

► **Are platform workers willing to unionize? Exploring survey evidence from 14 European countries**

Authors / Kurt Vandaele, Agnieszka Piasna, Wouter Zwysen



Are platform workers willing to unionize?

Agnieszka Piasna

Senior Researcher, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)

Associate Researcher, Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven

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Protest and organising among platform workers

- Willingness to act
 - evidence of collective resistance of platform workers, especially in location-based delivery and transport
 - perceptions of common interests and grievances (specific to platform work) open space for informal bottom-up initiatives, which often emerge outside of the traditional union framework
- Willingness to unionize ?
- Bargaining power: associational [potentially strong], workplace and marketplace [relatively weak]

To what extent are platform workers willing to become union members – now and future?

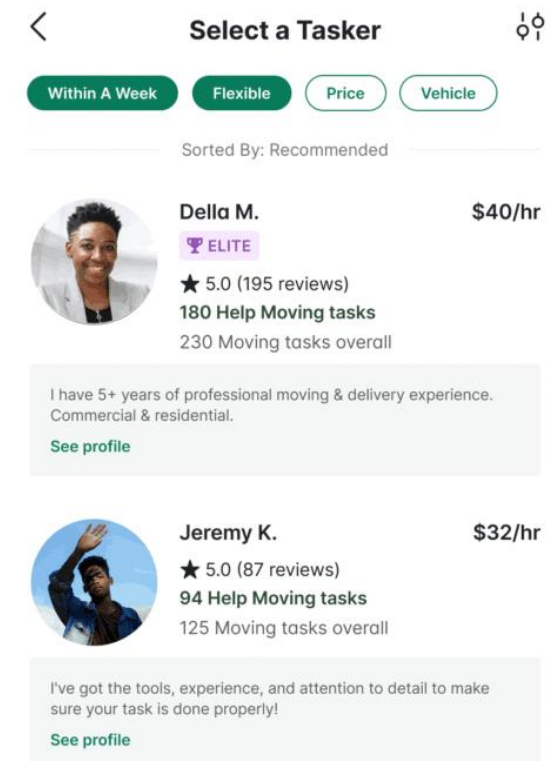


Obstacles to building workers' solidarity

- Platform workers face several hurdles to becoming trade union members stemming from the specific work and employment model:
 - Algorithmic management – disciplinary control over task allocation and performance tends to suppress worker voice, no dialogue with a 'shadow employer'
 - Regulatory arbitrage on employment arrangements
 - An asset-light model, framed and promoted as 'micro-entrepreneurship', an entrepreneurial orientation and between-worker competition (over-hiring) hampers collective identity, solidarity
 - Spatially dispersed and isolated workforce, high volatility work with short tenures

What are attitudes of platform workers towards unions?

What might motivate them to become members?



Beyond a physical workplace

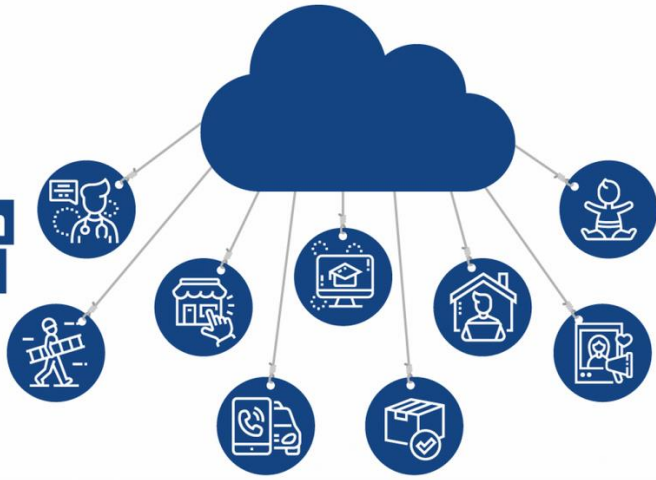
- Platform work challenges the workplace-oriented approach of unions to organizing
- The argument is put forward that union strategies could pivot on three relevant drivers for unionization, which are not necessarily tied to a physical workplace:
 1. the individual pro-union attitudes of platform workers
 2. their degree of embeddedness in union-friendly offline social networks [**community unionism**]
 3. their online activity in digital work-related communities, overcoming their spatial dispersion [**digital unionism**]

} two types of networked unionism complementing and overcoming a solely workplace-oriented approach

