



A TOOLBOX

# Establishing workers' representation and social dialogue in the platform and app economy



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The project “Establishing workers’ representation and social dialogue in the platform and app economy” was coordinated by the ETUC (Ignacio Doreste, Wolfgang Kowalsky, Cecilia Lazzaroni, Elisabeth Terren) in partnership with the IRES (Odile Chagny) and ASTREES (Christophe Teissier), the two organisations that initiated the Sharers & Workers network, under the political guidance of ETUC Confederal Secretary Ludovic Voet. The project benefited from the expertise of Marielle Benchehboune, Franck Bonot, Dave Sheik and Jean-Daniel Zamor.

This toolbox was written by Odile Chagny, Ignacio Doreste, Cecilia Lazzaroni, Christophe Teissier and Ludovic Voet on the basis of the experiences and expertise shared by the initiatives that participated in the project: CGT (France), DidaNet (ÖGB, Austria), FGTB Plateforme (Belgium) FNV (Netherlands), GMB (UK), Idea Diffusa (CGIL, Italy), NGG – Lieferando (DGB, Germany), Sindacato Networkers (UIL, Italy), United Freelancers (CSC, Belgium), UGT (Spain), Workers’ Observatory (Scotland).



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# Foreword



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**Ludovic Voet**  
ETUC Confederal Secretary

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Although most digital work platform companies are hostile to any effort to organise worker representation, the practices used to construct this toolbox show that ETUC member organisations have been successful in consolidating models for the collective organisation and representation of digital platform workers across Europe.

The project has highlighted the different actions undertaken by European trade unions to challenge the way platforms have based their business model on the suppression of workers' rights. This guide incorporates the collective knowledge of trade unions that have succeeded (and sometimes failed) in reaching out to these workers, organising them into unions and creating the balance of power necessary to negotiate with platform companies. The guidelines are based on the practices of unions that have participated in the various project activities. Many other ETUC-affiliated organisations are also active in organising and representing workers on platforms.

These successes and failures must be viewed in the light of platform companies' systematic evasion of their responsibilities as employers, which makes this daily work extremely difficult. It is clear that the number of workers organised in trade unions and the number of collective bargaining agreements signed with digital platform companies will increase significantly when Europe makes platform companies respect the rules on workers' rights.

We hope that the lessons learned from the experiences of the trade unionists and workers whose efforts have led to this guide will help other ETUC organisations to strengthen their trade union actions in respect of workers on digital platforms.

When the European Commission adopts its legislative initiative to provide quality jobs and to make platform companies respect the rules, the European trade union movement will be ready to contribute to its implementation, at national and sectoral levels and in the platform companies themselves.

The road is long, but the landscape (our common struggles and efforts) and the final destination (the collective organisation of the workers involved) are worth it.



# Introduction: Guide to the toolbox

This toolbox is the result of a two-year project involving eleven initiatives from various European countries. It incorporates the lessons learned from discussions and coaching sessions during the two years of work.

The toolbox does not constitute academic research, nor does it aim to be a comprehensive catalogue of all actions undertaken in Europe since the rise of the platform company model. Rather, it aims to provide a faithful account of the messages shared by the organisations that have participated in the project over its duration.

The document was written using a purely bottom-up approach. The project team took note of the messages coming from the participants and sought to organise them into a logical framework — not to give its own interpretation.

While neither scientific nor exhaustive, the toolbox may be a useful instrument for addressing the challenges that unions and initiatives face in reaching out to and organising workers in platform companies, and within the framework of negotiations. Indeed, all of the strategies or combinations of strategies described in this document have proved useful at some point for at least one of the initiatives in the project.

A note on terminology before getting into the heart of the document: we refer to “platform companies” in an effort to counter the narrative put forward by these companies. While the word “platform” may evoke the idea of a digital marketplace, a simple mediator suspended in digital space, the expression “platform companies” forces us to reflect on the true nature of these companies. A digital platform company is (like an ordinary company) an employer, (temporary work) agency or intermediary. Platforms are indeed “companies” with a wide range of prerogatives and management powers. They should, therefore, assume all the obligations that come with this status, including the function of employer, where applicable.

The first part, “Organising and building a collective”, focuses on the steps that unions and initiatives need to take in order to gain a position of strength: reaching out to workers and building membership, formulating demands, mobilising workers and communicating. The second part, “Strategies to open the door to negotiations”, focuses on the different approaches unions can use to pave the way for negotiations: legal or lobbying strategies, forming alliances with other relevant actors in the platform economy or coordinating at international level.

# 1 Organising platform company workers into unions

## 1.1 Raising awareness/reaching out

In the absence of a single or clearly identified workplace, which has historically served as the basis for union establishment, reaching out to and uniting workers in platform companies is a particular challenge. Section 1.1 explores the ways in which unions and workers' initiatives are reaching out to platform workers, building trust among them, generating interest and getting them involved in the union project.

### 1.1.1 Creating gathering places

While digital platform work is accessed through technological devices used by the individual, union strategies in organising and reaching out to these workers have been effective when combining both an approach adapted to the target group and the need to provide opportunities for face-to-face contact.

Sometimes, to enable this “real” contact, unions have to respond to the specific expectations and practices of the workers concerned. There are many possibilities for physical meetings. The strategy followed by the CSC in Belgium is to meet workers where they are most often found (fast-food restaurants for delivery workers), and to organise weekly meetings in a relaxed and cheerful environment. In France, the CGT is planning meeting places for delivery workers where they can rest and take showers. In Austria, the ÖGB is working on creating a space where delivery workers can rest and have their bikes repaired. The opening of a dedicated space followed a phase of informal meetings with workers at specific assembly points. This preliminary phase has proved to be essential for gradually building trust.

