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Platform employment as the main trend in the development of the labor market in modern conditions in Kazakhstan

Abstract:

Object: Consider various definitions of platform employment, systematize theoretical approaches to analyzing new forms of employment organized with the use of digital technologies, assess the prevalence of platform employment in Kazakhstan, and systematize the positive and negative aspects of the development of platform employment in the country.

Methods: In the study methods of statistical and econometric analysis, as well as comparison were used.

Findings: Based on various definitions of platform employment, a theoretical approach to the analysis of new forms of employment organized using digital technologies was systematized and an assessment of the scale of platform employment was carried out. The assessment of the scale of platform employment in Kazakhstan revealed the strengths and weaknesses of platform employment in the country.

Conclusions: Theoretical approaches to the analysis of new forms of employment organized using digital technologies were systematized. Based on the definitions, the scale of platform employment in Kazakhstan was assessed. This indicator tends to increase in the long term, but with slight fluctuations in numbers from year to year in the short term. Based on the systematization of definitions of platform employment and assessment of the scale of platform employment in Kazakhstan, the strengths and weaknesses of platform employment were identified.

Keywords: employment, platform based employment, digital platforms, labor market, self-employment, freelancing, social protection.

Introduction

The rise of digital technologies has facilitated the widespread adoption of online platforms for employment across diverse professional domains, encompassing fields like web design, programming, and copywriting. These platforms facilitate the completion of specialized tasks ranging from childcare and tutoring to transportation and legal services (Ortyukova, 2022).

Platform employment has surged in popularity in recent years, offering opportunities for flexible and temporary work that deviates from traditional job structures. This trend is not only pertinent to the Republic of Kazakhstan but is also observed globally, driven by the digitization of the economy and advancements in information technology. Platform employment entails individuals offering their services or finding employment through digital platforms, whether on international platforms like Upwork and Freelancer or specialized national platforms (Bobkov, 2020).

Defined economically, virtual employment platforms serve as entrepreneurial entities acting as intermediaries or job brokers in the labor market. In the contemporary world, platform employment is increasingly sought after, providing a convenient avenue for individuals to engage in work or offer services without geographical constraints.

Flexibility is a hallmark of platform employment, enabling workers to choose their schedules and work in modes that suit their preferences. This flexibility appeals to individuals seeking supplementary income or seeking to balance work with personal pursuits.

Moreover, platform employment offers opportunities for skill expansion and professional development, with many platforms offering training to enhance employees' competencies in their respective domains.

However, platform employment also presents challenges. Some workers encounter issues such as low pay or income volatility, while others face limitations in social protections and lack insurance coverage. In

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this article, our aim is to comprehensively analyze the various facets of platform employment, including its advantages and disadvantages, and assess its impact on the contemporary labor market and society at large.

Literature Review

Platform employment, characterized by tasks performed via online platforms linking labor market supply and demand, has gained prominence in recent years owing to technological advancements and the rise of remote work.

Literature on platform employment explores its multifaceted aspects, with varying perspectives on its implications. Some authors view it as a novel employment model and a source of business opportunities, while others perceive it as a challenge to traditional employment structures and socio-economic security.

For instance, Nekhoda E.V. and Pan Li, in their article “Transformation of the labor market and employment in the digital age”, delve into platform-based employment practices and their economic and societal impacts. They advocate for accompanying platform employment with social guarantees and worker rights protection.

Glotova N.I. and Gerauf Y.V., in their research, analyze platform employment practices and offer recommendations for adapting to this emerging form of employment. They underscore the importance of self-organization and skill development for remaining competitive in the labor market.

Bobkov V.N. and Chernykh E.A. delineate the scope of platform employment and outline a classification of organizational forms based on its structure.

Kristen Jesnes, in her research, examines platform employment in Norway, comparing it with traditional labor relations and evaluating associated risks. Her work focuses on employment strategies in platform companies and their impact on job stability (Jesnes, 2022).

He Q., Qiu Y., and Dong X. discuss the impact of platform-based flexible employment on workers' job selection behavior, emphasizing the mediating role of workers' subjectivity and platform policies' regulatory effects (He et al., 2019).

