

IMPACT OF DIGITAL ECONOMY ON NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT:

THE ISSUE OF CROWDWORK

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CONTEXT: RISE OF NON-STANDARD EMPLOYMENT

- Temporary employment, part-time work, temporary agency work and other multiparty employment relationships, disguised employment relationships and dependent self-employment.
- Casual employment - “on-call” work, “zero-hours” contracts (with no guaranteed minimum hours) and the “gig economy” – crowd work and on-demand work via apps

CROWD WORKERS BEING INVISIBLE

➤ Empirical studies

- Task design, managerial practices, innovative mechanisms, control systems and mechanisms
- Motives for participation
- Speed and quality of work in the platforms
 - Discussion about « social and financial incentive schemes » to manage quality and their effectiveness (Ipeirotis and Kokkodis, 2014; Huang et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2011; Mason et al., 2010)

➤ Recent empirical studies

- Legal issues, working conditions, wages and social security (Graham et al.; 2017, Berg, 2016; Stefano, 2016; Sundarajan, 2016; Bergvall and Howcroft, 2014)

CROWDWORK IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY CONTEXT

- Potential positive effects, creates new income and employment opportunities where local economies are stagnant (Nickerson, 2014; Roy et al., 2013; Narula et al., 2011)
- ‘Silver bullet’ for development and fighting poverty (Schriner and Oerther, 2014) – creation of small business and investing in education
- Create opportunities for non-specialists to access labour market (Sundararajan, 2016)
- Concerns are also raised about whether the power imbalance that exists between capital and labour, would lead to ‘*race to the bottom*’ in wage rates (Graham et al., 2017)
- Underlying notion that it can provide gainful employment opportunities for the low-skilled and those in unemployed, under-employed or in informal sector

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

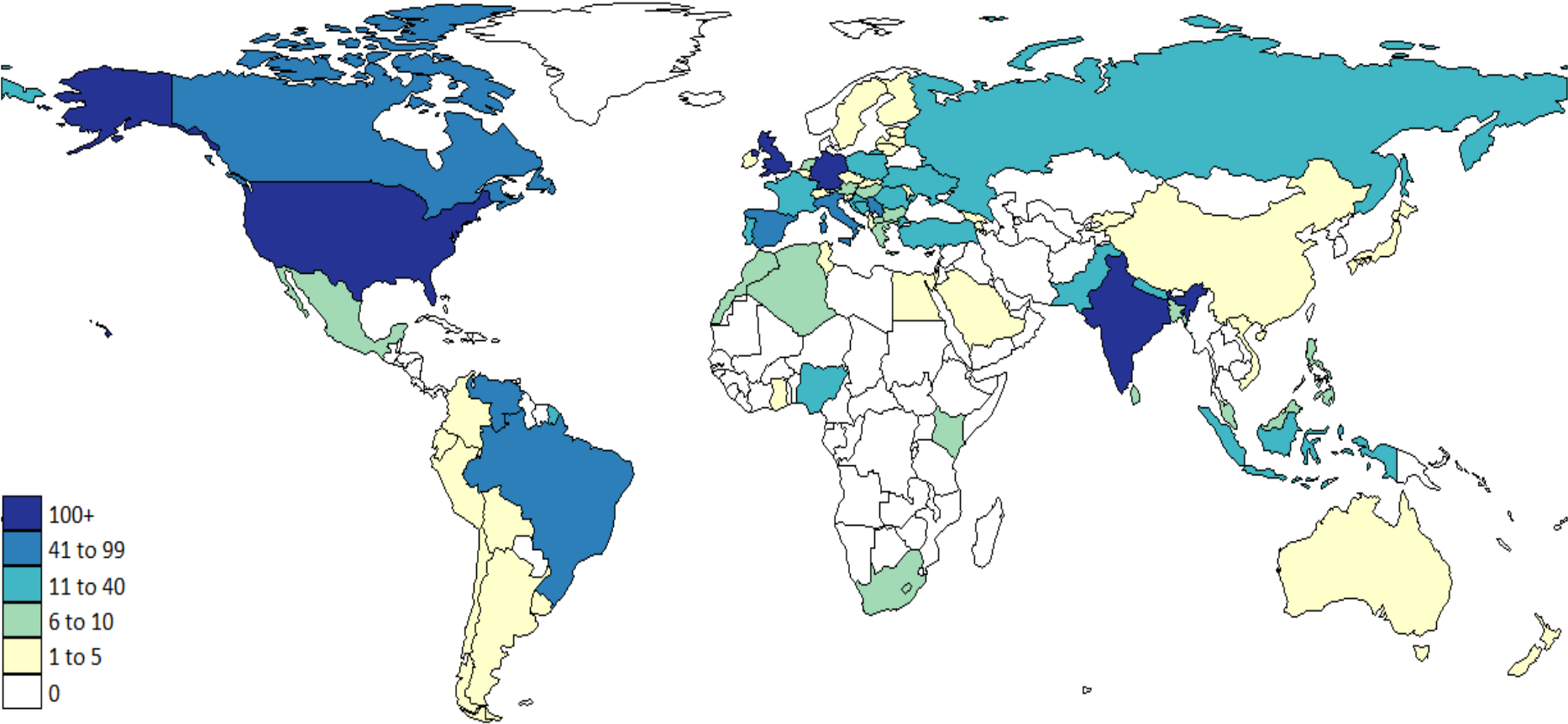
- Who are these crowd workers and how do they fare?
- What risks do crowd workers working in on-demand digital economy face?
- What efforts have been made to address this issue?

CROWD WORKERS SURVEY

Survey of workers on open worker platforms

- First Survey of Crowd workers 2015 (Berg, 2016)
 - AMT – US and India (1167); CrowdFlower (353)
- Second Survey of Crowd workers 2017
 - AMT, CrowdFlower, Clickworker, Microworkers, Prolific (2350)