Every opportunity to reach out to workers and increase the likelihood of success must be seized. In Germany, for example, NGG took advantage of the creation by a platform company of a repair space to have that space considered as an establishment, and to go and meet the delivery workers. In the UK, the collective agreement between GMB and Uber gave the union access to all the platform company's green light hubs.

### 1.1.2 Building on existing communities and forums to reach workers and mobilise social networks

A difficult decision in reaching platform workers via social networks or forums is choosing between a dedicated forum created by the union itself or making use of an existing forum. The challenge is to combine three objectives that are not easily reconciled.

The first is to use network impacts to reach the largest possible community and thus limit the “acquisition” costs specific to social networks, to achieve a critical mass allowing for lively discussion and other desired outcomes to take place. The second is to control the content of the discussions. Large groups and communities raise real difficulties with regard to the ability to monitor participants. The third is to provide security for workers on the forums where they exchange information with each other, to avoid exposing them too much to the risk of disconnection by the platform companies.

Some lessons can be drawn from the strategies implemented by certain unions and workers' collectives:



To organise interactions with workers, it may be much more effective to combine different tools, rather than thinking about a single portal. This also means accepting the idea of using already established groups that are not necessarily formal, such as FB groups created by workers themselves, and organising feedback and discussion within the group/community, before proposing a more formal organising tool allowing exchanges between the union and the workers to be structured. For example, the CSC adopted this approach for the United Freelancers webtool, an innovative project supported by the European Social Fund in Flanders to design an Internet tool appropriate to meeting workers' needs.



It may be effective to join pre-existing forums/groups with a large audience, where workers from platform "X" meet to discuss issues that are often work-related, rather than trying to create a separate forum from scratch and attempting to contact workers. IG Metall adopted this strategy to reach out to YouTubers. A large Facebook group with over 20,000 participants already existed. The creation of Fairtube made use of this group, by formalising precise demands, particularly in terms of transparency and pay. A video was produced and went viral thanks to the cooperation of several YouTube influencers.



When a strategy is implemented to build an audience on forums and social networks, it is vital not to adopt an instrumentalization approach. The example of the UGT in Spain shows that it is fundamental to be "passionate", to make noise, to be present at all times, and also to be very responsive to any messages that arrive, to position oneself as a fully-fledged actor on the social network.



In any event, the type of interactions that take place on the forum must be clearly defined and linked to a more global strategy of interactions with the workers. The forum makes it possible to discuss, demand and mobilise. It is essential to gain the workers' trust without immediately communicating a trade union offer, and participation in forums can be a crucial part of this. But it is not intended to respond to specific requests, to provide legal information or expert advice. To achieve these other dimensions, a more formalised tool is needed. That, for example, is the strategy followed by IG Metall with Fairtube.



When forums are created by the platform companies themselves, they can be mobilised to reach out to deliverers.



### 1.1.3 Telling workers' stories

The challenge of uniting platform workers can be explained in part by the absence of a single or clearly identified workplace, which has historically served as the basis for union establishment. But there is also another problem of a different kind: how to communicate a message or put forward initiatives that reflect the experience of these workers and thus arouse their interest? Formulated in this way, the issue is undoubtedly not limited to platform workers. However, it is particularly evident in their case.

The experiences shared by a variety of actors who work towards the collective representation of these workers underline the distance that can exist between them and the trade union organisations or workers' collectives that wish to organise them. Distrust of organisations perceived as being distant or bureaucratic, or the fear of being deprived of their freedom by an "authoritarian" collective are just some of the challenges that are difficult for organisers to overcome, and this distance may be widened by the individual profiles of the workers (migrants or people in particularly vulnerable situations).

These observations call for a commitment to ways of talking to platform workers that are as rooted as possible in their experience. Overall, this may involve identifying or relaying workers' stories and testimonies that reveal the reality of their working and even living conditions. In a way, then, it is a matter of creating the means to "make work visible" and thus combat the invisibility of which the workers in question are often victims. And to do so by allowing workers themselves to express or directly narrate their life at work and the problems it raises.

This collection of experiences can take various forms: texts written by the workers themselves or based on an interview with them, short videos aimed at showing part of the reality of the work carried out (broadcast, for example, via social networks such as Instagram or Tik Tok...), audio podcasts, photographs, etc. The material can then be disseminated on one or more dedicated virtual spaces (sites,

blogs, social networks) and thus bring visibility and clarity to the initiative.

The benefits to be expected from this type of approach, which should be integrated into a broader strategy, are varied. They make it possible to:

- concretely publicise and legitimise the trade union organisation or workers' collective as the voice of the workers, in the eyes of target workers as well as other stakeholders (local authorities, media, political staff, etc.);
- initiate sharing between the workers themselves by giving an unfiltered view of the experiences of each individual; and
- collect empirical data for the organisation based on work experience in order to formulate claims or take other initiatives.

Within this framework, almost anything is conceivable and can be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, subject to the human and material resources available, which themselves constitute a limit to be carefully considered. An interesting experiment from this perspective is the [Workers' Observatory](#) set up in the city of Edinburgh and the result of cooperation between researchers and platform workers, supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress. Launched in late 2020, it aims to "*support platform workers by developing tools and tactics to obtain the information and influence they need to become collectively empowered*". The Observatory has a website with information and ideas provided by the workers themselves, organised into small groups ("guilds") each dedicated to workers on certain types of platforms (digital delivery work platform, care services, etc.).

Videos can be found on the Internet made by workers, in which they describe their working conditions as concretely as possible, for example [here](#).





### 1.1.4 The case of clickworkers

Clickworkers, generally classified as online platform workers, deserve a separate section because of the significant differences between their work methods and those of offline platform workers. These differences mainly relate to the low visibility and the isolation of clickworkers.

