

EMBRACING THE DIGITAL AGE: THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT AND PLATFORM WORK

Implications for youth employment policies and
skills development

COUNTRY REPORT: ALBANIA

Disclaimer

This report was prepared by PPMI for ETF.

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PREFACE

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is engaged in the international debate about the future of work in developing and transition countries, in particular in the EU Neighbourhood and Central Asia. It has launched several actions analysing global transformations that impact labour market performance and skills demand, identifying the implications for workers and learners. Updating and consolidating the knowledge on recent changes in work patterns driven by digitalisation sheds light on key issues for employment and skills development.

This report is a part of the ETF study conducted in the 6 Western Balkan countries, following the work in the 6 Eastern Partnership countries [The future of work: New forms of employment and platform work in the Eastern Partnership countries](#). The country-specific research and consultations in Albania took place between December 2021 and May 2022. The manuscript was completed in June 2022.

The analysis confirms the huge impact of technological change on Western Balkan economies, including Albania, with the Covid-19 pandemic accelerating digitalisation trends and increasing labour flexibility. New economic models with efficient matching of labour and skills demand and supply provide online-based employment opportunities and, to some extent, skills development. Young people take up those opportunities, which open up new markets and new ways of work, often becoming an alternative to migration. Therefore, beyond the inherent volatility of contractual relationships, issues of quality and inclusiveness, new forms of work are an important source of income, a place to use and develop skills, and a chance to harness entrepreneurial potential.

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INTRODUCTION

Social, economic, and technological changes within the EU and other countries, including the Western Balkans, have fostered a notable increase in **labour market flexibility**. New and non-standard forms of employment¹ have grown in scale and prominence in recent years. Many of these new forms of employment deviate from traditional concepts of work, both in terms of their legal and contractual form, as well as in practical working conditions.

Some of the most notable **non-standard forms of employment** include temporary employment, part-time and on-call work; temporary agency work and other multiparty employment relationships; as well as disguised and dependent self-employment. Besides the general trend of increasing flexibility in labour markets, digitalisation enhances the development of non-standard forms of employment. Work through digital labour platforms (platform work) is one of the more significant examples of recent transformations in the employment landscape, especially given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Platform work is a new and expanding phenomenon and the key focus of this report. It can be defined as services provided on demand and for remuneration by people working through digital platforms. These platforms can facilitate the provision of both remote and on-location services that require varying skill levels, and – depending on the business model of the platform – exert various levels of algorithmic control over the workers. Platform work has also different names, for example gig work, online freelancing, app work; or is simply better known by the brand of individual platforms such as Uber, Glovo, Upwork, and many others.²

This report examines the emergence of new forms of employment and platform work in Albania by relying on a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis, involving desk research, interviews, and analysis of automatically collected data from the platforms. The in-depth research was complemented with a survey to identify priorities for policy actions.

The desk research and interviews were conducted in English and Albanian between December 2021 and February 2022. Interviews were targeted at policymakers, representatives of business and worker associations, as well as platform companies operating in Albania and people working through these platforms.

The automatic data collection was conducted between November and December 2021 and targeted four platforms that are popular among the freelancers from the Western Balkans - Freelancer.com, People Per Hour, Guru.com, and Hubstaff Talent. These platforms were selected based on the number of people from the region working through them, as well as the possibility to collect data in an automated way from the platforms. Upwork, one of the major platforms, could not be scraped due to measures implemented by the platform to limit such activities at the time the automated data collection took place. Therefore, this platform was covered through alternative data collection methods.

¹ Mandl, I. (2020). New forms of employment: 2020 update. New forms of employment series. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg.

² The conceptual framework of platform work included in ETF (2021): The future of work – New forms of employment in the Eastern Partnership countries: Platform work, Annex I, available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/future-work-new-forms-employment-eastern-partnership>

SETTING THE SCENE

Over the past two and a half decades, Albania has made significant strides to consolidate the market economy. Thanks to strong growth performance at a rate of around 6%, Albania grew from the poorest nation in Europe in the early 1990s to the status of a middle-income country in 2008.³ For 2021, economic growth was forecast at 7.6% and is projected to remain at around 4% throughout the following medium-term period.⁴ Around 43-44% of Albania's GDP is generated in the service sector, followed by 30% in agriculture, and 20% in industry.⁵

Notwithstanding the growth trend, the structure of the economy is dominated by small enterprises (95%). These businesses, even with a substantial contribution in terms of both economic growth and employment, offer limited potential for job creation. With a narrow export and production base, as well as limited innovation capacities, the competitiveness of Albania's economy is weak. The Albanian government has committed to transforming the economy from an import-dependent, consumption-based, and informal economy, to one that is based on sustainable job creation and increased productivity. As such, it has largely recognised the need to systematically address employment by re-orienting the vocational education and training system towards labour market (LM) needs and modernising and extending the outreach of employment services.⁶

As of January 2021, Albania's population stood at 2.88 million which represents a decrease of 3,991 people (-0.1%) since January 2020. During the period 2011-2020, an average of about 42,000 people emigrated each year.⁷ What concerns other demographics, 49.1% of Albania's population is female, 62.5% of the population lives in urban centres, and 37.5% lives in rural areas.⁸ In January 2021, the majority of the population fell within the 20-24, 25-29, and 55-59 age groups.⁹

Although the Albanian economy recorded a significant recession in 2020, it has been considerably more restrained than initial forecasts which ranged from about negative 6%, according to the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), to about negative 8% from other domestic and international institutions).¹⁰ During the first half of 2021, the Albanian economy showed encouraging signs of a rapid recovery of economic activity. The GDP had increased by about 11.9% compared to the first half of 2020, according to the latest estimate.¹¹ This recovery has relied on a wide range of factors and is present in almost all sectors of the economy. The easing of COVID-19 restrictions on account of the decline in the number of infections, the increase in business and consumer confidence, the improvement of partner economies, as well as fiscal and monetary support policies, led to increased household consumption, public and private investments, as well as exports. Both the manufacturing and services sectors benefited from these developments, providing recovery for business and employment, and creating good premises for the medium-term outlook.¹² Overall, growth in the first half of 2021 was generated almost entirely by domestic demand, both from private consumption and investment, while net foreign demand was estimated to also had made a positive, yet more moderate, contribution to total growth.¹³

³ UNDP Albania, <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/projects/skills-development-for-employment--consolidation-phase.html>

⁴ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

⁵ INSTAT Interview (2022-01-11)

⁶ UNDP Albania, <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/projects/skills-development-for-employment--consolidation-phase.html>

⁷ <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/statistikat-n%C3%AB-shkolla/piramida-e-popullsis%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABris%C3%AB/>

⁸ DATAREPORT.AL, 2021, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-albania>

⁹ <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/statistikat-n%C3%AB-shkolla/piramida-e-popullsis%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABris%C3%AB/>

¹⁰ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

¹¹ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

¹² INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

¹³ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

The shock of COVID-19 reversed positive trends in the labour market that had prevailed since 2014, increasing the number of unemployed jobseekers in the second quarter of 2020 (compared to Q2 2019) by 10,000.¹⁴ Fortunately 2021 brought back some positive developments. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the employment rate for the population aged 15-64 was 62.1% (68.8% for men and 55.4% for women). During this quarter, the total number of employed increased by 2.1% compared to the fourth quarter of 2020, and by 0.1% compared to the third quarter of 2021. The official unemployment rate decreased by 1.9% compared to the same quarter of 2020 for the population aged 15 and over, closing the final quarter of 2021 with 11.4% (11.0% for men and 11.8% for women).¹⁵

Women and youngsters were more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those employed in family businesses with or without a payment.¹⁶ The already existing pre-pandemic labour market inactivity, especially among women, is seen as one of the main obstacles to growth. One-third of young women do not seek work because of family obligations.¹⁷

Undeclared work in Albania is another important problem of the labour market. Three types of undeclared workers can be distinguished: unregistered workers, under-declared employees, or bogus self-employed individuals. The classical form of undeclared work in Albania is partially undeclared work (34.9% - 36% of cases depending on the survey type)¹⁸, followed by the absence of a written contract (16%), and social security and unpaid health insurance (12%). Undeclared work is more prevalent among individuals who are relatively less educated; almost 90% of employed respondents with secondary education work with a written contract, compared to only 20% of employees with primary education.¹⁹

A high share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), particularly among the most educated, indicates challenges in labour market transitions for young people. By the end of 2020, youth NEET accounted for 27.9% of the population aged 15-29 years. Within the NEETs group, 35.1% were classified as unemployed. The rest were outside the labour force because they were discouraged workers²⁰ (15.2%), fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities (16.6%), or inactive for other reasons (33.1%).²¹

Young men and women often seek job opportunities through family or patronage networks, especially for coveted jobs in the public sector.²² A sense of relative deprivation and unmet expectations, including for employment, have become driving forces for emigration and potentially for radicalisation among young men.²³ Yet, many employers in Albania report difficulties in finding sufficiently skilled workers. At the same time, adult participation in lifelong learning is very limited, with only 0.8% participating in training in 2019 compared to 10.7% in the EU in the same year.²⁴

¹⁴ ETF, 2021: Country fiche Albania <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Albania%20Education%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf>, pg. 10

¹⁵ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

¹⁶ INSTAT interview (2022-01-11)

¹⁷ INSTAT 2021 c. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/>

¹⁸ Karma 2019, <https://ojs.cimedoc.uniba.it/index.php/law/article/view/1102>, pg. 20

¹⁹ Karma 2019, <https://ojs.cimedoc.uniba.it/index.php/law/article/view/1102>, pg. 20, cit. IDM 2016, https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Policy-brief_Hidden-Economy-and-Undeclared-Labor-in-Macedonia-Albania-and-Kosovo-1.pdf, op. cit., pp. 7-8

²⁰ A discouraged worker is someone who has given up looking for work and has left the labor market.

