

# ***What Does the State Know About Our Work?***

***State Administration  
Offices in Poland  
and  
Work for Delivery Platforms***

***report 2025***

***ZENTRALE***



# Report summary

The hereby report consists of two parts. The first is analytical in its character – it contains the results of the research and study we've conducted as to the actions taken by the state of Poland concerning the conduct and adherence to Polish law of Delivery Platform services. In the second part we present our conversations with Delivery Platform employees working as Delivery Workers.

## THE AIM OF THE REPORT

We have decided to verify if the Public Administration of the Polish state is aware of the issues with Delivery Platforms concerning their adherence to Labour Laws and if it takes any kind of action within this field. To achieve this we have sent 35 requests for access to public information to Ministries, Inspectorates, Offices and Labour Unions as well as Employer Organisations.

## THE RESULTS AND TYPES OF ANSWERS:

The answers we have received can be split into 8 distinct categories:

**1. No answer** – we have not received any response or reaction from: the Lewiatan Confederation (Konfederacja Lewiatan) and NSZZ "Solidarność".

**2. Refusal to answer due to the request "Not fulfilling the character of public access to information requests"** – as such were the answers from a few branches of the National Labour Inspectorate (Warsaw, Opole, Poznan, Kielce, Lublin and Wroclaw).

**3. "This issue does not concern us"** – some institutions as, Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), General Directorate for National Roads and Motorways (GITD), or the Central Institute for Labour Protection (CIOP) responded that the subject lays beyond their scope of interest.

**4. Without the NIP numbers, we are not able to share such information** – this is an answer we received from the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) in Katowice, Szczecin and Gdansk; we consider this to be a sign of bureaucratic arrogance.

**5. "We have received no reports of irregularities"** – this is the most common category, which includes responses from five ministries, Offices of Electronic Communication (UKE), National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) in Rzeszów, the Federation of Polish En-

trepreneurs, Offices of Data Protection (UODO) and OPZZ. We were particularly surprised by the attitude of the Offices of Data Protection (UODO), whose representatives publicly declared that they were monitoring the situation, yet reported that they had not received any reports of irregularities.

**6. We are aware of irregularities, but...** – the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) in Łódź and Krakow and the Competition and Consumer Protection Office (UOKiK) admitted that they had isolated cases or reports, but did not take meaningful action.

**7. Yes, we are aware of the problem** – only the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) in Białystok admitted that it had conducted inspections of the platform's activities, including Bolt Services. Several decisions were issued, but all of them concerned health and safety, not the employment of Delivery Workers.

**8. Yes, we are investigating the issue of platforms (but...)** – the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) in Bydgoszcz provided us with documentation from the inspection of Bolt Services, but it turned out that it concerned their scooter warehouse, not the delivery workers.

## CONCLUSION:

The responses gathered show that most public institutions avoid responsibility and does not take action of their own initiative. We see that the administration acts in reaction to receiving a report – and those are rarely delivered.

In addition, the National Labour Inspectorate has limited ability which makes it virtually powerless to take on the problems of people employed on Mandate Contracts or B2B. We do however assume that even if the Inspectorate had the ability they would still act in reaction to reports and in a conservative manner.

The only exception was the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) branch in Białystok which actually took action on the issue, despite the limited legal means.

Unfortunately the full picture is negative – the state pretends to act and its institutions responsible for the protection of the workers do not take real and solid steps against the pathococial nature of the Platform Work Industrial Complex. We are of the opinion, that such a state of things makes the state that allows such practices look laughably weak.

# Who's Who

## DELIVERY PLATFORM

A large, international company, usually with a global reach. It provides intermediary services for the sale of goods and services via an online application. It most often offers products from restaurants, cafes, and stores, while also providing direct delivery of these items to customers within a relatively short period of time (usually within 2 hours). Sales are handled through the application, and delivery is handled by individuals working as Delivery Workers.

The Platform generates profits from commissions collected from both restaurants and stores (up to 40% of the net price), as well as the difference between the delivery fee and the wage paid to the Delivery Workers. Additional sources of income include the sale of equipment necessary for Delivery Worker's employment (e.g., backpacks, helmets, clothing), advertising contracts with restaurants, and commissions from banks that intermediate the payout of wages. Platforms may also sell their own products (so-called dark restaurants and dark shops). The business model is based, in short, on selling as many products as possible, at the highest possible price, while paying as little as possible for the work of the delivery workers.

Platforms' activities focus on the continuous improvement of the web application and its ongoing advertisement — among end customers, sellers of goods and services, and potential employees. The application's operation is managed by an algorithm.

Economically, platforms are a typical example of modern capitalism. On the one hand, they generate

enormous revenues (for example, Uber generated approximately 178 billion PLN (Polish Zloty) in revenue in 2024—equal to the annual budget of the entire National Health Fund in Poland), but on the other, they officially do not generate profits and do not pay taxes.

Platforms can operate in different countries under different brands, depending on local conditions and laws.

## ALGORITHM

A key tool in the operation of a Platform. It is a highly complex computer program that, through millions of instructions, determines its operation. In short, it's responsible for product sales and managing the delivery workers. It's absolutely crucial to the Platform — a well-designed solution allows for minimizing costs and maximizing profits (e.g., it determines which products are promoted more strongly among customers — these may be the ones that generate the greatest profits for the Platform).

From the Delivery Worker perspective, the Algorithm is crucial: it accepts (approves) the Delivery Worker's account in the app, assigns tasks, determines wages, motivates them to work more efficiently, and can terminate the employment relationship (by suspending the account).

For obvious reasons, its operation is confidential. At the same time, due to its complexity and constant modifications, the Algorithm is riddled with errors that often hinder or prevent the fulfilment of the Delivery Worker's responsibilities.

## FLEET PARTNER

A local (national) company acting as an intermediary between Delivery Workers and the Platform. The introduction of Fleet Partners has removed the Platform's obligation to directly employ Delivery Workers and the resulting legal and tax obligations. A fleet partner employs a Delivery Worker, earning commission on their salary. Formally, they handle the Delivery Worker's registration in the Platform's application and provide (often by selling) the equipment necessary for their employment.

They often operate in a gray area — multiple companies operate under one name, quickly established and just as quickly dismantled. Fleet Partners operate based on brutal tax optimizations: Fleet Partners are shell companies that appear and disappear.

At the same time, they play an important role, complicating the legal obligations towards the employee: while the delivery worker may work for the Platform (carrying out its instructions), they have a signed contract with the Fleet Partner and receive wages from them.

## DELIVERY WORKER

A person who undertakes work for online platforms. However, according to the Platforms themselves, they are not an employee, but merely a "subcontractor" or "partner."

## PLATFORM WORK DIRECTIVE

The Platform Work Directive is a European Union regulation aimed at improving the working conditions of people employed via Platforms. This document applies not only to Delivery Workers, but to all individuals whose work is managed or controlled by Algorithms (e.g., passenger transport, cleaning, nursing, IT services, etc.).

It is estimated that approximately 45 million people in the European Union work this way (out of a total workforce of approximately 200 million).

The main objectives of the Directive are:

### 1. Correct determination of employment status.

It introduces a legal presumption of the existence of an employment relationship between an employee (currently euphemistically referred to by Platforms as a "subcontractor") and the Platform. In practice, this means that if certain characteristics indicating subordination to an employer are met, the Platform must prove that it is not a relationship of employment.

**2. Transparency of algorithms.** The use of algorithms for employee management will be regulated. An obligation will be introduced to ensure human oversight of key decisions (e.g., dismissals/firings) as well as informing employees about the systems used.

### 3. Protection against dismissal.

Employees cannot be dismissed based solely on a decision made by the Algorithm.

Member States, including Poland, have until December 2, 2026, to implement the Directive into national law. However, due to political activities and lobbying by Platforms, the Directive is quite general, meaning that each Member State will independently define, for example, the criteria for determining employment status. These criteria can be very simple or so complex that they are never met in practice.

### Full title of the legal act:

Directive (EU) 2024/2831 of the European Parliament and the European Council from 23rd October 2024 on the improvement of working conditions on platforms.

(Dyrektywa Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady (UE) 2024/2831 z dnia 23 października 2024 r. w sprawie poprawy warunków pracy za pośrednictwem platform.)

# **Delivery Platforms and Workers Rights**

Contrary to popular belief, delivery platforms have been around long enough to be a permanent fixture for the generation currently entering the workforce. Uber has been operating for 17 years (in Poland since 2015), and Pyszne.pl has been operating in Poland for 15 years. Although the services offered by these and other platforms have gained immense popularity among consumers, criticism of the way these companies treat their employees is growing.

Eight of the most serious violations can be identified:

## **1. FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THE RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYMENT**

The most serious accusation concerns bogus self-employment. Most couriers and delivery drivers are not employed as employees, but as “associates” or “sub-contractors” – often through so-called Fleet Partners. This arrangement effectively prevents them from being recognized as employees. Partners typically offer cooperation within the framework of a business or a mandate contract. Another common practice is a bizarre “tax optimization” involving payment of wages based on a vehicle rental agreement. There are also cases of working without any contract (“off the books”). In practice, however, Suppliers perform all the duties typical of an employee:

- they work within a strictly defined system,
- they are assessed by the employer (via an algorithm),

- they are monitored (via GPS tracking and customer ratings),

- they must comply with instructions, rules, and standards imposed by the application.

This model meets the characteristics of an employment relationship within the meaning of the Labour Code (Article 22 §1 of the Labour Code), yet Platforms consistently avoid recognizing it as an employment relationship, as they consider the obligations arising from it to be the same as those of an employer. And, most importantly, it allows for the wages to be kept below the minimum hourly rate applicable in Poland. The system involving Fleet Partners further facilitates this. The employee often doesn't know who their actual employer is—the Platform (operating via an algorithm) or the Fleet Partner (with whom they've signed a contract and who pays their wages).

## **2. LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND INSURANCE FROM ACCIDENTS**

Suppliers working under civil law contracts or in a B2B model are not provided with social benefits, such as:

- paid vacation,
- sick leave,
- pension and health insurance contributions (unless they pay these themselves).

As a result, many delivery workers – including the numerous migrants working in this sector – are left without real protection in the event of illness or accident, despite performing physically demanding and

work involving risks. According to reports from the New York City Office, the delivery sector has a higher accident rate than construction, which is traditionally considered one of the most risky industries.

### **3. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT**

Another criticism concerns the lack of transparency in the operation of algorithms that determine:

- hiring (account activation),
- assignment of work orders,
- wages to be paid,
- penalties and account suspensions. Working for platforms is, in fact, a constant source of uncertainty and instability. Delivery workers often don't know why their account has been suspended or how to appeal. The suspension can be temporary (e.g., for a few days) or permanent – which in traditional settings would mean a "disciplinary dismissal."

The scale of the problem is evident in the numerous posts on social media and in delivery worker groups, full of questions like: "Can someone explain to me why I was suspended and what should I do about it?" or "Where is the best place to wait for orders so I can receive them more frequently?"

### **4. UNCLEAR COMPENSATION POLICY**

The wage system on platforms is dynamic and opaque – delivery rates fluctuate depending on the time of day, location, weather, demand, and customer ratings. Platforms deliberately create confusion by announcing promotional "wage multipliers" and "challenges." Rates can be unilaterally reduced, and bonuses and incentives introduced and withdrawn without notice. Furthermore, apps often display "gross" amounts to create the illusion of higher earnings, when in reality, the wage is reduced by numerous fees: taxes (VAT, PIT), Partner commission, social security contributions, fuel costs, vehicle rentals, etc.

All of this makes it impossible to plan work and predict earnings, and therefore to live a stable life.

### **5. OBSTRUCTION OF UNION ACTIVITY AND LACK OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE**

Platforms avoid dialogue with employee representatives and hinder union activity, citing the lack of a formal employment relationship. The lack of rec-

ognition of employee status means that the delivery workers have no right to union protection or collective bargaining.

The situation is exacerbated by the geographical dispersion of work and a sense of isolation. Many employees consider this form of employment to be temporary, which is why they are reluctant to engage in union activities at all.

