

Germany: Hidden Champion of Online Platform Work?

02 August 2021 by Dr. Fabian Stephany

The corona crisis has already demanded a lot from us. In particular, our work life has been turned upside down by the global pandemic. Offices and shops had to close, and work needed to be done from home whenever possible. This was an enormous challenge, especially for families with children.

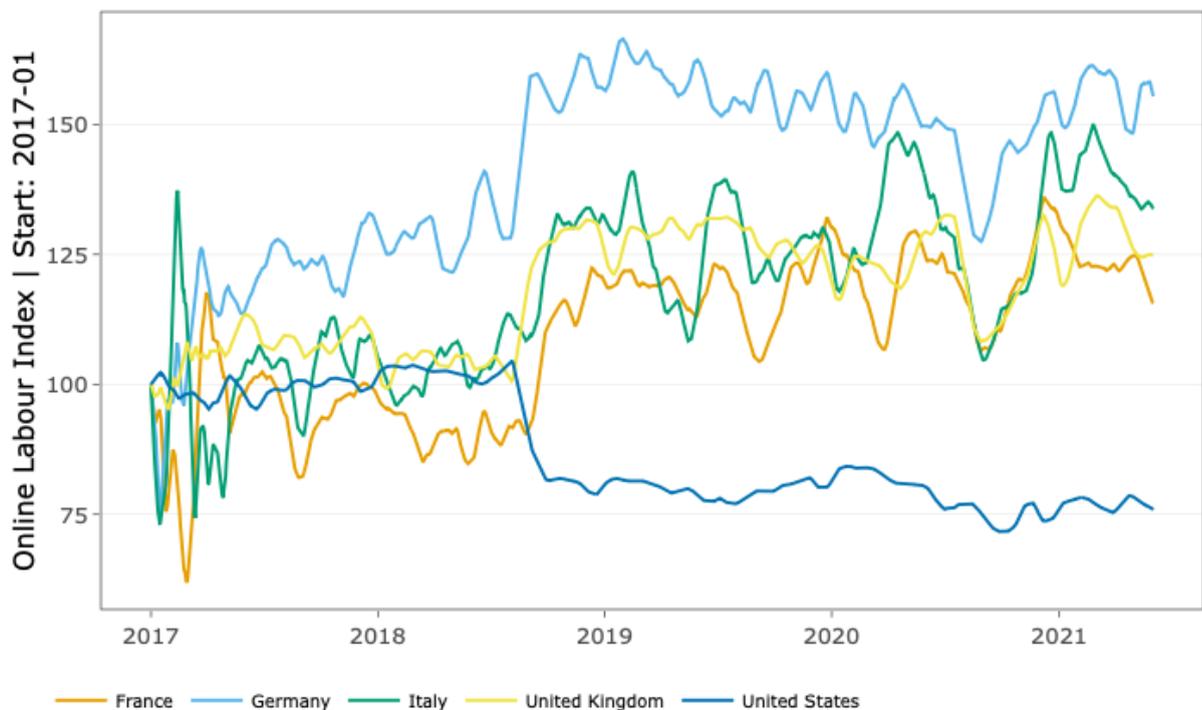
Online Gig-Work is booming

Many of us had to get used to digital work and video meetings. But for others, this type of work was “business as usual” even before Corona. We are talking about online workers, so-called crowdworkers or online freelancers, who receive jobs as software developers, graphic designers, accountants or translators via internet platforms. While the public attention on platform companies is often focused on tech firms like Uber or Amazon, marketplaces for online work – platforms like UpWork or Fiverr – are becoming increasingly relevant, too. [According to current estimates](#), around 160 million people worldwide are registered on online work platforms. In the US, in fact, [more than a third](#) (36%) of the workforce is employed in the gig economy. But even though more and more people, especially in economically uncertain times, find jobs – so-called gigs – via online platforms that operate worldwide, the entire economic scope of the online job market remains often hidden.

A new research portal now makes the global scale of the online gig economy more visible: The **Online Labour Observatory** – a collaboration between the [Oxford Internet Institute](#) (University of Oxford) and the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) – keeps scientists, journalists, and the general public up-to-date about various aspects of the online working world. Here, questions about the economic relevance of the new online markets are addressed and their regional expansion is examined.

Germany is catching up

This bird's eye view of the new online working world is extremely interesting, especially from a German perspective. While a large part of the demand for online services in the past came mostly from the US or the United Kingdom, some nations have started to catch up – in particular: Germany. The [Online Labour Index](#) allows a statistical analysis of remote platform work. This shows that the demand for online work from Germany has grown by up to 60 percent in the past five years (as shown in the figure below). No comparable industrial nation has experienced such rapid growth in the use of online services.



The Online Labor Index measures the development of global online labour markets since 2017. In hardly any other industrial nation has the demand for online work grown as strongly as in Germany.

But Germany is also catching up in terms of job vacancies. In the field of writing and translation work, German online freelancers are now [among the most popular in the world](#). Almost two percent of the global job offers in this area come from German platform workers alone. In Europe, only the UK is ahead of Germany with just under eight percent.

Platforms shape the future of work

It is worth keeping an eye on online platform work and its growing popularity, because working via the Internet will also be more and more important for conventional office jobs. With new digital forms of work, platforms will continue to penetrate our working world. Companies such as Spotify or Twitter are already organizing their work processes via in-house platforms. If you want to master the digital future of work, you have to understand how algorithms distribute labour or why reputation on platform markets is worth gold. There is still a lot to learn from the digital pioneers of the online labour market.