Tianyu Wang and Fang Li Kuk identify three types of platform employment in China, analyze platforms' motives in labor utilization, and discuss legal implications and dispute resolution mechanisms (Wang, 2021).

Platform employment has also garnered attention from labor law researchers, with Annika Rosin exploring the status of platform workers in labor legislation and the complexities of defining employment relationships (Rosin, 2021).

Tax and labor laws play a significant role in shaping platform employment dynamics. Works by Abi Adams, Judith Freedman, and Jeremias Prassl examine the growth of the gig economy in the UK and propose reforms to align tax and labor laws with policy objectives (Abi, 2018).

Regulatory challenges arise due to the evolving nature of employment relationships, with established taxonomies facing pressure. Adams, in her work, discusses the ambiguity in categorizing workers and calls for clarity in labor and tax legislation (Kushkarova et al., 2021).

Hassel, A., and Sieker, F. study the impact of platform employment on employment trends, particularly in non-platform firms or sectors. They highlight employment regulations, access to social security, and labor relations in traditional companies as factors limiting platform companies' transformative power (Hassel, Sieker, 2022).

Overall, research on platform employment delves into its diverse facets, including its economic, social, and legal implications, providing insights into its evolving nature and impact on labor markets worldwide.

Methods

The study's methodological framework and analytical approaches draw upon both theoretical and practical developments in assessing the current state of employment and platform-based employment, as well as determining trends in their dynamics. Data for analysis were sourced from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Strategic Planning and Reforms (hereinafter referred to as the BNS), the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Results

The emergence of new forms of employment leveraging digital technologies is currently gaining traction. Much attention is being directed towards platform employment facilitated by online platforms connecting workers with potential employers or customers (Eremina, 2020). This form of employment,

increasingly (ILO, The role of digital labor platforms in the transformation of the world of work, 2021) prevalent in the digital economy, allows workers to offer various services such as freelancing, transportation, rental housing, food delivery (ILO, Prospects for employment and social protection in the world: The role of digital labor platforms in the transformation of the labor sphere, 2021), etc.

Platform employment is characterized by several key features:

- Workers have flexibility in choosing their work schedule and location, enabling better alignment with personal responsibilities.
- It provides opportunities for individuals residing in remote areas or lacking access to traditional employment, broadening job options and income opportunities.
- Many platforms incorporate rating and feedback systems, enhancing decision-making for both employers and workers.

Today, a plethora of digital platforms covering diverse sectors and offering a wide array of services exist. Platform employment has particularly thrived during the pandemic, addressing not only the challenges posed by movement restrictions but also providing income opportunities during periods of enforced inactivity. Although the pandemic is subsiding, digital labor has created a burgeoning market (Jansarayeva, 2022). According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Kazakhstan, the number of individuals employed through various online platforms like Yandex, Uber, Wolt, and Glove has reached up to 500 thousand. For comparison, this figure is comparable to the number of employees in manufacturing, civil service, and healthcare sectors combined.

For the first time at a high state level, the President of the country K.K. Tokayev spoke about platform employment, who in his Message to the People of Kazakhstan dated September 1, 2021 noted that “total digitalization has led to new forms of employment based on Internet platforms”, stating the need for state assistance in this area from the point of view of social and medical insurance, pension provision and taxation (Akorda.kz, 2023).

The OECD considers those employed in the platform economy to be people who use an application or website to find customers and provide a service for money (OECD, 2019).

Notably, the most common types of platform employment, such as taxi and courier services, often require minimal qualifications, contributing to the prevalence of low-productivity sectors in the economy. This underscores the significance of creating high-quality jobs and promoting professional development and lifelong learning.

Platform employment also encompasses professions requiring specialized skills, predominantly focusing on household services in urban areas, despite widespread broadband internet access across the country.

However, both categories of platform employment face challenges regarding social security and labor rights, with platforms often absolving themselves of legal obligations by positioning themselves as intermediaries rather than employers. Consequently, workers are left to shoulder the burden of social risks without access to state benefits.

