



Expertise of the Expert Commission
on the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government:
New ways of restructuring paid work and (unpaid) care work

Factsheet 9:

Current challenge: Digitalisation

Technological upheavals have redistributed the (access) opportunities and development capabilities of women and men. This raises the question of how a gender-equal distribution of capabilities and risks can be assured with ever-increasing digitalisation.

Gender equality and digitalisation

Digitalisation in this context means different parallel developments that not only affect the markets but also society itself. These developments include increasingly efficient IT systems, increasing Internet use, improved robotics and sensor technology, new production techniques and the growing significance of big data, the availability of information and changes in communication. It also entails more flexible and varied working opportunities, automation capacity of routine service operations as well as changes in vocational requirements and work contents, even up to the disappearance of specific occupations. Digitalisation therefore not only alters private and social communication processes, it also leads to significant changes in the labour market, which also impact gender relations.

- » The decoupling of work from concrete places allows for a new balance between paid work and care work.
- » Expected productivity growth could re-ignite discussions about working time reductions.

Little is known about the possible effects of digitalisation on gender relations in the employment world, and the subject hardly features in the social policy and labour market debates until now. Committees and programmes that have so far addressed digitalisation have mostly disregarded its effects on gender relations.

The Expert Commission therefore recommends

- » gender mainstreaming in all committees that address the future and digitalisation of work as well as
- » consistent integration of gender competence in all employment-market research.
- » To achieve this, an interdisciplinary expert committee should meet on regular basis in order to assess relevant prognoses and develop recommendations for the stakeholders in this field.

Mobile work is an example for the importance of gender aspects. On the one hand, mobile work has made it possible to study and work independently and with temporal flexibility, thus allowing employees to balance paid work and care work more flexibly. On the other hand, the removal of temporal and locational boundaries also creates health risks due to constant availability and work overload (see Factsheet 4: Gender equality in dependent employment).

- » Therefore, legal, tariff and employers' measures are needed which guarantee and ensure that mobile work does not involve the removal of boundaries nor encourage an unequal apportionment of paid work and care work.

Regulation of digital platforms

Increasingly many companies offer their services via digital platforms in order to save transaction costs. This trend is known as 'platforming'. It denotes the relocation of entire branches to platforms as well as the relocation of activities otherwise performed by permanent company employees to a cloud or crowd ('crowdsourcing').

Platform companies are often based on the solo self-employment of those who provide the services. The solo self-employed pay their own social welfare contributions, despite the inadequate income achieved as a platform worker. To attain a reasonable earnings level, digitalised orders must be processed under immense time pressure. Yet another precarious market is being created. Furthermore, platform companies not only broker services, they also employ access barriers and reputation mechanisms to determine the quality of the services being offered. They do not, however, assume employer-responsibility. The traditional, dependent employer relationship including all its social security provisions does therefore not exist in this business model.

The Expert Commission recommends improved regulation of digital platforms:

- » Addressing questions of platform access, the choice of service provider and the design of digital reputation mechanisms from a gender-equality perspective.
- » The platform providers' algorithms used to allocate platform work have to comply with anti-discrimination regulations.
- » Self-employed crowdworkers need legal minimum safeguards with respect to earnings, rest and break periods between working, occupational safety and contract termination.
- » The introduction of comprehensive compulsory social security for the solo self-employed can inhibit precarious solo self-employment.

Platforms providing social and household-related services are especially important for gender equality policy. Such services can relieve households and support better compatibility of care work and paid work as well as ease the re-entry into employment after having performed care work. At the same time, the model of solo self-employment in the field of household-related services threatens to bring social security levels to a new low. Solo self-employed workers do not only pay their own social welfare contributions and health insurances, they also perform a lot of unpaid work organising their work. Especially in the cleaning industry, most workers are female migrants (about 80%). Platforms should be prevented from using the solo self-employed model to avoid costs like social welfare contributions, sick pay, etc.

The Expert Commission therefore recommends measures to improve the working conditions for employees working via platforms:

- » Issuing certificates and quality seals to platforms to ensure quality standards for good and sustainable employment that go beyond the minimum standards required by social law.
- » Introducing a subsidised voucher system for household-related services to ensure that households with middle and low incomes can also benefit from load-relief in everyday life.

Effective actions against cyber harassment

For many people, the internet has become a workroom. This not only applies to platform workers but also to journalists and other professions. Such groups are particularly exposed to cyber harassment and the adverse economic effects of hate comments and campaigns. From time to time, cyber harassment is used strategically to eject people from digital spaces. These types of attacks often have long-term effects. Defamatory statements remain online and thus become part of the digital profile of a person. This can not only have negative impacts on career development and the search for employment, for instance if a person is searched for online. It can also lead to serious health and psychological effects.

People are regularly targeted by viciousness, threats, stalking, mobbing and cyber sexism on the grounds of their sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. Cyber harassment, and other forms of gendered harassment present a severe problem with regard to gender equality; they are used -

particularly against women and marginalised groups - to exert power and 'show a person their place'.

The Expert Commission therefore recommends the introduction of measures aimed at improving digital communication culture.

- » More responsibility should be borne by the providers of platforms used for cyber harassment.
- » They should be responsible that digital comments (and the corresponding accounts, where appropriate) are immediately deleted and
- » the victims are given the necessary support if further legal steps are required.

Community managers should manage these virtual spaces and bear responsibility for the preventive elimination of offensive postings. This is a very onerous task which requires specific measures under labour law.

The scope of the General Act on Equal Treatment should be extended to the customers of solo self-employed workers.

As a supporting measure, the Expert Commission recommends a complaints procedure with a lower threshold than for legal action via which clarification processes can be initiated in respect of the required organisational and digital mechanisms for the prevention of cyber harassment. To this end, the federal anti-discrimination agency should appoint an ombudsperson to accept and examine complaints as well as moderate conflicts and (subject to judicial monitoring) award legally binding compensation.

Further reading:

Expert Commission on the Second Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government (2017):
New ways of restructuring paid work and (unpaid) care work. Expertise of the Second Gender Equality
Report of the German Government. Available online at

www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/gutachten2gleichstellungsbericht.pdf

- With regards to this factsheet, see in particular chapter D.I

Factsheet created by the Agency for the Second Gender Equality Report

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