers were more likely to respond that platform work was their only source of income: 7.6% of the male platform workers stated that this was their only source of income compared to 11.6% of the female platform workers.

Age

Platform workers can be found in all age groups but are more likely to be in the youngest age groups. Figure 10 shows the breakdown of the UK platform workforce in the 2019 survey by age with 31.5% aged 16-24, 28.7% aged 25-34, 16.4% aged 35-44, 13.4% aged 45-54, 5.7% aged 55-64 and 4.3% aged 65-75. It is of interest to note that of those aged 16-24 who are platform workers, 29.4% identify themselves as being students. Of those that undertake platform work at least weekly, 28.3% identify themselves as students.

A focus on intensive platform workers (those who do so at least once a week) shows similar results with 34.0% aged 16-24, 28.9% aged 25-34, 19.1% aged 35-44, 10.4% aged 45-54, 4.3% aged 55-64 and 3.3% aged 65-75.

In terms of reliance on platform work for income (more than half of personal income comes from platform work), the age distribution is again similar with 30.1% aged 16-24, 29.5% aged 25-34, 19.8% aged 35-44, 12.7% aged 45-54, 3.4% aged 55-64 and 4.5% aged 65-75.

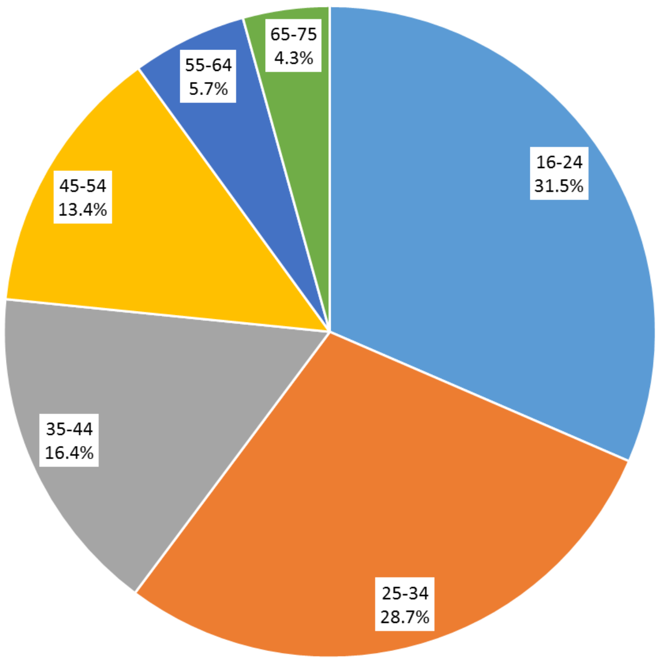


FIGURE 10: PLATFORM WORKERS BY AGE [Base: 349 UK platform workers in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

Location

The 2019 survey found that platform work was quite evenly spread throughout the UK, with the strongest concentration being in Greater London. Further investigation will be required to investigate to what extent this may be correlated to such factors as urbanisation, poverty, seasonality of employment or the pre-existence of a large informal economy.

Platform workers by Region in 2019 survey

	Frequency (weighted)	Percentage of working age population
North East	15	16.29%
North West	34	13.80%
Yorkshire and The Humber	32	16.38%
West Midlands	33	16.64%
East Midlands	16	9.44%
East of England	26	12.69%
South West	26	13.68%
South East	47	16.09%
Greater London	60	21.07%
Wales	16	14.78%
Scotland	26	14.07%
Northern Ireland	10	14.97%