According to the European Parliament and the International Labour Organization (ILO), platform employment is defined as a non-standard form of employment mediated by online platforms and digital technologies. These platforms have a significant impact on the global labor landscape, necessitating greater transparency, auditing, and compliance with tax regulations (ILO, 2021).

Identifying platform employment accurately requires specific forms of statistical reporting, considering factors such as information mediation and platform control over service provision. However, the diverse nature of platform employment and the opacity of digital platforms hinder accurate assessment, exacerbating the shadow economy.

For some workers, platforms offer opportunities for additional income or skill development, while others rely on them as their primary source of livelihood. Freelancers and professionals often leverage platforms to enhance their visibility and attract clients, thereby expanding their career prospects.

The adoption and utilization of digital platforms vary widely across countries and regions, influenced by factors such as economic development and technological accessibility.

Despite challenges in assessing the freelance services market's volume, experts anticipate continued growth due to its convenience and benefits for both workers and employers.

Understanding the nuances and dynamics of platform employment will facilitate the development of effective strategies to support this sector and ensure a conducive working environment for all participants.

Today, assessing the freelance services market's volume is increasingly challenging due to its dynamism, diversity, and the absence of standardized data, not only in Kazakhstan but globally. Nevertheless, this market continues to gain momentum, driven by its convenience for freelancers and profitability for employers (Labor market of Kazakhstan on the way to digital reality 2022, iac.enbek.kz, 2022).

According to data from the Bureau of National Statistics of Kazakhstan collected from enterprises, the number of individuals working under civil contracts has been steadily increasing. Compared to 2017, there has been a 40 % growth in such workers by 2022 (Fig. 1) (Labor and income. Statistics of standard of living Stat.gov.kz, 2022).

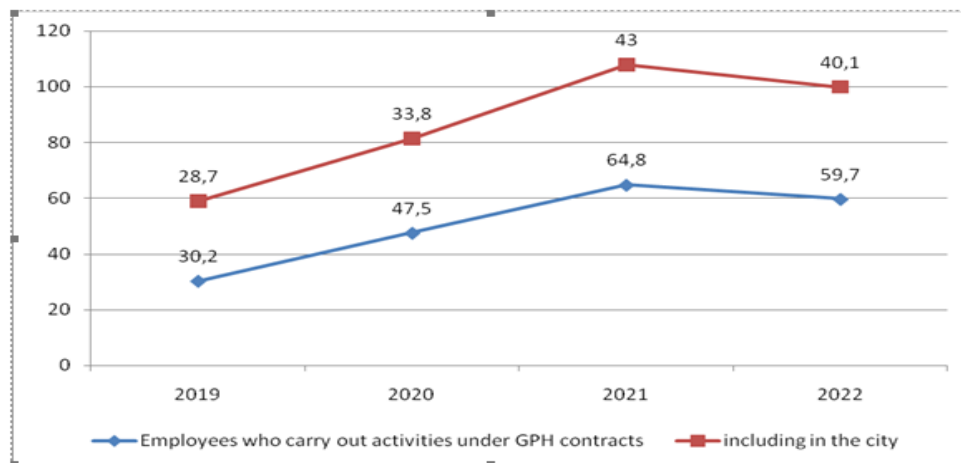


Figure 1. Employees engaged in activities under civil law contracts

Note – compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Over the span of three years, the number of individuals employed under civil contracts has more than doubled, with a 1.5-fold increase observed among the urban population. Moreover, this indicator reached its peak in 2021, suggesting a continued upward trend. The focus on the urban population is attributed to the concentration of platform employment primarily in large urban areas. Meanwhile, individual entrepreneurs represent the largest category of the self-employed, although it is challenging to isolate platform employment workers from the total number. Additionally, it's worth noting that the number of sole proprietors in the labor market significantly exceeds their count according to enterprise statistics. This observation may narrow down the necessary target group of potential platform-based workers, excluding sole proprietors who operate as employers from the total number (Fig. 2) (iac.enbek.kz, 2022), (The impact of digitalization on the labor market of the republic of Kazakhstan, kasipodaq.kz, 2020).