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS ACROSS COUNTRIES

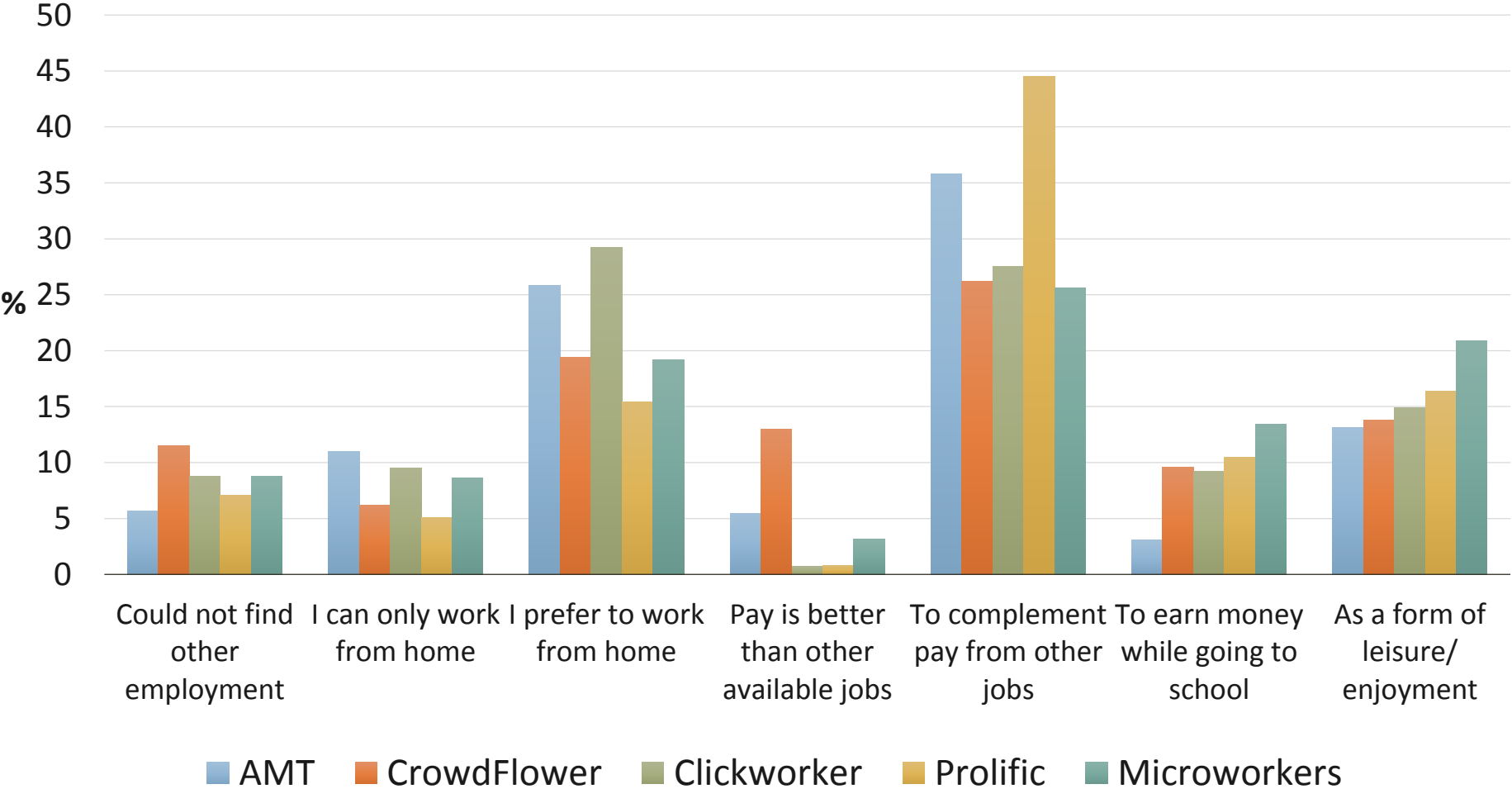


CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKERS

- Gender: Males 65%; Females 35%
- Age: 18 to 65 years and average age is 34.5 years
- Educational levels:
 - University (72%); High school diploma (45%); High school dropouts (3%)
 - University education is quite high in Asia (80%), Latin America (58%), Africa (47%)
 - High school diploma is high in Africa
 - Currently pursuing a university degree: Africa (40%), Latin America (33%), Asia (21%)
- Active as a crowd worker: 56% have worked for more than one year