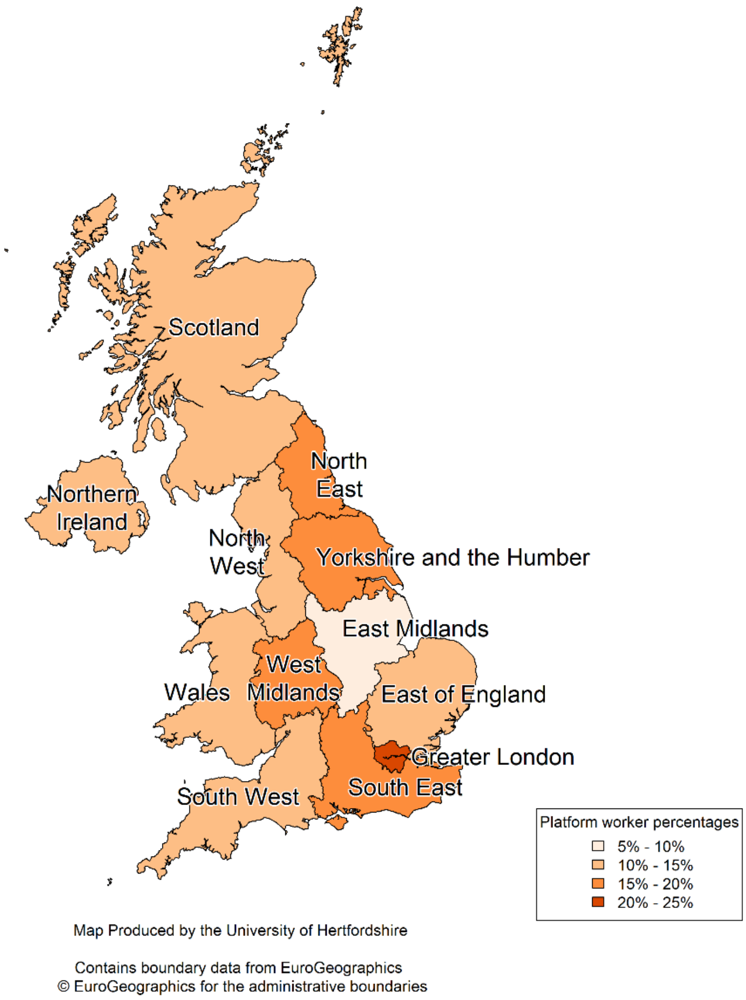


FIGURE 11: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF PLATFORM WORKERS IN UK FROM 2019 SURVEY

What types of work are platform workers doing?

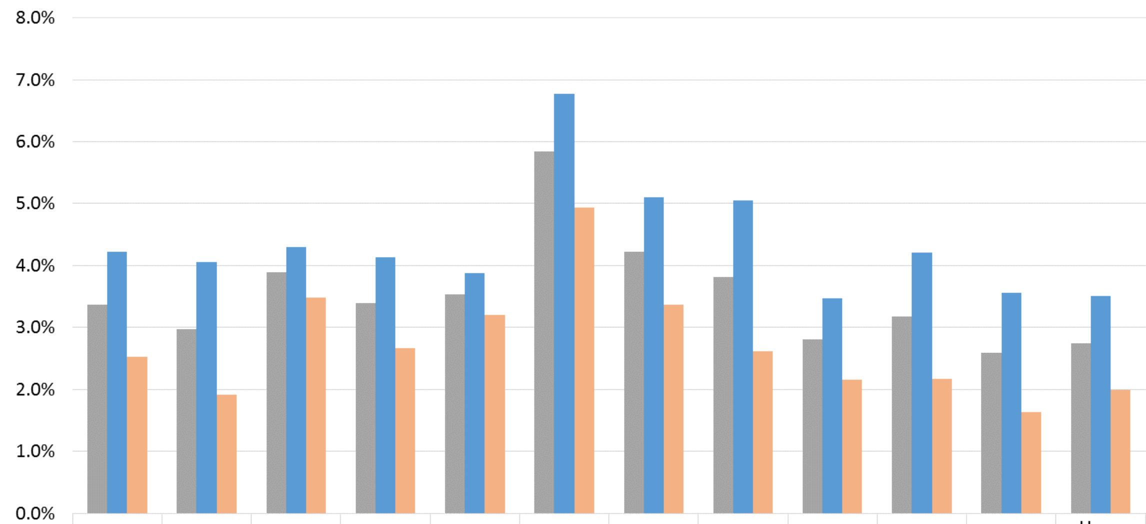
Turning to the work reported in the 2019 survey that platform workers actually do in the UK, one of the most striking features of these results was the propensity of respondents to name more than one kind of work. This suggests that they were trying to gain an income from as many sources as possible but makes it difficult to gain an accurate picture of the breakdown of the platform workforce. 39.0% of platform workers said that they carried out office work, short tasks or 'click work' on their own computer or other online device at least once a week (an estimated 5.8% of the working age population of UK, aged 16-75; 2,860,500 individuals) and 27.9% of platform workers carried out more high skilled online work (such as design, editing, software development or translation) at least once a week (4.2% of working age population; 2,066,900 individuals).

Fewer (23.3%) had run errands or carried out routine office-type work in other people's premises at least once a week (3.5% of working age population; 1,731,300 individuals), carried out occasional work in other people's homes, such as plumbing or household repairs at least once a week (20.0% of platform workers; 3.0% of working age population; 1,458,200 individuals), done regular, scheduled work in other people's homes (such as cleaning, gardening or babysitting) at least once a week (25.9% of platform workers; 3.9% of working age population; 1,904,100 individuals), or professional work (such as legal services, accounting) at least once a week (25.6% of platform workers; 3.8% of working age population; 1,869,500 individuals).