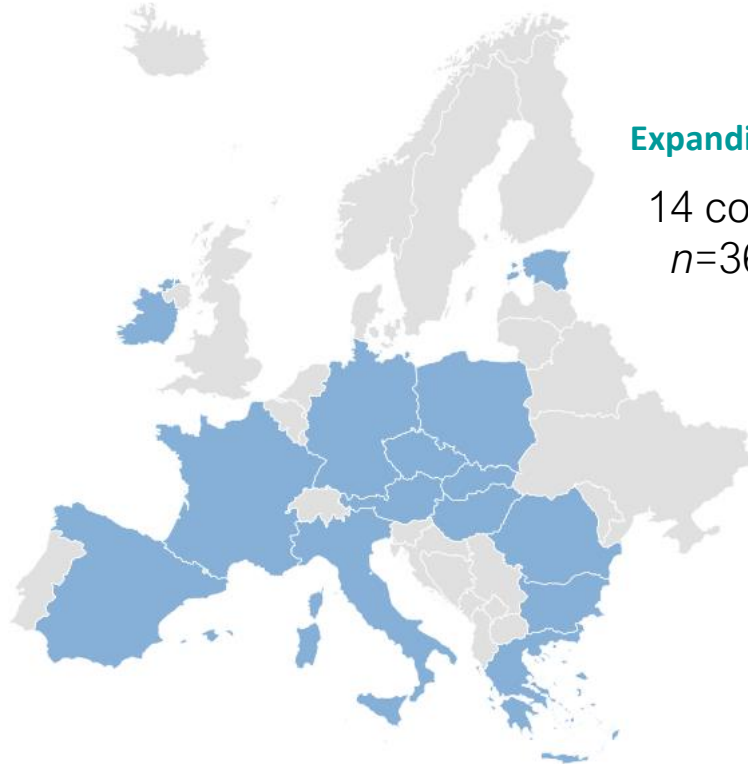
What kind of strategies could unions embark on to recruit and organize a spatially dispersed and isolated workforce in the platform economy?



IPWS Internet and Platform Work Survey



IPWS 2021



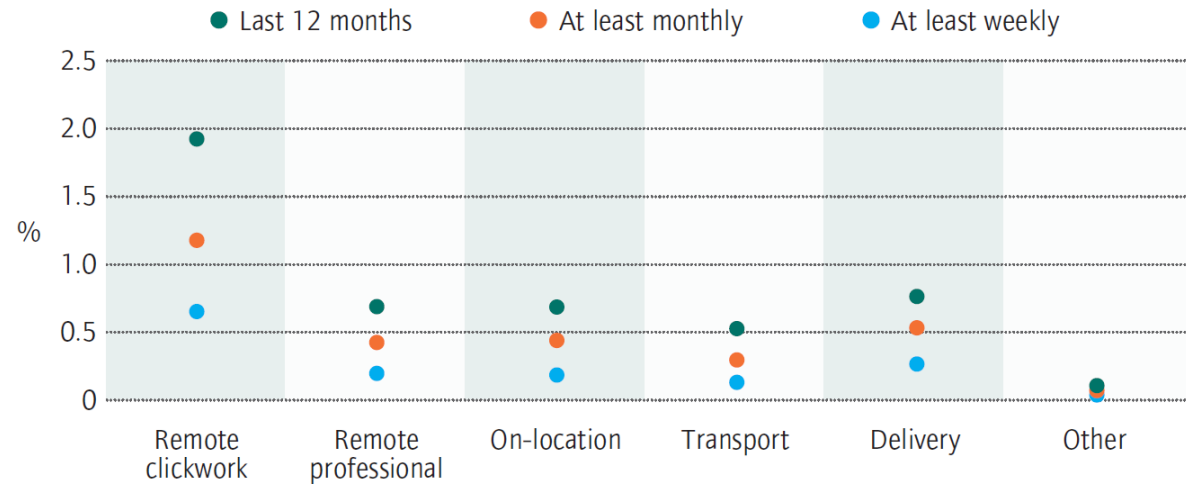
Expanding regional scope

14 countries
n=36,124

Internet work

Activity	Classification
1. Remote clickwork	Platform work Activities 1-5 and 10 if performed through digital labour platforms
2. Remote professional work	
3. On-location work	
4. Transport	
5. Delivery	
6. Influencer	Platform work
7. Renting	
8. Sell self-made products online	
9. Sell or re-sell other products online	
10. Other freelance services or tasks	