### **6. USING FLEET PARTNERS AS INTERMEDIARIES**

Virtually all Platforms operating in Poland force delivery workers to cooperate with Fleet Partners. This model often results in:

- unfair improper calculation of wages,
- avoidance of social security and health insurance contributions,
- abuses against foreigners who do not know the language and regulations well.

### **7. EXPLOITATION OF THE DIFFICULT LIFE SITUATION OF MIGRANTS**

The nature of the work of delivery workers means it has a very low entry threshold: it does not require language knowledge, contacts in the local community, education, or specialized skills. Therefore, it is often used by people from marginalized social groups, including migrants.

Furthermore, the prevailing atmosphere of hostility towards migrants intensifies their fear of losing their jobs and hinders the enforcement of their rights.

### **8. VIOLATIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS**

Although delivery workers work in traffic and often in difficult weather conditions, Platforms do not provide training or protective equipment. Road accidents are not recorded as "occupational accidents," making it impossible to claim compensation.

Lack of break time and constant time pressure contribute to fatigue and increase the risk of accidents. It's also standard practice to pass on the costs of purchasing equipment required by the Platforms (e.g., backpacks, helmets, jackets) of their delivery workers.

This equipment is often inappropriate for the job – a car driver and a delivery person wear the same jacket in winter.

# **State Administration and Delivery Platforms**

While creating the hereby report we assume that the public opinion was, on numerous occasions, informed as to the issues relating to the upholding of labour laws (amongst other laws in Poland). We therefore decided to check whether or not the state administration bodies are aware of these issues and if they are taking any steps to address them.

We have turned to 35 different offices and institutions with a request for the release of information on the subject. We did this according to the laws pertaining to access to public information by putting forward such a request (public information access form) to each of them.

The List of Administrative Offices includes:

- 5 Ministries: of Digital Affairs, of Finance, of Industry, of Development as well as the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy,
- The National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) (both the General Inspectorate as well as all of its respective voivoidship branches),
- Offices: of Electronic Communications, of Data Protection (UODO), of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK),
- the General Directorate for National Roads and Motorways,
- the Central Institute for Labour Protection,
- the Social Insurance Institution (Central Office).

In general, the answers did not surprise us. Depending on their substance they could be split into seven different groups:

## **1. NO ANSWER AT ALL.**

Despite the legal obligation, we did not receive any answer from the Supreme Audit Office. We also did not receive a response from the Polish Confederation Lewiatan (Konfederacja Lewiatan) and from NSZZ „Solidarność”.

Although we were not surprised by the in-action of Lewiatan the stance that NSZZ „Solidarność” is perplexing. Does this organisation actually represent the interest of the workers in the current day?

## **2. A REFUSAL TO ANSWER - “THIS REQUEST DOES NOT FULFIL THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION”.**

We have received this response from 6 office branches of the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) (Warsaw, Opole, Poznan, Kielce and Lublin). What is interesting in this example is that they all had the same exact response – clearly a copy-pasted response prepared according to the same response form. The Wroclaw branch of the Inspectorate had a more nuanced response. They refused to answer due to the “confidentiality of the respective case”. We do not however know if this was the true justification or only an excuse.

## **3. THIS QUESTION DOES NOT CONCERN US.**

This category is in half our fault. For example the Central Institute for Labour Protection does not in fact conduct control-related activities. What was however surprising that we received a similar answer from the General Directorate for National Roads and

Motorways. Is the mass transportation of food stuffs and related products truly not the concern of road transport? Are they not related to the security of road and motorway transport? The most perplexing is the answer of the Social Insurance Institution which has informed us that “(it’s offices) collect and processes only information related to social insurance and not the failures in the execution of hiring procedures.” As such, our hope that social insurance is treated as a key part of labour laws has been snuffed out.

#### **4. WITHOUT THE NIP NUMBERS (OF EMPLOYEES) WE WON’T SHARE INFORMATION.**

We received this answer from two branches of the National Labour Inspectorate (Katowice and Szczecin). We read this as a clear and simple case of bureaucratic arrogance. If there is an accident during construction works does the Inspectorate ask for the NIP of the employer first before it takes action? An answer in a similar tone was given by the Gdańsk based Inspectorate branch: the employers “Uber Eats”, “Glovo”, “Wolt” and “Bolt” do not exist in the registries of the Gdańsk Labour Inspectorate. These answers perfectly show that the state can pretend to do its job – under any pretext it will ignore its citizens while at the same time conducting media campaigns under the slogan “we care”.

#### **5. WE DID NOT REGISTER ANY REPORTS OF IRREGULARITIES.**

This is the largest answer group. Offices informed us casually that “[...] in the last two years we did not register any claims of irregularities”. We do not know if the offices truly did not receive any reports or just did not take initiative and work in reaction to stimuli – only after official reports. We received such answers from: the Ministry of Digital Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Development as well as the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, the Rzeszow branch of the National Inspectorate for Labour, the Office of Electronic Communications as well as the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs. A special exception has to be given to the Offices for Data Protection (UODO) as well as the OPZZ Union. The stance UODO took is surprising. Literally a few days before we got the answer, a representative of the office took part in a conference about the protection of data of platform employees. The results of the studies presented were worrying: the Platform infringe on the privacy of their workers not only during working hours but outside of them as well – instances of private calls being recorded were even registered and noted. During that same conference the vice of the president of UODO, mr. Konrad Ko-

mornicki reassured that the office is “carefully monitoring the current situation. The response of OPZZ also concerns us deeply. On one hand they inform us that they received no information about irregularities and on the other hand on the Platform “Pyszne.pl” there is the single active labour commission of Konfederacja Pracy (which is part of OPZZ) and of which the employees of Pyszne.pl are members.

#### **6. WE KNOW ABOUT IRREGULARITIES BUT...**

This group of responses requires detailed discussion.

The Łódź branch of the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) reported two reports that are “under review” – however, it is unclear what they concern or when they were submitted.

The Krakow branch of the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) admitted that it received reports of drivers being employed by platforms, but due to the nature of the contracts, it was unable to conduct an inspection of the employer. Interestingly, the institution itself admitted that it does not use the term “platform work” as a separate category, so it is unable to identify such cases.

The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK), on the other hand, reported that it received isolated reports of disputes between couriers and platforms, but “no action was taken due to the lack of a justified basis to indicate anti-competitive practices.” It is unknown whether these reports were forwarded further up the chain or whether the reporting parties received any instructions.

#### **7. YES, WE’RE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM.**

The National Labour Inspectorate in Białystok was the only branch of the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) to admit to having received reports of irregularities regarding employment on platforms operating in Poland under the brands Uber Eats, Glovo, Wolt, and Bolt.

In 2025, the PIP in Białystok conducted an inspection of the warehouse of BOLT SERVICE PL Sp. z o.o. in Białystok, resulting in seven spoken decisions and a written order containing two decisions. All of them concerned occupational health and safety regulations, as the company does not employ drivers, only warehouse workers.

In the same year, the PIP in Białystok attempted to inspect GLCO Sp. z o.o., but it turned out that the company did not employ employees under an employment contract (one person worked there under a mandate contract), which made it exempt from PIP inspection. This most likely concerned one of the so-called Fleet Partners. Significantly, contacting a representative of this company proved impossible.

The National Labour Inspectorate also admitted directly:

“In the case of entrusting work on a basis other than an employment contract, the labor inspector can only inspect the employer in terms of the legality of employment and the correct payment of the minimum hourly rate.”

This means that the Labour Inspectorate is practically powerless and unable to effectively enforce workers’ rights.

Despite this, the attitude of the Białystok branch appears to be a bright spot against the rather gray background of other PIP branches. This is, however, a sad conclusion—this is not the attitude one should expect from the administration of a country aspiring to be among the most developed countries in the world.

## **8. YES, WE ARE INVESTIGATING PLATFORMS (BUT!)**

The response from the Bydgoszcz branch of the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) deserves particu-

lar attention. On the one hand, the office admitted that it was not certain whether it had investigated the Platforms, as “entities providing services as the aforementioned “Platforms” likely operate under different names.” At the same time, it provided us with documentation from the inspection of Bolt Services Sp. z o.o. (Bydgoszcz branch).

As a result of this inspection, three spoken decisions and three written decisions were issued. Unfortunately, an analysis of the documents dashed our hopes – it concerned a warehouse of scooters rented by the minute. The decisions mainly concerned compliance with occupational health and safety regulations, with only one concerning labour law (specifically the conversion of a set-date contract to a full-time contract for a warehouse worker).

We can then therefore say ironically, that this is the first case in Poland of a decision relating to employment on a full-time basis while working for Platforms – only this time it concerned not a supplier, but an individual previously employed under a work contract.

# ***This is what exploitation looks like***

## **Hi Ömer, could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?**

Hi, hey! I'm 25 years old, I'm a student, and I came to Poland in 2018. I've worked in various places, but mostly as a delivery driver for a restaurant in Wilanów, Warsaw. A year ago, I worked in logistics for three months as a translator and freight forwarder. I dealt with documents, such as certificates for drivers and permits for lorries. Unfortunately, I couldn't get along with my boss, so I used my last pay cheque to buy a Golf IV (with LPG!) to drive for deliveries.

## **That's when you started working for Glovo?**

I started working for Glovo last year, in September to be precise. After three months, I got banned because I cancelled slots too often. Then I registered on other apps. Later, I found out that you can appeal a ban. So in April, they unblocked my account, and the next day I was driving without any problems, but the day after that, I got banned again - for the same reason. So now I think I hold the world record for the fastest ban ever (after 15 hours!). Then I went to the hub in Wola district and they unblocked my account again. Now I have an active account.

## **How do you work? Directly for Glovo or do you have a contract with a Partner?**

I work through a partner (Natviol), but I would prefer to work directly for Glovo or other Platforms. The 'city guardian', i.e. the person at the Glovo hub, told me that it used to be possible to work directly for Glovo, but

now you can only work through Fleet Partners, which is a shame. I have a contract of mandate with a Fleet Partner. I think the Partners are crooks, charging each person 120PLN or more per month. It depends on how they settle accounts with the courier. For example, it can be daily, in which case the partner charges 15 PLN per day, which is 450 PLN per month. I believe that everyone is capable of settling their own PIT (personal income tax form), a Partner is not necessary, it's just a waste of money. They have no influence anywhere, they don't help with anything. On the first payday, they charge 50 PLN as an activation fee. But no one knows what they are activating. If you intend to work as a delivery driver, you first have to earn money for them. So the first few orders will be for them, and only later will you start earning money for yourself. Several thousand people work for such partners across the country. If you add it up, it comes to an astronomical amount. Personally, it pisses me off, they earned over 1000PLN from my work, so... I don't want to swear, but I don't know any other way to put it.

## **And before you started working, what else did you have to do? Did you need any equipment?**

Well, apart from a car, I had to buy a thermal bag. It cost 50PLN. I drive a car, so a bag was all I needed.

## **How much do you earn at Glovo? Has it changed over time?**

Now, the earnings are not very encouraging. At the beginning of this adventure, in September and Octo-

ber, I was able to earn 1300PLN a week. It was worth it, it was really fun. I usually worked from 6 p.m. or 8 p.m. until midnight. The hourly rate was always (yes, always) over 40PLN/hour. So I had no problem.

But now, I can call this job modern slavery. I get up in the morning, I feel like working, I have my time slots booked, I plan to drive for 5 hours. I think to myself, today I'll earn 200 PLN. I get my first order for 8 PLN. I say: okay, maybe the next one will be good. But the next one is for 12PLN, then an order from Biedronka, you can see that the customer has done their monthly shopping, over 20 kilograms (I never, ever blame the customer, because I also order through the app). I get 13PLN for such an order. If you don't split the order, you get 1PLN (one little zloty!) bonus for a heavy order. It's a joke. Then you wonder, because you got a 7PLN tip from the previous order. And after three hours of work, you've earned 58 PLN. You have to deduct fuel from that (I assume you didn't get hungry and didn't eat anything). So the hourly rate comes out to be 20 PLN, or if you're lucky, 25 PLN. Annoyed with myself and the app, I use the emergency exit: I click 'my transport broke down, I can't drive' and goodbye. This job would be profitable if I rode my bike from morning till night, but I'm not cut out for it, I wasn't born for it.

