

First survey results reveal high levels of crowd work in Switzerland

Authors:

Ursula Huws, Neil H. Spencer, Dag S. Syrdal

The so-called ‘gig economy’ has attracted increasing attention in recent years, with a boom in online platforms for providing taxi services (such as Uber), delivery services (such as Deliveroo) and a range of different household services (such as Handy). But how many Swiss actually earn their living through working for such platforms?

Now, results are available from an online survey by the University of Hertfordshire and Ipsos MORI, in association with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), UNI Europa and syndicom which show high participation by Swiss in the growing online economy.

A third of Swiss seeking online work
In an online survey of 2001 Swiss between the ages of 16 and 70, 647

(32.2% after weighting) said they had tried to find work, managed via so-called “sharing economy” platforms such as Upwork, Uber or Handy.

Not all of them succeeded, however. The proportion who had actually found such work was 18.2%, equivalent to approximately 1,090,000 people across the whole population of Switzerland. Women were slightly less likely than men to find work this way: roughly 15.6% of women had found work through these platforms, while 20.8% of men had done so.

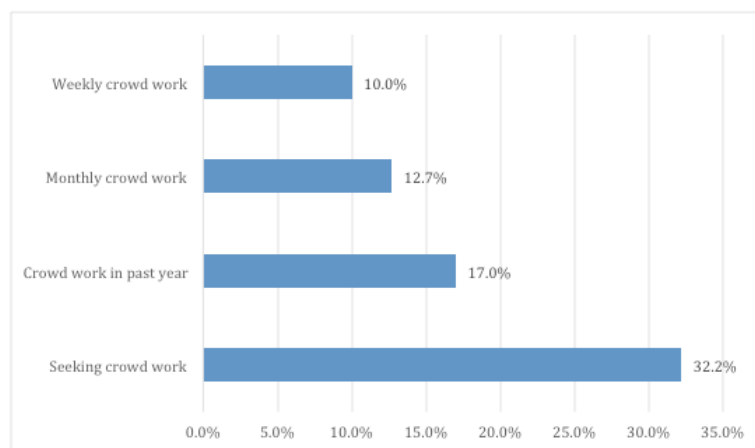
For most, this work is only occasional, but a significant group of 10.0% claimed to find paid work via online platforms at least once a week while 12.7% found such work at least once a month.

Main source of work or a supplement to a main job?

It is often thought the gig economy is used as an occasional income top-up in addition to another main job, or even just for fun, and indeed for almost three-quarters of crowd workers (73.9%) it represents less than half their income. But for a substantial minority of crowd workers, it is the only or main source of income with 12.5% of crowd workers saying it is their only source of income (equivalent of 135,000 people) and 26.1% that it represents at least half (equivalent of 280,000 people). A substantial proportion (30.7%) did not know or did not wish to divulge this information.

Male crowd workers were marginally more likely than women to respond

FIGURE 1: SWISS CROWD WORKERS – OVERVIEW



Base: 2001 Swiss aged 16-70 (weighted)



that crowd work was their only source of income. 12.5% of the male crowd workers stated that this was their only source of income compared to 12.4% of the female crowd workers.

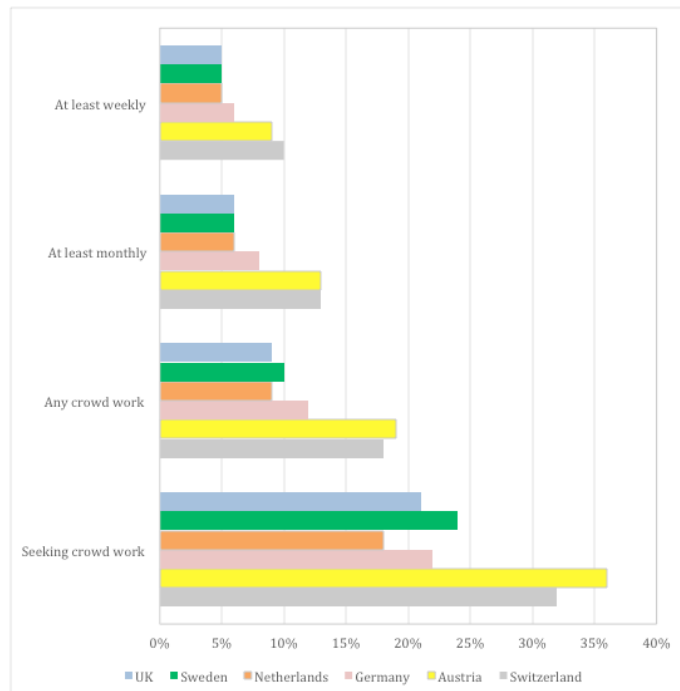
How does this compare with other European countries? The level of weekly and monthly crowd work is significantly higher in Switzerland than in other Western European countries. Surveys carried out in 2016 in the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and Austria showed lower levels of crowd working in these categories in all of these countries, except Austria, which showed higher levels of people searching for crowd work (but not finding it). Further research is required to establish the reasons for this difference.