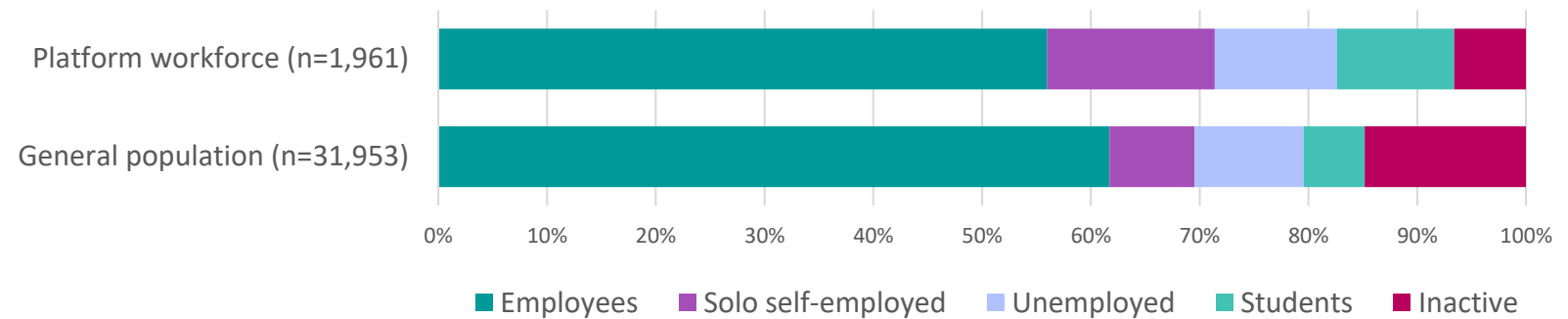
Including different types of platform work



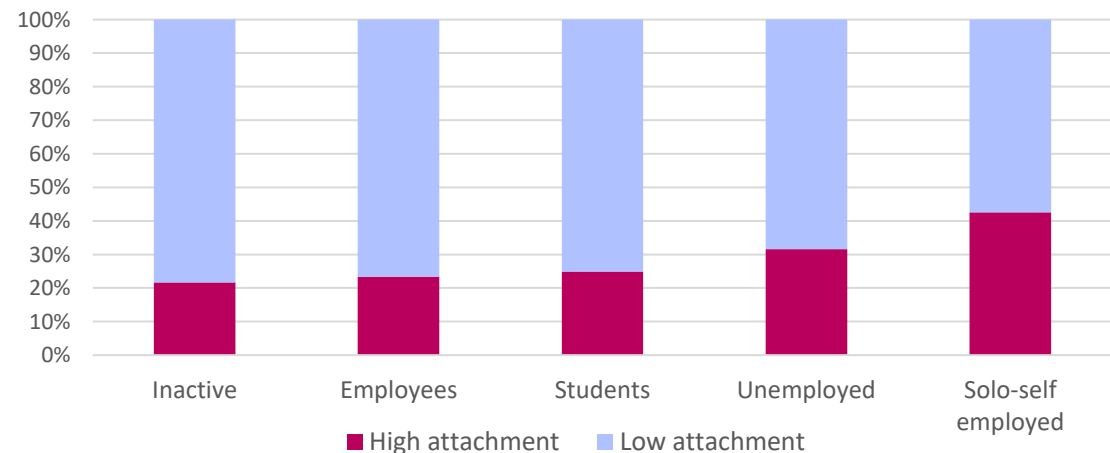
Platform workers are embedded in the 'offline' economy

- 'Online' platform economy is not a separate ecosystem.
- We need to look beyond the halo of novelty of platform work: it fits into long-term trends towards erosion of standard employment, workplace fissuring, flexibilization, informalization and deregulation.
- Accounting for the heterogeneity of platform work is crucial for trade unions: informing their priorities in selecting target groups and understanding their (diverse) interests and needs.