The discouraged worker effect is defined as the decision to refrain from job search as a result of poor chances on the labour market. Discouragement effects can arise from a lack of individual qualifications, from discrimination in the labour market or from a high local level of underemployment.

²¹ Annual Progress Report of NESS, 2020. Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2021, pg. 8,

<https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>

²² <http://europeandcis.undp.org/blog/2013/02/13/albania-young-people-talk-jobs-and-what-they-want-post2015/>

²³ IDM 2015, <https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf>

²⁴ ETF (2021) Adult participation in lifelong learning in the past 4 weeks (aged 25-64), Key indicators on education, skills and employment 2021.

According to reports by international organisations, the vocational and tertiary education systems in Albania are fragmented and unable to provide young people with the skills needed for the labour market.²⁵ Albania's vocational education system is very small and attracts very few women. The share of all students in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational programmes in Albania was reported to be 18.25 % in 2019, according to the World Bank.²⁶ Women represented 16.1% of the vocational education students.²⁷

Generally, youth employment prospects are linked to education levels, with higher employment rates among those with upper secondary and tertiary education (this has been a constant trend over the last number of years). Young people are staying in education longer, yet often lack relevant skills and remain unemployed. Insights from the labour market and information about skills needs are not sufficiently integrated into education curricula. Such shortcomings in the educational and vocational education and training (VET) systems, coupled with the challenges to equip youth with knowledge and skills for the current labour market, partly contribute to the high youth unemployment rate.²⁸

Nevertheless, the VET curricula in Albania have improved over time, following the guidance and support of various international projects, including for example Skills for Jobs.²⁹ Flexible curricula were paired with internships, apprenticeships, and other types of on-the-job learning in companies. This seems to have improved the employability of graduates, at least in some occupations. According to some interviewees, very few VET graduates struggle to find employment, as many of them find jobs in the growing construction, technology, and other sectors.³⁰

Skills for the ICT sector specifically have become an increasingly prominent topic in Albania in recent years.³¹ According to the magazine Monitor,³² students pursuing ICT are among the most sought after in the job market. At the graduate level, it is rare to find students who are not employed in these professions, and they often start working in the last year of their bachelor's studies. During the academic year of 2018-2019, over 10,000 students were enrolled in the field of ICT, which is a 21% increase compared to the previous academic year. ICT is a well-paid profession and the employment market in Albania is centred around this sector. In other words, one does not need to rely on "friends" to find a job.³³

The use of ICTs in Albania is widespread. Based on the results of the Survey on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Households and by Individuals in 2021, 79.3% of the population aged 16-74 use the internet, of which 91.7% use it every day.³⁴ Meanwhile, 88.3% of Albanian households have access to the internet. In 2021 all technological or computer skills had increased, with the highest growth recorded for skills related to "software/application installation" and "materials transfer" which saw an increase of 8.6 percentage points and about 6 percentage points, respectively.³⁵

²⁵ UNDP, 2016, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/835281?ln=en>

²⁶ <https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/percentage-of-students-in-upper-secondary-education-enrolled-in-vocational-programmes-both-sexes-percent-wb-data.html>

²⁷ ETF 2020, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Albania%20Education%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf>, pg.5

²⁸ UNDP, 2022, <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/projects/youth-employment.html>.

²⁹ Interview with a vocational school ed director for the purpose of this study (2022-01-21)

³⁰ Head of vocational school Interview (2022-01-21)

³¹ <https://skillsforjobs.al/publications/does-albania-need-new-qualifications-in-ict/>

³² <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>.

³³ <https://www.monitor.al/a-mund-te-kthet-shqiperia-ne-oaz-te-sheerbimeve-te-it-2/>

³⁴ INSTAT (2021), d. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/social-condition/information-and-communication-technologies-ict-usage-in-households-and-by-individuals/>

³⁵ INSTAT (2021), d. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/social-condition/information-and-communication-technologies-ict-usage-in-households-and-by-individuals/>

In an increasingly digital world, Albania has high demands for digital skills development but few opportunities to acquire them.³⁶ Demand for digital skills in Albania concerns both general skills as a key competence, as well as specialist skills related to specific occupations in ICT. Both skillsets are integrated into the VET curriculum.³⁷ As a result of efforts so far, in 2019, there were no individuals in the 16-29 age group who had no overall digital skills, and 43% of them had basic or above basic digital skills. This figure reached 34% in the 25-34 age group in the same year.³⁸

The current demand for digital skills is linked to the desire for digitalisation and the changes that the economy is undergoing in this respect. The COVID-19 pandemic that sped up the process, enhancing in parallel the labour market flexibility.

³⁶ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

³⁷ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

³⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_SK_DSKL_I_custom_2250168/default/table?lang=en

NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

Non-standard forms of employment are emerging in the context of recent labour market developments in Albania. Several new forms of employment are present. These include most notably, seasonal jobs, part-time jobs, double employment, contract of service, online remote work for national or international employers, on-call work, agency employment, and dependent self-employment. In some sectors, occupations, and companies, the shift towards non-standard working arrangements is obvious, however, rather little statistical data exists to quantify the trend and prevalence of these arrangements. The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) gathers information on full-time and part-time employment, as well as temporary (fixed-term) and permanent contracts.³⁹ Information for temporary agency work, on-call work, and platform work is not collected.⁴⁰ The services of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (AKPA/NAES) do not cover people engaged in the new forms of employment.⁴¹

Temporary employment is quite common in Albania in sectors impacted by seasonality (tourism, agriculture, catering,⁴² and construction). According to INSTAT, in 2020, temporary employment constituted 6.7% of paid employment in the country (among those aged 15-64). Seasonal work represents a common type of temporary employment.⁴³ Considering the seasonal nature of the production, the employees are engaged on a casual or temporary basis. Notable shares of seasonal workers are employed informally, i.e., without a contract of employment or other form of work engagement as a legal basis in accordance with labour regulations.⁴⁴

Temporary work takes place not only within the country but also across the border, as multilingual Albanians go to neighbouring countries like Greece and Montenegro to work in sectors like agriculture and tourism.⁴⁵ While in many cases temporary seasonal work takes the form of unregistered employment, especially in agriculture,⁴⁶ cross-border temporary employment tends to also take the form of **agency work**. Meanwhile, various specialists and contractors use service contracts for temporary assignments.

Furthermore, **part-time** work is increasingly prevalent. According to INSTAT, in 2020, 3.3% of those employed with payment were found to be working part-time. Such arrangements are mainly found in the service sector, especially in call centres where one can decide how many hours to work. Part-time work is also present in many other sectors, from high skilled (university teaching) to low skilled (household cleaning, etc.). In addition to this, part-time work is common in cases of double employment, which is legally acknowledged in Albania; as well as in freelance work, which is a growing trend in the country, especially growing during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁷

³⁹ INSTAT Interview (2022-01-11)

⁴⁰ INSTAT Interview (2022-01-11)

⁴¹ NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

⁴² The catering industry is comprised of businesses that provide food, beverages and other services to a variety of clients, usually for special events. Catering industry jobs vary from small intimate affairs to large events that involve providing not only food and beverage service but also tableware, linens, service personnel and other aspects of the event. <https://www.delightedcooking.com/what-is-the-catering-industry.htm#:~:text=The%20catering%20industry%20is%20comprised,clients%2C%20usually%20for%20special%20events>.

⁴³ Seasonal work is not known as a specific form of labor engagement, but as a part-time job by the Labour Law. There is no difference between full-time and part-time contracts in terms of administrative procedures and in the way taxes and contributions are calculated, except that the liability is proportionate to the amount of time spent at work.

⁴⁴ https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Regional_Seasonal_Engagement_Systems_Analysis_final.pdf pg.4

⁴⁵ SwissContact Interview (2022-02-05)

⁴⁶ https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Regional_Seasonal_Engagement_Systems_Analysis_final.pdf, pg.3

⁴⁷ SwissContact Interview (2022-02-05)

Dependent self-employment is understood as “formal self-employment but de facto employment relationship, if not de jure, not least because they only work for one employer”.⁴⁸ It is increasing in popularity among highly skilled workers, in international companies or on international projects. Exclusivity of pre-agreement is often a contract condition for such employment.⁴⁹

These new forms of work are becoming attractive to various groups within the Albanian population. Since the full-time, permanent employment contracts are not easy to obtain (e.g., during the third quarter of 2021, the employment rate for the population aged 15-64 was 62%), flexible models of work give new possibilities to work and make extra money. Informal arrangements are somehow attractive as additional sources of income thanks to the low enforcement of taxation on income. For young people, new and more flexible forms of work are also appealing because they do not need to go through the traditional recruitment process (in most cases the process in new forms of employment is based on skills and not diplomas) and offer a faster transition into the labour market.