What work are they looking for? The most popular kind of crowd work that people were looking for were jobs that they could carry out for different customers outside their homes such as Handy, with 75.7% of crowd workers saying that they had looked for jobs in this category (79.8% for males and 70.2% for females). Also 61.7% of crowd workers said that they had looked for taxi-type work using an app or a website such as Uber (68.8% for males and 52.3% for females). Finally, 79.3% of crowd workers said they had looked for online work that could be carried out on their own computing devices from their own homes, including platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer and Time etc (80.2% for males and 78.1% for females).

What work are crowd workers actually doing? Turning to the work that crowd workers actually do in Switzerland, one of the most striking features of these results was the propensity of respondents to name more than one kind of work. This suggests that they were trying to gain an income from as many sources as possible but makes it difficult to gain an accurate picture of the breakdown of the crowd workforce.

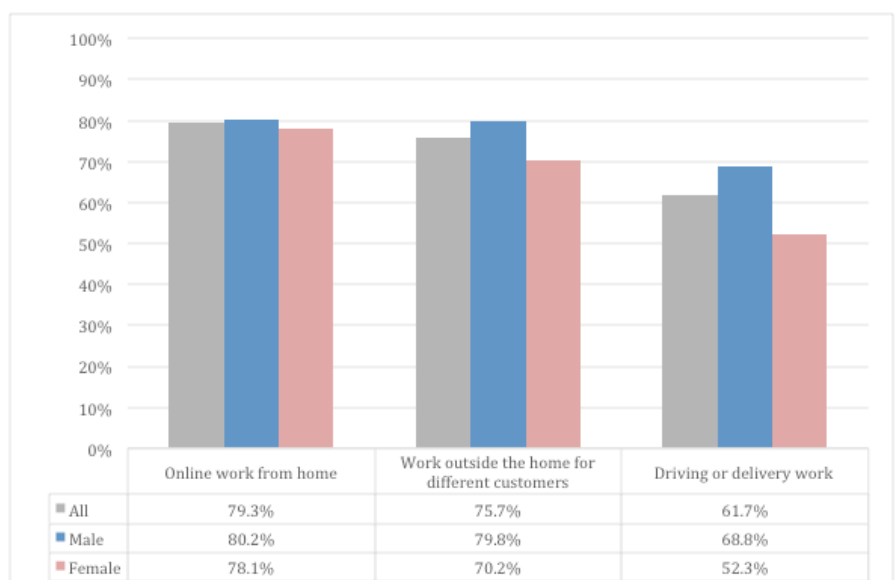
81.4% of crowd workers carried out office work, short tasks or 'click work' on their own computer or other online device (82.9% for males, 79.4% for females) and 74.5% of crowd

FIGURE 2: COMPARISON WITH OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES



Base: 2238 respondents in the UK, 2146 respondents in Sweden, 2125 respondents in the Netherlands, 2180 respondents in Germany, 1969 respondents in Austria and 2001 in Switzerland (weighted).