Bike couriers are an example of a very recognisable category of offline platform workers: they work on the streets, carrying large thermal backpacks bearing the logos and colours of platform companies on their backs. Clickworkers, on the other hand, frequently work from home. Bike couriers sometimes take breaks at strategic locations between one order and the next or wait together outside restaurants to collect orders. Clickworkers have no obvious physical places to meet and few of them know their “colleagues”.

These aspects, which mark the differences between clickworkers and workers on offline platforms, also make it particularly difficult for trade unions and workers’ rights initiatives to reach out to clickworkers and raise their awareness.

Despite these difficulties, there are some significant examples where union attempts to reach out to online workers have been successful.

In some cases, contacts with trade unions were made possible by external circumstances or the emergence of spe-

cific needs. In Serbia, and in connection with the ÖGB-led DidaNet project, the clickworkers’ action stemmed from a reaction to a government announcement on tax issues. *The Association of Internet Workers* quickly organised against this threat, and then sought and obtained the support of the two largest trade unions in Serbia. When the Serbian government announced on Facebook that the country’s clickworkers would be subject to a retroactive tax, Facebook was where clickworkers – and trade unions – first came into contact and started connecting to respond to the urgency of the situation. The action was successful, and the government’s proposed tax will ultimately only be applied from the time it was announced, and not retroactively.

Another example is *United Freelancers*, which tried to get in touch with clickworkers by registering on different digital work platforms and posting job offers or tasks. The search for online micro-tasks to be completed in pairs allowed *United Freelancers* to briefly connect with the clickworkers who completed these tasks.

There are other possible strategies for getting around the difficulties illustrated above in reaching out to clickworkers. For example, many workers in platform companies, including clickworkers, work for platform companies as a sideline. Although they are invisible in their secondary activities, they can be approached in the context of their main activity or job. From this perspective, it would be interesting to map the areas of work usually complemented by these online micro-work activities and to recruit members from among these workers: artists, retail employees, etc.

These examples highlight an interesting point. Even though clickworkers operate on very different bases to offline platform workers, the strategies adopted by unions to reach out and connect with them – through Facebook, exploiting a moment of crisis, or meeting them ‘at their workplace’, even if it is purely virtual – are ultimately not so different from the strategies adopted in the case of other types of platform work.

### 1.1.5 Community targeting

Members of communities including, for example, minority groups, may not be familiar with local unions and may be inhibited by cultural differences. Both can hamper the ability of unions and worker initiatives to reach out to workers in these communities.

An effective way to gain the trust of workers in platform companies in these cases may be to present representatives of trade unions or initiatives as being “one of them”.

The following are possible strategies to achieve this result:

1

**Take in-house recruitment policies** into account, so that the union or initiative has a diverse staff with a variety of skills, as the Dutch union FNV has done.

2

**Seek out workers where they are and build on existing communities**, for instance by organising within neighbourhood, community and parents’ associations, in front of schools, at mosques, places of worship, university halls of residence; by getting invited to parties/events organised by the communities, and so on. This can be done on-site (for example by contacting mosques and imams), or online, for example by identifying workers, interacting with them and studying their social interactions.

3

**Create dedicated branches for migrant workers** in order to organise them and empower them to become local union activists.

4

**Identify community leaders**, including on social networks, and meet and get to know them. After identifying workplace leaders, the British trade union GMB usually offers development opportunities and training as an activist.

5

**Use digital solutions and approach community members’ meeting places** to identify them. GMB is currently developing a pilot project in this regard.

6

**Flashmobs and events** are more attractive than meetings and can help bring more people together, as the FNV proposes.

## 1.2 Leading the workers' collective and building trade union action

In order to interact with workers, understand their needs, provide individual or collective responses, and lay the foundations for common demands, the use of digital tools is almost inevitable, and there are few trade unions or workers' collectives that have not either already deployed such tools or have plans to do so. The objectives are many, as summarised in a study conducted by United Freelancers as part of its reflections on its webtool project for platform workers. First, the tool can be used to interact with workers, whether in the context of "horizontal" discussion forums, or to provide information (via a blog, an FAQ), or to allow workers to report problems encountered with a platform company. The tool can then allow workers to access the services offered to them: comparative information on platform companies, information on their rights, calculation of real hourly wages, comparison of positions, etc. Finally, the tool can also be used to gather information, in particular on working conditions, pay, working hours, etc.

There are many and varied questions about the right combination of tools, the timing of their deployment, the interaction with groups already established on social networks, and the ability to reach the targeted populations. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the ideas below describe some of the strategies implemented by trade unions and workers' collectives to improve the effectiveness of such tools, whether in terms of user experience, information sharing, linking tools, or control of individual data.

### 1.2.1 Thinking about users' experience of tools in relation to the target population

For any tool to be effective, it must meet the needs of its target audience.

This involves carrying out preliminary research on the target audience, and possibly identifying some typical profiles, in order to have a clear understanding of whom the tool will be designed for. For example, when developing its webtool, United Freelancers of the CSC identified possible profiles of platform workers and selected those

to be targeted first. As was pointed out in the coaching sessions, sets of data (visits, views, approvals, etc.) are important, but are less meaningful and will have less impact if they do not come from the targeted end-users.

Once the target audience has been identified, a further step is to identify the common challenges faced by the workers within that group, in order to design a tool that will meet their needs and that will be designed for their use – not based on the unions' perception.

The initiatives participating in the project identified a number of services that can be useful to workers in platform companies, which they provide through their online platforms and other tools. These include:

- ▶ Providing answers to the questions most frequently asked by platform workers;
- ▶ Providing a space to make contact;
- ▶ Providing specialist assistance, including by way of direct contact with trade union experts. Advice and guidance on legal and tax issues are particularly relevant for workers;
- ▶ Providing information on the quality of platform companies, wages and working conditions.

Accessibility is also part of the equation. To allow workers to contact the union via several different channels without missing any messages, different FGTB (Belgium) centres have joined forces to create a Facebook site/page that is the "receptacle" for all questions about platform workers. These questions are then dispatched internally to the relevant FGTB centres (metallurgy, food, cleaning, transport, etc.).