And I'm really not making this up. I'm on Dexterowski's Discord, where everyone has almost the same results as me, I check every day out of curiosity. Most people work for Glovo, because that's the only place where you don't really have to wait between orders. When you deliver, a new order is already waiting for you. That's why Bolt, Uber and Wolt are out of the question.

Additionally, after registering in the application, the employee does not receive any training or introduction. I remember that my first order was paid in cash; the customer paid me for shopping at Biedronka. I didn't know what to do with the cash, so I went back to the same Biedronka and asked if I should give it back to them. A man explained to me that I had a balance in the app and that I should keep the cash with me. And I also didn't know that heavy orders could be split up.

#### **How would you describe the work as a delivery driver? Easy and enjoyable? Difficult?**

Overall, the work is really enjoyable (assuming you're happy with the pay). The only problem is orders that weigh over 15 kg. I'm not strong, so every time, I try to split these orders (yes, literally every time), I don't want to damage my back for fifteen zlotys.

#### **Have you had any difficulties or problems at work? Moments of hesitation, doubts about its meaning?**

I haven't had any difficulties. It's the kind of job where you don't even need to speak Polish. You drive from point A to point B, anyone can do it. Well, of course, one question did pop into my head: wasn't I born for something bigger?

#### **Have you ever had a situation where you needed support from the Platform?**

Once, yes, it was an order to a student dormitory with no driveway. There is security and barriers, but they don't let couriers in. It's raining, and to get to the customer, you have to walk half a kilometre there and back. I wrote to the customer that there was a problem and described what it was. Then another delivery driver from a pizzeria arrived. And his customer came to him. And if I remember correctly, there was an option in the app: customer does not pick up the order. I pressed it and after a few minutes someone from Glovo called me. I explained what had happened. And the order was cancelled. But the kebab went in the bin, unfortunately it wasn't good.

#### **You work with a car. Are there any advantages and disadvantages to working with a car? Do you get more orders? How long does one order take you on average?**

I always have to find a place to park. That wastes time. If the order is from a restaurant, it takes about 20-25 minutes. If it's Biedronka, then as I said, it varies. On average, 20-30 minutes per order. I should add that I drive in Warsaw in Praga-Południe and Wawer districts. I prefer to stay as far away from paid parking zones as possible, because if I get a ticket, I'm three days' wages down, which is how much the fine for not paying is. Fines are entirely my business, my concern, Glovo doesn't help with that. If I remember correctly, if you die at work, I think they cover the cost of transporting your body back to your country. But I'm not sure about that. If that's true, it's a big plus for me. There's also some insurance, but I wouldn't want to have to use it. Of course, they also wrote on their website that they fight discrimination and support multiculturalism. But that's where it ends.

#### **Wait, what's the deal with these Biedronka shops? Why do these orders take longer?**

Because you have to wait for your order: sometimes a minute, but sometimes more than half an hour. Personally, I try to stay away from Biedronka. People don't know that there are two types: one is an average shop in a residential area, and the other is a shop only for couriers, the so-called Biedronka Express. I avoid them because I know very well that I will waste my time there. The shop staff must first serve regu-

lar customers and only then take external orders. Of course, if they want to or if they notice that there is an order to prepare. Maybe now someone will say, 'But you get paid for waiting.' Yes, that's true. 60 minutes of waiting time is 6 PLN, but this time only starts counting ten minutes after you arrive at the location. That's nothing. There are also special orders that the app reserves especially for you. You go to the location and wait for the details of the order to appear. So the location hasn't even received the order yet, but you have to go there and wait. On top of that, your earnings for this trip will either increase (you're lucky) or decrease (oh well). You accepted an order for 10PLN, but you'll do it for 8PLN. But that's not all! Sometimes, after waiting for twenty minutes, for example, they cancel the order, and we get as much as we came to the pick-up point for. Usually 5PLN and goodbye and see you later. And then there are the bonuses for large orders. For example, when I had an order that weighed 17 kilograms (6 bags), I received a bonus - one polish zloty! In this case, the nice gentleman gave me a tip, so I ended up with a reasonable amount.

**And what do other people working for Platform think about all this? Have you talked to anyone?**

Conversations at Biedronka or McDonald's are gold. When we're waiting for orders, I often strike up conversations with others because I really enjoy it. I just ask how they are, what's new, how things are going, etc. I talk to others because I want to find out and confirm whether I'm the only one who's screwed (sorry, but I don't know a more appropriate word). It's hard to find a happy person, maybe 1 in 10. There are always some troubles or other problems. I can communicate in Polish, a little in Ukrainian, and if someone is from another country, I only understand swear words. Well, we're all similar, so I hear similar things. There are also those who don't care about anything, like robots, they just do what they have to do. I'm not a robot and I feel emotions.

So, in my opinion, this is what exploitation looks like, this is how people are exploited. Thank God I now have another source of income and I don't care about Glovo anymore. But I feel really sorry for those people who HAVE to do it.

# *I like action at work*

**Hi! Thank you for finding a moment to answer some of our questions. Łukasz, we've been following your publications online ([www.dostawca-jedzenia.pl](http://www.dostawca-jedzenia.pl)) and we've been amazed by your reliability and regularity. How long have you been working for Delivery Platforms? How did you end up working like this?**

Before the pandemic, I've been co-running a restaurant for 12 years. As you can guess, the early stages of the pandemic were a horrible time for restaurant owners. You can't describe how much stress we' were hav-

ing. We'd gotten through the first lockdown, but I was quite sure it wasn't the end and that similar situations were bound to happen again. That's when I decided to quit the business. I took a couple of months off to take a rest, and founded a different business in February 2021. Because running it didn't take much of my time, naturally I started looking for a side job. During the pandemic, I'd delivered our restaurant's food myself and I'd liked it, so I decided that I could find extra cash for the new business by working for Uber Eats.

Sadly, after a year I realised that my plan didn't work. I suspended that business and decided to focus on food delivery. I founded a blog, which was when I signed up to Wolt, and the following year to Stuart, Bolt Food and Szama Express, too.

#### **How did you get around before and how do you work now? Do you ride a moped, a bicycle? Car?**

When it comes to the vehicles, I decided from early on, that I'd ride a bicycle whenever it's safe, but drive a car when it's wet or freezing. The only thing that has changed over the 3 years is that I changed from a normal bicycle to an e-bike.

#### **How do you work? Under a Partner, or your own business?**

I still have a registered business. Unfortunately, today Uber Eats are the only ones who would directly make deals with the self-employed, so I'm doing Wolt and Bolt through a Partner, but also as freelance.

#### **I'm sure working quite long in Food Delivery, you can make comparisons: what did this work look like when you were starting, and what is it now? What's changed for the better, and what for the worse?**

First of all, back then we got paid better. Nowadays, you can make a little more on Uber, but it doesn't look that great when you consider inflation. Wolt pays less even if you forget inflation. The war in Ukraine obviously changed a lot, with suddenly there being much more of us.

I think another thing that has changed, is combining work on several apps. 3 years ago only a handful would do that, and the apps, I'd say, only started considering such an option. Right now I believe most food delivery workers, except those from Pyszne.pl, work on multiple apps.

When it comes to everyday issues, I'm sure now you don't wait so long for the food in restaurants. 3 years ago it was rather a nice surprise to see that the food was ready to pick when you arrived at a restaurant. Now, it's usually there for you.

#### **Have you had your account suspended on a Platform?**

I could say Stuart suspended my account, but that's because I simply stopped using it. When I started to be interested in riding for them again later, I found that the account wasn't suspended at all. I didn't have such problems on other apps.

#### **What do you like about the job? What are the advantages?**

What I like the most, is that as opposed to a normal

nine-to-five, where you need to adapt your personal life to your working schedule, in food delivery it's the other way round: we may adapt our work timetables to other aspects of our lives. If I decide to go relax in the forest, I simply take my family in the car and off we go. If I'd like to take a doctor's appointment, go to a barber or go shopping, I can do this at any time of the day. Do you need me to be at home at 1 p.m.? No problem, I will. Tired at work? I log out of all the apps and head home. It's an unbelievable comfort for someone who had worked at terrible hours for 12 years, often at night and at times wouldn't have had a day off for a month. My wife is happy about it, too, as we've been spending much more time together than we used to.

Besides, I'm not a type of guy who'd take on long-term projects. I like action at work, and that's what food delivery offers. I also enjoy the unpredictability of this job. I'm hardly ever bored, though it's been more than 3 years.

#### **Have you ever had an unpleasant or dangerous situation? Has anyone helped?**

Besides one bicycle accident, when I hurt my arm, I've had nothing dangerous. Sadly, back then I hadn't taken time to read about my insurance at Wolt and I didn't claim my insurance that I theoretically could get.

I guess what you're asking about is violence. I haven't had such a thing, but I heard once of Wolt support advising a food delivery worker to cancel delivery when they suspected a potentially aggressive customer.

#### **What would you tell a person who's just beginning to do this job? What should they pay attention to, what should they avoid?**

I'd advise them to read my blog :) That's what I founded it for, to make it easier for people to get into this job. The journalistic writing was to be farther down the line. I know, it's not an answer you counted for, but in fact, I'd have so many tips it would be hard to squeeze them in one interview. For sure, I'd say take it easy with the job. Of course, do it the best you can, but don't sweat it. It's alright if you do something wrong. You'll get thousands of deliveries more, and you can do them better. Sure, you should learn from your mistakes to not repeat them in the future.

#### **Your website features a regular comparison of pay across Platforms - you've been posting it for a long time. I'm sure you've noticed some patterns. What do you think the remuneration and the pay depend on?**

Food delivery is the most capitalistic job market. With the exception of Pyszne.pl, the apps pay just what they have to, to keep the smooth flow of their

services. That's why the pay is higher at winter, when customers order more. You can make a pretty penny in November and December, when only the most hardcore riders take their bicycles and even mopeds are less numerous. In springtime, it flips, with seasonal delivery workers, especially cyclists, coming back. Apps are in a comfortable position: they can reduce pay almost to a bare minimum. What's worse for us, delivery workers, not only are these deliveries paid less, it's also harder to get them. In the summer holidays, when students join the game, it's already pointless to work in food delivery (except for Pyszne and maybe Glovo). I once said it jokingly, that working in that season is only for the most passionate or the most desperate, and I repeat it often now. Experienced delivery workers find different solutions to that. I know those that work their asses off in the winter so that they can have the summer off. Others look for a different summer job (I also accepted an extra gig this year and I've been focusing on it more lately). Of course, there are those that set their teeth and ride being paid peanuts.

What you ride or drive matters, too. Lately, Platforms have been clearly putting moped riders in advantage, so I'm sure delivery workers that ride them find it the easiest to survive the summer season.

**And yet there's the well-known catch of dynamic remuneration used by Platforms. The same gig can get one courier 10 zloty, another 12. If that's how it is, why do Platforms use different "multipliers", too?**

Multipliers are exactly why the same route can cost 12 zloty on one day, and 10 on another; it may even be the difference of one minute between one ride and another. What Platforms give is a specific baseline pay, that hardly ever changes (e.g. in Uber they only changed once over 3,5 years). The multipliers increase your pay by a certain percentage, which is why you can have theoretically the same rides at different prices. In the given example, the 10 zloty ride is one with the X1.0 multiplier, and the other with an X1.2 multiplier.

Since November, the exception has been Wolt, where you don't even know the base rate anymore. That change in Wolt has been loudly criticized by food delivery workers. Such issues as base remuneration should mandatorily be made public by the Platform. Bolt has also been messing up with its base rate, and even if you still know how high the base rate is, you can no longer tell how much of it is each component of the pay.