Similar numbers had done taxi work, using an app or website such as Uber at least once a week (22.6% of platform workers; 3.4% of working age population; 1,647,200 individuals) and personal service work (such as hairdressing or massage) at least once a week (22.7% of platform workers; 3.4% of working age population; 1,660,300 individuals).

When it comes to making deliveries, 18.9% of platform workers used a car or van to deliver meals from a restaurant or takeaway at least once a week (2.8% of working age population; 1,373,500 individuals) with the figure for using a bicycle, moped or scooter being 17.4% (2.6% of working age population; 1,266,600 individuals). For delivery of other items at least once a week, 21.5% of platform workers used a car or van (3.2% of working age population; 1,556,300 individuals) with the figure for using a bicycle, moped or scooter being 18.4% (2.7% of working age population; 1,340,400 individuals).

Simplifying this picture by aggregating categories into four main types shows that the largest category, at 7.8% of the adult population, is online work. This is followed, at 5.4%, by work involving the provision of services in other people's homes. Third in order of importance, at 5.1%, is driving and delivery work, followed, at 3.5% by running errands.



	Taxi work	Occasional work in other people's homes	Regular work in other people's homes	Personal service work (e.g. hairdressing, massage)	Errands or office type work in other people's premises	Short tasks or 'click work' on own computer	Creative, IT or professional work on own computer	Professional work (e.g. legal services, accounting)	Use a car or van to deliver meals	Use a car or van to deliver other items	Use a bicycle, moped or scooter to deliver meals	Use a bicycle, moped or scooter to deliver other items
All	3.4%	3.0%	3.9%	3.4%	3.5%	5.8%	4.2%	3.8%	2.8%	3.2%	2.6%	2.7%
Male	4.2%	4.1%	4.3%	4.1%	3.9%	6.8%	5.1%	5.0%	3.5%	4.2%	3.6%	3.5%
Female	2.5%	1.9%	3.5%	2.7%	3.2%	4.9%	3.4%	2.6%	2.2%	2.2%	1.6%	2.0%

FIGURE 12: TYPES OF PLATFORM WORK CARRIED OUT AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK (% OF WORKING AGE POPULATION) [Base: 349 UK platform workers in 2019 survey aged 16-75 (weighted)]

For whom are the platform workers working?

The 2019 survey also looked at customers for online work. This captures information relating to services delivered directly to consumers but, not, of course, those kinds of online work that are delivered directly to corporate customers. Overall, 60.7% of the sample said that they had ever bought the services of a platform worker. This is equivalent to 29,727,700 people across the whole UK working age population.

People in higher income brackets are more likely to be customers for platform work, at around two-thirds for those earning £20,000 to £34,999 and at around three-quarters for those earning over £35,000. This proportion falls to 50.9% among those earning less than £20,000. This does, nevertheless, reveal that a substantial proportion of the users of platform services are themselves low earners. Indeed no fewer than 76.0% of people who say that they provide driving and delivery platform services at least weekly are also customers for them at least monthly (92.8% at least yearly) while than 67.2% of people who say that they provide platform services in other peoples' homes at least weekly are also customers for them at least monthly (89.6% at least yearly).