MOTIVATION TO UNDERTAKE CROWD WORK

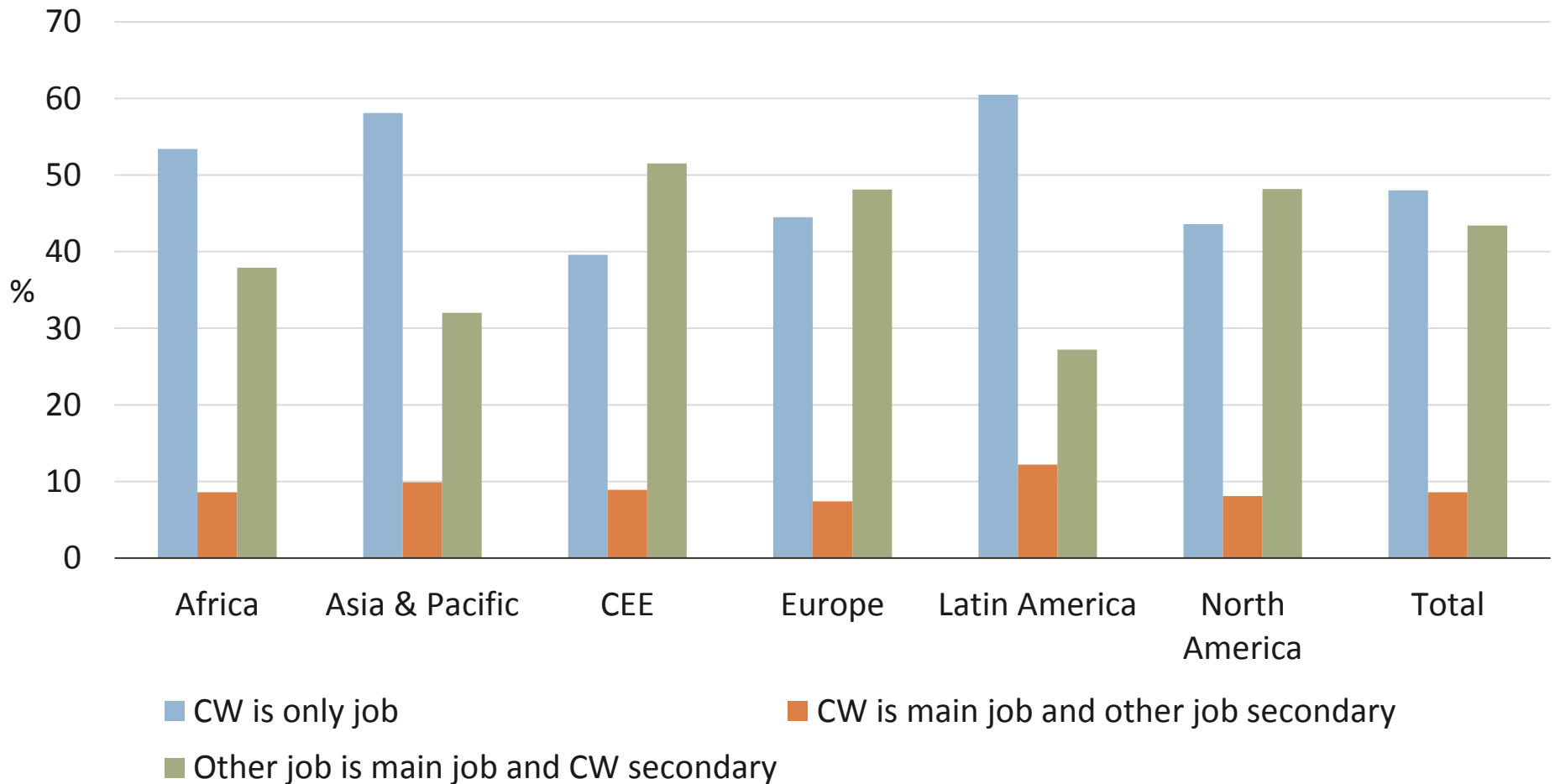
by platform



CROWD WORK AS A MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME

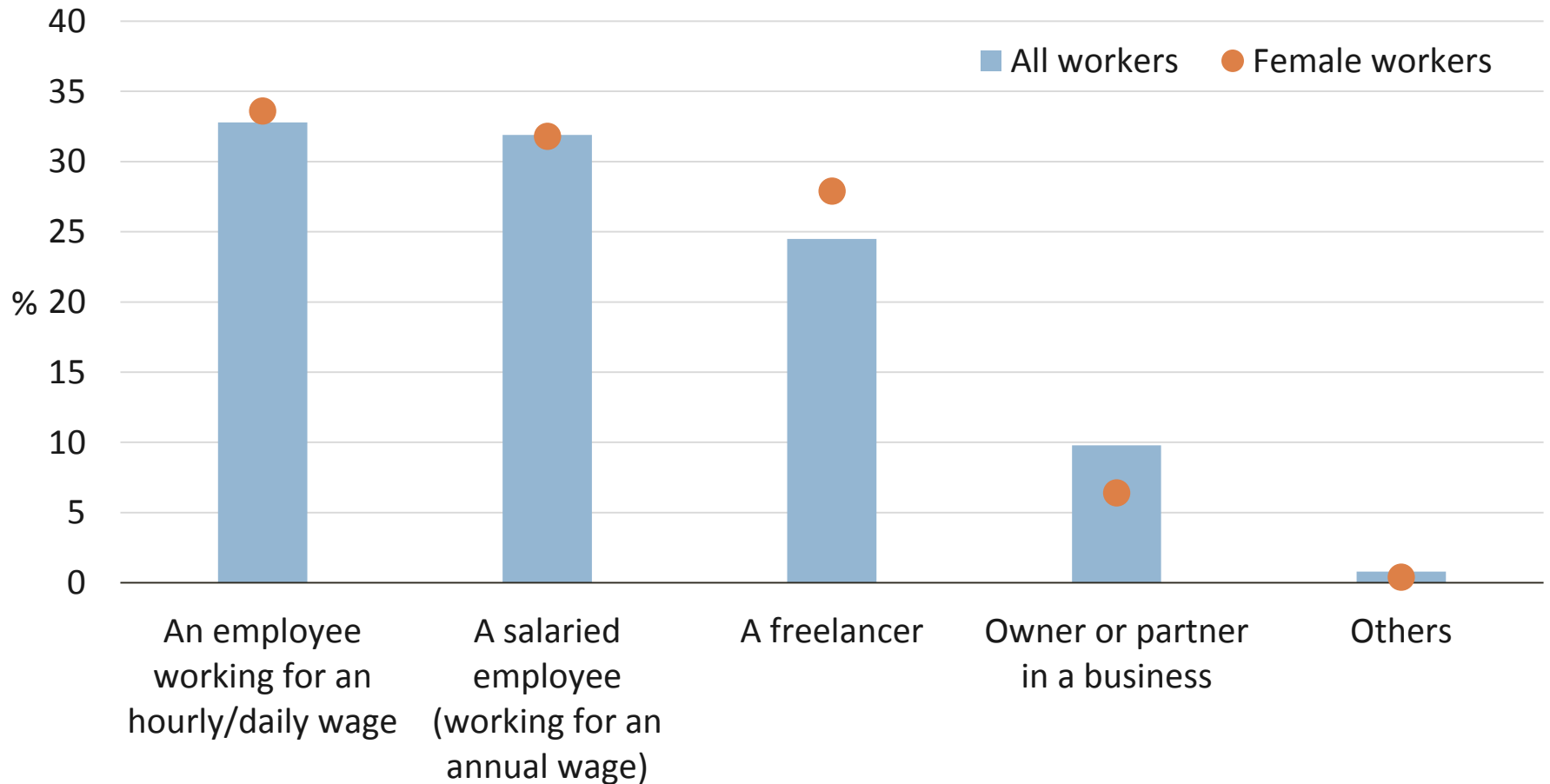
For 48% crowd work is the only source of income

by region



CROWD WORKERS HOLDING OTHER JOBS

52% have another job besides crowd work



SPENDING TIME ON CROWD WORK WHILE ON THE OTHER JOB

- 45% perform crowd work during the working hours of other jobs
 - Africa (65%), Latin America (60%), and Asia & Pacific (55%)
- 10% perform crowd work only during working hours
 - Europe (15%), Africa (13%), and CEE (12%)
 - They are bored of the tasks they are doing or do not find them interesting and motivated
- 34% believe that the employer would be accepting of them performing crowd work during working hours
 - Latin America (45%), Asia & Pacific (41%), and Africa (39%)

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR WORKERS



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of clear employment relationship (dependent self-employment)
- High intensity and Insufficient work
- Low pay and pay differentials across countries
- Lack of regulation on the platforms
- Content of work

(LACK OF) CLEAR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP

- Crowd workers are said to be at the high end of 'home work' and classified as dependent self-employment
 - Traditional home work, had regular flow of work and dependent on supplier/ contractor, **but** in crowd work one has to look for work continuously and there is no guarantee of work
 - For every hour spent on paid work, about roughly one-third (20 minutes) of additional time is spent on searching for the job (unpaid work)
 - Exclusion and discrimination of workers from certain countries
 - Work resembles 'wage labour'
- Classified as 'Self-employment' or 'Independent Contractors' or 'Participants'