FIGURE 3: TYPES OF CROWD WORK SOUGHT



Base: 2001 Swiss aged 16-70 (weighted).





workers carried out more high skilled online work (such as design, editing, software development or translation) (77.2% for males, 70.8% for females). Slightly fewer had run errands or carried out routine office-type work in other people’s premises (64.2%, 69.0% for males, 57.6% for females), carried out occasional work in other people’s homes, such as plumbing or household repairs (62.9%, 71.1% for males, 51.7% for females), done regular, scheduled work in other people’s homes (such as cleaning, gardening or babysitting) (65.0%, 66.8% for males, 62.6% for females), or professional work (such as legal services, accounting) (62.3%, 70.9% for males, 50.6% for females), done driving or delivery work, using an app or website such as Uber (60.1%, 67.9% for males, 49.5% for females) and personal service work (such as hairdressing or massage) (61.2%,

62.1% for males, 60.0% for females).

Use of digital ‘apps’ Many of these activities have been carried out in the past by casually-employed or self-employed people, both inside and outside the formal economy. It is therefore necessary to ask to what extent these findings represent new developments related to digitalization and the development of online platforms. Further detailed research will be required to investigate this further but it was possible in this survey to isolate those workers who reported using an ‘app’ on their smartphone, tablet or computer to notify them when work is available.

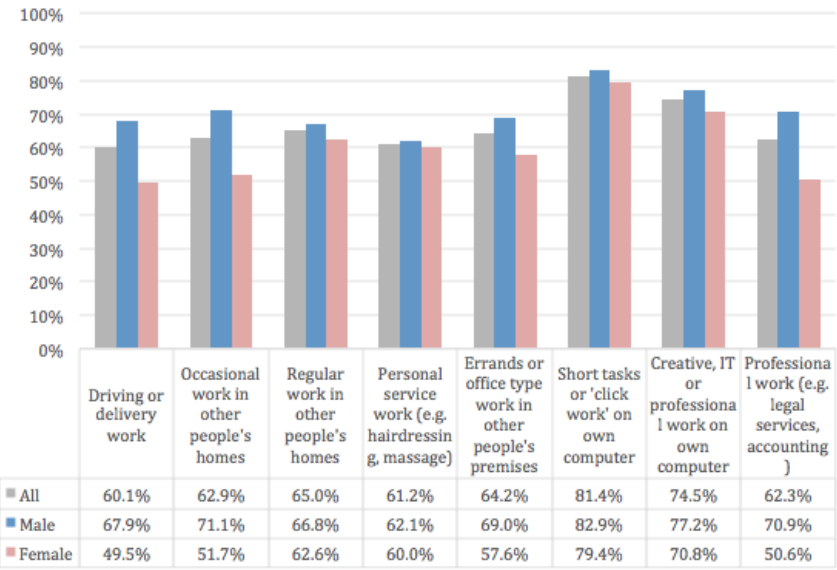
Narrowing our definition of ‘crowd workers’ only to those using such an ‘app’ risks excluding some crowd workers, for instance those working on high-skill online platforms such as Upwork, who may rely on this kind of

work for their income but may not use such an ‘app’. However it is a useful way of focusing on those crowd workers whose work organization is digitally enabled.

Looking at all crowd workers (who comprise 18.2% of the total Swiss population) applying this definition reduces the proportion to 12.0% of the population (an estimated 720,000 people, as compared with 1,090,000). However it is interesting to note that the more intensive the crowd work is, the greater the propensity to use Apps.

As can be seen from Figure 5, 73.8% of those who report crowd working at least every week use such apps, and the percentage of those who say that crowd work constitutes at least half of their income using such apps is 78.1%.

FIGURE 4: TYPE OF CROWD WORK CARRIED OUT



Base: 361 Swiss crowd workers aged 16-70 (weighted).





Characteristics of the Sample

Age Crowd workers can be found in all age groups but are somewhat more likely to be young. Figure 7 shows the breakdown of the Swiss crowd workforce by age with 25.3% aged 16-24, 25.1% aged 25-34, 20.3% aged 35-44, 14.9% aged 45-54, 9.8% aged 55-64 and 4.6% aged 65-70.

A focus on intensive crowd workers (those who do so at least once a week) shows a similar pattern with 28.9% aged 16-24, 26.7% aged 25-34, 18.3% aged 35-44, 14.0% aged 45-54, 10.1% aged 55-64 and 2.0% aged 65-70.