Main labour market status



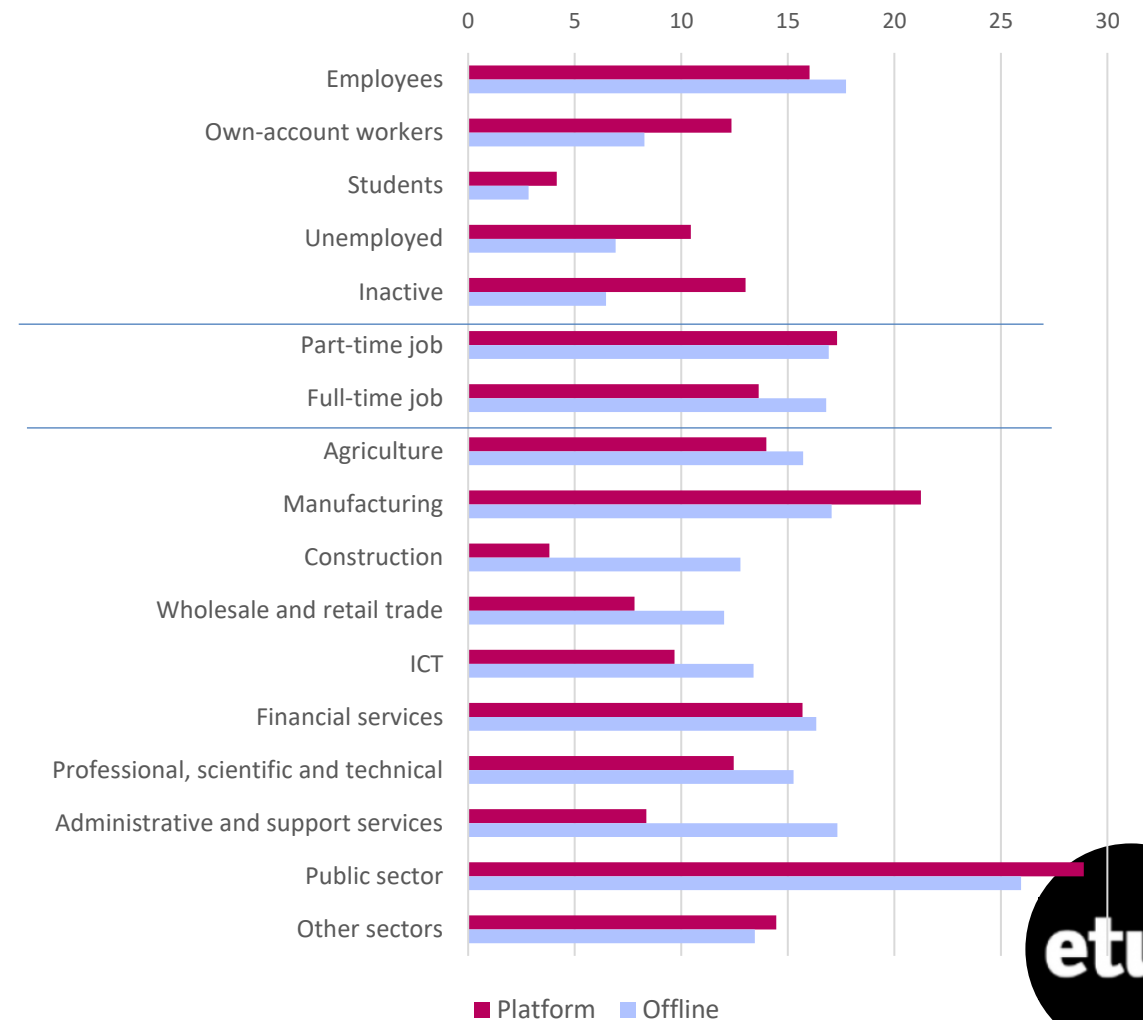
Platform workers' attachment to the platform economy by their labour market status



Existing unionization levels in the platform economy

- Overall unionization rate = 13.4%* for both platform workers and the general working age population.
- “Platform unionism” most likely rooted in the conventional economy.
- Similar patterns specific to socio-demographic characteristics, but:
 - older, migrant and lower educated platform workers have higher unionization rates
 - platform workers in ‘marginal’ or ‘outsider’ positions in the traditional labour market have higher unionization rates than the rest