Another example of a strategy to respond to user requests is deployed by the UGT in Spain through its website [www.turespuestasindical.es](http://www.turespuestasindical.es), set up in September 2017. The objective is to provide support for any worker inquiry through a web platform. The initiative has been through two distinct periods of work: before the pandemic, when the UGT provided support to 3,000 users, and since the start of the Covid-19 epidemic, when the service moved towards a more direct exchange of information via other channels (such as WhatsApp). The UGT adapted its tools to the new demands of workers. As the number of questions increased significantly, the union decided to provide this service in partnership with its youth department (RUGE). In this way, it has helped over 21,000 users. The union decided to respond to users' requests by also referring them to the trade union movement in order to handle their demands collectively. The topics covered by the users' questions are numerous: bogus self-employment, wages and

unpaid work, dismissals and disconnection from the digital work platform, social security issues, other working conditions, etc.

Language is also a key element. On the basis of the target audiences identified, the tools should ideally be accessible in all relevant languages. GMB explained that they use a lot of pictures and images to make their messages easier to understand.

All of these efforts should ultimately enable workers to understand and make up their own minds about the issues.

### 1.2.2 Enabling workers to access data and share information

An innovative way to approach and keep the attention of platform workers may lie in methods or tools that allow these workers to collect precise data on their work activity, whether it be the time spent working via a platform company, the income actually received once expenses have been deducted, trips made, etc.

On the basis of the information collected, it is then possible to offer individual support to workers: traceability of payment received and time worked, the evolution of pay rates, etc. On this basis, additional advice or information can be provided to the worker: comparison with the minimum pay of a salaried employee or other comparable platform workers, tax implications of the income actually received, determination of the most lucrative time slots, comparisons between the pay offered by different platform companies in the same sector, or a better understanding of the algorithms used by platform companies to organise work and their updates.

Initiatives of this type obviously benefit trade union action aimed at platform workers, as they can make it easier to target or formulate specific demands to be submitted to the platform companies. They can also allow unions, for example, to develop relevant communication with workers based on the information gathered: a possible example is a communication campaign whereby unions explain to



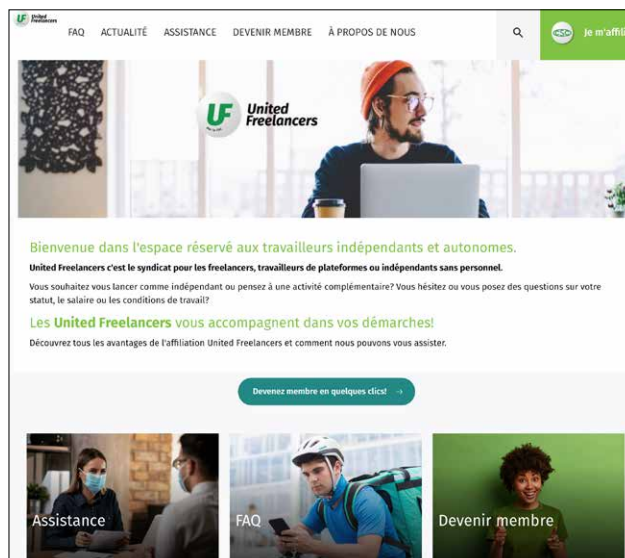
workers that the establishment of a platform company in a new territory (city) is often accompanied by fairly advantageous pay conditions (to attract the workers the platform needs), which then deteriorate once the company has a secure footing in its new market.

In its webtool project, *United Freelancers* aims to integrate this type of tool into its overall service offer to workers: a worker pay indicator as well as a tool for tracking time worked and the income received are planned. The project made it possible to carry out a task, as essential as it is valuable, consisting of an inventory and analysis of existing tools, in particular those developed by trade union organisations: the *Deliveroo unwrapped* site promoted by the British IWGB union, the pay calculation tool of the *Mobile Workers Alliance* in the United States, the *GigCompare* application which makes it possible to calculate the net hourly pay received, or *WeClock*, an application which Uni Global Union is involved in developing, the *pourquiroulez-vous* website, etc.

### 1.2.3 Understanding the need to share tools

A major problem faced by most trade unions and workers' collectives in using digital tools or applications to collect data to understand working conditions and share information is that each tool is developed and deployed according to its own specifications. These tools entail significant development costs. They are almost never shared: the *WeClock* application does not communicate with the *pourquiroulez-vous* application, for example, even though these two applications are designed to collect information of a similar nature, on platforms that operate on a largely international scale and are particularly reluctant to share data.

It is sometimes necessary to adapt the tools to each country, as the specific characteristics of each national or even local context must be taken into account. However, this can hamper the ability of these tools to collect a critical mass of information that makes it possible, first, to have enough data to be used and, above all, to become familiar to a sufficient number of workers.



This question was raised several times during the coaching sessions organised during the project. Two main responses emerged. The first was to highlight the European Trade Union Confederation's ability to bring together and pool, if not necessarily tools, at least resources that could be mobilised by all the affiliated organisations. For example, the idea of creating a common image bank was raised during the working session with the UIL in connection with the *Sindacato-Workers* initiative. The second was to promote the use of interoperable solutions, i.e. solutions that use the new web standards and, like the Solid standard, that allow platforms to exchange their data in a fluid manner while guaranteeing the preservation of personal data. This possibility was discussed in particular during the coaching session with the CGIL, in connection with the *Idea Diffusa* tool.



#### 1.2.4 Promoting the use of tools that guarantee control of personal data and anonymity to avoid spying on the part of platform companies

Algorithmic technologies have provided employers with new tools to exercise power in employment relationships through monitoring and surveillance.