In terms of reliance on crowd work for income, the age distribution shifts clearly to younger crowd workers with 35.3% aged 16-24, 34.0% aged 25-34, 12.9% aged 35-44, 10.4% aged 45-54, 4.1% aged 55-64 and 3.3% aged 65-70.

Employment Status

Full-time/part-time/self-employed/full-time-parents/retired/students 51.7% of crowd workers said they were in full-time employment with 21.2% part-time, 9.4% self-employed, 3.1% full-time parents, 5.1% retired and 5.4% students.

Amongst intensive crowd workers (those who do so at least once a week), the figures are similar with 52.8% employed full-time, 23.9% part-time, 10.2% self-employed, 2.2% full-time parents, 2.8% retired and 5.6% students.

For those who gain at least half of their income from crowd work, the pattern shifts slightly with full-time parents making up 1.3% and retirees 5.6%. 55.6% saying they are full-time employees, 21.4% part-time, 12.1% self-employed and 6.2% students.

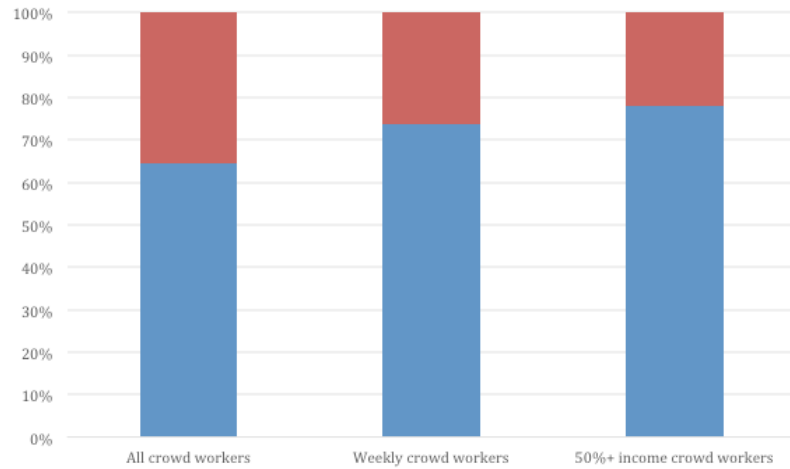
Temporary Contracts

26.4% of crowd workers say they are on temporary contracts and the figure is similar (27.0%) for frequent crowd workers. This rises to 36.1% for those who earn at least half of their income from crowd work.

More than one paid job

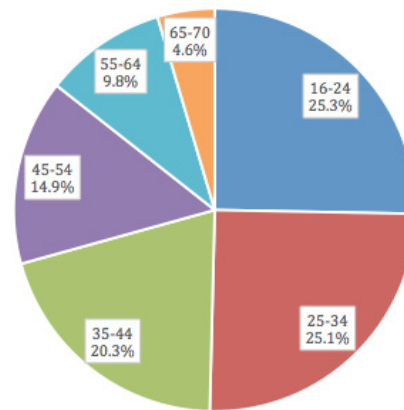
15.3% of crowd workers have more than one paid job which rises to 19.0% for frequent crowd workers

FIGURE 5: PROPORTION OF CROWD WORKERS USING AN APP TO NOTIFY WHEN WORK IS AVAILABLE



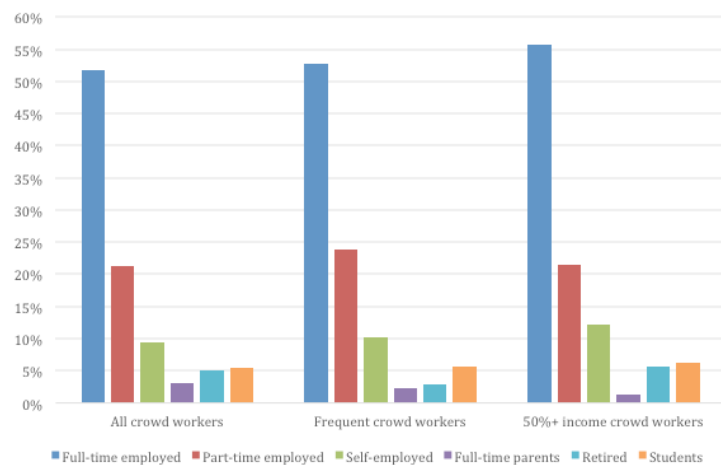
Base: 361 Swiss crowd workers aged 16-70 (weighted).