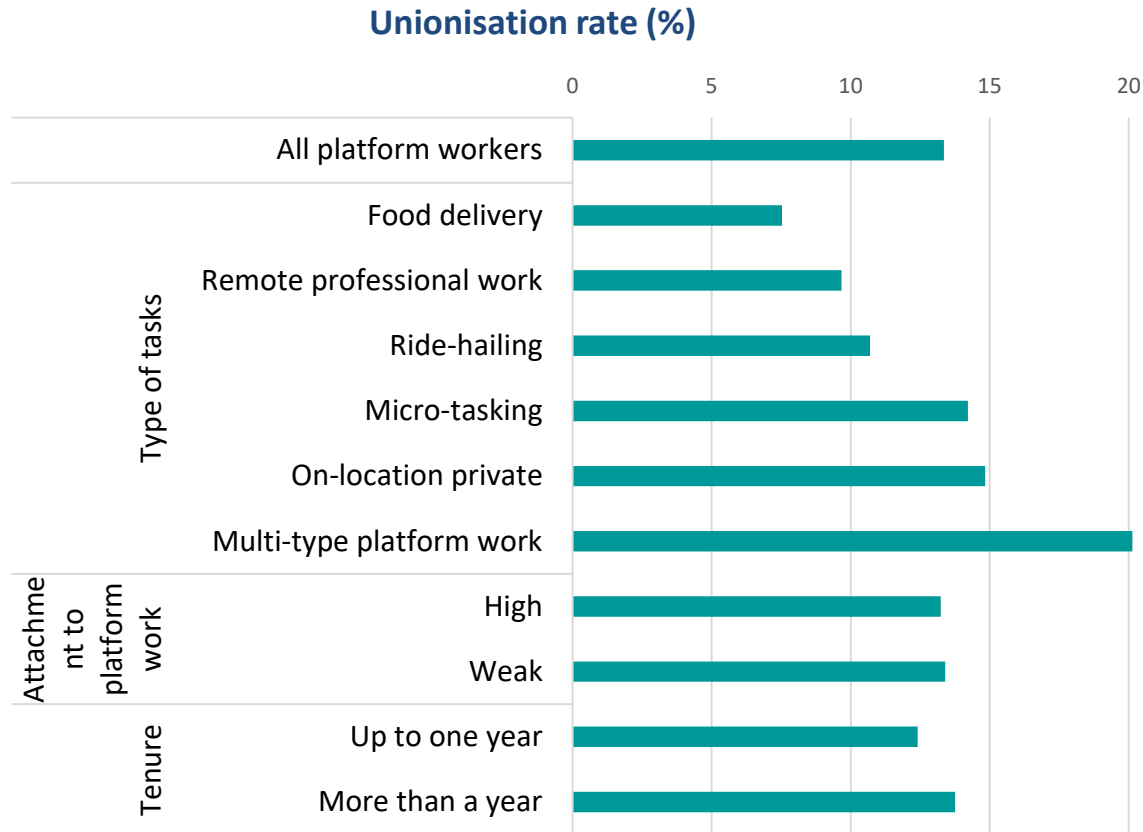
Unionisation rate (%)



* To compare like with like, the calculation of union density includes non-workers in the conventional economy. Trade union density in the conventional economy in the survey sample is 17.7% when only employees are included.



Existing unionization levels in the platform economy



- In devising trade union strategies for the platform economy, it is key to recognize and understand not only the differences between platform workers and those working in the conventional economy, although there is a large overlap between the two, but also the heterogeneity among platform workers in their views on and experiences with trade unions.