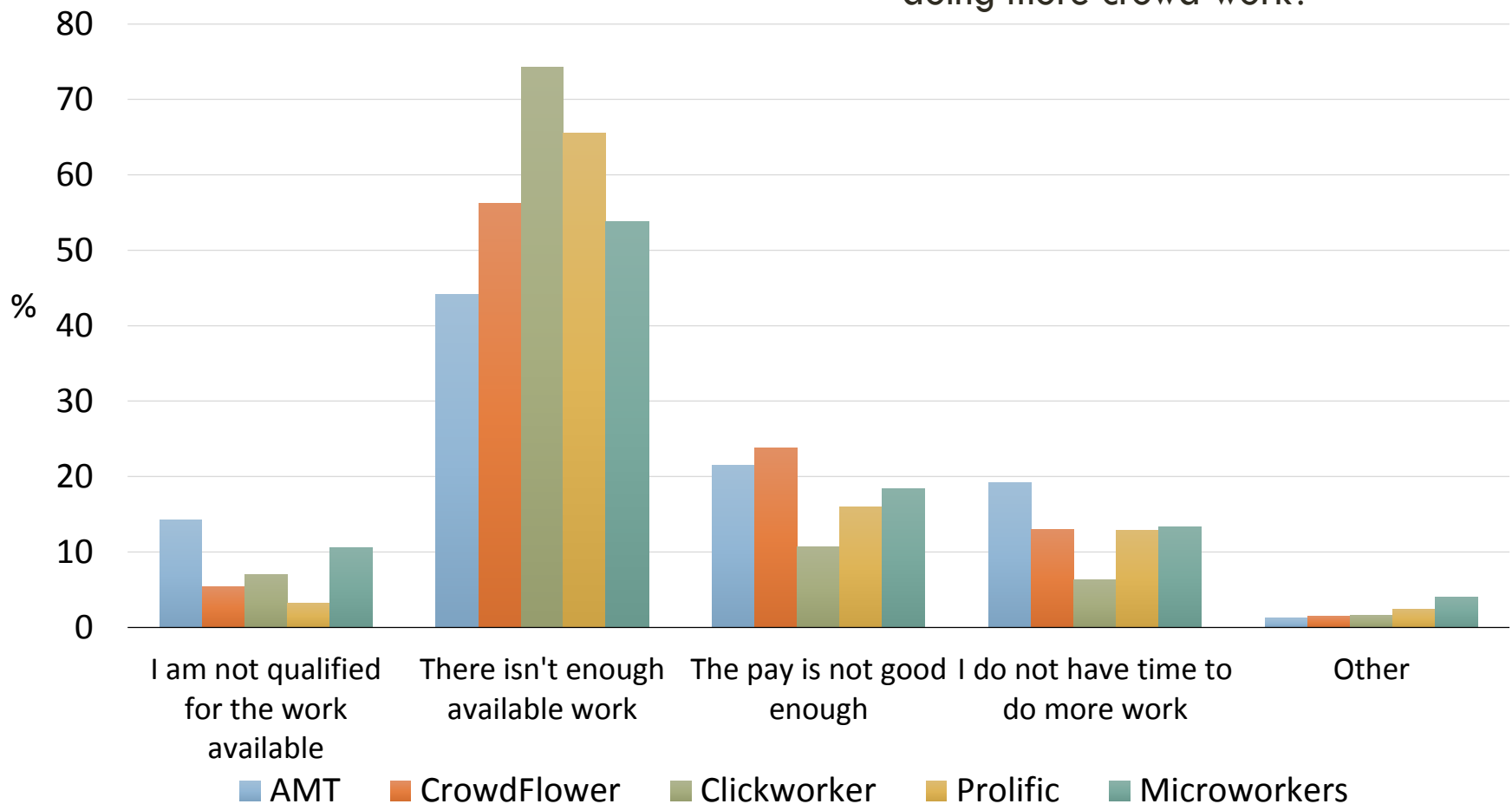
HIGH INTENSITY OF WORK

- Intensity of work quite high as there is continuous search for tasks (24/7) economy
- Working more than 10 hours per day
 - 10 hours for 1-10 days in a month (44%)
 - 10 hours between 11-30 days in a month (23%)
- About 21% of the workers work for 6 days a week, 44% of them work for 7 days a week
- About 32% of the worker workfor more than 2 hours in the night for more than 15 days per month

INSUFFICIENT WORK

88% would like to do more crowd work

→ Why are you not currently doing more crowd work?



INSUFFICIENT WORK

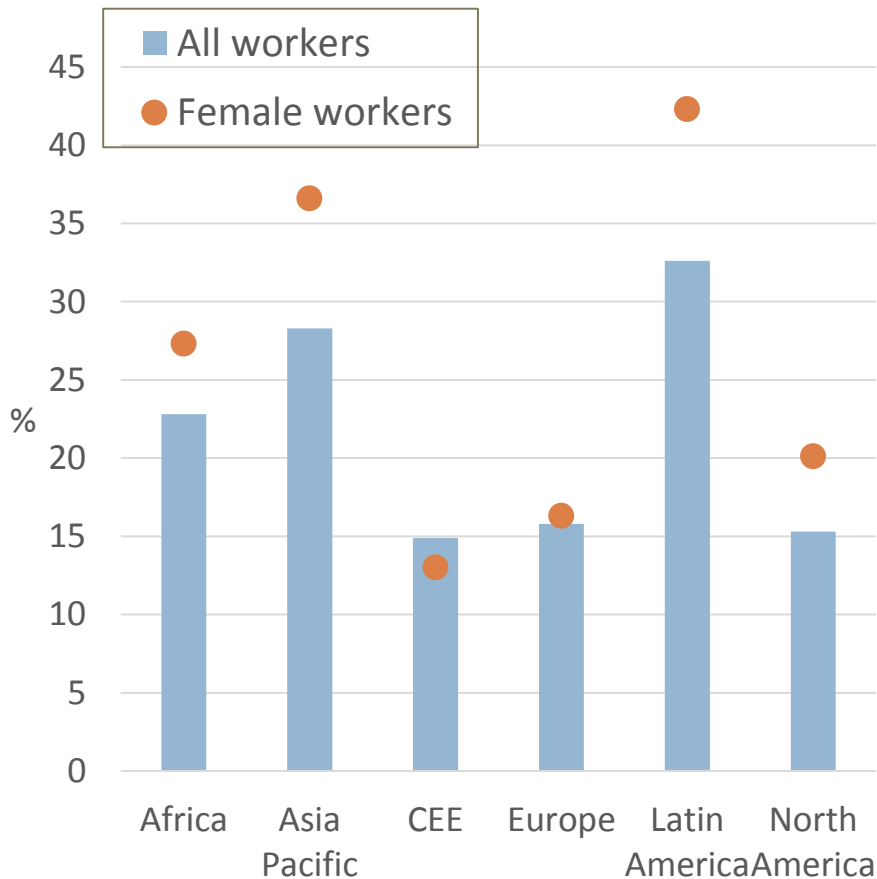
- Workers' perception about availability of work:

“Make more available to users from countries other than US, they get the best work, whereas turkers in some countries have to scrape for quality HITs.” (Respondent on AMT, India)

“They should treat all the workers in equity, no matter the country you come from. more jobs should be given to Nigeria.” (Respondent on Microworkers, Nigeria)

SOURCE OF WORK FOR WOMEN WITH YOUNG CHILDREN (0-5 YEARS)

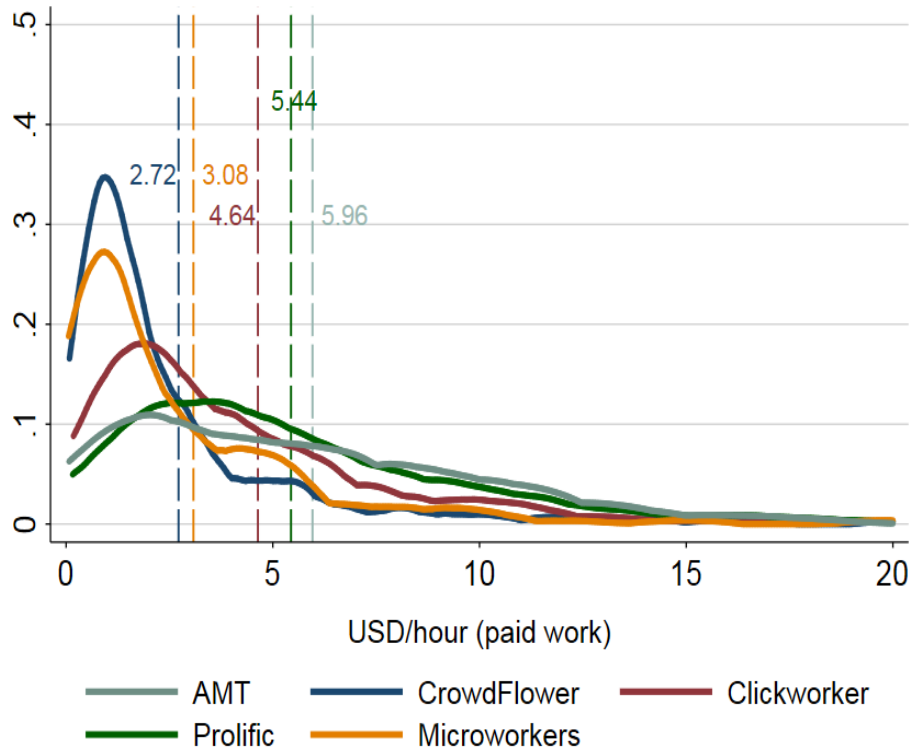
Share of workers with young children (0-5 yrs)



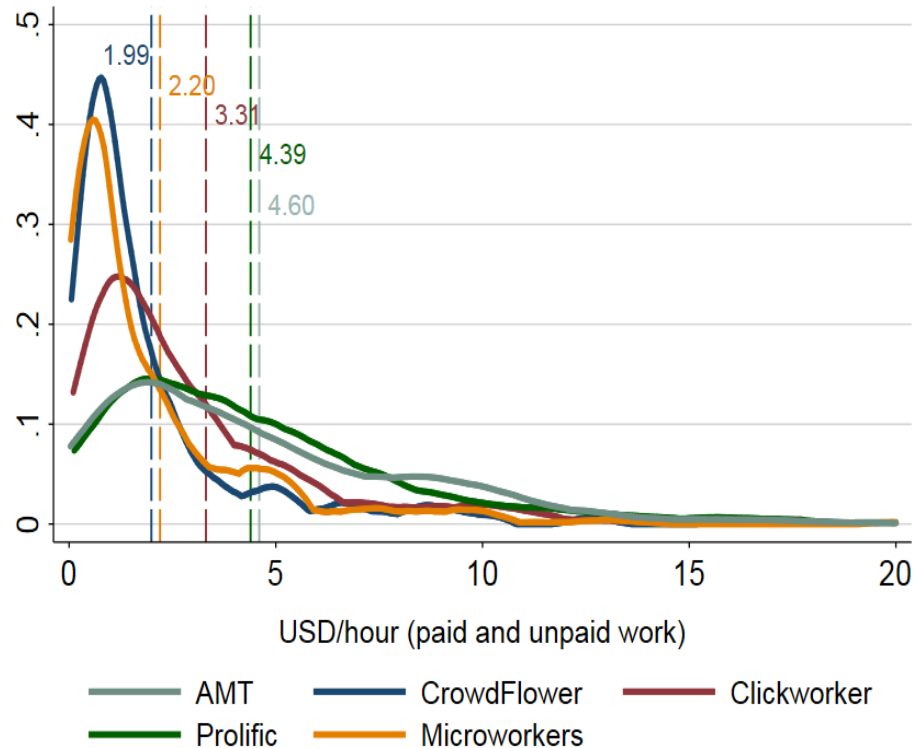
- About 14% of the workers work for 6 days a week, 29% of them work for 7 days a week
- Working during night time (10pm to 5am) - 40%
- Working during evening (6pm to 10pm) – 64%
- About 40% of the workers work for more than 2 hours in the night for more than 15 days

DISTRIBUTION OF HOURLY PAY

Hourly paid work (US\$)



Hourly paid and unpaid work (US\$)