**And what do you think of "challenges" and "bonuses"? Why do you often think of them as abstract or**

**inciting hazardous behaviour on the road; e.g. "deliver 10 orders in 2h, get guaranteed bonus of 50 PLN"?**

I have never been offered a bonus for 10 deliveries in 2 hours. It wouldn't make sense, as there's no chance you could make so many rides that fast. The only platform whose bonuses could have made the attempts to score them cause dangerous behaviour, was Wolt. The problem wasn't just the high bar (they wanted 8-9 rides in 3 hours), but it was the moment in which they would calculate the bonus. In all apps I ride on, that is the moment of accepting the last ride, but for Wolt it was the moment of completing that delivery. That's why the last ride would be done at deadly speed. We would report this to the Central and finally they fixed this some time ago and now it's like everywhere else there. Or, at least it was like that, because Wolt formally stopped giving bonuses and it's hard to tell whether they bring them back in the winter.

In Uber, Bolt and Stuart, bonuses are time-wise set up so that they're doable. Or, they can be reachable provided that you can even get this number of rides at all. It's easy in the winter, but in the summer the bonuses either don't exist, or it's hard to count on the required number of deliveries.

**You're one of the few people with such a long experience in the job. Research indicate that most people quit after about 3 months. What do you think may be the reason?**

I think that if it's 3 months, it's because the likes of me and my colleagues, who work even longer, pull this average up. I believe that frankly most people quit after getting their first or second payslip. It's bonkers how many people don't understand taxes. First, they think they'll get what they see on the app, and then they realize it's much less. Disappointment comes and they feel cheated. Many people don't understand the seasonal aspect, either - what I mentioned before.

Of course, for many people it's only their first job, or an additional one. For students it's only a summer job, and this affects the stats, too.

**Exactly: Few people understand why Platforms wouldn't cite net pay, and only give allegedly quite abstract payments for a job. What you're saying is that it's because they don't understand taxes. But what if Platforms do it on purpose, to manipulate them?**

Platforms have no chance to cite net pay, or your bare wages. This is because different people, according to their situation, are obliged to pay different taxes; the same with social security (ZUS). I count my taxes on

B2B with VAT differently from someone else with a B2B with no VAT. Of course, those who don't have a registered business are a different category, and then it matters if you're a student of 26 or younger or not. And then, the matter of your contract with a Partner - is it just a mandate contract or mandate plus lease? When you go to a job interview in a standard company, provided it's not under-the-table, you also discuss your gross, not net pay, and the reasons are the same.

(It seems) Stuart, Wolt and Glovo show this amount in the simplest manner possible; so it's the sum paid to the Partner for the delivery without value added tax. The amount is then reduced by the settlement fee, as well as taxes and social security contributions appropriate to the courier's situation.

It is more difficult with Uber, because for the last three years they have been showing the courier the amount with VAT added, which in my opinion is unjustified. Apart from the likes of me, VAT-paying self-entrepreneurs, everyone else is not covered by VAT. It's a tax, where the delivery worker is not a party; it's all between Uber, the Partner and the tax collectors. To me it all seems a psychological game. At times, I find myself looking at my Uber rides with an optimistic eye, because they look better-paid than they really are. Having said that, I must admit that currently Uber pays relatively well, even when you deduct this VAT.

With Bolt, it's the most complicated. Working for them means you receive part of your wages from Estonia and part from Poland; that's why part of your fare includes a 0% VAT. And then there are Partners who pay the VAT or not, for unclear reasons. I have no idea what it depends on. I can only assume it's based on what type of contract they have signed with Bolt.

### **The EU has signed Platform Work Directive, which is due to enter the Polish law within two years. Are you hopeful or fearful about it?**

I first read this directive 1.5 year ago and I was very optimistic back then. Whatever you may have read in the media, the directive in that form would not make everyone have to sign full-time job contracts. In that version the idea was to give the Platforms a chance to adapt to the law; they could rationally prove that they weren't our employers. I myself don't have this sort of relationship with none of these companies. They're more like business partners to me. What it would take would be individual companies reforming to an extent, giving us even more liberty and definitely more transparency about the algorithms that take decisions impacting our work.

Unfortunately the regulations were made more strict after that year and now I'm not that sure what

it will all look like. At first glance, they may find it too difficult to reform if they don't want to be our employer. I find such a situation to be very unfavourable to people with an attitude like mine (I believe it's the majority). We may end up working 8 hours a day for minimum wage with no impact on anything. I say "we" here, but I'm sure I'd quit this adventure altogether if this happens.

All in all, the apps belong to huge multinationals and I don't think their lobbyists and lawyers will ever allow this to happen. I can't even recall another sector where private entrepreneurs are forced to sign job contracts. Perhaps this will end up being one of the forms available to delivery workers, their choice being to sign a minimum-wage job contract, or to stay with the current form of cooperation. Either way, things would change. The Platforms would obviously try to exploit those couriers that are paid by the hour, while those paid per ride would be paid peanuts.

Personally, I'd prefer if those working on new regulations in our country focused on the problem of importing couriers here, most often by means of fake universities getting them student visas. I've got nothing against those guys, but I believe that we've got enough people here in the country - Poles, Ukrainians and others who are in Poland not just to become food-delivery workers or drivers - for all this to work. Of course this would mean higher costs for the apps; but this would force them to rationalise their activities at the expense of other parts of the business, rather than just ours. The Directive says nothing about importing couriers, but I have a hunch that our branch played a big part in the visa corruption scandal that's in the limelight now; so, who knows? Maybe our government will also start looking in that direction.

### **Have you heard anything on food delivery workers unionizing?**

I know of a Pyszne.pl delivery worker union. It's not a coincidence that such organizing is being done with that company, as it's the last one to be hiring couriers (or part of them) directly. About other platforms, the problem is that you wouldn't know under which employer those workers would have to unionize. This started to come out when Wolt introduced unfavourable changes for its couriers. An idea came up to unionize; but it came out to be so problematic that in the end it never happened.

For the rest of the delivery workers, if they were to unionize, then as whose employees? Probably the partners', being the most usual direct employers to the couriers. But the problem is, there's a number of Partners, subcontracting couriers under different apps, with different problems and demands.

And then, except for riders in Pyszne.pl, it's hard to find a sense of community among delivery workers. An organization which would care for our interests would be very welcome now. The issue is, I believe it would be

very hard to find a common ground. Different couriers, working under different apps, have different problems and ideas on what this work should look like. Most often they are even opposed to each other.

# ***Never a dull moment here***

**Hi, Ivan. Can you tell us about yourself? We know that you chair the Courier's Worker's Initiative Trade Union (OZZ IP), working under Glovo. But how did you start working there?**

My name is Ivan Strzelbicki. I came to Poland 3 years ago and I have Polish roots. I'm a filmmaker, I graduated film school as "assistant director". I'm working on my first short feature film now.

I chose this work, because of the flexible timetable and I can choose when I work. It's a perfect choice for me, having a time-consuming hobby.

**Do you enjoy working in food delivery? What is interesting in the job?**

I enjoy it, especially after not having a job for years. Riding my moped throughout the city, watching what

happens, talking to people, that's always a good vibe, provided you have this internal harmony and good mood. To me it's a job where time flies and there's never a dull moment.

**Are there any darker sides to the job?**

The dark side to the job, and to be more precise - to platform work - is the employment system. Most of us have no regular contracts, taxes and social insurance are a mess. It's all the employer's fault - they're the one who has to organize this and pay the social insurance.

**What made you go into unions?**

How the company treats the workers, many injustices, all this begs for counterattack. We're not slaves and they have to take us seriously.

## **What does the day-to-day union activity look like? How do you take action?**

First of all, we speak publicly of our grievances. So that we're visible in the society. In a way, this helps us put pressure on the company. Another of our priorities is meeting representatives of state authorities, because they will soon impact the reforms of our sector. Meetings with Glovo Platform representatives are also very important to us. These are the directions we take.

When it comes to our union, I hope for couriers to notice that it's worth to join forces, especially because of fundamental changes our branch is going to experience. Not to overlook them, because the directive is going to be implemented anyway. There are many important questions, and that is when couriers will find it worthwhile to let themselves be heard, put out their demands, and even defend their interests from the potential consequences for the imperfect employment conditions present today. The union is a super important cause and a force. But can delivery workers unionize? We are yet to see.

## **If you were to point to three most urgent issues to be taken care of at work as a food delivery Platform worker, what would they be?**

The most important are adequate and lawful working conditions, and this doesn't mean a less flexible timetable.

The second thing is decent wages and being compensated if you use your own vehicle.

And third, IT coders who would improve apps in real

time and who would take opinions of delivery workers into consideration.

## **Your biggest success?**

For now, the biggest success are the meetings with people from the Ministry of Labour, and with the representatives of the Glovo Platform. This shows we step in the right direction.

## **And what makes union work more difficult?**

What makes it difficult is, for example, that as a trade union, we haven't been added to the main Facebook group, "Glovo couriers, Poland". It's a group with more than 16 thousand couriers from the entire country, and we can't reach these people with our information. The group is administered by one of fleet partners, CityDrive. We went as far as writing them a letter, but they ignore us. It's unacceptable.

## **The European Union has passed the Platform Work Directive. What do you think about it?**

I believe couriers need to take part in this process somehow, voice their opinions and demands, because it's us who are going to work in the conditions they will create for us soon.

## **And finally: if you could offer any advice to those who are beginning their work in food delivery, what would you tell them?**

First of all, it's worth investing in your vehicle; it's supposed to be comfortable and economical. E-bike is the best, and a moped is the most comfortable. Renting a vehicle doesn't pay.

# **I can't see why this job has to be male-dominated**

**Hello, Julia. Thanks for agreeing to talk to us. We felt it important to get to know a woman's perspective on delivery work, but it wasn't easy to find one. Can you tell us a bit about yourself - how did you end up working for Platforms?**

It may sound untypical, but I was attracted to it by... Dexterowski. It's a dude who makes videos of delivery work. At first I felt intimidated. I can't see today why I was so afraid and I'm glad I overcame the fear. Even the videos that you can find considering this work, taught me a bit and gave me some tips. I first rode for Glovo in September.

## **What were you afraid of?**

I was afraid I wouldn't make it. Let's face it: some customers' addresses are complicated. I thought I'd get lost in Poznań streets and I'll make deliveries run late. But after a while, customers started complimenting me for coming fast, or even that I managed to find their door without having to call them. Things like this can motivate you to work more.

## **And how do you work: do you ride a bicycle, a moped or drive a car? Are you self-employed or do you work through a Partner?**

I drive a car. I know it isn't the best means of transportation for delivery work, but I just love driving. Personally, I have considered becoming a taxi driver, but I haven't decided finally. My billing partner is Ewelstar. I have no problems with them. The previous one was AppJobs, which

no longer exists, as far as I know, due to a personal data leak. There was a lot of noise

about this partner for a while, but I managed to leave before the scandal broke.

## **What contract have you got with your Partner?**

I'm partly on a mandate contract and on car rental, so I pay less social insurance although I pay some. It seems complicated, but the partner I mentioned shows everything clearly: what fees are for what, etc. The company is also on Discord, which helps getting in touch with the support team in case of any problems.

## **What platform do you work on? How many hours per week?**

I work for Glovo. My schedule is adapted so that my order flow remains steady and I practically don't have to use other apps. I'm also in Uber Driver but there I didn't have this steady order flow. I try to work about 40 hours weekly, so you can call it a full-time job.

## **Do you enjoy the job? Is there anything interesting in it?**

I like having liberty. There's [flexible] timetable in Glovo; I decide myself when I go to work. No one tells me beforehand how long I'm supposed to ride etc. It's me who plans this out, according to my needs.

I like working freelance; I used to work in retail. Whenever someone couldn't come to work, another person had to take over. Believe me, if you haven't

worked a day in a supermarket you have no idea why you need to wait up to an hour for your groceries from Biedronka. In food delivery, though, you work for yourself, so to speak.

What I like, is that I plan how I work each week. It's usually 4pm-2am for me, night shifts. Working nights is usual for me. Up to the point that BP filling stations or kebab joints know me well. What's interesting is some orders from customers, especially in Glovo. The Platform doesn't only offer food, but also pharmacy, flowers, or groceries. This makes our deliveries diverse. Several times a customer would ask me to buy them fags, etc.