FIGURE 6: CROWD WORKFORCE BY AGE



Base: 361 Swiss crowd workers aged 16-70 (weighted).

FIGURE 7: EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF CROWD WORKERS



Base: 361 Swiss crowd workers aged 16-70 (weighted).





and 17.0% for those who earn at least half of their income from crowd work.

Benefits or Retirement Income

People who receive benefits or pensions make up 6.4% of crowd workers. For frequent crowd workers, the figure is lower at 3.5% and lower still at 2.4% for those who get at least half of their income from crowd work.

Income from Investments

The proportion who receive income from rents and/or investments is relatively low but significant: 8.3% of all crowd workers, 8.7% of frequent crowd workers and 13.2% of crowd workers who get at least half of their income from crowd work.

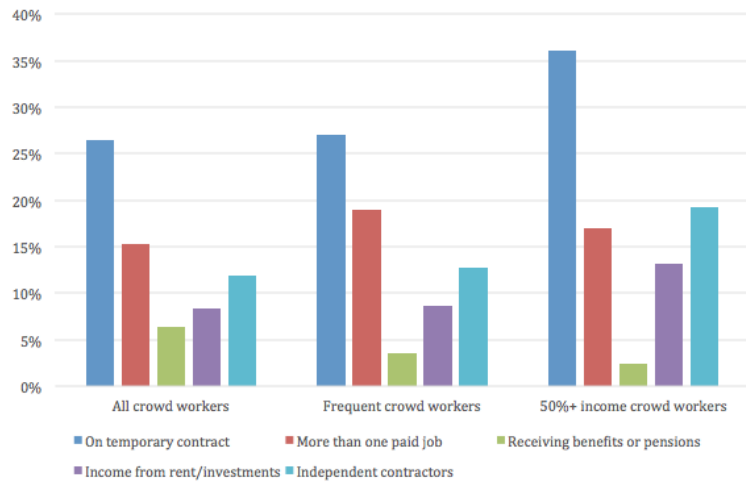
Independent Contractors

Given that many online platform use the term 'independent contractor' to describe the workers who use their services, the survey also investigated the extent to which crowd workers characterised themselves as independent contractors. Of all crowd workers, 11.9% gave themselves this label. For frequent crowd workers, the figure was 12.7% and for those who gained at least half of their income from crowd work, the figure was 19.3%.

Location

Crowd work is not distributed evenly in Switzerland. The strongest concentration is in the South, in Ticino, but there is also a high level of crowd working in and around Zurich. The lowest concentration is in the Eastern region, followed by Espace Mittelland.

FIGURE 8: OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF CROWD WORKERS



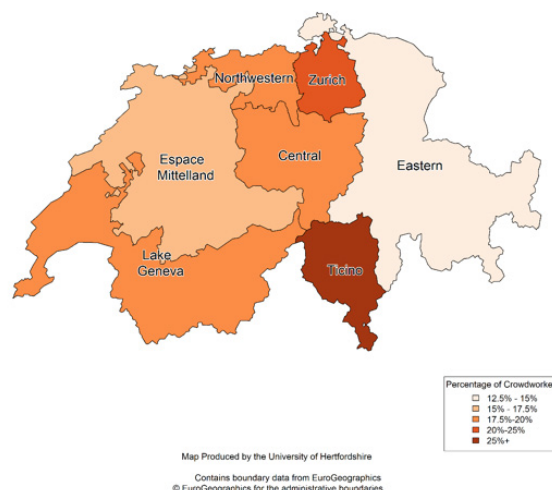
Base: 361 Swiss crowd workers aged 16-70 (weighted).

