Making Data Move: Action Research on Data Portability in the Gig Economy

Martijn Arets[*1]

[1]Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences – Netherlands

Abstract

Technology plays an increasingly important role in access to, and organization, allocation and evaluation of work. The place in the labour market where the impact of this technology is extremely visible is the gig economy, which is defined as "online platforms which mediate the independent contractors with platform clients for paid services" (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020).

In the gig economy, reputation systems play a central role in bridging the trust gap between workers and clients. To gain this reputation profile, platforms offer clients the opportunity to evaluate platform workers Ex Post via a commonly used five-star rating system. Sometimes combined with the possibility to leave a written review. A large number of studies show that platform workers with good ratings and reviews are trusted more (Boero, Bravo, Castellani, & Squazzoni, 2009; Charness, Du, & Yang, 2011; Duffy, Xie, & Lee, 2013) and results in more work (Diekmann, et al., 2014) and higher pay (Lehdonvirta et al., 2019). However, the value of a worker's reputation can create a platform lock-in, restricting worker mobility and innovation.

Data portability is often presented by policy makers as a solution to mitigate the lock-in effect (Chaudary, 2021; DGB, 2021; Van Dijk, 2022). This refers to a system that allows platform workers taking their ratings and reputation profile with them. While data portability is proposed as a solution, most discourse on the topic remains conceptual and based on assumptions rather than empirical evidence.

The foundation of my research was laid by analysing several (unsuccessful) cases where data portability has been applied in the platform economy by both third-party service providers, governments and platforms themselves (Arets, 2021). The lessons from these initiatives have been used to work, in collaboration with 6 gig economy platforms, towards a workable pilot: GigCV. GigCV is a data sharing agreement, supported by an API and a set of legal documents. It allows more than 100,000 workers in 6 countries (Europe and Africa) to download their data via the participating platforms in a digital (PDF) CV. Over 30,000 CVs have been downloaded.

By grounding theoretical discussions in empirical research, we aim to transform a normative debate into an evidence-based dialogue, offering valuable insights for policymakers, platform designers, and worker advocates. This research urges a shift from generic advocacy to nuanced, stakeholder-informed implementations, addressing not only technical feasibility but also social impact.

---

[*]Speaker