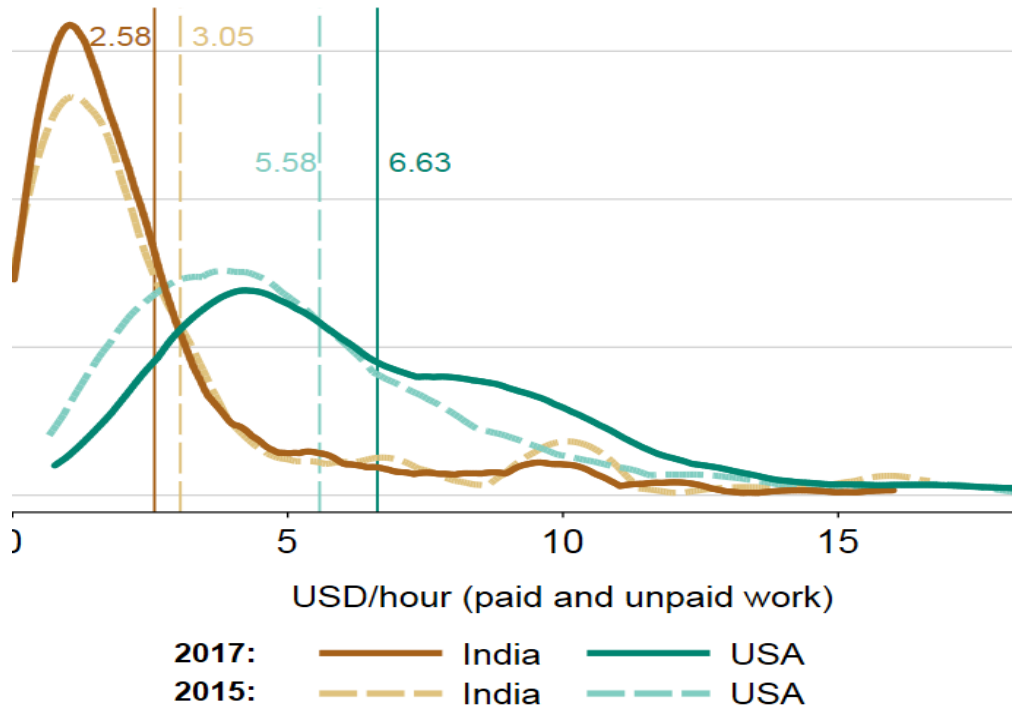


Note: Data trimmed at 1 and 99 per cent. Dashed vertical lines represent mean. Source: ILO Survey of crowd workers 2017.

DISTRIBUTION OF HOURLY PAY

Pay differences and skewed distribution across countries on the same platform

Amazon Mechanical Turk



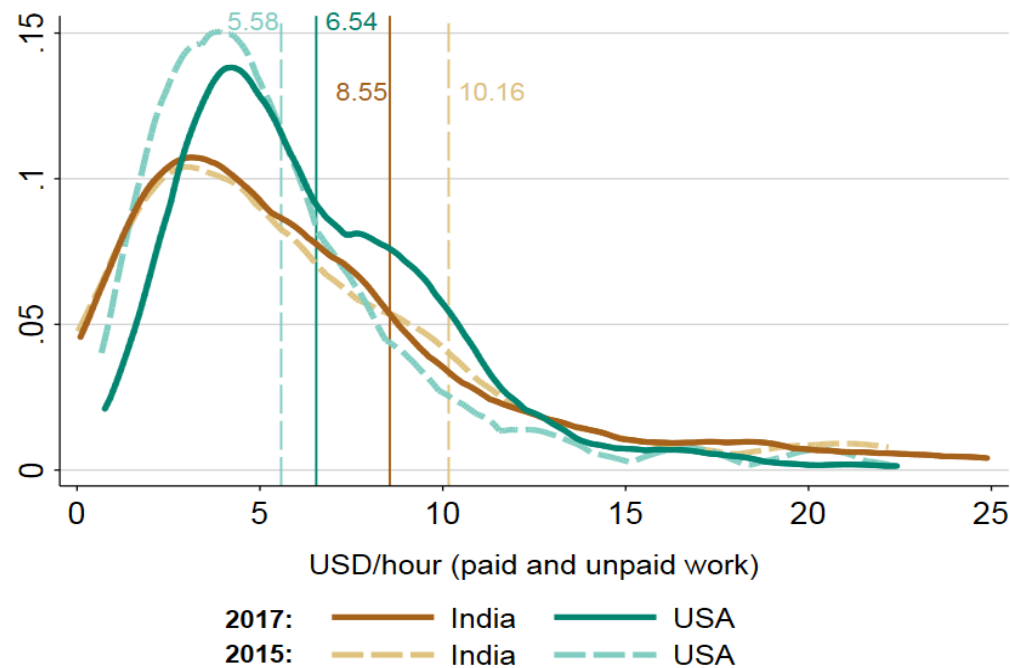
- American workers on average earn 2.5 times that of Indian workers
- Median wages, Indian worker on AMT earns \$1.67, while the American worker earns \$5.63 per hour
- American workers earned 4.9 times more than Indian workers (controlling for all factors)

"I would like to change and increase the pay scale we get here per task in India as it is very less compared to U.S workers and would also like to increase the number of tasks we get."
(Respondent on AMT, India)

DISTRIBUTION OF HOURLY PAY

Pay differences across countries on the same platform adjusted for PPP

Amazon Mechanical Turk



- Disparity in average wages is reversed (Indian workers earning 1.3 times as much as American workers)
- Median wages are almost equal
- American workers on AMT on average earned 38 per cent more than their Indian equivalent

WORKER'S PERCEPTION OF LOW WAGES

Insufficient Pay: *“I average about \$7 a day using 2 active sites (Clickworker and Prolific) and 2 passive sites (Earnhoney and earn.gg).”*

“The pay per hour (pay when all of the piece work is added up) is very low. If this was my only source of income, there would not be enough pay or work available to live on.”

Fairness: *“It is not really fair because the companies can pay more money for the work that is done, inadequate wages, I might try doing 8 hours one day to see how much I can make. On some sites you can maybe make \$2 per day.”*

*“We **need minimum wage**, that's the only thing that needs to change.”*

LACK OF REGULATION

Amazon Mechanical Turk (Self-regulation)

AMT in its Participation Agreement

“Workers perform Tasks for Requesters in their **personal capacity** as an **independent contractor** and not as an employee of a Requester or Amazon Mechanical Turk. As a **Worker**, you agree that: [...] (iv) you will not be **entitled to any of the benefits** that a **Requester** or Amazon Mechanical Turk may **make available to its employees**, such as **vacation pay, sick leave, and insurance programs, including group health insurance or retirement benefits**; and (v) you are not eligible to recover worker's compensation benefits in the event of injury. As a Requester, you will not engage a Worker in any way that may jeopardize that Worker's status as an independent contractor performing Tasks for you.”