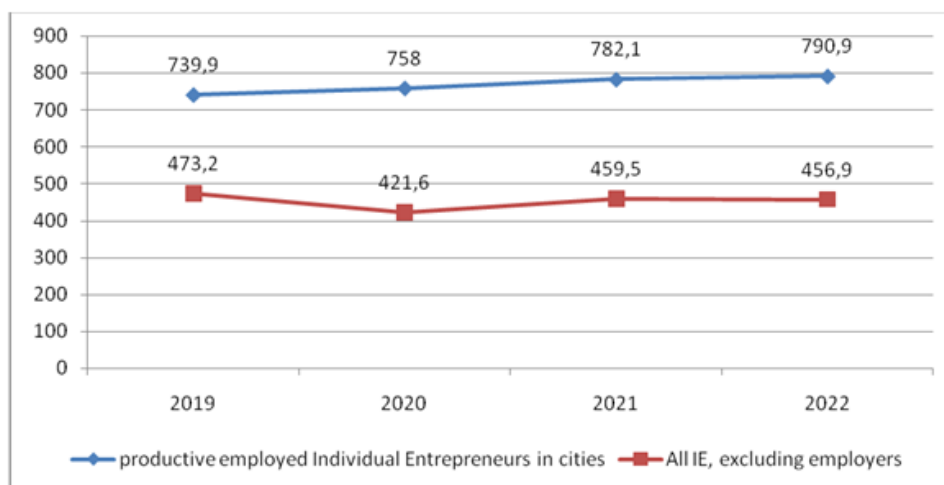


Figure 2. Individual entrepreneurs as per labor market statistics

Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Similarly, statistics indicate a consistent downward trend in the number of sole proprietors who do not hire workers over the past three years, with nearly a quarter fewer by 2022. However, the total number of productively employed sole proprietors in cities is gradually increasing, discounting shocks such as COVID-19 restrictions and seasonal fluctuations. Over three years, such sole proprietors increased by 8 % (61.5 thousand people), comparable to the same increase in the total employed population (65.2 thousand people) and more than 3.5 times greater than the increase in the self-employed as a whole (16.9 thousand people). In other words, structural changes are occurring in other categories of the self-employed population in favor of formal forms of work.

Regarding independent workers, the majority are engaged in private subsidiary farms, producing goods both for personal consumption and for sale, primarily in rural areas. Consequently, the potential target group for platform employment within this category likely consists of unregistered independent workers, predominantly in urban areas (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Informal independent workers

Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The number of unregistered independent workers in cities, such as taxi drivers, couriers, or individuals providing household and other services through digital labor platforms, has remained relatively stable over the past three years, with some seasonal fluctuations. In 2022, this figure stood at 38.4 thousand people, showing a slight increase compared to the same period in 2019 (by 5.8 %).

It is worth noting that, unlike the dynamics of the number of civil law contractors and sole proprietors, there was a significant increase in unregistered independent workers in 2020 when strict quarantine measures were imposed. This increase is likely attributed to the migration of labor from the formal to the informal sector. The peak of this indicator, similar to civil law contracts, occurred in the third quarter of 2021.

Furthermore, statistical indicators on remote employment were provided for reference, with official information published since 2021. These data likely only encompass employees whose remote work is regulated by the Labor Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Kali, 2022).

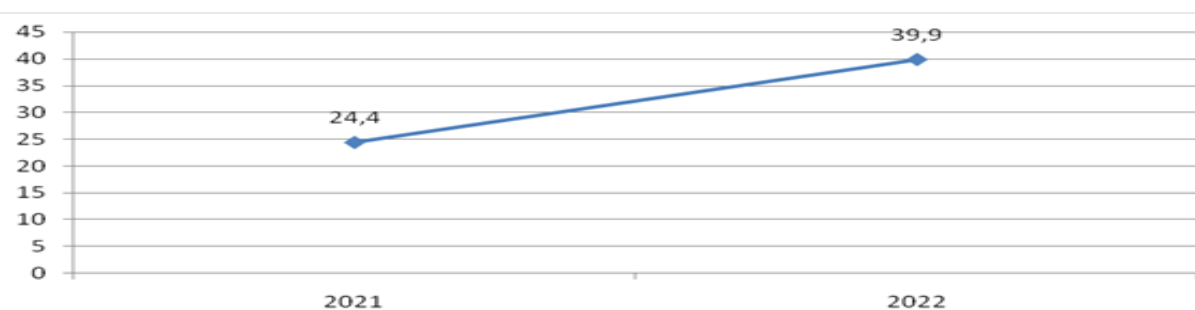


Figure 4. The number of employees engaged in remote work is in the thousands

Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Discussions

In his address to the Kazakh people on September 1, the President instructed the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to urgently develop mechanisms for safeguarding labor and social rights in platform em-