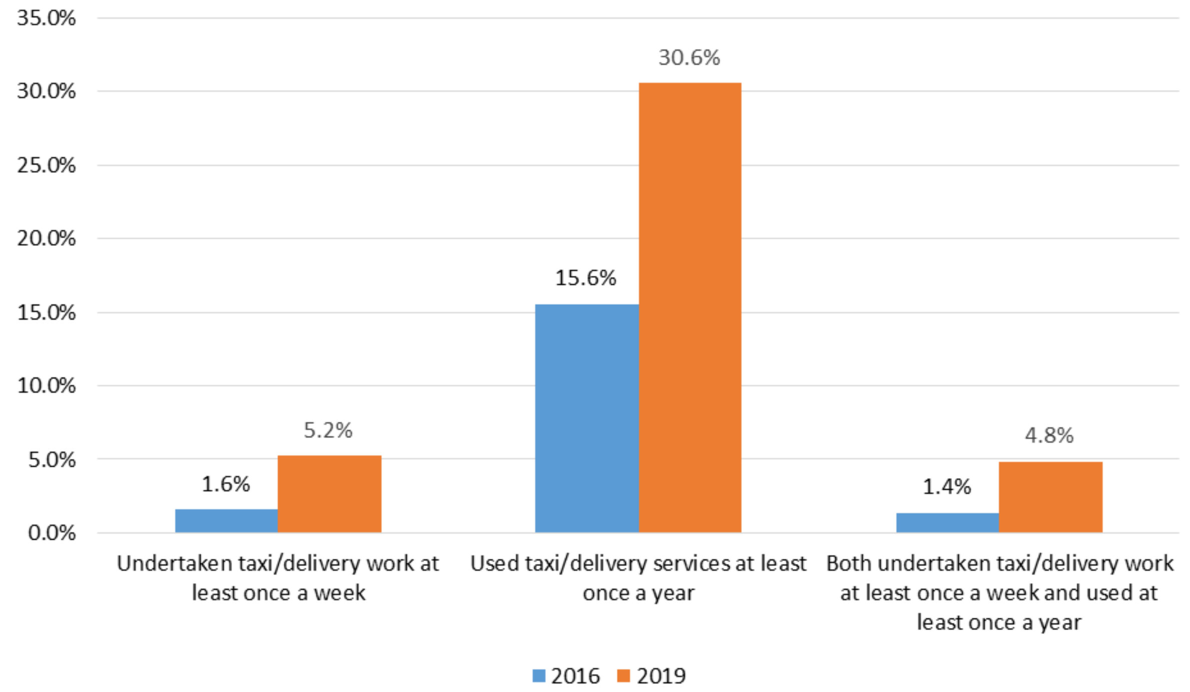


FIGURE 13: PROPORTION OF PLATFORM WORKERS WHO UNDERTAKE TAXI/DELIVERY WORK AT LEAST WEEKLY WHO ARE ALSO CUSTOMERS FOR THE SAME TYPE OF WORK AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR [Base: 4473 UK citizens aged 16-75: 2238 in 2016, 2235 in 2019 (weighted)].

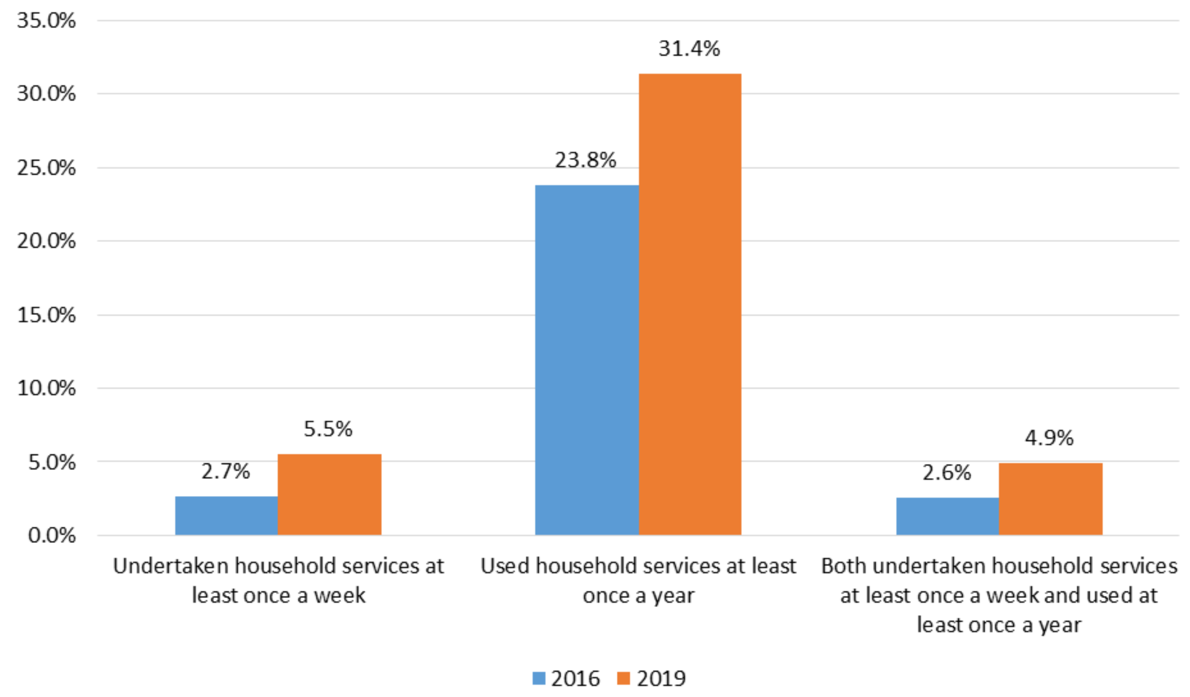


FIGURE 14: PROPORTION OF PLATFORM WORKERS WHO UNDERTAKE HOUSEHOLD SERVICESWORK AT LEAST WEEKLY WHO ARE ALSO CUSTOMERS FOR THE SAME TYPE OF WORK AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR [Base: 4473 UK citizens aged 16-75: 2238 in 2016, 2235 in 2019 (weighted)].

