Measuring online labour: A subcategory of platform work
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Measuring platform work has proven difficult, as there are many different terms and definitions in use, and the phenomenon is still quite small. Eurofound (2018) defines platform work as follows:

“Platform work is an employment form in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services in exchange for payment.[…] The main features of platform work are:

• paid work is organised through online platforms;
• three parties are involved: the online platform, the worker and the client;
• work is contracted out;
• jobs are broken down into tasks;
• services are provided on demand.”

Several attempts have been made to capture the size of the phenomenon in the Nordic countries through surveys. The studies show that platform work in the Nordic countries remains marginal. Estimates range from 0.3 per cent of the working age population in Finland to 2.5 per cent in Sweden, and these surveys are based on different definitions and methodologies (see Table 1). In this brief, we present an alternative measure of the growth in online labour, a category of platform work – the online labour index.

Table 1. Share of platform workers in the Nordic countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Question in LFS</td>
<td>Ilsøe &amp; Madsen 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>Question in LFS</td>
<td>Statistics Finland, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.5 - 1%</td>
<td>Survey (1525 respondents), interviews with CEOs and web search</td>
<td>Alsos et al. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>Survey of 7069 respondents</td>
<td>SOU 2017: 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online Labour Index: An alternative measure

Online labour is a sub-section of platform work consisting of platform work whereby the product is submitted online. This is in contrast to work that is mediated through a platform, but where the service takes place in a local labour market.

The Online Labour Index (OLI), provided by the Oxford Internet Institute, is an index that measures the utilisation of online labour platforms over time and across countries and occupations. This is an alternative to the survey approach to studying the scope and the growth in online labour.

The OLI is constructed by tracking the number of projects or tasks on the five largest English-language online labour platforms through web scraping. The index also tracks the number of freelancers on these platforms. The platforms include Upwork, Freelancer, Guru, Peopleper-hour and Mturk. Together, these platforms represent about 70 per cent of the global online labour market, measured in terms of website traffic.

Nordic online labour
By taking a closer look at the Nordic countries, the index shows that:

• There has been no systematic growth in demand for online labour in the Nordic countries since May 2017.
• The development of the online labour market in the Nordic countries corresponds largely to the overall European development.
• Demand for online labour in the Nordic countries is higher than supply.

Demand for online labour in the Nordic countries

Figure 1 shows the Nordic OLI, an interactive visualisation of the Online Labour Index zoomed in to the Nordic countries Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In the figure we see an index of the development in tasks posted by Nordic companies over a certain period of time. The figure shows that there has been no systematic growth in demand for online labour in the Nordic countries since May 2017, but some significant seasonal variation is evident. Also, the Icelandic curve needs an explana-
There are so few jobs in demand on Iceland, so a few additional jobs make a huge variation in the curve.

The data used to construct the index is collected by daily crawling and scraping of the list of vacancies (jobs, tasks, projects) available on each of the platforms. The index seen in Figure 1 is normalised so that 100 index points on the y-axis represent the daily number of tasks averaged over all days in May 2017.

Absolute numbers are difficult to provide as the OLI cannot be sure to have collected all available projects at a given point in time (a certain share of projects is not publicly displayed; others disappear from the platform before being collected).

Nevertheless, to give an estimate of actual numbers from Norway, Alsos et al. (2017) studied the publicly available database from the Oxford Online Institute project in September 2017. In Norway, a monthly average of 194 tasks were posted on the five platforms that month. Every job is available on the platforms for between 2 and 7 days, depending on occupation. If we assume 5 days as the average number of days the tasks were available on the five platforms, then there were about 1200 tasks posted by Norwegian companies in September 2017. This is an estimate of the number of tasks posted on the platforms in one country in a given month.

**Market shares and occupations**

One way to study online labour is by exploring market shares in various countries, i.e. to what extent companies in the Nordic countries buy services via these platforms. First and foremost, the index reveals that demand for online labour in the Nordic countries is higher than supply. Also, the Swedish and Danish companies use online labour platforms to a slightly greater degree than companies in the other Nordic countries, with an average global market share of 0.45% and 0.46%, respectively. The market share for Norway is 0.3%, for Finland 0.14% and for Iceland 0.04%. This means that Finland and Iceland are relatively marginal when it comes to use of online labour platforms.

The composition of Nordic demand for online labour into the main categories shown in Figure 2 corresponds largely to the European demand. Companies in the Nordic countries have a slightly higher demand for ‘software development and technology’ compared to the other categories.

**Notes**

2 The OLI is one attempt to bring data from different platforms together. Data is owned by the platforms, which all offer slightly different business models. Thus, not only is there no joint definition in place, but data are stored in different silos.