In the context of COVID-19, **remote work** became especially visible. The pandemic had a double effect. On the one hand, it forced many professionals to work from home. On the other hand, it also increased demand for the services of remote and freelance workers, especially in the ICT sector, and other areas of life (e.g., shopping, ordering services, and teaching) moved increasingly online too, driving the need for a specialist labour force to develop these solutions.⁵⁰ The popularity of remote freelancing has been also further encouraged by the pandemic.

Besides **remote work** as a working modality gaining popularity in existing companies, more and more professionals are “internationalised” (i.e., working from Albania for companies based abroad). This mostly applies to knowledge workers. Several international companies are applying a hybrid modality of employment allowing for their Workplace further digitalisation. Many international companies dip into the Albanian talent pool of highly skilled multilingual workers, especially in the ICT sector.⁵¹

However, according to an interviewee, these forms of work should not be seen as very widespread in the country. They are most popular among young people who are “comfortable” with non-standard forms of employment and who tend to have part-time jobs and perform online freelancing activities.⁵²

Remote freelance work is associated with high income. According to another interviewee, “we talk about big money when talking about freelance remote ICT work, and remuneration can reach USD 5,000 per month or project.”⁵³ Another source (Monitor 2021) highlights the example of young Albanians earning significant amounts of income via Upwork.⁵⁴ “More people, therefore, are engaging or trying to enter that form of employment.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_614176.pdf, pg.7

⁴⁹ SwissContact Interview (2022-02-05)

⁵⁰ Freelancer working on platform interview (2021-12-26)

⁵¹ AKPA/NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

⁵² Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2021-12-26)

⁵³ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2021-12-26)

⁵⁴ Magazine Monitor 13.01.202 Të rinjtë profesionistë shqiptarë po bëhen milionerë nga puna online për të huajt
<https://www.monitor.al/te-rinjte-profesioniste-shqiptare-po-behen-milionere-nga-puna-online-per-te-huajt/>

⁵⁵ Freelancer working on a platform Interview (2021-12-26)

PLATFORM WORK

The collaborative economy more broadly, and platform work specifically, are becoming more prominent and visible in Albania – especially since the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020. Non-standard forms of work have become the new normal for many.⁵⁶ However, the data on platform work is still scarce and fragmented, and mainly comes from the identification and analysis of specific platforms operating in the country or international platforms used by Albanian workers.

The research conducted for this report covered several platforms that operate in Albania. Their level of success in the market and the way these platforms operate varies. Albanian platforms dominate on-location services. They facilitate the digital matching and administration of supply and demand for services, while the delivery is physical. Intermediated services require various skill levels, from high end to low end. Meanwhile, considerable numbers of highly qualified specialists use international platforms for remote platform work.

Below, we present our key findings on the two distinct types of platform work: on-location, dominated by Albanian platforms, and remote, dominated by international ones.

Remote platform work

Remote platform work has become an attractive form of employment for many Albanians, although conclusive and precise data on its scale and scope is lacking. Because of this, the following findings on remote platform work are triangulated based on three available sources: the Online Labour Index (OLI)⁵⁷, Gigmetar report⁵⁸, and data automatically collected for the purposes of this study. It is important to note that while the data from the three sources is complementary, the findings from each of the three sources are not directly comparable.

- OLI data from 2017 until early 2022 presents information on active (not registered) platform workers on four English language web-based, freelancing platforms Fiverr, Freelancer.com, Guru.com, and People Per Hour.
- The Gigmetar report from August 2021 presents data on registered platform workers on Upwork, Freelancer.com, and Guru.com.
- Automatically collected data from November 2021 represents registered platform workers on Freelancer.com, Guru.com, Hubstaff Talent, and People Per Hour.

According to OLI data, engagement in online work has grown in terms of the number of active Albanian platform workers in 2017 compared to the beginning of 2022, despite notable fluctuations in the shorter term.⁵⁹ As visible in the graph below, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 might have caused a spike in online work in Albania. After a subsequent decrease, as of mid-2021, engagement levels have been increasing once again.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Based on calculations from OLI data, Gigmetar report, automatically collected data as well as data from the interviews conducted for the purpose of this report.

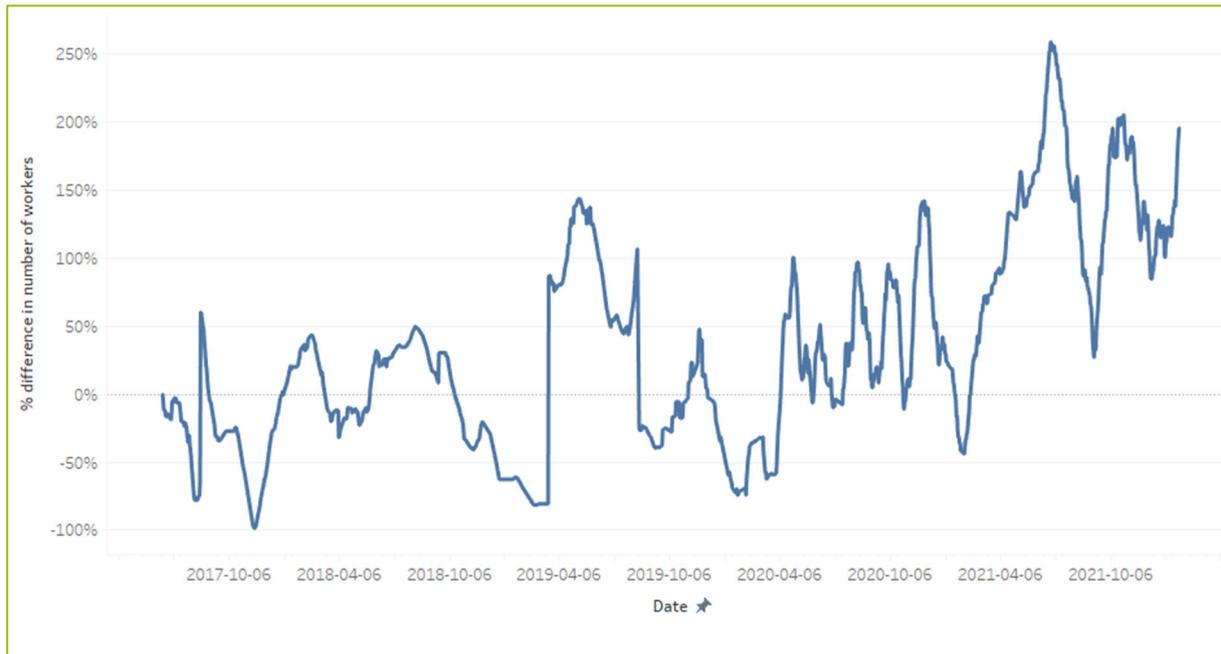
⁵⁷ Kassi, O.; Hadley, C.; Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Online Labour Index: Measuring the Online Gig Economy for Policy and Research. figshare. Dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3761562>

⁵⁸ Anđelković, B., Jakobi, T., Ivanović, V., Kalinić, Z., Bogičević, M., Lundin, S. & Radonjić, Lj. (2020). Gigmetar. <http://gigmetar.publicpolicy.rs/en/region5-2/>

⁵⁹ Kassi, O.; Hadley, C.; Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Online Labour Index: Measuring the Online Gig Economy for Policy and Research. figshare. Dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3761562>

⁶⁰ OLI data presents figures from five largest English-language online labour platforms, representing at least 70% of the market by traffic.

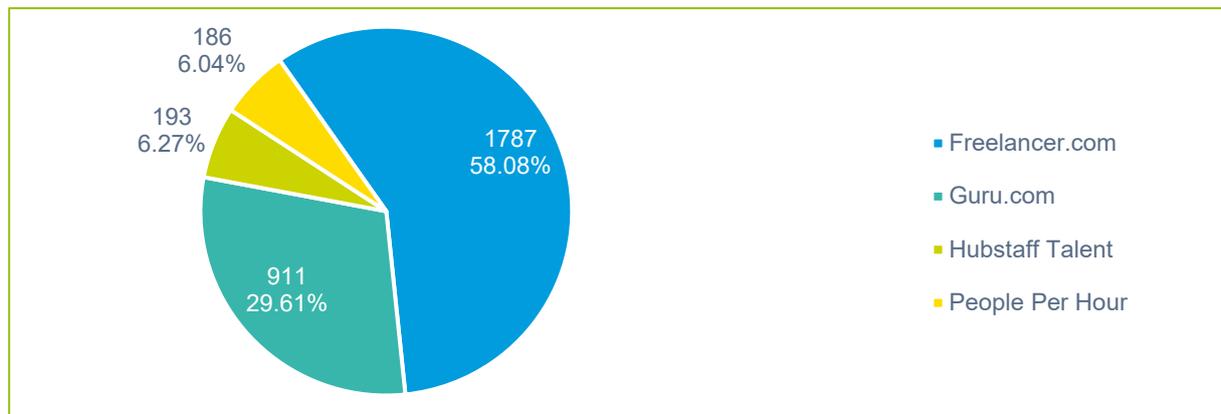
Figure 1. Change of engagement in online work among Albanian workers on digital remote labour platforms in time, relative to 2017 when data was first collected



Note: The graph presents the percentage change between the number of active workers from Albania on a specific day compared to the number of active workers at the start of data collection in 2017, which is used as a reference date. This graph was based on OLI data which calculated a weighted estimate of currently active workers by periodically sampling workers on the four largest online platforms once every 24 hours.