ployment. These measures aim to uphold employees' labor rights and formalize a significant portion of the workforce, bringing them out of informal employment.

It can be deduced that publicly available official statistics only provide indirect insights into the extent of platform employment in Kazakhstan. The diverse activities of digital platforms and the lack of clear legal and tax identification for platform workers significantly distort statistical reporting (Ruzaeva, 2023). Nevertheless, potential platform employment candidates likely include sole proprietors (excluding employers), individuals under GPH contracts in urban areas, and unregistered independent workers in cities.

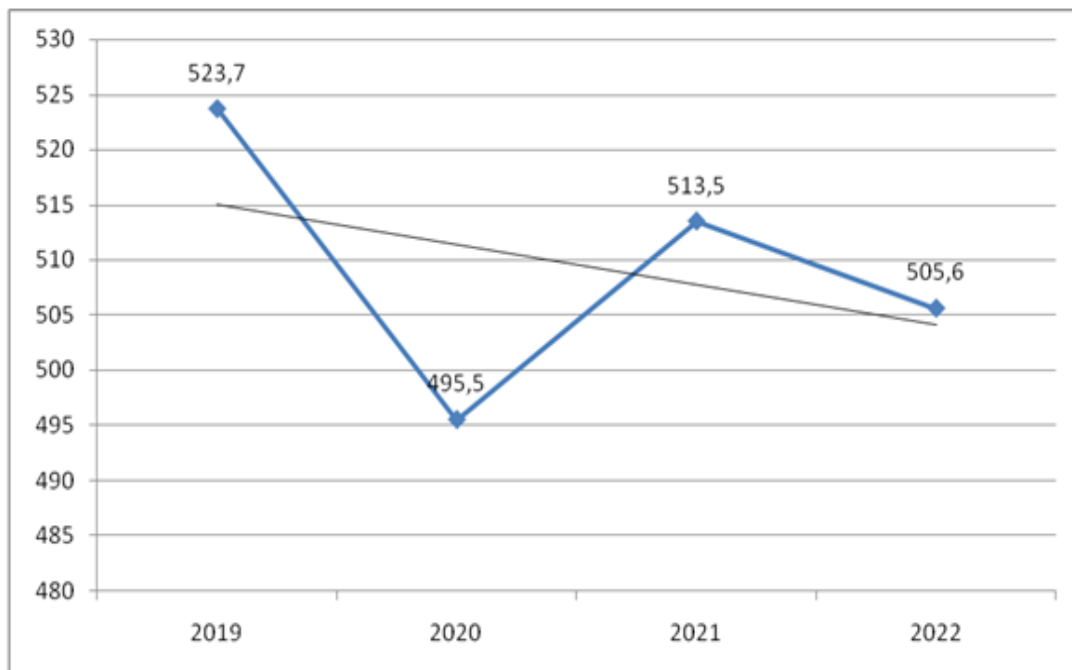


Figure 5. The potential number of platform-based employment candidates is in the thousands

Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

According to statistics, this indicator shows fluctuations, but overall it exhibits a downward trend, having decreased by 18 % over three years. The average value of the indicator for the period under review was 525 thousand people, which can be considered as an estimated base of potential employees for platform employment, excluding, for instance, individuals who have a primary permanent job and utilize internet platforms for supplementary income. However, without precise data from digital platforms, accurately calculating the extent of platform employment's penetration within the aforementioned employment categories proves quite challenging. Additionally, according to expert estimates, about a third of employees use digital platforms as their primary source of income. Therefore, it is likely that up to 175 thousand people are regularly employed on digital labor platforms. In terms of the work performed, platform employment workers are quite similar to other categories of self-employed. However, the working conditions of platform workers are regulated and, in some cases, limited by the rules of the platform, which effectively control the methods of work, remuneration, and may impose commissions for their services. What influences the dynamic growth of platform employment? To answer this question, one must consider the advantages and disadvantages of this type of employment from the perspectives of all three participants in the summary table.