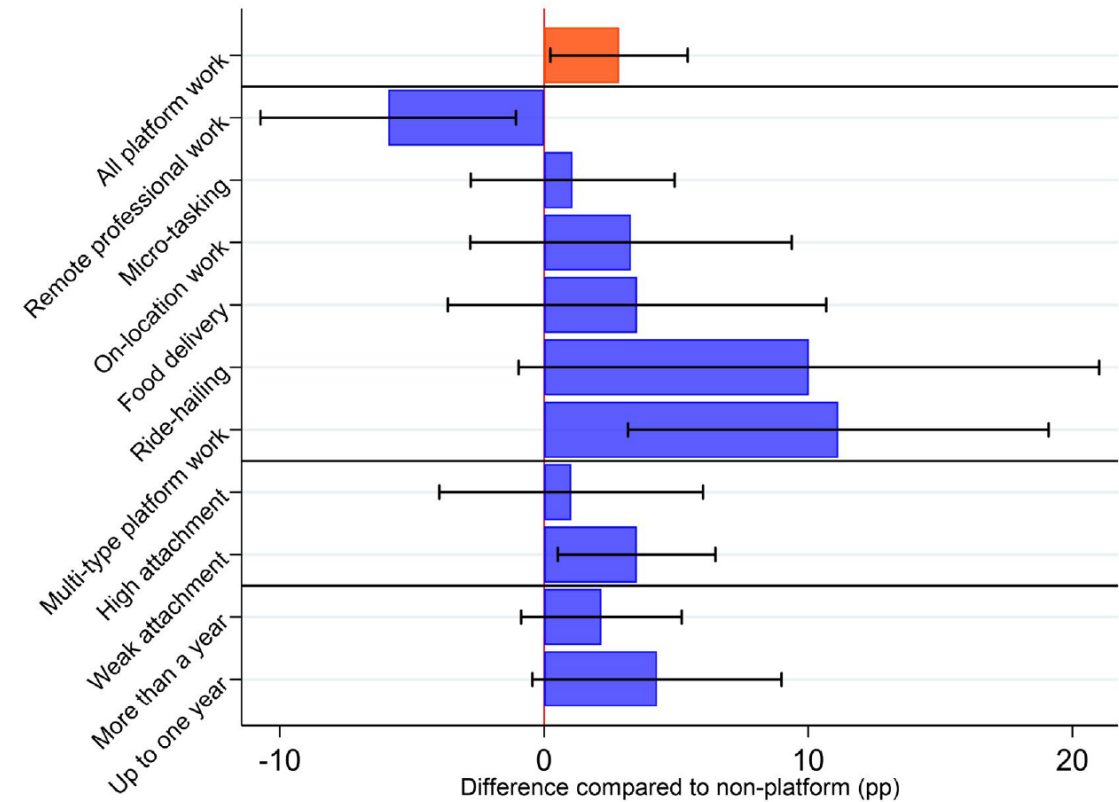
Unionization rates include membership both through the traditional and platform economy



Willingness to join union ranks

- Platform workers are more willing to unionize than the rest of the population
- A link between willingness to join a union and labour market bargaining power
 - → higher bargaining power (skills, pay), less need to be represented (possibly also more legal barriers to join a union for ‘freelancers’)
 - → migrant background and lower education linked to higher willingness
- Greater involvement in the platform economy (tenure, dependency) linked to less willingness to join a union
 - → weaker attachment to conventional economy (which is main breeding ground for unionization), more experience of platforms’ hostility towards unions

Willingness to unionize, compared to non-platform workers



Effects are estimated from logistic regression controlling for gender, age, migrant background, education, place of residence, trade union membership in the past, and labour market status including union presence at the workplace for those employed, including fixed effects.

Drivers for unionization among platform workers

- Unionization rates and generally pro-union attitudes stand at odds with the narrative of a union-free zone of highly flexible and independent workers, showing little interest in unionization and even hostile to unions.

	Pro-union attitudes		Union-friendly offline networks		Online work-related communities	
	Non-platform	Platform	Non-platform	Platform	Non-platform	Platform
Overall	65.0%	69.2%	29.5%	30.6%	37.5%	38.4%
Employees	65.7%	68.4%	30.1%	30.9%	37.7%	38.0%
Solo self-employed	52.1%	57.8%	26.3%	25.3%	35.8%	39.6%
Unemployed	56.9%	72.4%	31.1%	36.7%	n.a.	n.a.
Students	82.2%	88.7%	18.2%	29.6%	n.a.	n.a.
Inactive	67.1%	62.7%	32.8%	32.7%	n.a.	n.a.