Workers' Legal Rights (Self-employed/ Independent Contractors)

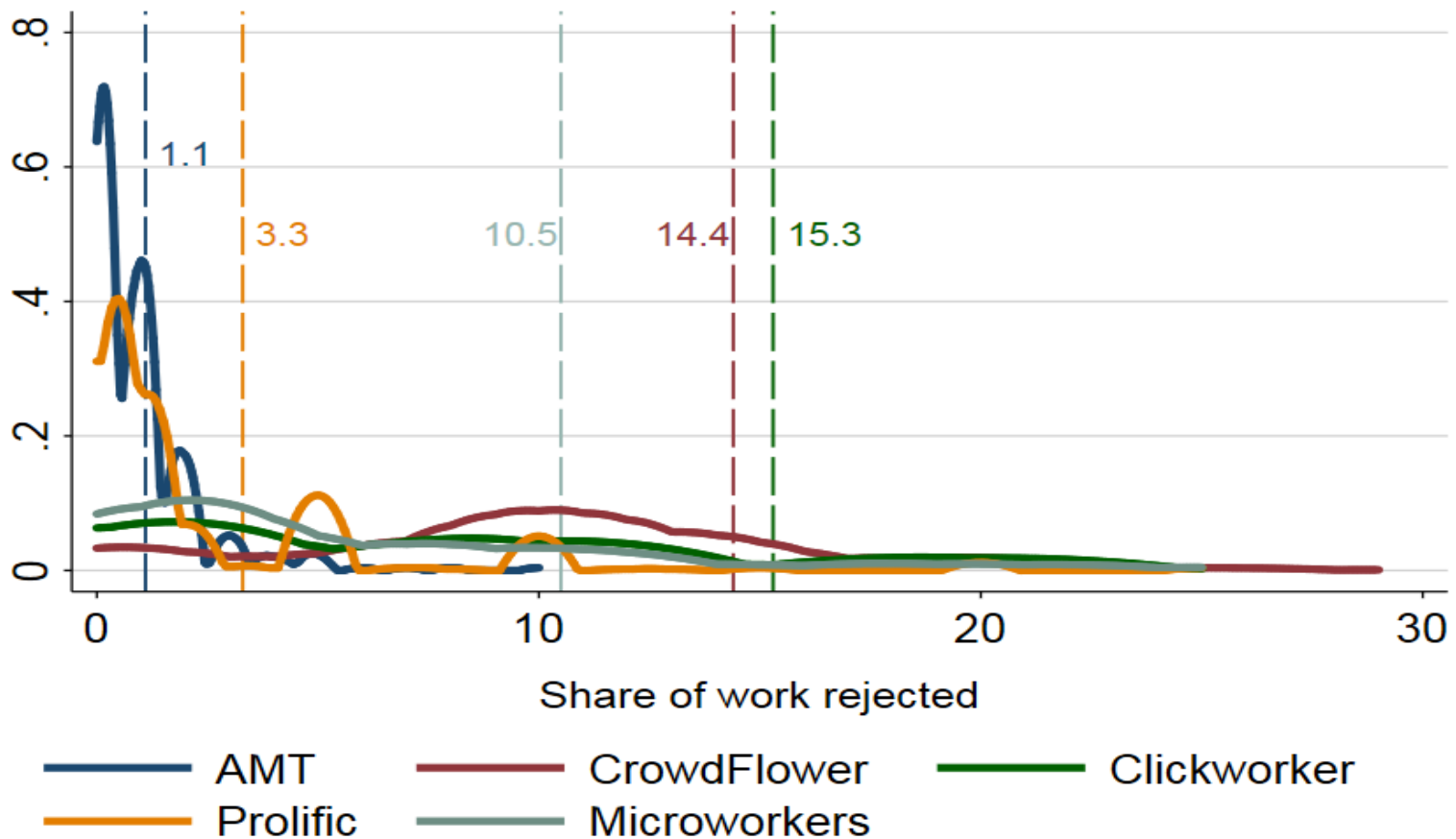
- Terms of service impose *constraints on workers' autonomy*
 - CrowdFlower Terms state that workers may not use bots, scripts, AI, or “otherwise attempt to obtain rewards from CrowdFlower without completing tasks as they are described.”
- If truly self-employed, then workers should be able to choose to complete a task in any fashion and using whatever tools they deem appropriate (including automation, scripts, and scraping).
- Self-employed workers should not be prohibited from subcontracting work, nor should workers be penalized for declining any tasks as they should have the full freedom to choose when to work and what tasks to work on without penalty.

Lack of Regulation leads to power imbalance between capital and labour

- Algorithmic management (boss) controls the labour
- Dismissals are very simply and easy, as entry and exit to the platform being determined by them without providing a reason
- Rejection Rates (Wage thefts) – 8.25%
 - 23% of workers have >10% rejection
 - 43% of workers (6 month experience) >5% rejection
- Non-responsiveness on the part of the Requester
- No redressal mechanism or opportunity to appeal

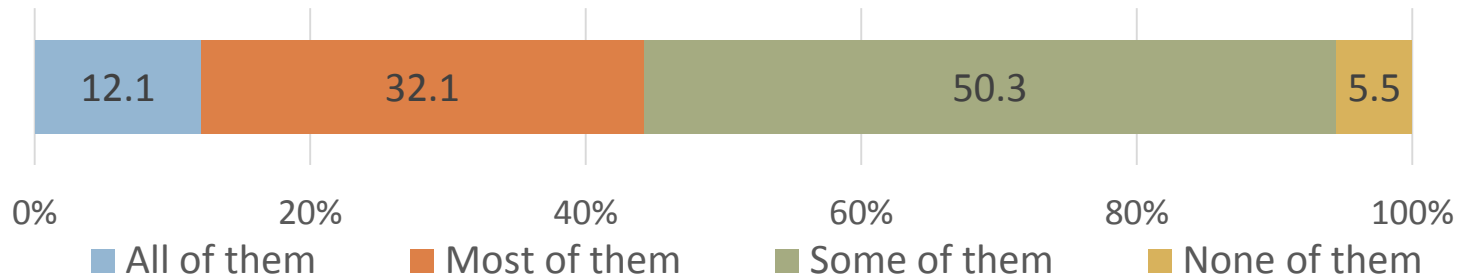
REJECTIONS

28% have <1% rejections; 27 % have 10% or more rejected



Note: Only workers > 6 months on platform. Rejection rates > 30% are not displayed (~5% of sample)