Percentage of people purchasing work online by income bracket

	Percentage
Up to £19,999	50.9%
£20,000 to £34,999	64.8%
£35,000 to £54,999	74.0%
£55,000+	78.3%

How does this compare with other European countries?

A comparison with the first UK survey, carried out in 2016, and surveys carried out in twelve other European countries between 2016 and 2019 shows that platform work has grown considerably in the UK in recent years. It is still not at the levels estimated to exist in some countries but it can be supposed that this increase would also be observed if surveys were to be repeated in other countries. It should also be noted that the upper age included in the survey differed due to sampling practicalities. Whereas the upper limit was 75 in the UK (for both surveys), it was 65 in Sweden, Austria, Finland and Spain, 70 in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, 55 in Estonia, Slovenia and Czechia.

In general, there appears to be a correlation between high levels of platform work and high levels of informal work. Platform work is particularly prevalent in rural regions (which have levels of seasonal work in industries such as agriculture and tourism; hence, perhaps a higher demand for other sources of income in 'low' seasons) and in parts of Central and Eastern Europe, Southern Spain and Italy, which have been characterised historically by large informal sectors.

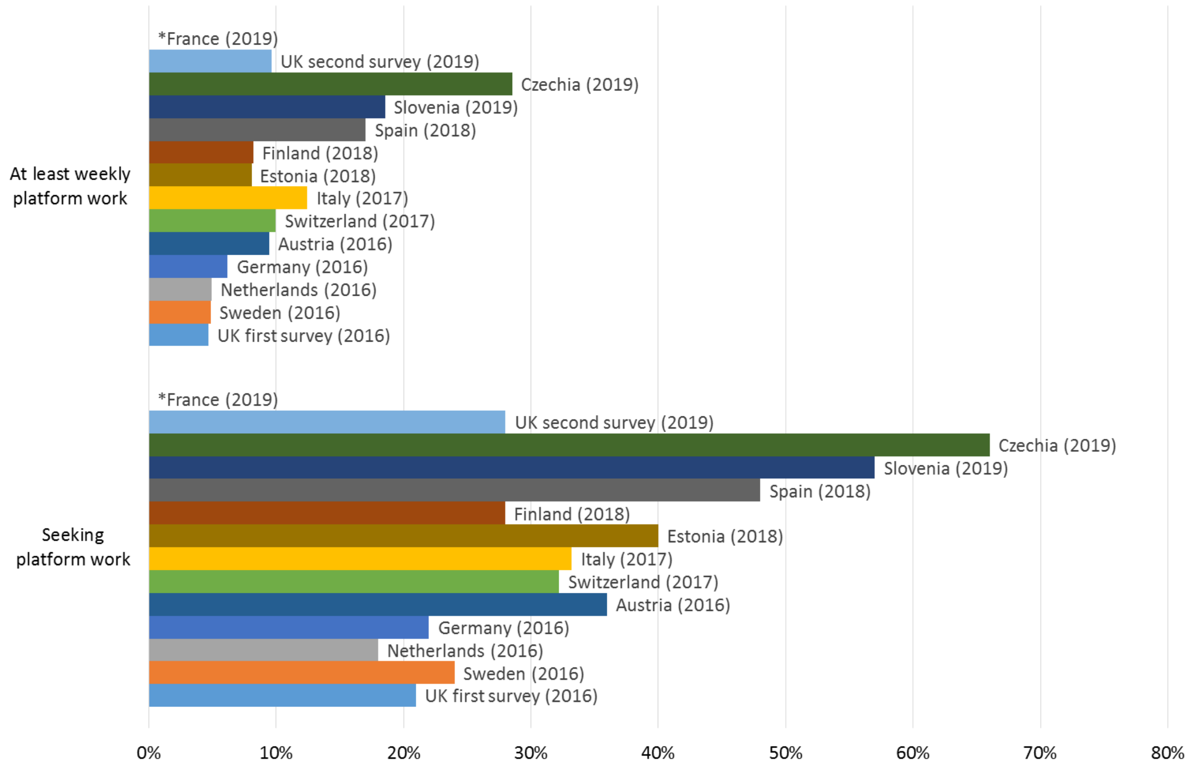


FIGURE 15: COMPARISON WITH OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - SEEKING PLATFORM WORK AND UNDERTAKING WEEKLY PLATFORM WORK [Base: 2235 respondents in the UK 2019 survey, 2000 in Czechia, 2001 in Slovenia, 2182 in Spain, 2000 in Finland, 2000 in Estonia, 2199 in Italy, 2001 in Switzerland, 1969 in Austria, 2180 in Germany, 2125 in the Netherlands, 2146 in Sweden and 2238 in the UK 2016 survey (weighted). Data from France is still to be collected and analysed.]