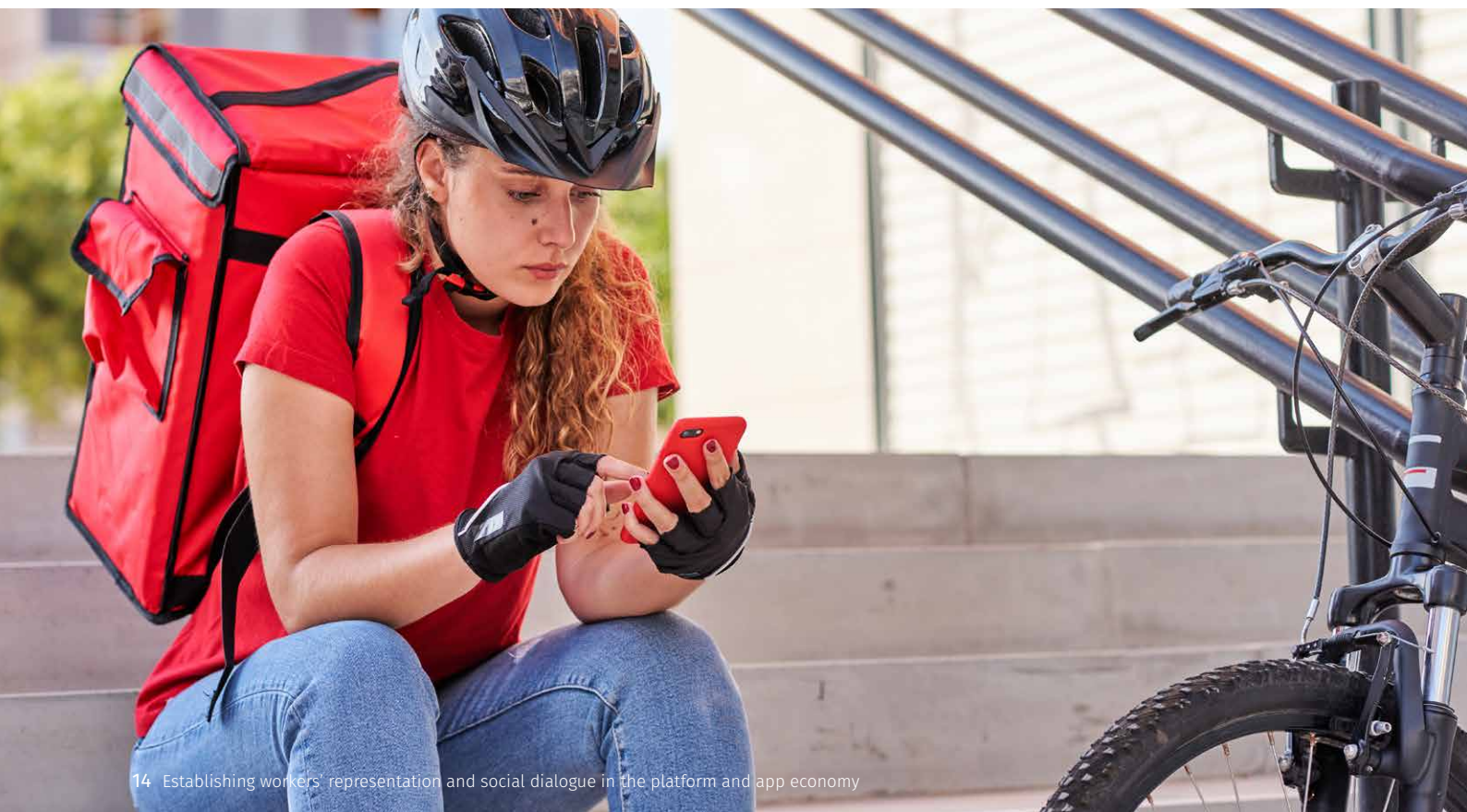
Tracking and surveillance technologies are becoming pervasive in society, undermining privacy and data-protection measures in the workplace. Workplace surveillance can involve direct, indirect and remote technologies and analysis.

One example of this is Facebook's attempt to erase the word "unionise" in its *Facebook Workplace* application.

As platform workers tend to use the internal communication channel provided by companies, they are exposed to

undue surveillance practices by the company. In order to prevent such abuses, some trade unions have considered using tools that guarantee personal data control and anonymity to avoid spying on the part of platform companies.

An example of this strategy is the collaborative *Idea Diffusa*, which is promoted by CGIL with the aim of analysing digitalisation processes at company level and planning the active role of trade unions in this context. It also aims to support collective bargaining activities. It contains various information directories, as well as a virtual community where users can access each other's profiles, get to know each other, and build relationships. The use of secure chat applications may be essential in some cases and is beginning to develop.



## 1.3 Formulating demands

In the previous paragraphs, different ways of contacting and organising platform workers were presented. Most of them are designed to lead to the formulation of demands, the process to which this next section is dedicated. The following paragraphs provide examples and lessons in relation to the approaches and tools that can be used to collate and formulate trade union demands: the importance of listening to workers, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as a possible source of data, making the most of the specific and diverse resources of trade union organisations, whether at local or national level and, finally, networking among workers as a key action to move from the formulation of demands to action and negotiations.

### 1.3.1 Adopting a bottom-up approach

Putting forward positions or demands already prepared by the unions and asking workers to support them, by imposing a “ready to use” argument, is not always the best strategy for drawing up demands that are shared and supported by workers. In fact, rather than directing demands towards their own objectives, unions and initiatives should always, and above all, listen to workers. Their primary interest should be to allow workers to come together and obtain information. As GMB says, it is the industrial relations process that creates the union’s identity, not the other way around.