Table 1. The benefits of platform employment

At the state and consumer levels of service.	At the level of operators and providers of digital platforms.	At the level of platform employees.
1	2	3
Reducing unemployment and labor migration rates, as it provides employment and income without the need to relocate.	The possibility of increasing the market share of services without additional costs, thanks to the phenomenon of network effects.	There are no temporary or territorial boundaries for employment and work performance as a self-employed individual.

Continuation of Table 1.

1	2	3
An additional source of replenishing the country's budget and contributing to GDP.	The increasing marginality of businesses in the digital economy.	It's easy to register on the platform and start cooperation.
The satisfaction of the country's population with the quality of services provided increases by enhancing the efficiency of social services for the population.	A variety of ways to formalize relationships (for example, under a GPH agreement, under a direct employment contract, under a service agreement with the self-employed, etc.).	Ability to choose independently: - Place of work - Employment form (online or offline, full-time or part-time) - Workload size - Convenient and flexible work schedule - Type of project being implemented
Scaling up technologies for the digital economy.		The possibility of combining primary and supplementary work, thereby diversifying income streams.
<i>Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan</i>		

Analyzing the data presented in the table, it is safe to say that more than half of all employed individuals in Kazakhstan see significantly more advantages than disadvantages from this type of activity.

Table 2. The drawbacks of platform employment

At the state and consumer levels of service.	At the level of operators and providers of digital platforms.	At the level of platform employees.
There is no distinct legislation to regulate activities on the platforms.	Limited government support for the establishment and stable development of new startups.	The particular risk of a decline in the transparency of working conditions.
Insufficient influence in platform employment.	is a long period of gaining the trust of the client	As a rule, there are no career prospects
The absence of legally supported practices for resolving disputes among platform owners, employees, and customers.	The rapid digital transformation and automation of business processes in the service market leads to a gradual reduction of jobs	A significantly inadequate provision of essential items such as inventory, fuel, maintenance, and tools for service provision.
The issue of instability	Unverified qualifications and a low level of digital literacy	Lack of employment status, leading to issues with social security and pension provision
Price volatility due to the unpredictability of tariffs for goods and services set by the platform owners	Performers have high demands for payment for services or works, but lack sufficient motivation for productive work	Uncertainty about income stability and the capacity to plan major expenses
Challenges in ensuring the security of transaction payments		Substantial expenses for professional development and skill enhancement
<i>Note — compiled by the authors based on data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan</i>		

According to the study of the role and depth of the impact of digital platforms on the economy of the state, it can be concluded that these types of technologies (in particular, sharing and search engines, social networks, e-commerce platforms, digital ecosystems, and websites) are an atypical tool for direct and indirect interaction and sharing of various assets between the buyer and seller, as well as between the employer and the applicant. The use of these technologies is one of the most important factors influencing labor market conditions, labor migration, the intensity of development of industry segments of the labor market and the formative changes in the cost of labor.

Thus, employees become dependent on the platform, perhaps even more so than employees under civil law contracts who work “off the books” for ordinary employers. It is also worth noting that, with a huge amount of information at their disposal, Internet platforms could become a source for conducting an in-depth analysis of the state of labor relations in the platform economy, the development of such sectors of the economy, as well as behavioral models in society in general.

Conclusions

Studying the platform employment, we can conclude that the presence of online digital employment platforms in Kazakhstan is expanding yearly, new players are coming, while foreign platforms occupy a large share of the market, which carry out their activities by creating representative offices in accordance with Kazakh legislation. Such platforms position themselves as information intermediaries between customers and performers, unambiguously excluding definitions as an employer for platform employees. However, at the same time, they can apply various models of interaction with these employees.