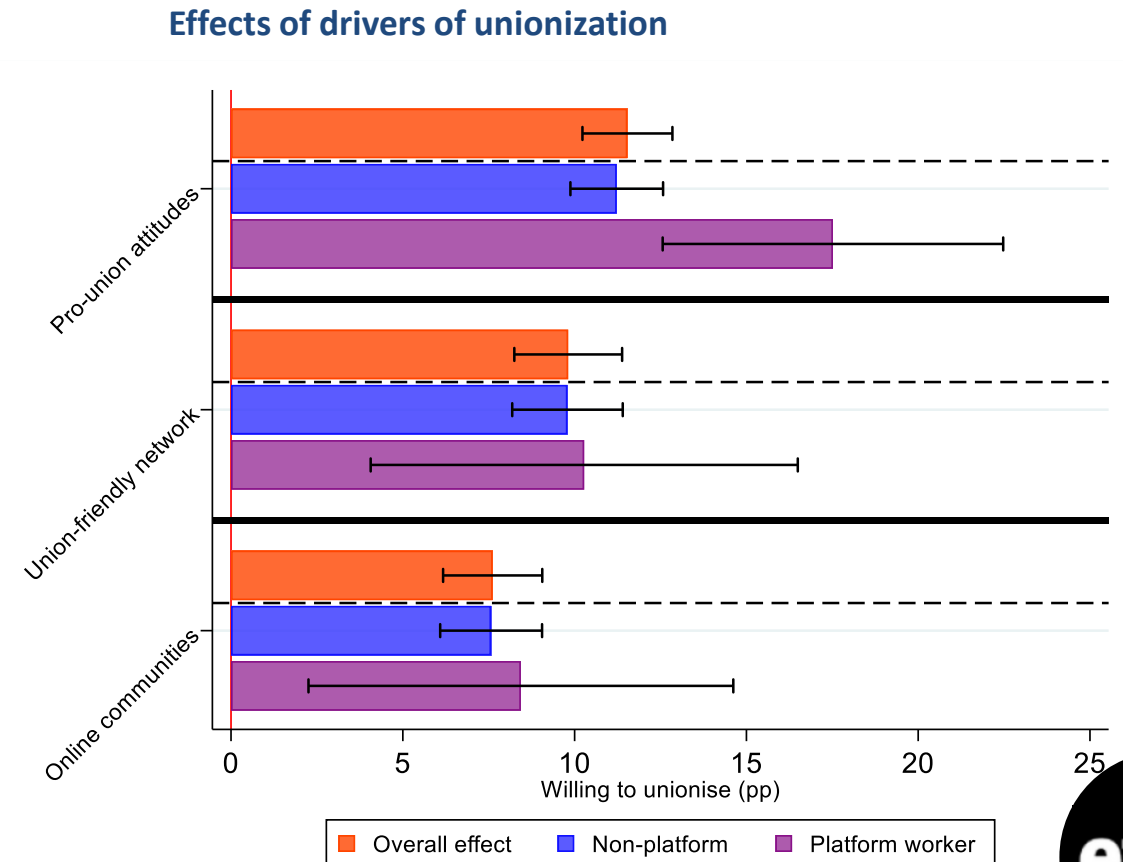


This part of the analysis includes only non-union members.



The relationship between unionization drivers and the willingness to unionize

- Overall, the effect of each of the three drivers on willingness to unionize is positive and significant.
- The effect of pro-union attitudes is much stronger among platform workers.
- Gap between pro-union attitudes and willingness to join – e.g. students and inactive sympathetic to unions but have fewer reasons to actually join; openness of unions to groups beyond traditional member base