### 1.3.2 Using data obtained via GDPR to draw up claims

One approach aimed at better identifying how work is organised and controlled by platform companies is being developed by the Scottish *Workers’ Observatory* mentioned above: this initiative is conducting a project in association with academics to determine the legal means by which platform workers can obtain their personal data. The aim is to gain a better understanding of how platform compa-

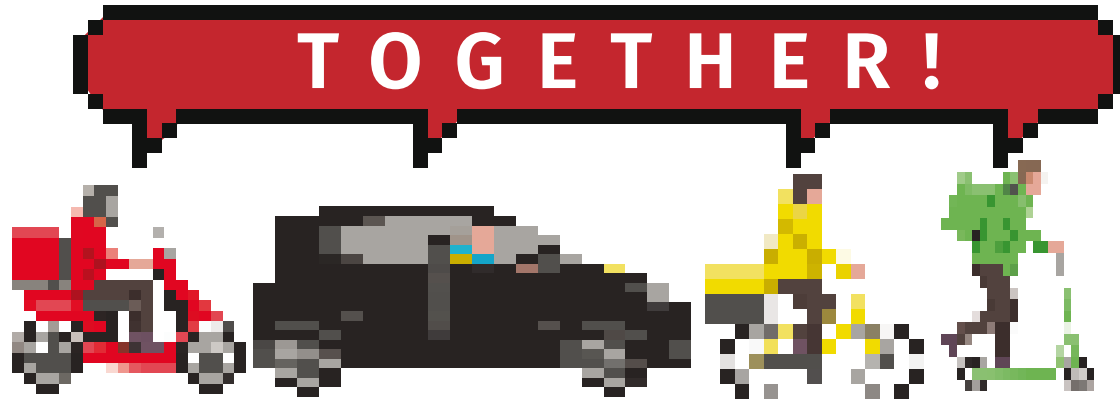
nies use workers’ personal data and thus to formulate demands. In this context, the *Workers’ Observatory* website contains brief tips to encourage workers to use the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to legally obtain their personal data.

### 1.3.3 Mobilising the capacity of trade unions to unite local workers’ collectives

Although on-demand workers operate in specific territories (different cities scattered over a given national territory), they nevertheless work for one or more platform companies that operate globally (on a country level). To this extent, the benefit of establishing links between the local level (for example, all the delivery personnel in a given municipality) and the global level (all the delivery personnel of a given platform company, or several platform companies, on a national scale) seems obvious. The task is then to develop and submit to the right level (the platform(s), the public authorities) common demands, despite the geographical dispersion of the workers.

Thus, in practice, and in several countries, we find examples of trade union coordination of workers - in other words the organisation and coordination of a collective at national level. This is the case in France, where since 2017 and on the initiative of delivery workers working for different platform companies, various “local” CGT unions of bicycle delivery workers have been created under the aegis of the CGT: in Lyon, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Grenoble, Limoges, Dijon and recently, in Paris. National union coordination of delivery workers was set up on this basis to encourage and support new local initiatives, organise joint collective actions and submit common demands at the national level (minimum wage, social protection, contractual status, etc.).





In Germany, the strategy adopted by the trade union NGG (affiliated with the DGB) is illustrated by the *Lieferrn am limit* campaign, initially launched via a Facebook page at the beginning of 2018 by Deliveroo delivery workers, of which the union has been an official partner since November 2018. Independently of the digital work platforms involved, the aim is to support the establishment of works councils in various cities around the country and in various platform companies and thus coordinate employee representation at a global level. For example, the initiative has led to the establishment of works councils on the Lieferando platform in Stuttgart, Nuremberg, Frankfurt and in northern Germany (Hamburg, Bremen and Kiel).

This type of trade union initiative can be developed on the basis of existing, self-organised local workers' collectives. In this context, pre-existing local workers' collectives will find it in their interest to be part of a broader coordination and to benefit from the specific and diverse resources of trade union organisations (resources, but also experience, visibility, etc.).

#### 1.3.4 Getting to the “breaking point” together

Based on the feedback from some organisers, the best results are often achieved when workers' frustrations simultaneously reach a breaking point.

This is another argument in favour of bottom-up approaches as described in section 1.3.1. In order to reach the collective breaking point that will lead to action, allowing workers to share their frustrations and difficulties and, more generally, bringing them into contact with each other can be much more effective than offering them ready-made solutions or paths to follow.

This was notably the case in Serbia, as described above in section 1.1.4. In this case, the unions were able to capture the anger of the workers as soon as the Serbian government announced the retroactive tax, leading to a successful collective mobilisation.

Trade unions and workers' initiatives need to be based on the feedback and needs of people who express their feelings of injustice. It may be good practice to start by proposing goals that are easy to achieve. Small victories may then encourage greater participation.

## 1.4 Communication

Communication that targets platform workers is seen as a cross-cutting activity that accompanies the actions outlined in this toolbox. It is of key importance at every stage. This chapter presents communication activities as a means of supporting workers and shows the importance of creating a narrative that can counter that of the platform companies, based on an evaluation of the flexibility they claim to offer workers.

### 1.4.1 Communicating with platform workers

Communication and the provision of information are key ways to support platform workers. However, they require an adequate communication strategy, which implies investment in specific communication techniques and tools.

In its communication strategy, when entering into direct contact with workers via platforms, NGG focuses on questions relating to economic problems. The union believes that it is important to stagger the provision of information to members in order to build loyalty. In due course, the information on the need to join the union, in order to achieve the 50% employee representation requirement set

by law for the establishment of a workers' council, can be provided. Another convincing argument used by many organisations (NGG and UGT) is about gaining access to the stage of negotiation with the institutions.

In terms of communication channels, access to WhatsApp groups where workers come together for discussion is very important for introducing the union.

To reach out to content creators, the UGT created its own videos, focused on conveying the positive experience of union membership. It is important to adapt the communication strategy to telegraphic messages that are easy to understand for a large part of the population. It is therefore important to have people with the technical know-how for this style of communication.