Simultaneously, nearly all Internet platforms adopt similar approaches in establishing conditions for their workers: public offers are created, modified, and terminated unilaterally; the platform retains the authority to reject or disconnect an employee without providing any reason. Although the platform does not directly control the employee, it exercises control indirectly by defining methods, deadlines, and quality of services, enforcing compliance with platform terms, and imposing penalties for violations.

Also, a common characteristic of online digital labor platforms is the inclusion in public offers of limited rights of platform employees. Specifically, there is access to information about orders; the platform's ability to use and distribute personal data of employees without notifying them. A number of platforms affect the employee's freedom to choose orders, as well as the ability not to accept orders without negative consequences such as a downgrade in the system.

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Қазақстандағы платформалық жұмыспен қамту: қазіргі жағдайда еңбек нарығының дамуының негізгі тенденциясы

Аңдатпа:

Мақсаты: Цифрлық технологияларды қолдана отырып ұйымдастырылған платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың әртүрлі анықтамаларын қарастыру, олардың жаңа нысандарын талдаудың теориялық тәсілдерін жүйелеу, Қазақстанда платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың таралуын бағалау, елдегі платформалық жұмыспен қамтуды дамытудың оң және теріс жақтарын саралау.

Әдісі: Мақалада статистикалық, эконометрикалық талдау, салыстыру әдістері қолданылды.

Қорытынды: Цифрлық технологияларды қолдана отырып жасалған платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың әртүрлі анықтамалары негізінде жұмыспен қамтудың жаңа нысандарын талдаудың теориялық тәсілдері жүйеленді және платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың ауқымы бағаланды. Қазақстандағы платформалық жұмыспен қамту ауқымын бағалау Қазақстандағы платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың күшті және әлсіз жақтарын анықтады.

Тұжырымдама: Цифрлық технологияларды қолдана отырып ұйымдастырылған жұмыспен қамтудың жаңа нысандарын талдаудың теориялық тәсілдері жүйеленген. Анықтамалар негізінде Қазақстандағы платформалық жұмыспен қамту ауқымы бағаланды. Бұл көрсеткіш ұзақ мерзімді кезеңде өсу үрдісіне ие, бірақ қысқа мерзімді кезеңде жылдар бойынша санның аз ауытқуы байқалды. Платформалық жұмыспен қамту анықтамаларын жүйелеу және Қазақстанда платформалық жұмыспен қамту ауқымын бағалау негізінде Қазақстанда платформалық жұмыспен қамтудың күшті және әлсіз жақтары айқындалды.

Кілт сөздер: жұмыспен қамту, платформалық жұмыспен қамту, цифрлық платформалар, еңбек нарығы, өзін-өзі жұмыспен қамту, фриланс, әлеуметтік қорғау.

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Платформенная занятость в Казахстане: основной тренд развития рынка труда в современных условиях

Аннотация:

Цель: Рассмотреть различные определения платформенной занятости; систематизировать теоретические подходы к анализу новых форм занятости, организованных с применением цифровых технологий; оценить распространенность платформенной занятости в Казахстане; систематизировать положительные и негативные стороны развития платформенной занятости в стране.

Методы: В работе использованы методы статистического, эконометрического анализа, сопоставления.

Результаты: На основе рассмотренных различных определений платформенной занятости систематизированы теоретические подходы к анализу новых форм занятости, организованных с применением цифровых технологий и оценены масштабы платформенной занятости. Оценка масштабов платформенной занятости в Казахстане выявил сильные и слабые стороны платформенной занятости в Казахстане.

Выводы: Систематизированы теоретические подходы к анализу новых форм занятости, организованных с применением цифровых технологий. На основе определений оценен масштаб платформенной занятости в Казахстане. Данный показатель имеет тенденцию в долгосрочном периоде к повышению, но с небольшими колебаниями численности по годам в краткосрочном периоде. На основе систематизации определений платформенной занятости и оценки масштабов платформенной занятости в Казахстане выявлены сильные и слабые стороны платформенной занятости в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: занятость, платформенная занятость, цифровые платформы, рынок труда, самозанятость, фриланс, социальная защита.