And then there are tips; perhaps it's my gender or something, but I do get tipped. A friend once asked me how much; well, it's up to 200-300 zloty a month - when you count just tips handed in cash. Tipping though apps is a different story, but altogether it's perhaps twice as much. Of course, this can be more or less; it all depends whether your customers are generous.

#### **And are there any darker sides to the job? Anything bothering you at work? What would you change?**

There's no guaranteed pay. When there aren't any orders, you're not being paid. Then, if the app finds an order far up-town, you may end up paying your own drive back. They could give you orders based on location instead. I'm talking about Glovo a lot, but it's them I worked for the most, and I've got the longest experience with them. There are some days with no idle waiting, and then there are some where you have no order coming for 20-30 minutes. It may not seem a lot, but you can have several such hours in a week or in a month, and this lowers your pay.

Glovo's support - I think those people should be replaced with someone with higher competences. I once had the support team cancelling 2 hours of my work - as "penalty". Why? Because I wrote them the truth. I had no change, it was an order paid in cash. The support told me to take my order back to that restaurant! And I was like, what? You want the customer to be given cold food? I rang off. I called another one, and that guy solved the problem like he should. But I lost my hour slots. I reported that further, but I'm not sure if any consequences have been drawn. It's not been the only situation like this. I'm on couriers' Telegram group and the FB group, and other couriers have been through more or less the same. I know that support team are a different company that has nothing to do with food delivery even. But lately in case of any trouble I have only encountered good people.

When it comes to customers, I haven't met many aggressive ones. I've had one such situation recently:

one customer got angry, that I came too late; he had placed his order an hour earlier. But I haven't had a lot of such stories. Seeing that I've had 2600 deliveries, I consider myself lucky. Especially that, as I mentioned, I drive at nights.

And then the bonus for large orders from Glovo - it's really pittance. I don't get Glovo's policy; why can't they give one courier 10-15 zloty for carrying heavy groceries, rather than giving them, well, 1 zloty? on a standard ride. They'd rather pay another courier for helping to deliver the order. I don't get it, so when I can, I split the delivery.

Oh, and the waiting time in restaurants! There are days when you wait quite long there; and then it matters if you're paid for waiting time or not - it's no small money. 1h of waiting is 6 zloty with Glovo; but Uber pays nothing for waiting.

#### **You've mentioned Telegram and FB groups. But what do contacts with delivery workers look like IRL?**

In real life, they hardly ever talk to me. Many aren't Polish nationals. I can communicate in English, but not much in Ukrainian. I have never experienced verbal or physical violence at work. I have a very good contact with the ambassador and carer in Poznan. The ambassador was one of those who proposed that I get interviewed. I also meet women working on different apps. They are a small minority, true, but I see more and more of them with each year. I may be wrong, perhaps the stats say something else.

#### **Why do you think it is such a male-dominated job?**

It's about the stereotype, that women are bad drivers. I think this is one of the reasons. When my friends ride somewhere with me, they're not afraid. On the contrary: they know I will remain calm in any situation. Riding in the downtown and generally in Poznan taught me patience. I sometimes watch delivery workers being fast and reckless on the road. I do my best to obey the law; I don't want to pay fines.

Another reason is the bulk of the deliveries; how a woman can manage to carry all that load. If there is an order which is heavier, and I can't share it with another courier, I just take it. It can be difficult at times, but hey, that's what this job is. In every job there are better and worse days. To be honest, I can't see other reasons why this job has to be male-dominated. I believe that the retail work I did before was more physically demanding than food delivery.

#### **But have you ever faced straightforward commentaries, like: a woman in delivery work? I'd like to see how she manages heavy orders...**

I read this on Telegram today, and what I can say is: some days I get four flights of stairs, no elevator, several times, or no times at all. When it comes to groceries, if conditions allow, I share the load with another courier, to protect my health. I also tell this to men at work: share the load! You only have one spine and one pair of arms. But often I get the looks. I don't know if they've been negative or positive. I've had male couriers pushing me away, thinking, I'm just a regular customer in the restaurant. That's why I started wearing a branded hat or jacket, to stand out. I've once had a fellow courier asking me out and I rejected him; but I respect that he was straightforward about it. There were situations, though, when it was me giving others advice on what to do, etc., or I would give them tips. I'm still doing it. I'm active on Telegram. I like helping others.

**The European Union has passed the Platform Work Directive, which is supposed to be implemented in Poland within two years. What do you think about it?**

I've read about it. For now, I can't tell how impactful it will be. If the cooperation with the apps will not go as I would like it to, or won't be positive for me, we will simply part. A lot of people in this business talk a lot

and complains how they hate it on this or that platform, but they stay there anyway. There are people that like it as it is, but there will also be ones that will like the conditions we are to see. The directive isn't implemented nationally yet, so I can't really tell if the change is really for good.

**Finally, a practical question: Is there anything you would advise to people who are starting to work in food delivery? What should they take into consideration, what should they avoid?**

It never hurts to ask - ask the people who have experience. Don't hesitate to ask even the questions that seem obvious. Everyone started from scratch.

Don't always look at pins on the map when it comes to customers' addresses. They are often elsewhere. I recommend Yanosik maps, I consider them better than Google Maps.

Be kind to people working in restaurants and other points. They're humans, too. Of course, you will meet rude people, but I believe calmness and self-restraint are crucial in this job.

If you have a worse day, don't give up. There are brighter moments, too. And yet, everyone decides on their own, if their job is nice or not.

And keep yourself hydrated.

# **We have changed the standards by means of union activity**

**Tell us about yourself: How long have you worked as food delivery for Platforms? How did you end up working there? What did you use to work with, and what are you working with now: a moped? a bicycle? or a car? And, in which Platforms and which cities?**

I moved to Berlin in 2017 and I had to find a source of income real quick. Germany was experiencing the first boom in Platforms delivering food. A friend of mine worked for Deliveroo, the main company in the business and a huge employer. I applied and they hired me right away. I planned to work a couple of months there, but I stayed almost three years. Then I worked riding a bicycle as food delivery in a courier collective, and a cargo bike in another collective; I also drove a van, delivering beverages, but that wasn't for a Platform.

**How did you work? Was it a contract, freelancing, or through an intermediary?**

I worked freelance. Deliveroo started off by giving job contracts, but it quickly ended, and after a while, nearly all couriers were already forced to be freelance, and the new employees weren't even given a chance to work on a full-time contract. It took several weeks to register self-employment, but there were costs involved that we hadn't been informed of. In Germany, logistics jobs, like truck drivers or bus drivers need to have an extra accident insurance that's obligatory. We found that bicycle couriers are included in that group.

Normally, companies pay these fees for their workforce, but we weren't considered workforce officially, so we had to pay them ourselves. It was € 80 a month, but nobody in Deliveroo or in the administration had told us anything about it, and the Sector's Insurance Bureau starts requesting the fees after a year has passed since registering self-employment. Practically, it meant I suddenly received a 1000-euro bill of overdue fees. We weren't earning enough and those fees drove me into financial trouble.

Likewise, theoretically we are all supposed to pay our own medical insurance. In a normal job, half of it is paid by the company and half by the employee; we, however, had to pay it all as self-employed. It was 250 euro or more, so migrants from EU member states would hustle; they'd pay their insurance cheaper in their countries of origin, they would not pay the fee, they'd work with their EHIC. Being self-employed in Germany with a Polish, Italian or Finnish EHIC is of course illegal, but their health insurance offices can't control it all, so you could have worked like this for years. While self-employed, you're also obliged to pay retirement fees, but these weren't paid by anyone, as they'd amount to one third of our wages.

**You worked quite long in food delivery, so I guess you can compare: what did the job look like when you were starting? What has changed for the better, and what for worse?**

The wages changed for the worse. Delivery would pay per ride and they started lowering the payments.

In the beginning, when you avoided all those fees, you could have made 10-12 euro per hour including tips, so it was a relative living wage. Then the company started changing the algorithms, in order to pay less per ride, and it was harder and harder to keep the same earnings. Couriers started competing over the best zones in the city. You could make three times more money in one neighborhood than in another one, but the places where limited and it was harder to get in. And then at some point we started getting less orders. I don't know why, perhaps Deliveroo had hired too many couriers, or prices for customers were getting too high, or it was losing the competition. In any case, we found ourselves to be sitting on benches more and more, waiting for orders and not earning anything. You could freeze horribly in the winter when you waited like this.

#### **What do you enjoy in this work? What are the advantages?**

That was a very migrant work. Almost no Germans, but you could meet interesting people from all around the world. I made friends I'm still in touch with today. A lot of friendship developed, people helped each other, there was a feeling of solidarity. I also enjoyed working outdoors, out in the air on my light bicycle. Afterwards I worked a bit on cargo bikes, but that's not for me: I prefer light road bikes and light loads.

#### **Have you had any unpleasant, dangerous situations? Did anyone help you deal with them?**

I've had accidents, including a serious one, when a car rammed me and an ambulance took me to hospital with brain concussion and broken ribs. The doctors were nice and stayed quiet about the fact of my working in Germany with a Polish EHIC. Of course, as self-employed I couldn't get a sick leave or anything, the company didn't give a damn about cases like mine, and I was without income for a couple of weeks. I got help from coworkers and the trade union. Accidents happened regularly, and as a trade union we tried to help injured couriers; mostly we raised money so they could pay their rent and food when out of work. The company didn't care the least about those accidents.

#### **What would you tell people seeking advice as they are starting off? What should they pay attention to and what they should avoid?**

Think twice before you go freelance. It seems you make more money and it makes sense on short term, but in the long run you get into trouble over insurance, retirement fees and so on. And all the costs are on the employee's side, too; your equipment deteriorio-

rates, especially in the winter. Once I crashed my old roadside with a customer's heavy door, breaking the fork and I had to invest in a new bicycle. Or after my accident: I found my EHIC pays my hospital bills, but not the ambulance, and I got a bill for 600 euro. The pay is neat only as long as nothing like this happens to you. And not getting sick leave means a simple flu can make you lose one third of your monthly income. All in all, it's a risky work that keeps generating equipment- and health-related costs, and if your employer refuses to cover any of these costs, better not go there.

#### **The European Union has passed the Platform Work Directive, which is supposed to be implemented in Poland within two years. What do you think about it?**

In Germany, the state has put some pressure on the Platforms and now most of them give job contracts or at least offer them as an alternative. But it's great that this directive comes up, because otherwise I can't see how anything would change there in Poland.

#### **Have you done any trade union activity? What do you think of it?**

Yes, we were unionized under FAU, a syndicalist trade union similar to the Polish Worker's Initiative (OZZ IP). After we decided to unionise, FAU was the only trade union to accept us, because officially we weren't recognized as employees and large unions refused to talk to us. In the union, we collected workers' signatures, petitioning for e.g. accident insurance bonus, partial payment for vehicle costs etc. The company would refuse to budge in, we would organize rallies at their HQs and local wildcat strikes. The problem with unionizing in this sector is that there are hundreds of couriers, people don't know each other, and you need to literally get them in the streets to tell them about the union and its activity. It's a completely other ground than a workplace where the same people see each other every day, eat meals together and hang out during breaks. On a Platform, organizing workers takes incomparably more time and energy, and people often work there only a couple of months, so once you create an organization, it can break up quickly and you have to start from scratch again.

That's why at some point we focused on media activity, reporting the company's illegal actions, cooperating with activists and researchers from universities and local politicians in order to put pressure on the company. A lot of grievances were managed to be made public. The union did not succeed in pushing the main demands, but we have partly succeeded, for instance, the company has introduced a small lump

sum for equipment costs. The union has also been a support network for delivery workers, and that has been one of its core values.

**In the end, did you quit on your own, or did you fall victim to Deliveroo's sudden escape from the German market?**

By the end of summer, 2019, Deliveroo suddenly disappeared. They announced they were closing down in Germany. Literally, they emailed us on Monday that they would close down on Friday. Over 2000 couriers in Germany lost their job. They offered us 200-300 euro settlement to keep us from further claims. Me and three mates from the union decided not to take that money, but go to court. What we wanted was for the court to check, if all this time we shouldn't have been employed on a job contract. In such cases, the court doesn't look into what contract the employee signed with the employer, because it's obvious that such a large Platform as Deliveroo can give people any crap contracts to sign, and people will sign them to have food on their table. So the court checks if your work matched the definition of a job contract or not. If it matched it, it means you had the employment relation and the B2B contracts were wrong - they're supposed to be job contracts.