An issue arises when it comes to overcoming language barriers in the case of migrant workers. To solve this problem, the GMB relies on union organisers who speak different languages. The ÖGB is working on four different language versions of its website (which is currently only available in English and German).



### 1.4.2 Developing a different narrative from that of platform companies

Trade union communication takes place in a space that is also occupied by platform companies, which have significant funds and already-established channels of communication with workers. One of the main messages conveyed by platform companies is that workers will lose their freedom if they become employees. This message was transmitted quite successfully to platform workers, especially in the early days, partly because the high turnover rate in many platform companies makes it more difficult for newly recruited workers to learn from the experiences of their colleagues.

Having recognised this problem, several initiatives and trade unions, such as the ÖGB (Austria), the CGT (France) and the FNV (Netherlands) developed strategies to counter this and other misleading messages and information disseminated by platform companies.

The CGT sought to understand why these messages, and in particular those concerning self-employed status and the freedom that only this status supposedly conferred, were conveyed so effectively to workers. The CGT pointed out that, initially, platform companies were quite successful in this area of communication, presenting self-employed status as the only option that offered flexibility in terms of working hours. In the light of this observation, the CGT attaches particular importance to educating workers and their ability to self-organise. It believes that trade unions have an important role to play, especially in the early stages, when they can provide workers with the tools they need. According to the CGT, it is important for unions to be in “listening mode” before absorbing all requests and giving directions or proposing solutions. In its experience, the CGT has noticed that when workers are first asked about their employment status, the answer is usually that they are self-employed, but that as the discussion progresses, the workers change their views. Another strategy adopted by the CGT is to use surveys and questionnaires to collect data from workers. These data serve as a basis for

responding to platform companies. The CGT can now say that countering the narrative put forward by the platform companies is less difficult than it was in the past, as the message has got through and couriers are now more aware of their working conditions.

The ÖGB has found that the target group of platform workers is large, which makes communication more complex for the unions. In order to better address this problem, the ÖGB and other unions participating in the DidaNet project have launched a parallel initiative, called the *Riders' Collective*. The aim is to reach out to couriers and mediate between them and the unions. The goal is to focus more on the very heterogeneous and fragmented target group of couriers, which includes students and older unemployed people. The *Riders' Collective* knows how to talk to platform workers thanks to the experience of its members, who are often couriers themselves. The *Riders' Collective* thus seeks to break through the narrative put forward by platform companies, by adopting an educational approach.

In the course of its activities, the FNV has also met with platform workers and drivers, who had been convinced by the platform companies' narrative. According to the FNV, what proves effective on these occasions is to get these drivers to talk to organisers from the union team with the same professional background.

**RIDERS COLLECTIVE** [Support Us](#)

**deinen Arbeitsbedingungen. Survey about** [Take the survey!](#)

**GOOD TO KNOW**

**BIKE/PHONE GOT STOLEN OR BROKE?**

Most of us generously use our own phone and our own bicycle to work. If one of these things breaks or gets stolen or lost and are not able to afford a replacement right away, we can not work. However if it happens to you during your shift, you are not alone responsible, your employer is liable too. Here is the law which is your friend - no matter if your ED or FD.

By ANDREA SIEGL

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**GENERAL**

**"IT IS JUST A JOB. I DON'T IDENTIFY WITH IT."**

Die klassische Radbotin ist ein Fahrrad-Freak. In jedem klassischen Botendienst findet man ein paar Kollegen, die eigentlich arbeiten um Radfahren zu können. Bei den Plattformen wo tausende Rider beschäftigt sind um Pizza, Burger oder Sushi zu liefern, fahren aber 99 % hauptsächlich deswegen, weil sie Geld brauchen und dann erst weil sie gern Fahrrad fahren. Ob wir uns mit dem Job identifizieren oder

## 2 Strategies for reaching the negotiation stage

Establishing a balance of power in order to reach the negotiation stage involves the interaction of multiple levers: legal strategies, lobbying strategies, coordination with other unions but also with stakeholders in the platform economy.

### 2.1 Legal strategies



Several trade unions in Europe are supporting workers who are taking legal action against platform companies.

This is particularly the case in Italy, where the courts have repeatedly upheld the unions' positions. This has underpinned negotiations with the government and with the platform companies themselves. The same has been true in Spain, where a number of rulings in favour of the unions' positions helped to lay the foundations for the recently adopted "Ley Riders" law. In the UK, GMB won the right for Uber drivers to be considered workers with the right to a minimum wage and paid leave. Uber subsequently allowed drivers to unionise.

Unions are unanimous in their view that taking platform companies to court is a particularly costly strategy, both in terms of financial resources, human resources and time. Nevertheless, unions decide to invest in such proceedings to show what they can do to help workers. They also do so because, as described in the examples above, court rulings have so far proved to be an effective way of supporting trade union demands made to governments. Court rulings are often accompanied by media coverage, and in the UK, court successes have sometimes led to increased membership, further strengthening the bargaining position of unions.



## 2.2 Lobbying strategies

The aim here is to enable trade unions and workers' collectives to master and deploy strategies for lobbying governments, local government representatives and members of parliament. A representative of one of the project's initiatives summed it up by saying, "make yourself indispensable, and people will come to talk to you". Platform companies themselves are intensely lobbying public authorities, but coordinated and consistent actions can be successful – at least in part – when it comes to influencing regulatory projects. This can also involve alliance strategies that include, alongside trade unions, other actors committed to a socially responsible approach to platform companies, such as think tanks, foundations, networks of academics close to trade unions, etc.

In France, for example, it was a coordinated action between old and new trade unions and several organisa-

tions that led to the election of platform workers' representatives becoming a principle enshrined in law.