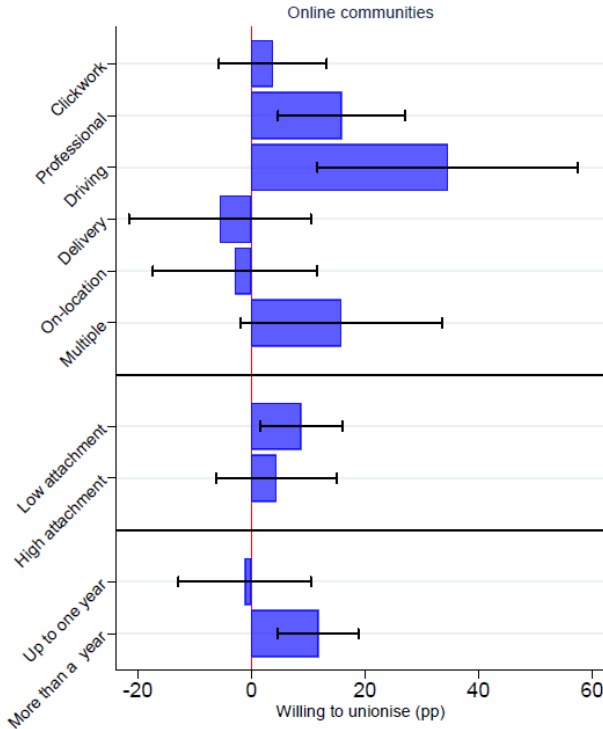
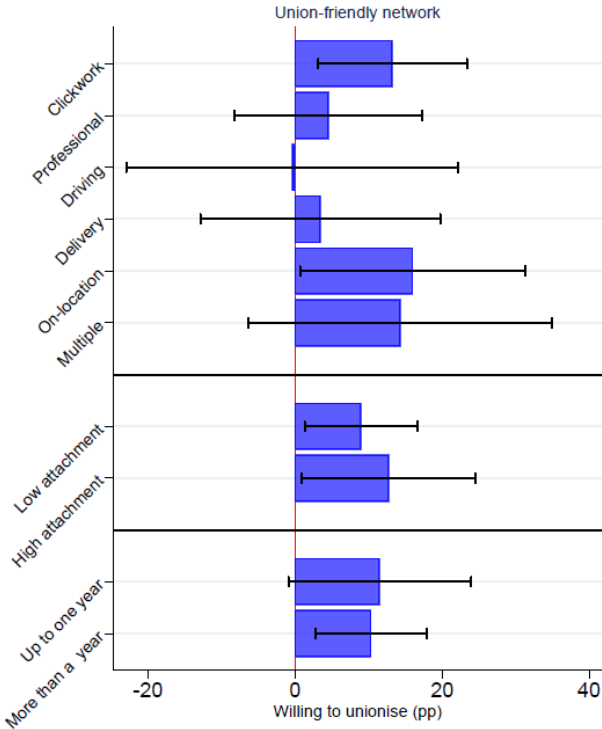
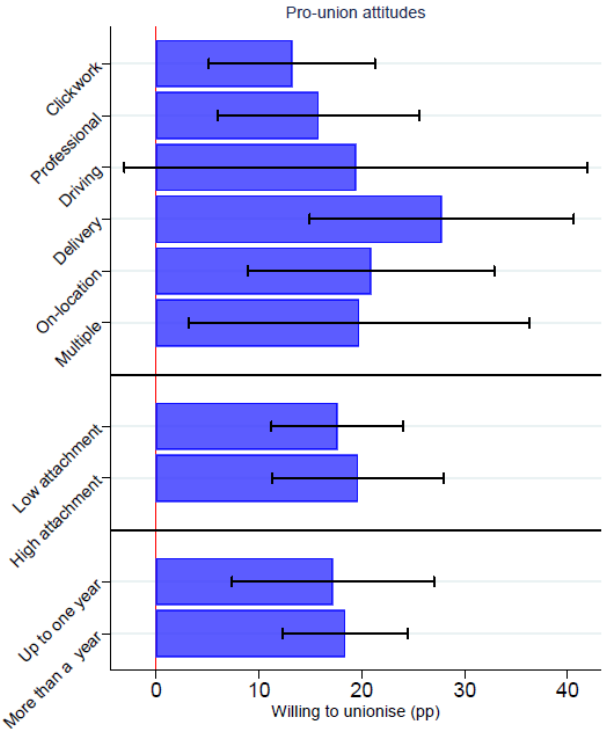


Logistic regressions controlling for gender, age, migrant background, education, place of residence, trade union membership in the past, and labour market status including union presence at the workplace for those employed, and country fixed effects



The unionization drivers affect some groups more positively than others

- Platform work spans multiple sectors so **sectoral approach is needed**. Challenge in organising multi-aping multi-sector platform workers.
- Unions with a tradition of organising similarly precarious, transient and dispersed workforce—e.g., cleaning or transport—can leverage this in connecting and mobilizing platform workers.



Summary



- Compared to the general population, platform workers have stronger pro-union attitudes and are more receptive to union membership.
- The small share of platform workers who are already unionized (even if through their 'offline' jobs) could be an entry point for union organizing strategies.
- Drivers for unionization among platform workers are similar to those for non-platform workers.
- Tapping into offline pro-union social networks and online work-related communities seems to be a fruitful strategy for unions in the platform economy → development of networked organizing tactics and strategies, and digital unionism.

Floor to Trade Unions



ATTRACTED BY THE SHINY PROMISES

PLATFORMS



FLEXIBILITY OPPORTUNITIES FREE COMPETITION NO BOSS

Watch out: Platforms don't play by the rules



UNPREDICTABLE
Salary

Gender
DISCRIMINATION

Union
BUSTING

Boss is a
ROBOT

Strong Directive = Fair working conditions

#FairPlatformWork

FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG

CONFEDERATION
SYNDICAT
EUROPEAN
TRADE UNION

Floor to Trade Unions

- What was your biggest organising success last year?
- What was your biggest challenge or misstep in the recent period?
- What platform sectors other than food delivery and hail-riding do you organise?
- Are you working with non-unionised workers? Have you managed to integrate them into your union?