We had wanted to go to court earlier, but we were afraid they'd sack us if we did, so we went there only after the company announced they were closing down. We were represented in court by the union

lawyer, and Deliveroo had a lawyer who tried, among other things, to convince the judge that we had been bad workers. She had our data from the app, and would show, for example, who had been late at work. Anyway, the case ended in the early stage, unfortunately. Deliveroo offered us several thousand euro settlements at some point, so that we leave them be, and we were unemployed with no income, we had to pay our rent and food, so we took that money. One colleague who wasn't broke refused the settlement and we had the idea to keep supporting his case. At that point the case turned political, it could create a precedent, and have the court's official decision on whether Platforms should give couriers full-time employment contracts or not. Sadly, the case closed when that last colleague took a job in another delivery company as freelance, got injured in a bike accident, went to hospital and went bankrupt. Deliveroo offered him then a large settlement, he needed the money and neither we nor the union were able to offer him the same financial support. So that last case also ended in a settlement. I regret that we didn't manage to push that to the end and win against the corporation. But on the other hand, Deliveroo was the last platform with such an employment model in Germany. The ones that came later, Gorillaz, Flink, Wolt, Uber Eats etc., offered full-time job contracts and paid insurance. I think that we have changed the standards a little by means of our union activity and our trial.

# Normal working conditions

**Hello, Stanisław. You work as a Courier, but you are also the leader of the Labour Confederation of Couriers Pyszne.pl (Konfederacja Pracy Kurierów Pyszne.pl). But before we ask you about that, let's start from the beginning: how and when did you find yourself working for Platforms?**

I started working for Pyszne in February 2022. At the time I was looking for some additional work and becoming a courier seemed like an interesting option.

**Do you like the job? Is there anything at all interesting in it?**

I like it, it's fun to go around the city, see some new places you've never been to, meet new people. In general, I think the work itself is pretty cool.

**Is there a dark side to this profession?**

The courier sector is currently a chaos zone. There are no clear rules that would guarantee even the most basic standards. This is the cause of the race to the bottom – where companies systematically lower their standards and working conditions.

**Have you had any situations at work where other couriers helped you out? Has there been any particular situation where you felt truly scared?**

I received a lot of help from my fellow couriers. Especially at the beginning, my colleagues have helped me tremendously as I had a lot to learn about this work and I could always count on their guidance. I

didn't experience any situations where I felt threatened, but I had some dangerous situations on the road – thankfully I never got injured.

**What motivated you to get into union work?**

Relatively quickly after I started working there, I started noticing many things I saw as unacceptable. Most of them came from the massive advantages the company had over individual workers. A worker's union gives us the tools to reduce this imbalance of power. Employees that stand together are able to achieve more.

**What are the realities of union work? What do your activities focus on?**

We conduct negotiations with the company, we put forward our collective demands, we gather information, we intervene in individual cases of our union members. We try to help every courier that comes to us. Often that's a lot of work but thankfully we have many involved people that help us put together the needed paperwork, those who prepare illustrations and video materials.

**If you were to point out the 3 most pressing issues to be worked out for Couriers that work on Platforms, what would they be?**

Normal working conditions – that means putting an end to intermediaries, risky schemes for optimising company taxes, the lack of standard rights, like the right to a paid leave. We need clear and transparent

rules as to our work responsibilities, how the algorithm works, how the contact with the dispatch/support team should be conducted etc. We need stable terms of employment and pay. Lastly, we should put an end to the worsening of working conditions that currently feel like being slowly boiled alive.

#### **What is your greatest success?**

In the winter last year we held a workers' strike of Pyszne.pl couriers. The main reason for the protests was the fact that the company had only introduced a winter bonus pay in just three cities in Poland. The harsh winter weather affects all of us equally, so we came to the common position that this was unfair. Thanks to the mobilisation of striking workers the winter bonus pay was extended to all cities in the country.

#### **What makes union work difficult?**

The laws that regulate union activities in Poland aren't adapted to the current realities. As an example, we lack the recognition of employment on mandate contracts. It is also scandalous to us that unions aren't authorised to conduct communication with the workers through digital means, for example through the use of a mailing list.

#### **As union activists, do you only take cases between employees and the Platform, or have you also intervened in conflicts between an employee and a client?**

We haven't had such a situation yet. We touched on the topic of how some restaurants treat couriers. We are of the opinion that restaurants shouldn't force them to wait outside in bad weather (when they have

available space inside) or refuse them the right to use a restroom. Thankfully such situations are rare.

#### **The European Union has passed a Platform Work Directive. In two years it should be introduced in Poland as well. What do you think about it?**

I see it as a great opportunity to improve our situation but I also have a lot of concerns. I'll put it like this: for a few years now we've been observing a systematic deterioration of working conditions within the courier sector and this directive gives us some hope of halting this process. We don't really see any alternative and we cannot wait sitting idly by. We think that should fight for a law to be passed by the government that is as advantageous for platform workers as possible. Platform lobbyists have already been active in this field for a long time and we shouldn't just give them full control.

#### **Last but not least, a practical question: If you were to advise people who are just starting work as a courier, what would you tell them? What should they pay attention to and what should they avoid?**

All the ads and promises made by platforms and their partners should be treated with caution. It's good to pay attention to the seasonal changes in this sector. In winter it is quite easy to get orders and work hours but during the summer you may have problems with that. Sadly, the stability and predictability of wages is very limited and this should not be the case. The platform's strategy is often based on the lack of transparency (in reference to rules and access to information). It is good to talk to other couriers to learn what the situation is on a specific platform or in a specific city.

# **Temporarily blocked for an accident**

**Hello Angelika, thank you for finding some time to talk to us. Tell us something about yourself. How did you find yourself working as a Courier for Platforms?**

My name is Angelika, I'm 34 years old. I started working for delivery platforms in March of this year (2025). I was attracted to it by the decent pay as Krzysiek, my partner of 10 years earned quite well working in the delivery sector.

**What platforms do you work for? Do you ride a bicycle, a scooter or do you drive a car? Are you self-employed or have you been hired by a Partner Company?**

Currently I'm being employed by Glovo and Uber Eats. I cycle and I'm hired like everyone else is, through a Fleet Partner on a mandate contract and leasing a vehicle.

**Do you like this job? Is it interesting?**

Do I like the job? I think that in a way I do. I can go outside, get on a bicycle and be "my own boss". It also gives me satisfaction when a client gets their food delivered as I see it as a form of help and I'm a person that likes helping others.

**Do you have another job or is this your only source of income?**

It's my only source of income. However, looking at what is happening right now, I may be forced to find another job.

**We are talking because we know that you've recently had an accident at work. What happened?**

Yes, I had an accident. A bike that was leased to me had faulty breaks, I couldn't stop in time, I hit my wheel against a curb and as a result fell together with the bicycle onto my arm. This resulted in my left arm being sprained. That made it impossible for me to work further – riding a bicycle when you have a sprained and swelled up arm is dangerous.

**Did you report this to the Glovo Support team? Did they help in any way?**

I contacted Glovo Support the next day, when I couldn't call off my shift and my arm kept hurting more and more and it was also getting more swollen. I also informed the Accounting Partner Company about the injury. Mmm, well: Glovo Support didn't do anything. I only received a copy-pasted response back. That is what we always get when contacting Support – we receive copy-pasted responses.

**How's your health after the accident? What about equipment? What were the 'costs'?**

It's gotten better after the accident, but my arm still doesn't function in its full range of motion. As for the costs, my work account got blocked by Glovo for two days. As the Glovo Support employee informed me, because the hours couldn't be "cancelled".

**What about your health insurance? Do you have health insurance? Did you have a doctor's appointment?**

As I am aware, I should have insurance but I didn't have a doctor's appointment. On Monday I'm supposed to have a visit with a doctor to get my medicine as I suffer from bronchial asthma, then I will know for sure if I have insurance.

**We'll ask you later about the stance that Glovo took. The Platform states that all of their Couriers are additionally insured for accidents. That they don't have normal social insurance coverage (ZUS), but they do pay fees to a private insurance firm. Did anyone suggest anything in your case? Were you even informed about this?**

I learned about the insurance for accidents on the day that I reported it to Glovo Support. However, it didn't work when I clicked the link the Glovo Support employee had sent me. So, there was no real action taken in my case.

**Hold on, because we're missing something here, something very important. We want to make sure: after your accident, you were punished by Glovo that blocked your work account for two days, and nobody did anything about your case?**

Yes, I was punished with my account being blocked. This happened because I couldn't cancel

my work hours for the day (it was too late for that), and Glovo Support didn't cancel them for me after I reported the accident to them. To contact support, I had to log into my account, that means that I was online (a so-called session) but I only wanted to report an injury/accident so I didn't accept delivery orders and for that my account was blocked for two days.

**The breaks on your bicycle didn't work, and you've been renting your bike, correct? What are the terms of that lease? Was the bicycle recently serviced?**

Yes, the bicycle was serviced. I rented it from a company that was neither part of Glovo or any other Platform. I had issues with my breaks before and I reported that to them. Apparently they fixed the issue, but 2 days after being serviced, the breaks needed repairing again. I changed the company from which I rented the bike, and now it's alright.

**What's up next for you? Will you still work on Platforms?**

What's next? Currently I'm still working as a Courier on the Uber Eats Platform. As for now I plan to stick to working as a Courier, but I'm not sure if I will work on Glovo again.

# **Constant manipulation**

## **Tell us something about yourself, how did you find yourself working as a courier on Platforms?**

My name is Franek, I'm 28, I've been working as a courier for platforms since 2020. I started working as a courier earlier in 2019. I started my work as a courier when I was a university student, to afford basic necessities. I chose this job, because at the time platforms were happy to hire students, and in addition I always liked cycling – for a certain period of time, it was a passion of mine. The first company I delivered for, was PizzaPortal which existed as a subsidiary of the restaurant enterprise Amrest. We delivered orders for restaurant chains belonging to Amrest – KFC, Burger King, PizzaHut. At the beginning we were offered a mandate contract for minimal pay, and were given all the required tools for the job – a phone, a bag, clothes and a bike. Then Amrest sold PizzaPortal to the Glovo platform, which immediately shut it down.

The first time that I was actually employed by a platform was when I was working for Wolt. I was hired as a student in 2020. Wolt was just entering the Polish market and the terms of employment they offered were, at the time, relatively good compared to now – a mandate contract with a guaranteed hourly wage plus bonuses. At the time we were being payed half the guaranteed hourly wage per finished delivery, which meant that after a third completed delivery within an hour you would count that as bonus pay. In addition, they gave you a backpack and clothes. I worked for Wolt for about two years including breaks. I quit when

Wolt started pushing their workers into contracts with partner companies or into self-employment.

## **Aside from Wolt, did you work on other Platforms? Do you work on a bicycle or do you use an electric scooter or car? Are you currently self-employed or on a contract with a partner company?**

I've always been working on a bicycle. Since now that's a requirement, I'm on a contract with a partner company. I've worked on many platforms now: Wolt, Glovo, Uber Eats, Bolt, Stuart and SzamaExpres. For a time, I was employed at the previously mentioned PizzaPortal, as well as for Pyszne.pl and the Norwegian Foodor.

## **How many days and hours do you work in a week?**

When working as a courier was my main source of income, I worked part-time ( $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ). The longest stretch of time I worked like this was for a year. Since last winter, I've been delivering less because my back has started to act up. When you do it long-term this isn't a healthy job.