TABLE 1: CROWD WORKERS BY REGION

Region	Number in sample	Weighted percentage of crowd workers
Région Lémanique	393	18.2%
Espace Mittelland	465	15.2%
Nordwestschweiz	253	19.8%
Zürich	351	20.9%
Ostschweiz	267	13.4%
Zentralschweiz	192	18.7%
Ticino	80	31.7%

Base: 2001 Swiss aged 16-70 (weighted).

FIGURE 9: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF CROWD WORKERS IN SWITZERLAND





Whom are they working for?

The survey also looked at customers for online work. This captures information relating to services delivered directly to consumers but, not, of course, those kinds of online work that are delivered directly to corporate customers. Overall, 35.7% of the sample said that they had bought the services of a crowd worker. This is equivalent to 2,150,000 people across the whole Swiss adult population.

People in higher income brackets are no more likely to be customers for crowd work than those in lower income brackets. Around a third of people in each bracket purchase crowd work.

Notes

Note 1: Percentages given above are based on weighted calculations to adjust for small deviations of the sample from population characteristics. Where percentages have been expressed as number of people, these figures are similarly weighted. Where counts of respondents (not based on percentages) are reported, these are not weighted.

Note 2: Confidence intervals have not been given above for the sake of brevity. For those percentages based on the whole sample (2001 respondents), all confidence intervals would be within +/- 2.2% of the figures quoted. For percentages based on crowd workers alone, confidence intervals would be within +/- 5.2%.

Note 3: Offline surveys have been carried out in UK (face to face) and Switzerland (telephone) in order to assess the effect of survey mode on results. Work to investigate this is ongoing.

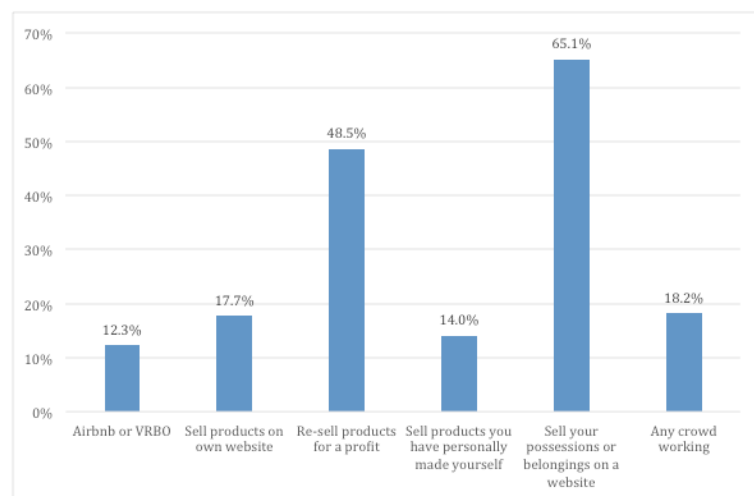
TABLE 2: ONLINE ACTIVITY

Activity	Percentage
Airbnb or VRBO	12.3%
Sell products on own website	17.7%
Re-sell products for a profit	48.5%
Sell products you have personally made yourself	14.0%
Sell your possessions or belongings on a website	65.1%

Base: 2001 Swiss aged 16-70 (weighted).

86.0% of the sample (equivalent of 5,170,000 people) are active in terms of buying or selling goods or services online.

FIGURE 10: CROWD WORK IN THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ONLINE ECONOMY AS A SOURCE OF INCOME



Base: 2001 Swiss aged 16-70 (weighted).

University of Hertfordshire, European think tank FEPS and European service workers' union UNI Europa are collaborating on a research project to explore the scale and impact of the growth of crowd working, and provide a more comprehensive picture of the digitalised labour market across the European Union.

Results have been published so far on the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany, with Italy to follow.

The Swiss survey was conducted in association with syndicom. In

Switzerland, 2001 adults aged 16-70 were interviewed. Interviews took place between 3rd and 14th April 2017. Data are weighted by age within gender, region, working status, population density of respondent settlement, chief income earner of the household and household size to match the profile of the adult population in Switzerland.

Population estimates are derived according to 2015 population figures for adults aged 16-70 in Switzerland, estimated at 6,020,000. Survey percentages are grossed up as a proportion of this figure.