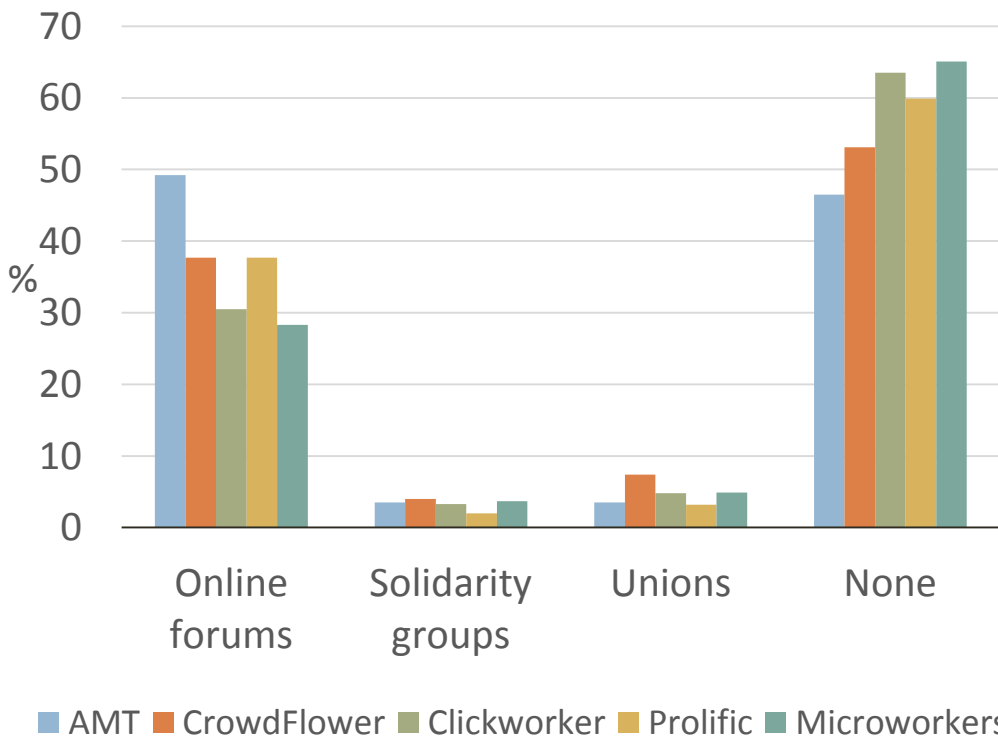
REJECTIONS — JUSTIFIABLE OR NOT?



- *"No justification given, when I know I did the task how it should have been done, there is no recourse for action. There are no payments made and the dispute doesn't go anywhere."*
- *"I would improve the evaluation of tasks related with sentiments. It is unfair your accuracy is affected because you "feels" in a particular way"*
- *"It is just that it is frustrating when you are doing the job right and you are being rated and judged by a computer which says the opposite."*
- *Entry and exit to the platform determined without providing a reason: "It's a precarious employment situation as you're entirely at the mercy of the crowd work platform. They could disable your account overnight and there's no protection against it."*

MECHANISMS TO VOICE WORKER'S CONCERNS

Which of the following provides you with some protection or a place to discuss your problems or consult for advice related to crowd work?



Online Forums: Mturkcrowd, mturkforum, turkernation, forum of different CW platforms

Reddit, facebook

“Since the only place I can get any info or talk about this kind of work are forums, protection is absolutely 0, as these are not legal bodies that have any leverage over the crowd work platforms and employers.”

MECHANISMS TO VOICE WORKER'S CONCERNS

“I think some of the efforts to organize Mechanical Turk workers in the past, such as Dynamo, Turkopticon, and the efforts of workers who get together on forums has had limited success. I’d like unionists and policy makers to expand on these types of projects and support a more widespread organization of workers. I would hope these policy makers would put workers at the forefront of these conversations and seek not only worker input but worker leadership in decision making.”

Source: <http://faircrowd.work/2017/04/30/worker-profile-rochelle/> Accessed 19 January 2018.

TASKS PERFORMED BY CROWD WORKERS

(% of worker performing a certain type of task, by education)

	High Sch. dropout	High Sch. diploma	Technical certificate	Bachelor degree	Master degree	Professional degree +	Total
Categorization	12.8	23.5	28.8	25.1	25.4	29.6	24.8
Content access	43.8	50.6	46.1	43.8	44.3	43.6	46.1
Content creation and editing	22.5	19.5	21.2	19.8	24.6	25.6	21.0
Content moderation	8.5	7.6	9.6	7.2	8.2	10.2	7.9
Artificial intelligence and machine learning	5.7	7.9	8.5	8.8	7.1	11.6	8.2
Data collection	29.6	33.8	38.7	36.4	37.0	25.6	35.4
Market research and review	25.3	12.7	18.7	15.2	12.7	16.7	14.7
Surveys and experiments	52.1	63.8	64.2	67.5	66.1	56.5	64.9
Transcription	23.9	29.5	29.7	34.4	35.9	32.0	32.4

CONTENT OF WORK: PROMOTION OF WEBSITES/ PRODUCTS



Website: Explore

Work done: **82/85**

You will earn **\$0.12**

Task takes less than **3 min** to finish

Job ID: 13e312a868a7

Employer: Member_264323

[add to Exclude List](#)

[add to Include List](#)

Tasks will be rated within **2** days

You can accept this job if you are from any of these countries:

 Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden

Search, Click, and Engage → Click 3x

? What is expected from Workers?

1. Find Website Link in the image attached. Visit that Website. Select Your Location and stay for one minute on landing home page
2. You will find 6 categories on home page (Services, Real Estate etc..) click on any one category (example: Services)
3. Stay on the landing page for one minute. There will be nine Block links (results) connected to that category. Click on any one link
4. You will be taken to another page. Stay on that page for one minute. You will find 'More Items You might be interested' Block in that Page. Click on any one Item of it
5. You will get another page. Stay on that page for Two minutes

! Required proof that task was finished?

1. URL of the final page you visited
Attached file: [COM.jpg](#)

Commercial Content Moderators: Behind the Screen

➤ Commercial content moderators are:

“unseen, unknown internet gatekeepers (*invisible labour*), responsible for ridding social media of violent, extreme and shocking material, on behalf of major firms who require their services” (Sarah Roberts, 2016)

➤ Content screening or content moderation include scenes of obscenity, hate speech, war zone footage, abuse of children and of animals, etc. as per the company’s policy

➤ Moderators are recent college graduates and stay-at-home mothers, and employees in outsourcing companies/ call centres in India, China or the Philippines or low paid contractors in the US

➤ Modern day piece work with psychological stress

Commercial Content Moderators: Behind the Screen

- Content uploaded every minute:
 - 50'000 photos uploaded to Instagram
 - 470'000 tweets sent via Twitter
 - 400 hours worth of video uploaded to YouTube (Dec. 2017)
- 98 per cent of the videos removed from the platform for violent extremism are flagged by algorithms according to YouTube's CEO (Perez, 2017).
- What is **concealed** is that once the videos are flagged by an algorithm, a human behind a screen has to verify this decision in order for the harmful content to be removed.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Need to embrace innovation and technology, **equally important** that there is a **structural balance** in the architecture of the platforms
- Platforms are self-regulated and there is a need for exchange between governments', unions and employers
 - Singapore constituted a tripartite committee
- 18 Criteria for Fairer Microwork Platforms (Employment status, Pay, collective bargaining, rejection clauses, etc.)-FairCrowdwork.org – IGMetall in 2015
- Dynamo Guidelines for academic requesters signed by 75 requesters
- Turkopticon, which is a third party website and browser plugin used by AMT workers to review clients (requesters) and tasks
- First ever Collective Agreement for the Platform economy signed in Denmark for Cleaning services (Hilfr)