On Wednesday 15 September 2021, the European Parliament adopted the report "on fair working conditions, rights and social protection for platform workers – new forms of employment linked to digital development", which, thanks to the ETUC's lobbying work, included many of the European trade union movement's demands, including the right of workers in platform companies to organise collectively and to be represented by trade unions. At the time of publication of this guide, it is up to the European Commission to act on the basis of the unanimous report of the European Parliament and the position expressed by trade unions in response to the consultation of social partners.



## 2.3 Coordinating demands from unions in different countries and submitting them to a platform company

The growth of large platform companies has led to a concentration of market power, especially as these companies diversify and offer an increasing range of services, often through acquisitions or mergers with other platform companies. Greater market concentration hampers the negotiation of fair working conditions for workers, and it can also have a negative impact in terms of circumventing laws and blocking innovation.

In addition to the concentration of market power, all the major platform companies are located outside the EU, primarily in the USA and China. For this reason, some trade unions have realised that the only way to gain bargaining power vis-à-vis the platform company is to organise a collective voice at global level.

In Germany, a *Youtubers union* initiative emerged from a Facebook group to defend the interests and rights of content creators on YouTube. With the support of the German trade union IG Metall, the initiative was structured and gained new members under the new name of *FairTube*. The demands were based on the theme of clear and transparent conditions and prices. Thanks to an effective communication strategy, including the cooperation of famous *Youtubers*, it was able to make a media impact and win new supporters. FairTube currently has over 27,000 members. Although initially seen as an initiative catering to content creators in Germany, it also attracts members from other countries.

In Spain, UGT began to listen to the concerns of YouTube content creators, who expressed their problems in terms of freedom of expression and the company's unilateral changes to fees. UGT raised the concerns of the content creators and arranged a meeting with YouTube Spain to try and negotiate a deal, but at that meeting it was understood that YouTube's terms could not be

changed locally. Inspired by the experience of FairTube, the UGT, in cooperation with the ETUC, has been involved in coordinating trade unions seeking to negotiate with YouTube at the continental level to secure fair conditions for its content creators.

One of the experts working on the project recommended identifying any media company or official institution that could make an impact or provide assistance and materials to *Youtubers* in each state, since *Youtubers* alone cannot really have a significant impact on a company as big as Google.

Another avenue to explore might be the creation of a pan-European association of content creators. One might consider what the European Union itself could contribute to such a project, as the Commission is always looking for cultural initiatives to support. In France, Youtubers receive partial support from official institutions whose competencies include copyright, support for creation, etc., but in other European countries, the content creator scene lacks this communication with official institutions.

Other initiatives to organise platform workers across borders are also developing. One example is the ongoing *Digital Danube Network (DidaNet)* project. Coordinated by the ÖGB, it organises a network of trade union organisations from different countries in the Danube region (Austria, Moldova, Serbia, Slovenia and also southern Ukraine) around various joint activities to protect platform workers. This networking at international level is particularly valuable and should make it possible, on the one hand, to develop a common trade union approach to the impact of the platform economy on labour markets and, on the other, to establish a transnational network of platform workers.





## 2.4 Claiming and putting into practice a common interest with other stakeholders in the platform economy

Platform companies are at the heart of an ecosystem which, in addition to their workers, involves other economic actors: the beneficiaries of the services (end customers), partner companies (typically the restaurant using the services of a platform company) or traditional companies operating in the same “sector of activity” as the platform (and are therefore in competition). Consequently, the working conditions of platform workers can have a potentially negative impact on these different stakeholders, whether in terms of the quality of the service provided (for example, delivery) or the conditions for fair competition between platform companies and traditional companies in a given sector. A common interest may therefore exist between platform workers and these various stakeholders, which needs to be built upon in ways that may prove to be highly diverse. It goes without saying that an initiative of this kind is not necessarily a simple matter. Indeed, the services provided by platform companies may seem positive in the short term to certain players (traditional companies, consumers, etc.). Fundamentally, the fact remains that guaranteeing decent working conditions for workers and a coherent economic model (ensuring fair conditions of competition between platform companies and traditional companies, including the companies that are partners of the platforms) requires a common reflection on digital autonomy and data sovereignty. Therefore, betting that several distinct stakeholders do indeed share a common interest is necessary and perfectly justified in our opinion.

An example of an initiative in this regard is that of the British union GMB, which has created brief “*Respect*

*couriers*” flyers aimed at informing delivery customers about the actual remuneration received by the couriers. The aim is to educate customers, with the courier delivering the union’s flyer to the customer at the time of delivery. Another recent example is the alliance between delivery drivers and customers of the efood platform company in Greece. By striking, the delivery drivers succeeded in mobilising public opinion, culminating in a customer boycott of the platform company. This led the company to offer its workers permanent employment contracts.

In the Netherlands, the FNV union developed a “*Drivers United*” campaign which aims to align the demands of Uber drivers with those of taxi drivers exposed to competition from the digital work platform. This initiative, for example, led to the production of a white paper ([Taxi with no roof light](#)) explaining precisely the impact of the platform company’s activity on the market and calling for intervention by the public authorities. From a different perspective, bike courier cooperatives have been or are currently being set up in France as alternatives to the large digital work platforms. In this context, they are trying to find customers (restaurant owners, goods suppliers, etc.) and are therefore thinking about how to become attractive alternatives from the perspective of the customer. For example, it may be a question of defining commissions or specifications that are less restrictive or costly than those applied by the major market players. It may also involve marketing a more ecological or social delivery service. In this vein, the [CoopCycle](#) federation is one example of the strategies possible.



# Conclusion

This toolbox is the result of an exchange of viewpoints. It has benefited from the wealth of ideas that the interaction of diverse initiatives can produce. But the situation is constantly evolving, which is why the collective dynamic of sharing and pooling of resources must continue. That is the objective of our website [https://digitalplatformobservatory.org/!](https://digitalplatformobservatory.org/)





A TOOLBOX

# Establishing workers' representation and social dialogue in the platform and app economy

November 2021