The automatically collected data from four selected platforms⁶¹ showed that there were 3,077 registered online workers from Albania in November 2021. Considering the total working-age population (aged 15-64) in 2020, the share of platform workers in Albania stood at 0.16%. Out of the registered online workers, only 12.5% (384 freelancers) could be considered active accounts who had received feedback, reviews or completed projects on the selected platforms. Freelancer.com seemed to be the most popular platform among the Albanian service providers, with around 1,800 or 58% of all Albanians registered on the four selected platforms (see the figure below). The second most popular platform was Guru.com with 29.6% of registered Albanian platform workers. Similar shares of workers were registered on Hubstaff Talent and People Per Hour (PPH) platforms (around 6% on each platform).

Figure 2. Number and share of registered platform workers from Albania, by platform (November 2021)



Nevertheless, the most popular platform in the country seems to be Upwork. According to one estimate, there were 1,600 registered Albanians on Upwork in February 2021, while in June 2021, this

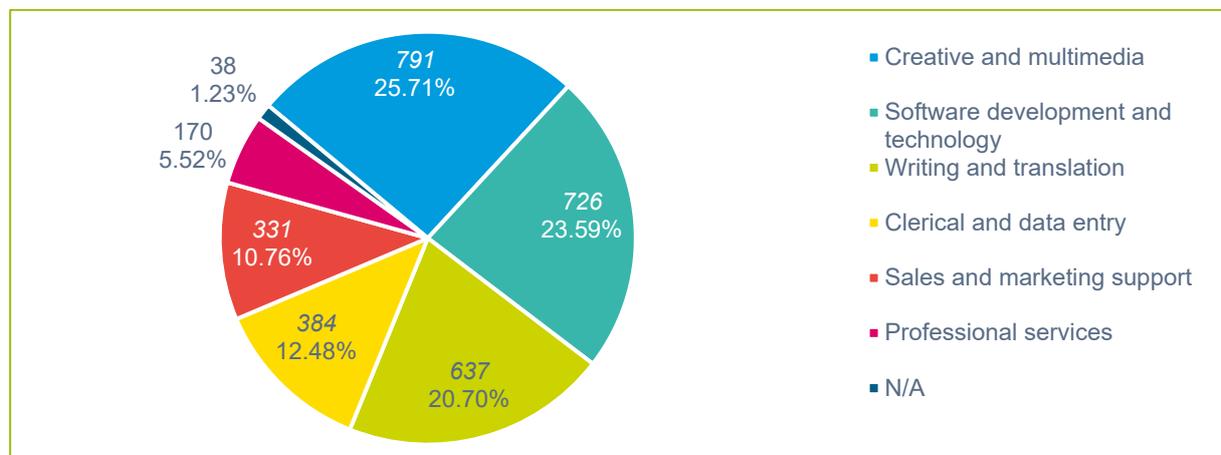
⁶¹ The four selected platforms for web-scraping were: Guru.com, Freelancer.com, Hubstaff Talent and People Per Hour.

number exceeded 3,000.⁶² In early 2022, there were about 8,000 reviews for individuals registered on Upwork⁶³ from Albania.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the sum of reviews of Albanian freelancers on the four web-scraped platforms (Freelancer.com, Guru.com, Hubstaff Talent and PPH) was only around 2,000 as of November 2021. This finding that Upwork might be the most popular platform for Albanian workers is also supported by the Gigmeter™ report, which suggests that in August 2021 the majority of freelancers from Albania - 57.4% - were registered on Upwork.⁶⁵ The number of people registering on the platform increased rapidly during the COVID-19 crisis, as it provided an alternative for young people in Albania who lost their jobs during the pandemic.

There is a multitude of occupations that can be engaged in through remote platform work. Popular fields, especially among young professionals, include IT (software development, technology, and multimedia) and translation.⁶⁶ Based on the opinions of those interviewed for the purpose of this research, platform work is widespread and increasing among highly skilled remote ICT workers.

Half of all registered Albanian platform workers⁶⁷ were engaged in either creative and multimedia or software development and technology work, according to the automatically collected data. The most popular occupation was creative and multimedia – represented by 25.7% of workers. This was closely followed by software development and technology which constituted 23.6% of registered freelancers (see the figure below). The Gigmeter report also found these to be the top two occupations among Albanian remote platform workers in August 2021.⁶⁸ Based on automatically collected data, writing and translation is the third most popular occupation. The interest in translation work online was confirmed through numerous interviews with Albanian freelancers who noted that engagement in this occupation is common.⁶⁹ Besides the large international platforms, Albanian translators mentioned using specialised tools like memoQ translator pro,⁷⁰ and platforms such as Translatorbase, Translationdirectory, and ProZ.⁷¹

Figure 3. Occupations of all registered platform workers from Albania on Freelancer.com, Guru.com, Hubstaff Talent and People Per Hour platforms (November 2021)



⁶² <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>.

⁶³ This is the only available metric, as the platform does not provide a number of registered workers, and implement measures to block automated data collection attempts.

⁶⁴ <https://www.upwork.com/hire/al/>

⁶⁵ Anđelković, B., Jakobi, T., Ivanović, V., Kalinić, Z., Bogićević, M., Lundin, S. & Radonjić, Lj. (2020). *Gigmeter*. <http://gigmeter.publicpolicy.rs/en/region5-2/>

⁶⁶ Swiss Contact Interview (2022-02-05); <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>

⁶⁷ On the four selected platforms: Guru.com, Freelancer.com, Hubstaff Talent and PeoplePerHour

⁶⁸ <http://gigmeter.publicpolicy.rs/en/region5-2/>

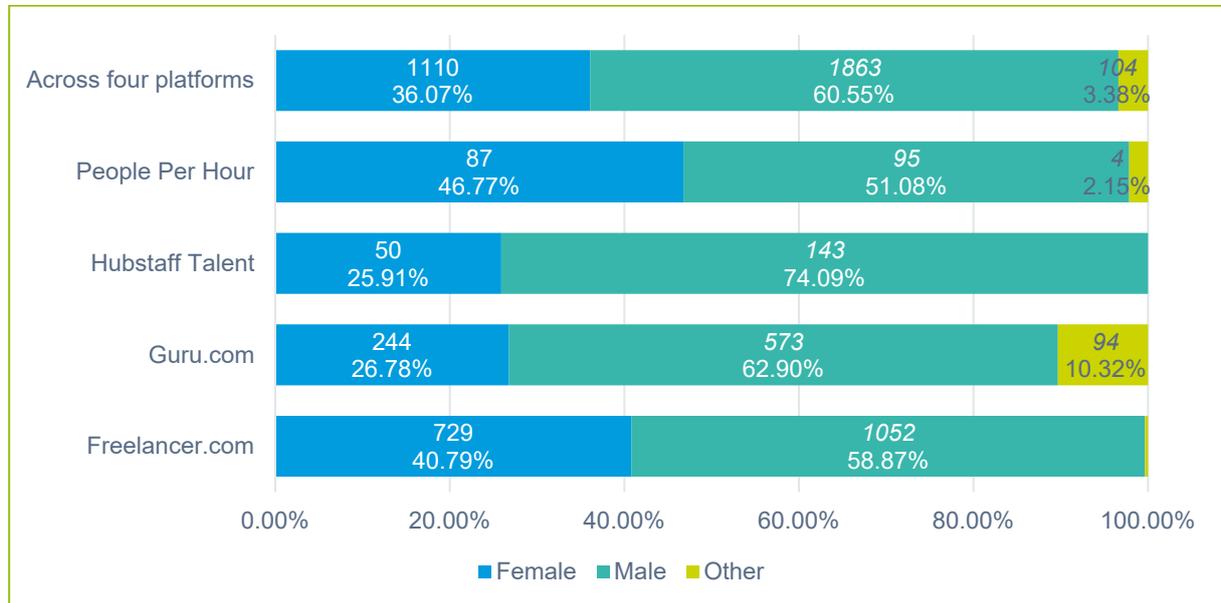
⁶⁹ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022-01-14)

⁷⁰ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022-01-14)

⁷¹ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022-01-14)

Furthermore, the automatically collected data revealed that Albanian men were 1.7 times more likely to register on the four selected platforms than women. Out of all registered workers, 60.1% were male and 36.1% were female workers (for 3.4% of accounts gender could not be identified, as these were collective or agency accounts, or workers registered under gender-neutral pseudonyms).