## **You have mentioned that you worked in Norway. Tell us, how it is different from working in Poland; It's obvious that wages are higher but I mean different topics: what are the working conditions (especially in winter), how are labour laws treated, what were your terms of employment there? Do partner companies exist there as well?**

I worked there during the summer, so I did not experience the severe Scandinavian winters. I worked in Oslo, a city with a lot of hills, so you mostly use electric bicycles for work – either ones you own, or ones you rent. Foodor did not offer bicycles to their workers. There's a Hub where it is possible to warm yourself up or eat something during a break. There are also workshop service shifts there, so you can regulate your bicycle or fix some small faults. All the employees received backpacks, a helmet and a phone case, as well as a powerbank. You had to return all that equipment after your contract ended. You could clearly see, that mostly migrants were working in the delivery service jobs. Norwegians worked at the restaurants as waiters and passed on the prepared food to us. I assume that this was mostly due to the symbolic status of how these jobs are perceived. That was interesting to observe a few years ago, although it is still surprising to me that we have repeated the same division here in Poland.

When it comes to the contracts themselves, you had three options. Being a direct employee of Foodora, working freelance (contracted by Foodora or self-employed) or being employed by a partner company of Foodora. People like me with a temporary work permit did not have access to the first option. It was only offered to long-term employees who were also able to join the employee's union. The second form of employment I mentioned (as a freelancer hired by Foodora) was the most popular form of employment. Being hired by a partner company of Foodora only happened in marginal cases, as it mostly allowed people to write off some of the expenses incurred while making their earnings – for example the cost of fuel. That being said, the partner company market as we see it in Poland, doesn't really exist in Norway. As I am aware there are only two companies offering such a service.

I worked freelance. Based on this contract, I payed for my health insurance and was otherwise insured. I do not know, however, if I had the right to a paid sick leave. After the workers strikes of 2019, an hourly minimum wage system was introduced, together with bonuses based on the amount of finished deliveries. However, these changes only apply to the direct employees of Foodora. As a freelancer, I had the choice of two ways to earn my pay – a fixed hourly pay (close to the minimum wage) or a per-delivery pay, without any guarantees.

While working for this platform, you had the feeling that two worlds exist there – a world of those who are directly employed and freelance workers. The reasons for the kind of contract that you were offered was caused by many factors, most of all ethnic and cultural differences, while at the same time the division based

on people's social status was clearly visible. This was most definitely a situation that influenced where the employees' union focused its efforts, as all the members were in some sense treated with distinction.

**This is a topic that seems to appear often in reference to employees' unions and it's an important issue that we need to rethink, in our regional context, where most of the people employed by platforms do not have Polish citizenship. For yourself, was this work a necessity or a choice? Is there anything fun about it?**

It was a choice. I liked riding bicycles a lot (and I still do, although not as much as before). It was incredibly nice to spend the whole day being physically active. After a few weeks, I entered a sort of state of trance and I treated my work as exercise. At the time, I also valued the fact that I could work alone, as I'm a pretty shy person. If someone loves cycling, and it is something that you can truly love – then this kind of work in-and-of-itself can seem like an incredible privilege. You earn money by cycling. Can you imagine that?

**In the email that you wrote to us, you expressed a lot of criticism toward Platforms. Could you list the three most pressing issues with this form of employment?**

There's a whole plethora of issues most of all connected to what you aptly call the "algorithmisation of work", that is to mean the potential for the constant manipulation of terms of employment that platforms can perpetrate through the use of algorithms.

As a result, the first and foremost issue is in my opinion the constantly changing nature of how your earnings are calculated, which results in unstable pay, changing work hours that are needed to make the same amount of earnings, and so on. But the issue of algorithmisation persists around other functions that until recently were performed by human beings, and that in my opinion should still be performed by them – for example tech support lines that you contact when you encounter sudden problems.

Currently, while working for some platforms, an employee can't access any information in any other way than through a conversation with a chatbot – this includes information concerning the terms based on which your earnings are calculated, and so on. It's incredibly discouraging and it takes away your agency. This issue doesn't strictly concern access to information and the influence that has over rational decision-making. It also concerns affective and cognitive communication in relation to interpersonal relationships which are a key element of a healthy environ-

ment for cooperation. This is also absent, since it is replaced by code on the most basic level. As a result, it is increasingly more difficult for employees to organise, to raise common demands, and so on.

As an employee, this gives you a feeling of working in a social vaccum, in which you only receive directions from a figure of a spectre-boss. The main function of the algorithm in platform work is alienation and it functions perfectly. The third problem that I observe working for platforms, is an almost exponential worsening of working conditions. It's truly infuriating to see a growing market that employes more and more people lower its standards proportionally to its growth. First, they force people into contracts with partner companies, then they transfer some of the costs related to work onto the employee (for example, the need to buy your thermal backpack from the company) and finally they progressively keep lowering your per-delivery wages. So it's not only that the conditions of work for platforms are bad, they're getting worse. I see this as a systemic characteristic of employment for the platforms.

#### **Have you spoken about this with other people employed by Platforms? What do they think?**

I have, but not all that much. Of course, people are keen to complain, but realistically it's easier to quit, than to try to change something. On the other hand, mentioning unionisation often resulted in sarcastic comments about totalitarian state structures.

#### **How do you think we can heal from this situation?**

Some of the pathological tendencies I wrote about connect to the mechanisms of maximising profit, which are the only guiding principle in an unregulated market. This is why we have laws that are meant to protect the rights of workers, and not just the enterprise companies. Put simply, these laws describe contracts that correctly define the employee – employer relations as well as the minimum pay for every hour of work. In contrast to that, my current contract defines my 'work' as leasing a bicycle to the platform's partner company to which the platform pays arbitrary wages for transferring goods in the name of the platform. It's absurd. At the most basic level, we should have a proper definition of the terms of employment, beginning with the introduction of a minimum wage. On the other hand, the algorithmisation mentioned before is a more complex issue that cannot be solved by regulating wages alone. It's also an issue that is going to affect many more professions.

Using code and algorithms to socially isolate an employee is profitable from all standpoints, beginning with the fact that an algorithm can be implemented

everywhere it's needed and it's cheaper than the work of a human being. I see grassroots self-organising as a way to counteract this, so that the code mirrors human cooperation (it would be best, if that was regulated by an institution) which as a result should lead to a greater chance of creating laws in our favour as well as ensuring their proper enforcement. I am of the opinion, that we are not yet fully aware of the possible repercussions that employees could face due to algorithmisation. These changes will negatively impact people's working conditions so the point is to create effective measures to counter them.

#### **Have you ever encountered any Worker's Union activities within this sector of the market? Have you had any contact with people from a Union?**

The union activities were especially visible in Norway. Foodora has experienced large scale strikes, including a six week long worker's protest in 2019 after which a workers' union was founded. The employees won a lot during that time, since aside from meeting their demands for higher pay and funds for an early retirement, they managed to create a strong workers' organisation that continues the dialogue with Foodora until today. I started working for Foodora a few years after those protests. Open online meetings, which all employees could join, were held once a week by union representatives. The representatives would inform everyone about the progress of the last talks with Foodora and then you could introduce your proposals that should be brought before Foodora by the union representatives during their next meetings. I was very impressed by that.

When it comes to Poland, I was aware that there is a union in Pyszne.pl but I only worked there for a few months. I know that recently an employee's initiative of couriers was founded under OZZIP and that is platform couriers. That's a great step forward because I believe that's a 100% rise of worker's initiatives in platform work in Poland.

#### **Last but not least, a question about the European Union Directive on improving working conditions in platform work. Do you think its introduction could improve the situation here in Poland?**

Yes, I've heard about this Directive and I think that the changes proposed within it are an obvious necessity. Introducing a mandated requirement of regulating the minimum wage should be at the forefront. At the same time, I am aware that the majority of large platforms are in terrible debt, and these changes can greatly influence their stability. My quiet hope is that these changes bring about a kind of reset of the market monopoly that could allow smaller players (maybe even cooperative initiatives) to enter the market.

# We talk about it all the time

## **Can you tell us about yourself? How did you end up working for the Platforms?**

Hi, my name is Dominik. I study in a college and I love driving – that's when I rest the best. And, like many people my age, I like listening to good music and sometimes play computer games. How did I end up working for Platforms? I was searching for a job for almost two months and a half. Spending a weekend in my hometown, I met a friend and she told me she knew someone who can get me a job.

## **What Platforms have you been working on? Only Stava, or elsewhere, too? Have you been working long?**

I work for Pyszne.pl, and we're subcontractors for Stava. I had never been working in a similar company or anything like it. I signed up at the end of last year.

## **How do you work? On a bicycle, moped, or maybe a car?**

We have company cars. Mostly Skoda Fabia now. We should be filling them up using petrol cards. Sadly, the cards haven't been working properly these days, so we have to pay with our own money. Theoretically the money is reimbursed, but... it sucks. Perhaps cycling or using an e-scooter would be better.

## **Formally, do you have a contract. If so, what kind, and with who?**

When it comes to the type of contract, we are all on the contract of mandate (although I know they also accept B2B agreements). It's a year's contract, if I remember well. Lately, the company renamed, and we had to sign new contracts, with the company Asperiks... or Asterix, at least it sounds like this.

## **Do you enjoy this work? Is there anything interesting in it?**

Do I enjoy the work? Yes, I must admit I love it. I like what I do – driving daily, with a car that isn't mine, on

fuel that's not mine, and being paid for it. This is the pleasant side of the work.

And what is interesting? To be honest – the interesting part is people, who we meet every day: customers, many weird situations; and, well, our co-workers. Whenever there are no orders coming, we see each other, chat, talk shit about the customers or the company – just anything.

## **The reason we're talking, is that you wrote to us about the issue with your pay. Can you tell us, what it's about?**

Yes, I wrote to you about my pay. I have a contract of mandate, with an hourly rate of 21.17 złoty, plus 2.51 złoty for each completed order. During my 8-9-hour working day, I deliver 20-22 orders on average, and I'm not the only one. I'm not a slacker. It's just that the orders aren't there.

When I got hired, I easily did thirty orders per day or more. When I went to work recently, it wasn't even two orders in an hour. So my hourly pay would amount to 25 or 26 złoty.

And then the other time, I my Sunday would start at 10:30. I came on time, but my first order wouldn't come up until 12:00. I waited an hour and a half in the car park, waiting there and struggling with the app, because our contract includes a provision allowing them to freeze my pay when the GPS on our work phone has no connection.

In that hour and a half, if I remember well, I had to restart the app every five minutes, because my GPS would go off. Otherwise I would only be paid for the initial five minutes.

## **Did you talk to anyone from work about it?**

We talk all the time and we complain about it constantly, with my workmates. We discussed everything that was possible. We even tried to write to the administration, the work inspection (PIP). All they told us was that their inspection found no irregularities.

Lately I made a spreadsheet with my hourly pay, the working hours, the number of orders and the rate per order. I calculated I was almost two and a half thousand zloty short of the minimum wage.

So... yes. We talk about it all the time.

**And how did you contact the work inspection (PIP)? Did you call? Did you visit them? You told me that you wrote them a letter, too, didn't you?**

We contacted PIP in writing. I wrote to the Poznan chapter of the work inspection myself, and I got a reply after about two weeks, saying I wasn't being specific enough – I didn't cite the specific reason or the

object of the inspection.

Frankly, that surprised me, because I had written plainly, that I wasn't agreeing with such a low hourly wage and that we were being paid less than the regulations on minimum wage specify.

**And what followed?**

I didn't reply to that letter, because the work inspection required that I share my personal data with the employer. And I knew from other co-workers, that the ones that did so would be sacked after a week or two. This was the company's punishment for trying to do something.

# **It's work, so work regulations apply**

**Let's start by you telling about yourself. How are you involved in Platform work?**

My name is Robert Walasinski. I live in Vienna, Austria. I was involved in Platforms as a worker, being employed in one of them in 2016, almost ten years ago. After getting a college degree, I was searching for something to do, temporarily, just to earn some money. That was when platforms came up, including Foodora that belonged to Delivery Hero group.

**How were you employed in Foodora?**

I received a normal contract after two weeks. I was hired plainly as a worker, with no special form of

employment. As a worker, I obviously enjoyed some rights that other groups did not.

**What "other groups" do you mean?**

Take freelancers or so-called free service contractors. Being self-employed, you run your own business and in such a case employment laws do not protect you and no work regulations apply.

