

**Shaping the new world of work – The impacts of digitalisation and robotisation**

**Panel 6: Organising and representing workers in the digital economy**

**Participants:**

- Peter van den Bunder, FNV-KIEM
- Grzegorz Cisoń, NSZZ Solidarność Amazon Fulfillment Poland
- Eric Lee, LabourStart
- Irene Mandl, Eurofound

**Discussant:** Thiébaud Weber, ETUC

**Moderator:** Magdalena Bernaciak, ETUI

**Reporter:** Kurt Vandaele, ETUI

In this panel, the different implications of the digital economy stood central. First, Irene Mandl sketched out the emerging developments and trends in employment, which will even likely increase in the near future. In relation to the digital economy, she emphasised the differences between crowd employment and ICT-based mobile work in terms of working terms and conditions. While crowd employment is frequently marked by worker precariousness, ICT-based mobile work offers additional autonomy and flexibility for often high-skilled workers who therefore favour this work organisation. However, Mandl paid attention to the unclear labour market status of online platforms and therefore, demand better regulation and representation. On the latter, representation, Peter van den Bunder reported on the initiatives taken by FNV-KIEM, a union organising subordinated workers and *zelfstandigen zonder personeel* (zzp'ers) or freelance workers in the arts and creative industries in the Netherlands – a sector marked by austerity measures since the Great Recession.

Driven by digitalisation and employers' cost-cutting strategies, but also by tax incentives and workers' preferences for autonomy, freelancers are the fastest growing group on the Dutch labour market. FNV-KIEM has adopted an inclusive strategy. In this way, the union wants to avoid the risk of cost competition between subordinated workers and freelancers, especially as they are often working together on the same project. This inclusive strategy should not only involve litigation procedures, lobbying the government and social dialogue for improving working terms and conditions. Also collective bargaining should apply to freelancers, which is legally impossible hitherto

due to price-setting regulation, although the Dutch Parliament has asked the government, indeed by coincidence on the very day that this panel took place, to take action for allowing collective bargaining to be applied to freelancers so that ‘David against Goliath’ situation could be avoided. At the same time, the union agenda should be broadened as representing freelancers also implies knowledge of traditional employer issues like corporate law and competitiveness law.

Whereas digitalisation has driven the rise of online platform workers, it has also introduced digital Taylorism of the workflow as Grzegorz Cisoń demonstrated in his analysis of Amazon’s distribution activities in Poland. The online retailer invested in so-called ‘special economic zones’ in 2014 and hired about 6,000 workers, while Polish consumers are still not able to buy Amazon products. Apart from very close digital monitoring of the workflow via daily quota, resulting in a high job turnover, managerial tactics and practices are quintessentially oriented towards union avoidance. Still, the Solidarnosc union has been set up at Amazon by especially focussing on health and safety issues and campaigns around pay and working time – all of which are traditional issues on the union agenda as discussed Thiébaud Weber remarked. Moreover, Eric Lee, representing [Labourstart](#), made the point that digitalisation also offers opportunities for unions. In contrast to the past, when global unions mainly dominated the international union work, digitalisation enables to transnationally connect the rank-and-file for fostering solidarity networks and successful union campaigns on the ground.