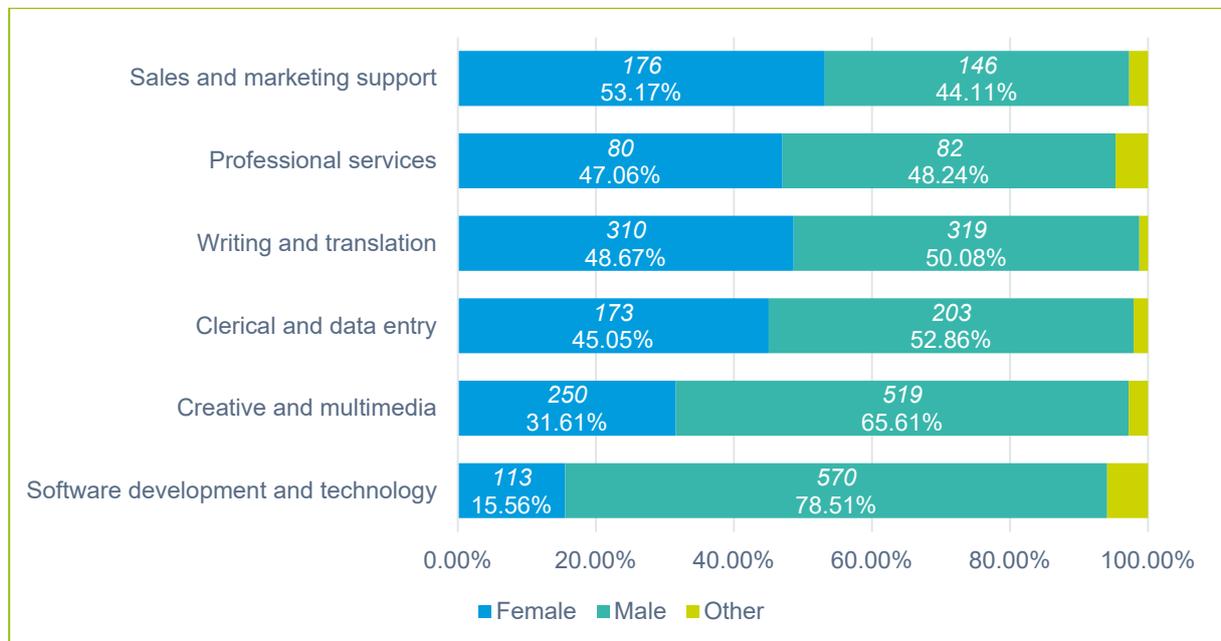
Figure 4. Gender of registered Albanian platform workers, by platform (November 2021)



Note: "Other" category shows worker profiles for which gender could not be identified.

Male online workers tended to dominate in all occupations except for sales and marketing support work in which female freelancers engaged more often. A significant male dominance was visible in software development and technology, as only 15.6% of registered workers in this field were women.

Figure 5. Gender of registered Albanian platform workers, by occupation (November 2021)

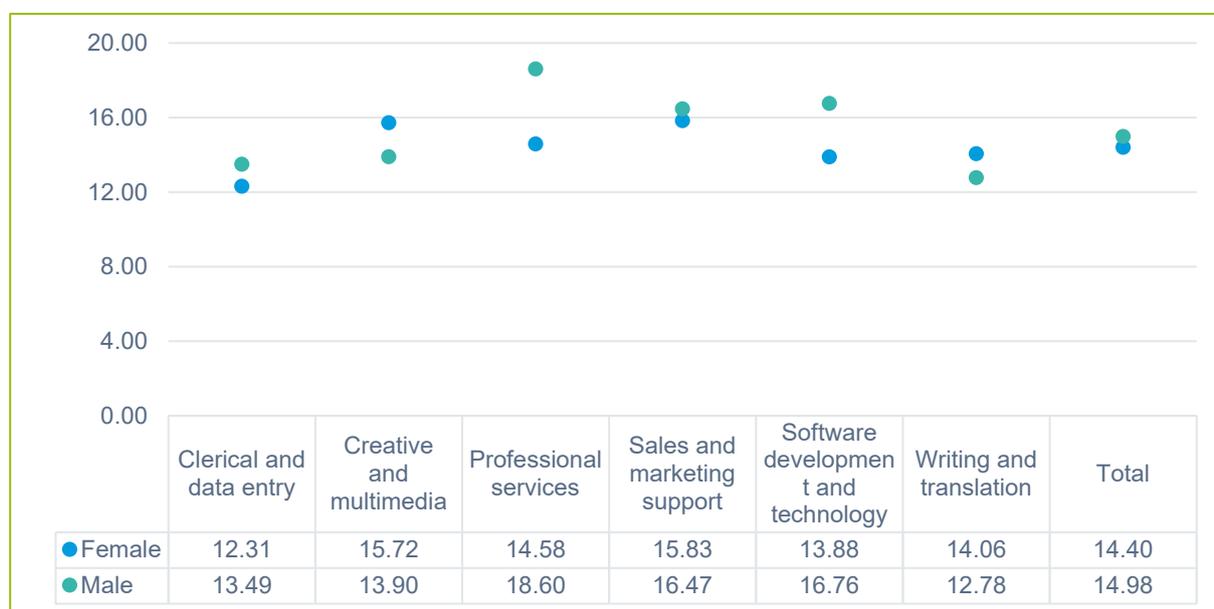


Note: "Other" category shows worker profiles for which gender could not be identified.

High pay has been highlighted as one of the advantages of working through online platforms.⁷² According to one source, some people on Upwork have earned more than EUR 100,000 in less than two years and most workers have secured a monthly income of about EUR 1,000 since registering.⁷³ Interviewees also noted that working full-time can allow freelancers to make EUR 2,000 per month. Even higher pay is common among freelancers working in the ICT field, according to one interviewee.⁷⁴ Although this is considered a high salary in Albania, it is unclear how many hours of work are needed to generate this income.

As illustrated below, Albanian youth tend to provide ICT services and other high-paying occupations (consulting, risk analysis, architecture, engineering, accounting, translation, marketing, data processing, etc.).⁷⁵ Based on data from Freelancer.com, Guru.com, Hubstaff Talent and PPH, the average hourly rate indicated by Albanian online workers was USD 14.7 in November 2021. Compared to other countries in the region, the gender pay gap among Albanian workers was one of the lowest. On average, female workers demanded USD 14.4 per hour while males demanded USD 15 per hour. Women in writing and translation and creative and multimedia occupations tended to demand higher rates than males in the same occupation. In the remaining four occupations, male online workers demanded higher hourly rates.

Figure 6. Average hourly rate in USD demanded by Albanian platform workers, by occupation and gender (November 2021)



The average hourly rate requested by Albanian platform workers also differed by platform. Freelancers on PPH demanded the highest rates (USD 17.7 on average), followed by freelancers on Hubstaff Talent who demanded USD 16.7, on average. Workers on Freelancer.com and Guru.com demanded similar rates – around USD 14.5.

⁷² Interview with a freelancer working remotely on a platform (2021-12-26)

⁷³ <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>.

⁷⁴ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2021-12-26)

⁷⁵ <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>.

Figure 7. Average hourly rate in USD demanded by Albanian platform workers, by platform (November 2021)



Albanians learn about remote platform work in different ways. According to the interviews, most people found out about opportunities online through social media or from their peers. However, registering is not enough to start earning, as securing a workflow is difficult due to the intense competition.⁷⁶ To secure a workflow, workers usually need to build a relatively stable client base first. In cases where this is successful, some platform workers establish companies which identify jobs offered through platforms and recruit people to fill them.⁷⁷

Based on the interviews conducted, platforms are an **attractive form of employment** for a number of reasons. It is a good way to earn additional income, it gives workers the opportunity to improve their professional portfolio, it offers a flexible schedule⁷⁸ and independence from managers, it allows workers to develop an international network⁷⁹. In addition, finding employment online is easier for young people who experience difficulties in entering the traditional labour market. Some interviewees mentioned that platforms run advertising campaigns to convince people that working online in occupations such as translation is easy and accessible to everyone. This has encouraged many people to learn foreign languages in order to earn money as translators.⁸⁰

From the client's point of view, the Albanian media has reported that Albanian platform workers remain competitive in the global online market because they provide services that require a high level of expertise, in a timelier manner and at a lower cost than freelancers from other countries.⁸¹ For some services such as architecture and translation, Albanian professionals demand much lower rates than freelancers in other countries, for example in the European Union. This is corroborated by data from Upwork which shows that young Albanian professionals generally receive positive reviews from clients, making the quality to price ratio of Albanian freelancers attractive to clients abroad.⁸²

However, the **negative sides of remote platform work** were also noted by interviewees who engage in high-skilled platform work. Among the disadvantages mentioned were platform fees (EUR 80-100 per year on a single platform), high bank fees for international transfers, high competition among workers, the unpredictability of the workload, monotonous and routine work (e.g., translating labels

⁷⁶ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022-01-14)

⁷⁷ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2021-12-26)

⁷⁸ For example interviewees indicated that they work at night when they have spare time and they can benefit from being in a different time zone than the client. (2021-12-26), (2022-01-14)

⁷⁹ Interview with a remote platform worker (2022-01-14)

⁸⁰ Interview with a remote platform worker (2022-01-14)

⁸¹ <https://www.monitor.al/a-mund-te-kthetshqiperia-ne-oaz-te-sherbimeve-te-it/>.

⁸² Monitor 2021, <https://www.monitor.al/3000-te-rinj-shqiptare-po-punojne-online-per-te-huajt-kerkojne-shperblime-4-5-here-me-te-uleta-se-tregu-nderkombetar/>.

and leaflets) and the necessity to invest in building one's profile which amounts to unpaid working time. Moreover, remote platform workers can rarely secure long-term or permanent clients and projects. Some clients also prove to be dishonest, while the options for redress and complaint handling are scarce.