**And how does it look with free service contractors?**

It's a form between self-employment and a full-time job contract. You have a worker's health insurance, but nothing beyond. No work regulations apply to

you. You don't formally belong to the company, so you can't demand guaranteed working hours, for instance. The company can simply tell you: "There are no orders now. Look for something else". The entire risk is on the worker's side.

#### **Which means you don't have a stable income?**

Precisely. It all depends on how many orders you get and how many employees are hired at a given time. You have no control whatsoever on how much you earn. You can ride faster, but it doesn't change much – in the end, it's the company who decides how much work you're going to get.

#### **And how does the full-time workers' wage differs from the one of "free contractors"?**

A full-time workers' pay is based on the working time, per hour; whereas a contractor or freelancer only earns per a completed order. The entire risk is on them, and they have no right to organize at the workplace.

#### **So only full-time employees may organize?**

Yes. We had this opportunity and we seized it. In Austria and Germany there is something like a work council; it's a form of an internal trade union.

#### **How does the council work?**

The council has specific rights. The company has to consult it in many cases; for instance, in dismissals, they have to give grounds for the decision. Workers elect members of the council, and it represents them against the company.

#### **Is it difficult to found such a "work council"?**

In Austria there need to be five or more people hired. You need to work in the company for minimum half a year. Then you can found a council. Its size depends on the number of employees.

#### **Do you need to have a trade union in your company to form a work council?**

No, and this is the interesting part: there's no need for a trade union, and there is no formal membership in the council. All you need is the employees. If there are five, of which one decides to found a council, they can do it. Then they become a one-person "work council".

#### **And is this all it takes, for the company to have to treat them seriously?**

Yes. Of course, the best is when other workers support them. Usually you do found a council with the help of a trade union, that knows the procedures and

helps organize elections, form an election committee and do all the paperwork.

#### **What is a company's reaction when someone wants to found a work council?**

The company tries to get rid of the initiator, for instance by firing them. This, however, is legally not allowed in Austria. If someone wants to fire you for organizing, the trade union takes them to court. It's one of the most common cases in labour courts. You can't simply terminate a contract.

#### **So the company has to treat this council seriously.**

Yes, exactly. The council has its rights, and its members can't be dismissed easily. It is only possible through a court case, and only if there was a serious breach of law.

#### **Let's go back to 2016: you worked at Foodora then, didn't you?**

I did. We then began talking to each other, saying that something needs to be done, because we saw the company changing its policy to worse: less full-time employment contracts, more and more contractors, lower wages, garages shut down. We decided to organize and found a work council in order to be able to talk to the management.

#### **Because you could have lost your job easily without it?**

Yes. If one criticized the company's decision, they were quickly fired. But if you were a council member, you were legally protected; they weren't able to fire you just like that. That gave us a stronger negotiating position against the management.

#### **How many of you decided to form a council then?**

There were eight of us, with four or five actively involved, and several supporters.

#### **How many employees did Foodora have at that time?**

Around three hundred, but it depended on the type of contract. Officially, the council could only represent those who had a full-time employment contract, them being the only ones who formally belonged to the company. Others were doing exactly the same job, but legally weren't employees.

#### **And so you founded your work council. What happened then?**

We cooperated with a traditional trade union, which was very helpful. That way we didn't only have a voice in the company itself, but we also got in touch with a

larger organization. The trade union could negotiate in our name, and we became a part of a wider worker movement.

#### **How long did you keep working for Foodora?**

Until mid-2019; but the key events happened a bit earlier, when the work council won some specific rights. One of them was, that if a company – Delivery Hero in that case – planned big changes, they had to inform us and negotiate with us.

#### **What changes were they?**

Delivery Hero took a decision to reform into a so-called Societas Europea; a special form of a EU-based company, operating across different member states. In their case it meant combining HQs of Berlin and Amsterdam.

#### **And you, as Foodora's work council members, had to be involved in those negotiations?**

Yes, exactly. It was even funny in a way: we, simple food delivery workers, suddenly became partners in negotiations among the management and financial executives in Berlin. They had to negotiate with us, because that's what the EU regulations demanded. And we sat there thinking: "What's going on? Is this really happening?"

#### **Were you able to say "no" then? To block their decision to reform the company?**

Yes, theoretically so. Of course, we were not alone: there were worker delegates from Germany, Norway, Italy and several other countries. But formally, we had a voice and we had to become involved in the negotiating process.

#### **Did you have a real impact on the changes?**

Yes. That was demanded by the EU regulations. If a company forms a structure conforming to Societas Europea, it has to involve worker delegates in the negotiations. This is a right applying in all EU member states that a company operates in.

#### **What did the negotiations look like?**

We were first invited over to Berlin. They organized a meeting in a four-star hotel, with full board – it was looking as if they wanted to bribe us. We said it plain though: "we don't know yet what you're planning. First we'd like to have a training to understand what your plan is".

#### **What did the management think of it?**

They were furious, because they had planned to have it over with in three days. And we reminded them,

that we had the right to a half a year of negotiations. And so, the next meeting was for us to have a training. The hotels became worse and worse over time, but the talks continued.

#### **And did you manage to win anything through the negotiations?**

Yes. We won ourselves a place for worker delegates in the structure of the new company. That was something that the company did not want, but they had to accept in order for the process not to drag on.

#### **So in practice, you gained an impact on the operation of the entire corporation?**

Exactly. Even more: as they had to invite us to the talks and pay travel costs, we met workers there from other countries, like Germany, Norway, France or Italy. And that's how our international network of platform workers came about.

#### **So the meetings brought about something like a pan-European cooperation?**

Yes, precisely. Owing to those negotiations we began organizing as a network of delivery riders and platform workers across Europe. That was a large change to us: from a tiny Vienna group we began a part of a European movement.

#### **What year was that?**

2018. That's when we began working in a wider context, not only locally.

#### **You mentioned that following 2018 you began working wider. What happened next?**

It was then when we began talking about common actions around collective labour agreements in Austria. We had already built an international network of platform workers – people employed at Foodora, Deliveroo, Uber Eats or Glovo.

#### **So the issue was a collective labour agreement for the whole sector, not within one company?**

Yes, precisely. In Austria the trend now is to negotiate collective labour agreements for entire sectors and not individual companies. Like this you can establish minimal standards of employment in a given branch, independent of who the employer is.

#### **So it is something like basic rights for all couriers and delivery workers?**

Yes. The aim is to have everyone working in the sector enjoy basic guarantees: insurance, minimum pay, protection from getting sacked.

## **What did your situation look like after you left Foodora?**

After 2019, I still worked in a small delivery company, as a regular worker. I was still in touch with the union, though. I took part in trainings and I was one of the representatives in the talks on collective labour agreements.

## **Did you remain active in the union movement?**

Yes. The union began to notice at that point, that platform work was becoming a major problem. It was no longer a novelty or a part-time student job, but began involving thousands of people Europe-wide.

## **And so, you began operating on the pan-European level, right?**

Yes. We began working with EMPs, mainly leftist groups, that were interested in the issue of platform work. We got invited to Brussels, so that we could share our experiences and suggest what regulations are needed.

## **What was your main message to the politicians?**

That platform workers are workers, too. We are no “new form of labour”, but we simply perform our work, even if it is through an app. And hence, we should enjoy the same rights as others.

## **The question was of workers’ rights equality, wasn’t it?**

Precisely. The platforms are trying to convince all, that they developed a “new, flexible model of work” which is the future. This is nonsense. For ages, people have been delivering food from point A to point B. What is new, is the marketing and the level of exploitation.

## **What would you consider the most pressing to do now?**

We need to simply give the people the rights they deserve. We aren’t inventing anything new. All we want is the same that workers have been fighting for during the last hundred years: stability, insurance, security.

## **Platforms in Poland often repeat that “flexibility” is a great value for their “subcontractors”. It’s true that many employees find this valuable: they can work two hours today, three tomorrow. Is the attitude in Austria the same?**

Yes, but it depends on the situation. If you have a normal contract, you may work up to 40 hours per week, which is logical, as we all need rest. However, if anyone wants to work just 2-3 hours, they may. Only then they won’t be treated as the platform’s employee, only as a genuine freelancer. The problem is that

most of such people have no real liberty; they work when their Platform allows.

## **So is the famed flexibility a myth?**

It is. Platforms say: “You work when you want to”. But the reality is, you work when the work is there. You can’t just choose that you’d like to do your ride when there are no orders; you wouldn’t earn anything. That’s not freedom.

## **Why then so many people still believe that you can’t have flexibility and work security at the same time?**

They’ve been gaslighted by the companies, that’s why. Companies give you the illusion of choice. For instance, in Foodora, theoretically you could have chosen to be either a worker or a contractor. But the reality was that the company was the one deciding how many hours you’d get. They’d say: “You want 40 hours? We’ll give you 20. There’s no more work”. And then, the opposite, when there was a lot of orders, they’d force you to take 40 hours”. That wasn’t freedom: all depended on the company’s decision.

## **In Austria, does law determine the employee’s flexibility?**

No. It depends on a company. Everything the law gives, is room for the flexibility. But how the employer uses that, is another thing.

**Many people believe that Platform work is something totally new, a modern economic model. And yet, the platforms have been operating for more than 15 years, all the time systematically dismantling worker rights. Do you think that the society has gotten used to the system already? Why has nobody reacted over all those years? Neither the government, nor trade unions, nor the public opinion? Why has it happened like this?**

It’s because platform work was considered as something temporary, something extra. Something that you do “for fun” or after hours. You’d say “It’s not a real job, so it doesn’t need protection”. This has changed, though. Today it’s the sole income for thousands of people.

## **So, something that was supposed to be an “extra job” became a primary source of income?**

Precisely. In Austria we see six thousand people delivering food every day. This is no “gig”, it’s a sector of economy in its own right.

## **But governments and political parties should have known about it.**

They should have, but many have become overtaken by the big tech's narrative. Corporations invested fortunes in PR campaigning and lobbying. Their argumentation was that they create jobs for migrants and people who wouldn't find work anywhere else. They even threatened the governments that they'd move their businesses out if regulations are changed.

### **So the governments are simply intimidated, is that it?**

Yes. These companies have huge budgets. In the US, there was Proposition 25. Their government wanted to introduce the ABC test – to clearly define who was a worker and who was self-employed. Tech companies spent over 200 million dollars for campaigning against that bill; and they won.

### **This shows how influential the corporations are.**

Exactly. They are able to shape the law. And they do it, in a very thoughtful way, under the guise of modernity, innovation and freedom. And the reality is, all they want is to maximize their profits while minimizing their responsibility.

### **So does it all boil down to the question of exploitation?**

Yes. It is exploitation in a new wrapping. Companies speak of "flexibility", "partnership" and "new possibilities", while in practice they shift all the risk and costs to the worker. We even have to buy our working

tools: bicycles, bags, shirts. They sell us a vision of independence, while in reality we are completely dependent on the app and its algorythm.

### **Sounds like we're back in 19th-century capitalism.**

Exactly. Only now we have apps, not factories, and algorythms in the place of foremen. But the logic is still the same: work without security, rights or stability.

### **Can you see a light at the end of this tunnel?**

Yes. More and more countries start reacting. For instance, in Spain, Ley Rider has been introduced, recognizing platform couriers as workers. New regulations are coming up in Italy. The process is slow, but change is possible.

### **What do you consider necessary for the change to speed up?**

We must stop believing companies to be "modern" and "different". They are regular employers, trying to circumvent the law. Nothing will change if we keep parroting their narrative. They simply need to be told: "Have you got workers? If so, act in accordance with work regulations". That's it.

### **The key is to recognize platform work as work, isn't it?**

Yes. This is the most important statement in the entire discussion: It's work, so work regulations apply.

# **ZENTRALE**

## **WE ARE ZENTRALE**

We are a group of delivery workers employed in different companies and delivery co-ops, in different cities.

Zentrale started as a delivery co-op, operating during the 2020 pandemic in Warsaw. We now commit our work for workers' rights. We demand the immediate end to the exploitation of workers by different online platforms that live off our work with no regard for any workers' rights.

We would also like to help platform-using customers understand that they take part in the exploitation; that they help continue it.

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What Does the State Know About Our Work?

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