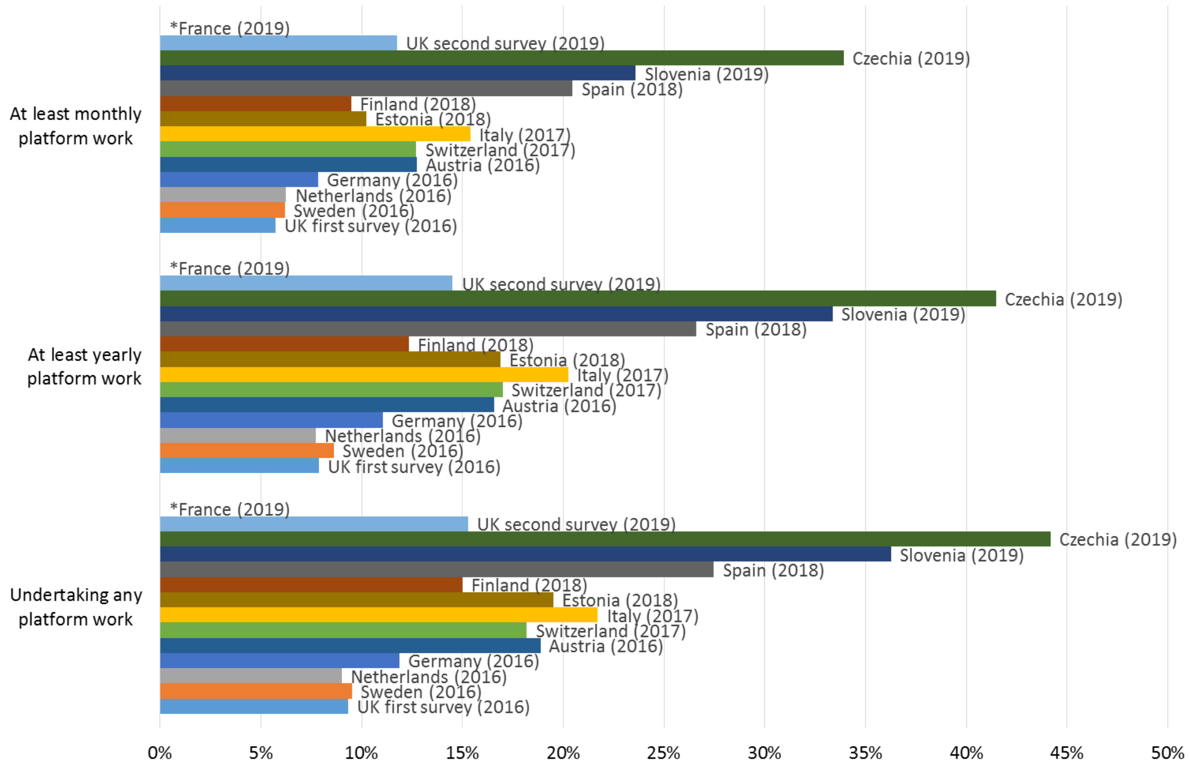


FIGURE 16: COMPARISON WITH OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - FREQUENCY OF PLATFORM WORK LESS THAN WEEKLY [Base: 2235 respondents in the UK 2019 survey, 2000 in Czechia, 2001 in Slovenia, 2182 in Spain, 2000 in Finland, 2000 in Estonia, 2199 in Italy, 2001 in Switzerland, 1969 in Austria, 2180 in Germany, 2125 in the Netherlands, 2146 in Sweden and 2238 in the UK 2016 survey (weighted). Data from France is still to be collected and analysed.]

Conclusions

We can conclude from this research that it is not possible to identify platform workers as a distinct and separate category in the UK labour market. On the contrary, platform work is taken up by a wide variety of people as a way of supplementing their income from other sources – often adopted on top of a full-time job. The fact that many more people are seeking such work than are actually finding it, and the way that is combined with other means of generating an income online (such as selling second-hand goods or renting out a room) suggest that it is driven mainly by economic need. This picture is confirmed by looking at other European countries where it is apparent that high levels of platform working are correlated with low average earning levels compared with other countries. The implications of this are that measures designed to target platform work as a distinct category are unlikely to be effective and that consideration should be given to broader strategies addressing low pay, poverty and precarity more broadly.