The topic of **working conditions** has become increasingly important, as some platform workers (most notably those working in IT) tend to leave their regular jobs to engage in online work full-time. Various risks are associated with relying on the income generated from remote platform work. Freelancers often report working unsocial hours on projects that have tight deadlines with clients based in different time zones. They lack the social contact and relationships common in regular workplaces and feel as though they cannot constructively confront these adversities as they are not organised (unionised) in Albania.⁸³ No regulation exists regarding working conditions or pay and remuneration, which has resulted in a lack of work security. This legal unclarity has also led to a high degree of **informality** among Albanian remote platform workers.

Regarding **in-work skills development**, remote platform workers acquire important soft skills and adaptability.⁸⁴ The nature of online work exposes workers to different requirements, ways of delivering the product, and clients. These factors require platform workers to be fast learners and develop new skills quickly, which can then be transferred from one platform to another.

The portfolios that freelancers build on platforms can be used in the traditional labour markets. However, it is unclear whether skills developed on platforms are accepted by employers in the domestic market. Interviewees referred to career prospects on platforms being 'undermined'.⁸⁵ Overall, there seem to be few conventional **career prospects** for remote platform workers.

On-location platform work

On-location platform work also exists in Albania and the identified on-location platforms operating in the country are of local origin. As in some other Western Balkan countries, well-known international platforms, such as Uber, Bolt, Glovo, and others, have not entered the market. On-location labour platforms in Albania not only offer common services such as food delivery and ride-hailing, but also the various arts and crafts services of on-call skilled workers. The identified platforms are presented in further detail below.

Gati.al is a marketplace of workers offering services in a variety of areas (217 occupations as of early 2022). On this marketplace, one can find the profiles of plumbers, electricians, welders, hairdressers, delivery couriers, car mechanics, tire technicians, hairdressers, painters, carpenters, and electricians, as well as musicians, specialists in finance, consultants and civil engineers. As of 2022, the platform had 2,640 professionals registered⁸⁶ in locations all over the country, although most of them were found in Tirana. These workers are mostly young professionals, both male and female, who are aiming to find their clientele or who have recently relocated to a new city. Older workers and those who have already established their client base are not as interested in the opportunities provided by the platform.

Gati.al functions as a marketplace and does not hire its workers. It does not charge workers or clients with commission fees, as it monetises through advertising. The platform helps workers to formalise their economic activities by providing service contract templates to be signed between the worker and the client.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the workers are ultimately responsible for declaring their income to tax authorities, and this does not always happen.

⁸³ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022-01-14)

⁸⁴ Freelancers working remotely on platform Interviews (2021.12.26), (2022.1.14)

⁸⁵ Freelancer working remotely on platform Interview (2022.1.14)

⁸⁶ <https://gati.al/media?target=1>

⁸⁷ <https://gati.al/ndihmese>

Despite the platform being active since around 2016, recently activity on it has been rather low.⁸⁸ According to the platform representative, to recruit new workers they used to hire students in Tirana who would go to their home cities, identify relevant professionals and encourage them to register on the platform. This formed the basis of the platform's visibility, but maintaining it proved difficult and expensive, rendering the future of the platform uncertain.

Another active Albanian platform, **Baboon**, is a food delivery platform that was serving 150,000 clients and 300 active food businesses in Tirana as of early 2022. Most of the delivery workers are males aged 20-35. Most people join the platform with the intention to earn extra income. The couriers are employed by the company full-time, however, some are also part-time workers. Although Baboon functions similarly to the food delivery platforms operating in the European Union, and it uses GPS technology to track workers and choose the fastest routes, some of the platform's processes are less automated. For example, Baboon employs operators who communicate with couriers regarding new orders. The recruitment process also requires active involvement from the platform (as opposed to simple registration on an application), and new workers need to be selected and trained, as well as own a scooter,⁸⁹ car or bicycle and have their own insurance.⁹⁰

Furthermore, several ride-hailing platforms that could be seen as Albanian alternatives to Uber have also been identified. These include Albanian platforms such as Speed Taxi, Taxi.al, as well as Ups Taxi. However, the business models of these platforms differ. Speed Taxi employs the drivers and owns the cars, while Ups Taxi does not. Taxi.al does not employ the workers and allows not only licensed drivers, but also private car owners looking for extra income to work via the platform. The profiles of the workers on these platforms are similar to others in the taxi sector and the vast majority of drivers are men of various ages.

The interviews conducted for this study confirmed that in Albania, the COVID-19 crisis had mixed effects on on-location platform workers. For some occupations (e.g., home services, taxi-driving) the high supply of workers did not match the demand for their services. Meanwhile for others (e.g., delivery services, health care, and nursing services) the demand increased.

Interestingly, emerging platforms in the Albanian labour market do not seem to see on-location platform labour as a widespread phenomenon. The lack of acknowledgement and definition of this type of work in public discourse, which has been confirmed by interviewees,⁹¹ may be contributing to this. For example, the interviewed owners of Albanian platforms (Baboon, Speed taxi, Gati.al) considered theirs to be the only labour platform (matching the definition used in this study) that exists in Albania. This indicates that there is considerable room for this market to grow.

The skills of those engaged in on-location platform work are developed in different ways (vocational schools, vocational training centres, universities, closed industries in Albania, self-made). Workers tend to register on the platforms randomly, without pre-selection, and with no expectations for the future. After establishing their own clientele, they may as well leave the platform.⁹² However, the scope for further skills development and career prospects are very limited in this type of work.

⁸⁸ Mr J. Demeti, owner and creator of the platform gati.al was interviewed for the purpose of this study. Following referred as "platform owner" (2022-01-18)

⁸⁹ Koli, Z., & Dibra, S. (2020). *Manaxhimi i burimeve njerezore* (3rd ed., pp. 57-58). Pegi.

⁹⁰ <https://www.baboon.al/per-drivers#>

⁹¹ Platform owner Interview (2022-01-14), etc.

⁹² Platform owner Interview (2022-01-14)

CURRENT REGULATION, POLICIES AND STRATEGIC APPROACHES

Regulating the new forms of employment and platform work

The labour market in Albania is governed by the Labour Law.⁹³ This law governs three main forms of employment contracts - full-time, part-time,⁹⁴ and services contracts.⁹⁵ Part-time employees have the same rights and obligations as full-time workers, proportional to time spent working.⁹⁶ As of 2019, the labour market is also governed by the Employment Promotion Law⁹⁷ which defines the rules and operations of public employment agencies, the services they provide, as well as active and passive programs in the labour market.

New forms of employment in Albania are covered by the existing regulation to some extent only. As mentioned above, people working through on-location platforms such as Baboon and Speed taxi are employed and their relationships with platforms are regulated by the Labour Code. This holds for full-time and part-time contracts; limited and unlimited duration contracts; employment agency contracts; individual and collective employment contracts; home-based employment contracts; commercial agent contracts; and apprenticeship/internship contracts. Therefore, many workers in non-standard employment are entitled to the same rights and protections against discrimination as any other full-time employee.⁹⁸

Freelancers working through remote labour platforms are covered by the legislative framework⁹⁹ for health and social insurance and tax income purposes. If the freelancing activities are the only source of income for a person, they are considered to be self-employed. Accordingly, they should declare their economic activities at the National Centre of Business and pay taxes¹⁰⁰ on their income. According to legislative changes made in 2021, registered taxpayers performing a business activity with an annual turnover of up to ALL 8 million (~EUR 65,910), are subject to simplified tax on small businesses at a 0% rate. Once the turnover exceeds this amount, the taxpayer is obliged to register for corporate income tax, which is still maintained at 0% up to ALL 14 million (~EUR 115,340). These changes were introduced to promote small businesses and favourable conditions for freelancers providing services as self-employed.¹⁰¹ Freelancers are also obliged to pay social security contributions, as well as health insurance for themselves and their unemployed family members.¹⁰²

⁹³The Law No. 7961, dated 12, 07, 1995 "The Working Code of the Republic of Albania".

⁹⁴ Article 14 of the Labor Law regulates part-time work as - half-time, weekly or monthly work or based on working hours.

⁹⁵ The Services Contract is not provided under the Labor Law; the service contract can be concluded for a period of only one week (7 days) in one calendar year.

⁹⁶ https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Regional_Seasonal_Engagement_Systems_Analysis_final.pdf

⁹⁷ The Law No. 15, dated 13, 03, 2019 "For the promotion of Employment",

<https://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLiqje/20190318131036liqj%20nr.%2015,%20dt.%2013.3.2019.pdf>

⁹⁸ https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/al/Documents/legal/EMP20_Chapter%201%20-%20Albania.pdf

⁹⁹ Law No.7703 dated 11.5.1993, "On social and health insurance in the Republic of Albania", Maw No.7870 dated 13.10.1994 "On health insurance in the Republic of Albania", Law No. 9136 dated 11.9.2003 On the collection of compulsory social and health insurance contributions in the Republic of Albania, Instruction No. 23 dated 9.12.2014, "On the collection of compulsory social and health insurance contributions in the Republic of Albania", Law Nr. 8438, Date 28.12.1998 "On Taxation of Incomes", Law Nr. 9920, dated 19.5.2008 "On tax procedures in the Republic of Albania changed", DCM Nr. 77, dated 28.1.2015 "On mandatory contributions and benefits from the system social insurance and health care insurance". www.tatime.gov.al, https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Regional_Seasonal_Engagement_Systems_Analysis_final.pdf

¹⁰⁰ https://efiling.tatime.gov.al/cats_public/Account/SwitchLanguage/2

¹⁰¹ Amendments on the Law "On income tax", <https://www.tpa-group.com/en/cee-news-en/albania-tax-update/>; <https://home.kpmg/al/en/home/insights/2021/01/changes-to-albanian-tax-legislation-effective-from-2021.html>

¹⁰² <https://www.tatime.gov.al/d/8/222/440/1143/mbi-deklarimin-dhe-llogaritjen-e-kontributeve-te-sigurimeve-shoqerore-dhe-shendetesore-te-te-vetepunesuarit-dhe-punonjesit-te-papaguar-te-familjes>

The table below summarises the different statuses of people working through platforms and how they are regulated in Albania.

Table 1. Labour market statuses of platform workers

Labour market status of a person	Applicable regulation	Types of contracts	Obligatory social security/ healthcare contributions	Is it a common status among platform workers?
Employed	Labour Code And Law 15/2019 „For employment promotion”	Fixed term, indefinite term, seasonal work employment contracts	Yes, paid by employer and employee	Among on-location workers
Self-employed	Civil Law, And Law 15/2019 „For employment promotion”	Service Contracts, registration with the National Business Center	Yes, paid by the self-employed (weak enforcement)	Among remote and on-location workers

New forms of work have recently attracted the attention of policymakers. Despite platform work and other new forms of employment being included in discussions at the National Labour Council,¹⁰³ according to the representative of ILO for Albania, public discussions are still scarce.¹⁰⁴ The lack of information on platform work and its specificities has proved to be a significant obstacle. According to interviewees, current discussions evolve towards closer attention to workers wellbeing in new forms of employment (for instance, mental and physical wellbeing) in line with the discussions on the new ways of working.

Labour market and skill development policies

Considering the broader context of labour market policies in Albania, the overall situation had been improving in the country before the pandemic. The short-term measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 shock have largely mitigated job losses. According to INSTAT, the labour market situation did not seem to be extremely worrying as of early 2022, especially regarding the long-term structural implications.¹⁰⁵ However, important issues have persisted in the areas of job creation, activation measures, and the alignment of education (including adult education) with the labour demand.¹⁰⁶ Many uncertainties about the future remain in relation to those areas. Labour market support in terms of reskilling and up-skilling, strengthening the active labour market policies, enhanced targeting of people on the margins of the labour market, the review of regulations, and ensuring the adequacy of social protection measures are particularly relevant in the medium term as Albania enters the recovery period.¹⁰⁷

The development of labour market policies in Albania has been a continuous process. The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2019–2022 foresees the inclusion of an activation strategy and expanding the range and outreach of services and active labour market programmes to offer an inclusive set of services in order to facilitate the individuals’ transition to a decent job.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, the national action plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee focusing on NEET youth has been planned to support the beneficiaries in this category.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ DM Consulting Interview (2022-01-31)

¹⁰⁴ ILO Interview (2022-1-13)

¹⁰⁵ INSTAT 2021, b, http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9342/atfp-t3-2021_press-release.pdf

¹⁰⁶ ETF 2020, pg. 9, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Albania%20Education%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Annual Progress Report of NESS. MoFE, 2021, <https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>, pg. 5

¹⁰⁸ NESS 2019-2022, https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Publikim_AL_Strategjia-Komb%C3%ABtare-p%C3%ABr-Pun%C3%ABsim-dhe-Aft%C3%ABsi-2019-2022.pdf, pg 11.

¹⁰⁹ NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

In 2020, the Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) were re-conceptualised and diversified in line with an individual-centred approach. The existing programmes of wage subsidies, on-the-job training, and internships were revised to better suit the needs of unemployed jobseekers and employers, as well as jobseekers with additional vulnerabilities (single parents, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities). Furthermore, two new programmes, the Self-Employment Programme and the Community Employment Programme were introduced based on prior pilots and experience from other EU countries. The Self-Employment Programme (SEP) targets registered unemployed jobseekers who have a viable business idea and supports them with grants. The Community Employment Programme (CEP) maintains a clear focus on workforce training and is designed to provide work experience in line with local and geographical employment opportunities. Although the scope of these programmes is broad in terms of target groups, the documents do not mention people in non-standard forms of employment as a target group specifically.

In addition, two new programmes were designed and adopted in 2020 to support labour market reintegration of workers laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic. The programmes were adopted by the Council of Ministers and were under implementation at the time the analysis for this report was conducted.¹¹⁰ A total of 4,146 jobseekers benefited from the Employment Promotion Programmes (EPPs) in 2020, of which 2,822 were from the reformed EPPs. Most, 68% of the beneficiaries were women and 40% were young women and men.¹¹¹

Additional initiatives relating to the recognition of prior learning and career guidance and counselling have also been introduced in the past few years. Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is part of both the Albanian Qualifications Framework Law and Vocational Education and Training Law.¹¹² The National Employment and Skills Strategy and Action Plan 2020 (NESS) has identified VNFIL as one of the priority measures. The “On vocational education and training” Law¹¹³ recognizes formal learning in VET,¹¹⁴ non-formal learning in VET,¹¹⁵ informal learning in VET,¹¹⁶ and “lifelong learning”.¹¹⁷ Career counselling and orientation are an integral part of all programs provided by vocational education and training institutions. Counselling and orientation in education and vocational training are intended to assist all citizens in selecting educational paths, training, retraining

¹¹⁰ NESS Annual Progress Report 2020, <https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>, pg.14, 15

¹¹¹ NESS Annual Progress Report 2020, pg.14, 15 <https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>, pg. 21

¹¹² In the AQF Law, within the Scope of the AQF implementation is: “certification of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in cases when the latter is certified, including here recognition of prior learning”. As well, in the VET Law “Recognition of informal and non-formal prior learning is the process through which competences a person obtained earlier in the informal and formal system, can be considered through an assessment leading to the award of a certificate of a formal qualification”. <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

¹¹³ LAW no. 8872, dated 29.3.2002 ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA AMENDED BY LAWS NO. 10 011, dated 30.10.2008 Nr. 10434, dated 23.6.2011 No.63, dated 26.06.2014 <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

¹¹⁴ “Formal learning in VET” is learning that takes place in an organized environment and structured, such as: higher education institutions, schools, training centers or at work and that is clearly designed as a learning form, in terms of objectives, time and resources. Formal learning is intentional and planned by the pupil, trainee or student. Completion of this learning is certified. <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

¹¹⁵ “Non-formal learning in VET” is learning through planned activities, not necessarily designed as learning forms, in relation to objectives, teaching time or teaching support, but which contains important teaching elements. Non-formal learning informal is intentional, planned by pupils, trainees or students, is generally not certified, but in special cases may be certified. <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf> Non-formal education is realized within separate courses (for typists, cosmetologists, dressmakers, etc.) and schools for learning foreign languages. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning_ro

¹¹⁶ “Informal learning in VET” is learning from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. This type of learning is not structured and organized in terms of objectives, time or teaching support. In most cases, informal learning is unintentional, unplanned by the individual who learns, as a rule not certified. <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

¹¹⁷ “Lifelong learning” includes all learning activities undertaken during lifelong development of skills and attainment of a qualification. <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

and vocational rehabilitation that fit their interests, as well as their physical and mental capabilities.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, the responsibilities of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) have expanded to include supporting the management of all public VET providers and performing VET graduate tracing.¹¹⁹

Innovation and digitalisation are increasingly applied to implement labour market measures. For example, the Employment Services IT system and a new Labour Market Information System, puna.gov.al, were launched in 2020 to post vacancies from businesses and provide an online space where jobseekers can look for jobs. This IT system is connected to the tax system. A parallel private IT system, duapune.com, has been operating in the country since 2015.¹²⁰

Overall, the role of labour offices shifted to focus more on outreach to businesses, since the new Employment Promotion Law 15/2019 lifted the obligation for employers to post their vacancies in the labour offices.¹²¹ So far, there have been cases of job vacancies offering part-time or fixed-term contracts posted in the labour offices, but NAES has neither the policies nor the protocols for non-traditional types of employment.¹²²

In addition, a number of projects financed by international donors exist. Coaching for Employment and Reintegration (C4ER) is a project funded by SDC and Medicor Foundation implemented in Albania and Kosovo by Swisscontact from 2010. The project is based on the Coaching for Employment philosophy and school to work approach. It is composed of several interventions that are aimed at increasing local reintegration and employability opportunities through personal and professional initiative capacity building. The project is targeted at young unemployed job seekers, returned migrants in Albania, and all disadvantaged groups searching for employment opportunities. The proposed activities of the project are fully aligned with the priorities and strategies of the Government of Albania and other relevant stakeholders in the area of social inclusion and employment. This includes the National Employment and Skills Strategy and the associated action plan, as well as forthcoming Youth Strategy.¹²³ This project also forms part of the efforts to reduce emigration from Albania.

Innovation, digitalisation, and digital skills

Since 2009, the Government of Albania has developed several strategies supporting innovation. The National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2009– 2015 was the first document of this kind. It defined a clear vision and objectives, in line with other national strategies (e.g., the National Strategy for Development and Integration and the Higher Education National Strategy). It focused heavily on capacity building of public and private entities in the area on science, technology, and innovation. The Digital Agenda for Albania 2015–2020 is another important strategy that concentrated on digitalisation in the public sector. It was designed to embrace the digital revolution, which would support the creation of new opportunities for citizens and businesses.