Although public attention on the gig economy has tended to focus on the taxi driving, food delivery and courier services that are visibly present on our streets, these results show that the workers providing these services are outnumbered by those working in more hidden ways, either providing household services in other people's homes or working in isolation on their own electronic devices carrying out online tasks in what is essentially a global labour market. This suggests the need for further in depth research on these less visible forms of platform work.

Another important conclusion from this research relates to the spread of digital practices for organising and managing work beyond the scope of those who work directly for online platforms into other sectors of the economy. Relatively little is known about the impacts of these practices on organisational culture, job satisfaction and professional development. There is also a need to explore their implications for data privacy and equity.

Notes

Note 1: Percentages given above are based on weighted calculations to adjust for small deviations of the sample from population characteristics. Missing and “don’t know” responses have been excluded. Where percentages have been expressed as number of people, these figures are similarly weighted. Where counts of respondents (not based on percentages) are reported, these are not weighted.

Note 2: Confidence intervals have not been given above for the sake of brevity. For those percentages based on the whole sample (2238 respondents in the 2016 survey, 2235 respondents in the 2019 survey), all confidence intervals would be within +/- 2.1% of the figures quoted. For percentages based on platform workers alone, confidence intervals would be within +/- 6.8% for the 2016 survey and +/- 5.2% for the 2019 survey.

Note 3: Offline surveys have been carried out in the UK (face to face) and Switzerland (telephone) in order to assess the effect of survey mode on results. Results have been broadly replicated. Investigations indicate that where differences in results exist, these are largely due to inevitable issues in converting an online questionnaire into face to face or telephone mode.

University of Hertfordshire, European think tank FEPS, UNI Europa, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and other organisations across Europe are collaborating on a research project to explore the scale and impact of the growth of platform working, and provide a more comprehensive picture of the digitalised labour market across the European Union.

Results have been published so far for the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany (surveys conducted in 2016), Switzerland, Italy (in 2017), Estonia, Finland, Spain (in 2018), Slovenia, Czechia (2019).

In the UK, 2238 adults aged 16-75 were surveyed online by Ipsos MORI for the 2016 survey. Responses were collected between 22nd and 26th January 2016. For the 2019 survey, 2235 adults aged 16-75 were surveyed online by Ipsos MORI in collaboration with Ampario and CINT. Responses were collected between 26th April and 1st May 2019. Data are weighted by age, gender, region, social grade and working status to match the profile of the adult population aged 16-75 in the UK. Ipsos MORI was responsible for the fieldwork and data collection only. University of Hertfordshire was responsible for the analysis, reporting and interpretation of the results.

For the 2016 survey, ppopulation estimates are derived according to estimated population figures for mid-2016 for adults aged 16-75 in the UK, estimated at 48,400,000. For the 2019 survey, population estimates are derived according to estimated population figures for 2019 for adults aged 16-75 in the UK, estimated at 48,950,000. Survey percentages are grossed up as a proportion of this figure.

Appendix

This appendix provides estimates of numbers of women and men in the UK in 2016 and 2019 falling into the following categories:

1. Having ever done any platform work;
2. Having done platform work at least monthly;
3. Having done platform work at least weekly;
4. Platform work constitutes 100% of income;
5. Platform work constitutes more than 50% of personal income;
6. General population using apps/websites to notify when work is available;
7. General population using apps/websites to log work done;
8. General population using apps/websites both for notification of when work is available and for logging work done;
9. General population in which work is rated by customers (2019 only);
10. General population using apps/websites both for notification of when work is available and for logging work done and having work rated by customers (2019 only).