At the same time, the government is currently developing new documents to address digital skills development. The National Strategy for Education, the National Strategy for Development and Integration, and The National Programme on Innovation and Start-ups that are now being drafted are expected to include references to digital skills. The latter programme is mainly targeted at youth and aims to increase employment and self-employment, as well as promote entrepreneurial culture and

¹¹⁸ LAW no. 8872, dated 29.3.2002 ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA AMENDED BY LAWS NO. 10 011, dated 30.10.2008 Nr. 10434, dated 23.6.2011 No.63, dated 26.06.2014 <http://www.vet.al/files/ligje%20etj/Ligji%20i%20AFP%20i%20integruar%202014.pdf>

¹¹⁹ ETF 2020, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Albania%20Education%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf>, pg. 8

¹²⁰ DM Consulting Interview (2022-01-31)

¹²¹ NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

¹²² NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

¹²³ SwissContact Albania 2021 <https://www.swisscontact.org/ Resources/Persistent/5/6/1/6/56166d470c10041ec3665e6c82de6434f64e54c1/C4ER%20NGO%20Partner%20Application%202021.doc>

innovation through capacity building, acquisition of new competitive skills, and education.¹²⁴ It is complemented by the new start-ups law that will reduce the administrative burden and make it easier for young people to start and manage a business and incorporate innovative practices into it.

Moreover, one of the pillars of the Digital Agenda 2021 – 2025 has a stronger focus on the development of basic and advanced digital skills, with the goal of involving the population in ICT services and increasing the number of ICT professionals.¹²⁵ Policy developments and piloting, as well as testing and experimentation in new ICT fields will be relied upon to achieve this.¹²⁶ These goals are in line with the government's longer-term orientation towards enabling a pro-innovation environment, especially for the youth.¹²⁷

Apart from that, several non-governmental digital upskilling projects are ongoing. 'Digital Jobs Albania' is a World Bank project that prepares women for online work. Within the framework of the project, three-month digital skills trainings are offered to women between 16 and 35 years old. As a result, women are expected to take up **freelance employment** in graphic design, web development, and digital marketing.¹²⁸ Moreover, there are two long-term projects. TechSpace is a technology lab that supports **start-ups** and students' **digital education** by providing infrastructure, incubation programmes, and job fairs. Around 1,200 students and 90 start-ups are currently registered.¹²⁹ Another educational centre was opened in Tirana in 2020. TUMO Center for Creative Technologies is designed for teenagers and combines self-learning and workshops to teach young people **specialised digital skills** such as programming, robotics, graphic design, and animation.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

¹²⁵ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

¹²⁶ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

¹²⁷ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

¹²⁸ The World Bank (2021). Women in Albania to Gain Greater Access to Global Digital Jobs Market, with World Bank Support. Press release. World Bank. Available [here](#).

¹²⁹ Techspace. Available [here](#); ITU Regional Forum for Europe on Digital Skills Development (2021). Albanian Innovation Ecosystem. Available [here](#).

¹³⁰ TUMO Tirana. Available [here](#).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

New forms of employment and platform work seem to present promising opportunities in a country where only 62.1% of the population aged 15-64 is employed.¹³¹ These opportunities could seem especially attractive to individuals in rural areas, those who lost jobs as their industries closed, young people entering the labour market, returning migrants, VET graduates, and anyone looking to earn an extra income with low entry barriers. New employment opportunities offer some potential to mitigate migration and the very pronounced brain drain if favourable working conditions are set.¹³²

As in many EU and other Western Balkan countries, Albanian policymakers recognise that while new technologies present valuable tools for better functioning of the labour market, technology alone is not sufficient. The applications of technology should be accompanied by a people-centric approach.¹³³

What concerns platform work specifically, the lack of recognition and knowledge about this phenomenon is among the key obstacles for the further improvement of such job opportunities for young people. As long as platform work is not defined and monitored, no policies or strategies can be designed to enhance opportunities and tackle relevant challenges.¹³⁴

Other challenges relate to the lack of enforcement of decent working conditions and workers' rights, as well as the persisting problems of undeclared work and income. Even the interviewed platform representatives acknowledged that labour legislation, social protection, and taxation should be better adjusted to the new realities of the labour market so that they create more benefits for the workers and the state. Young people are especially affected by the drawbacks of the new forms of employment, given that are more likely to engage in these types of work.¹³⁵

Another area to invest is career guidance to support the ability of individuals to manage their careers, transitioning between employment, self-employment, learning to employment, unemployment to employment etc.¹³⁶ A recent ETF review highlights priority areas with high relevance: (a) develop a strategic approach to career development support for workers; (b) supplement the existing and prevailing NAES classical matching approach focused on filling vacant positions with a service approach, moving towards career guidance as conversations with a career guidance practitioner, respecting trends in the labour market and personal interests and skills of individuals. This would address future employment in a spirit of aspiration and develop career management skills for managing future transitions – as a key response to adapting services to the new requirements in the context of changing labour markets.

Furthermore, the role of the public sector in dealing with these challenges should be focused on:

- Setting up methodologies and systems to monitor and analyse the new forms of employment, creating evidence for further policy action. This includes both, strengthening the data collection capabilities and developing better instruments for processing disaggregated data.¹³⁷
- Implementing measures to increase the transparency of work performed online and cross-border monetary transactions, which would enable the enforcement of existing laws, as well as tackle tax

¹³¹ <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/tregu-i-pun%C3%ABs-dhe-arsimi/pun%C3%ABsimi-dhe-papun%C3%ABsia/publikimet/2021/anketa-tremujore-e-forcave-t%C3%AB-pun%C3%ABs-t2-2021/>

¹³² ETF(2022) Use it or lose it! How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/use-it-or-lose-it-how-do-migration-human-capital-and-labour>

¹³³ WB 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/harnessing-transformative-technologies-arrest-unfolding-human-capital-crisis>

¹³⁴ NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

¹³⁵ Swiss contact Interview (2022-02-05)

¹³⁶ ETF (2022) National Career Development Support System Review. Albania Report

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/career-development-support-system-review-albania>

¹³⁷ NESS Annual Progress report 2020, <https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>

evasion and the grey economy. These organisations should place greater emphasis on automated systems that could facilitate the tracing process.

- In a similar vein, a holistic approach should be taken to reduce informality in the labour market and improve compliance with existing laws.¹³⁸ Good practice examples from other countries should also be adopted. For instance, what concerns seasonal and undeclared work, some countries, most notably Germany, have practices to support businesses looking for seasonal workers to employ them formally and ensure that they are protected by labour legislation.¹³⁹ This could be applied in Albania given the problems of unregistered workers, especially in the agriculture sector.¹⁴⁰
- Implementing systemic approaches to the monitoring of skills supply and demand (including digital skills¹⁴¹), as well as skills shortages in the growing economic sectors. This information can then be used when revising the education curricula.¹⁴² The Labour Market Information Systems should provide evidence and information beyond the functional responsibilities of single institutions.¹⁴³ Strengthening the role of public employment services towards new flexible forms of employment, including guidance and counselling, could enhance better matching in the labour market and open opportunities for young people and adults.
- Providing support for the private sector in digitalisation and development of ICT sector, as well as exploring possibilities for public-private partnerships in these areas to overcome the challenges stemming from differences in these ecosystems.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the private sector must foster innovation, building on innovative uses of data and technology for service delivery, and scaling them up for maximum impact.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099845001312232607/pdf/P1752090e8141b05a08afc06ea6bc385da3.pdf>, pg.17

¹³⁹ NAES Interview (2022-02-10)

¹⁴⁰ NALED 2019,

https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Regional_Seasonal_Engagement_Systems_Analysis_final.pdf, pg.15

¹⁴¹ Williams 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3672437>, pg. 36

¹⁴² https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2021/Digital%20skills/1_Florensa_Haxhi_Albania.pdf

¹⁴³ NESS Progress Report 2020, <https://www.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Klimczuk et.al, 2021, https://sharingandcaring.eu/sites/default/files/files/ebook/The_Collaborative_Economy_in_Action_European_Perspectives.pdf

¹⁴⁵ WB 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/harnessing-transformative-technologies-arrest-unfolding-human-capital-crisis>

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Tirana University, Law Faculty	Professor of Labour Rights	2021-12-08
University of Tirana, Department of Statistics and Applied Informatics. Norwegian University of science and technology, Department of Information Security and Communication Technology.	Professor of IT. Working through platforms	2021-12-26
National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)	Director for Social Statistic	2022-01-11
International Labour Office (ILO)	Head of ILO Albania	2022-01-13
Freelancer.com	Working through platforms	2022-01-14
Gati.al platform	Manager of platform	2022-01-18
Electrical Technical School 'Gjergj Canco' Tirana; The School of Information & Communication Technology 'Hermann Gmeiner' Tirana.	Director of both Vocational Schools	2022-01-21
DM Consulting	Founder of duapune.com and CEO of DM Consulting services, Head of Albanian ICT Association	2022-01-31
Swiss Contact	Advisor C-VET in the Products & Solutions global team of Swiss contact Lecturer & researcher at University of Tirana	2022-02-05
BABOON platform	Founder and owner of BABOON Co	
National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES)	Director General of NAES	2022-02-10

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