2016

	Men		Women		All	
	% (95% CI)	**Number of people (95% CI)**	**% (95% CI)**	**Number of people (95% CI)**	**% (95% CI)**	**Number of people (95% CI)**
Undertaking any platform work	8.9% (7.3, 10.6)	2.15M (1.74, 2.55)	9.7% (8.0, 11.4)	2.36M (1.94, 2.78)	9.3% (8.1, 10.5)	4.51M (3.92, 5.09)
Undertaking platform work at least monthly	5.7% (4.4, 7.1)	1.38M (1.05, 1.71)	5.7% (4.4, 7.1)	1.40M (1.07, 1.73)	5.7% (4.8, 6.7)	2.78M (2.31, 3.24)
Undertaking platform work at least weekly	4.5% (3.2, 5.7)	1.07M (0.78, 1.36)	4.9% (3.6, 6.1)	1.19M (0.88, 1.49)	4.7% (3.8, 5.5)	2.25M (1.83, 2.68)
Obtaining All Personal Income from Platform Work	0.2% (0.0, 0.5)	48K (0, 111)	0.6% (0.1, 1.0)	140K (32, 247)	0.4% (0.1, 0.6)	188K (63, 312)
Obtaining at Least 50% of Personal Income from Platform Work	2.8% (1.9, 3.8)	683K (448, 918)	2.1% (1.3, 2.9)	513K (309, 717)	2.5% (1.8, 3.1)	1195K (884, 1507)
Ever Been Notified of Work via 'App'/Website	8.7% (7.1, 10.4)	2.10M (1.70, 2.50)	11.1% (9.2, 12.9)	2.70M (2.24, 3.16)	9.9% (8.7, 11.2)	4.80M (4.19, 5.41)
Ever Logged Work via 'App'/Website	13.4% (11.3, 15.4)	3.21M (2.72, 3.69)	15.0% (12.8, 17.1)	3.64M (3.13, 4.16)	14.2% (12.7, 15.6)	6.85M (6.14, 7.56)
Ever Been Notified of Work **and** Ever Logged Work via 'App'/Website	7.9% (6.3, 9.5)	1.90M (1.52, 2.29)	8.2% (6.6, 9.8)	1.99M (1.60, 2.39)	8.1% (6.9, 9.2)	3.90M (3.35, 4.45)

Base: 2238 respondents in the UK

2019

	Men		Women		All	
	% (95% CI)	Number of people (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	Number of people (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	Number of people (95% CI)
Undertaking any platform work	16.5% (14.3, 18.7)	4.02M (3.48, 4.55)	14.1% (12.0, 16.1)	3.47M (2.97, 3.97)	15.3% (13.8, 16.8)	7.48M (6.75, 8.21)
Undertaking platform work at least monthly	13.2% (11.2, 15.2)	3.20M (2.72, 3.69)	10.4% (8.6, 12.2)	2.56M (2.12, 3.00)	11.8% (10.4, 13.1)	5.76M (5.10, 6.41)
Undertaking platform work at least weekly	10.9% (9.0, 12.7)	2.64M (2.19, 3.09)	8.4% (6.8, 10.0)	2.08M (1.68, 2.48)	9.6% (8.4, 10.9)	4.72M (4.12, 5.32)
Obtaining All Personal Income from Platform Work	1.1% (0.5, 1.7)	265K (116, 413)	1.2% (0.6, 1.9)	302K (144, 461)	1.2% (0.7, 1.6)	567K (350, 785)
Obtaining at Least 50% of Personal Income from Platform Work	3.8% (2.7, 5.0)	931K (656, 1206)	3.2% (2.2, 4.3)	799K (544, 1054)	3.5% (2.8, 4.3)	1730K (1354, 2105)
Ever Been Notified of Work via 'App'/Website	24.0% (21.4, 26.5)	5.83M (5.20, 6.45)	18.2% (15.9, 20.5)	4.49M (3.92, 5.05)	21.0% (19.3, 22.8)	10.29M (9.45, 11.14)
Ever Logged Work via 'App'/Website	27.1% (24.4, 29.8)	6.59M (5.93, 7.24)	22.2% (19.7, 24.7)	5.48M (4.87, 6.09)	24.6% (22.8, 26.4)	12.05M (11.16, 12.95)
Ever Been Notified of Work **and** Ever Logged Work via 'App'/Website	20.9% (18.5, 23.4)	5.09M (4.49, 5.69)	15.2% (13.1, 17.3)	3.74M (3.22, 4.27)	18.0% (16.4, 19.6)	8.82M (8.02, 9.61)
Ever Having Had Work Rated by Customers	26.2% (23.6, 28.9)	6.38M (5.73, 7.03)	21.9% (19.4, 24.4)	5.40M (4.79, 6.01)	24.0% (22.2, 25.9)	11.77M (10.87, 12.66)
Ever Been Notified of Work **and** Logged Work via 'App'/Website **and** Had Work Rated by Customers	17.9% (15.6, 20.2)	4.36M (3.80, 4.92)	13.0% (11.0, 15.0)	3.20M (2.71, 3.69)	15.4% (13.9, 16.9)	7.55M (6.81, 8.29)

Base: 2235 respondents in the UK