

A NEW HOPE

The role of the Platform Economy in facilitating migrants into the Swedish labour market



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Foreword



The move to the cloud, specifically digital and remote platforms, presents a whole new range of possibilities and opportunities for employers and workers - including migrants - alike.

From an employer perspective, the spark plug for innovation has always, and will always be people. Traditionally the war for talent hasn't been an equal playing field. Top talent concentrated in a few major cities. And top companies kept the world's brightest minds within their four walls. But the Human Cloud transcends borders and gives every company the ability to hire top marketers, developers, data scientists, writers, etc.

This is larger than HR. It's a fundamental reboot in how a company attracts and retains its most important asset: people. It's also far more than adapting to “remote”. Remote work is just one important feature of how the technology behind remote productivity and collaboration tools have made work digital and outcome-based.

Likewise, from a worker perspective - and this covers migrants as well as local born talent - the world of freelancing offers a path to increased opportunities. Just as companies are no longer constrained to full time headcount and headquarters, workers are free from the 9 to 5. But let's be crystal clear: being free from a 9 to 5 is far from being a ticket to blogging on a beach in Bali. Instead, it's a ticket to make work work for your unique situation. We've taken for granted the restrictions inherent in a physical office and static working hours. What if there isn't childcare? Or a family member becomes sick? Or there's a health condition unrelated to doing the actual work which conflicts with an office environment?

The traditional office would miss out on these individuals. On the contrary, the Human Cloud replaces these physical limitations with opportunity for anyone willing to work hard and deliver impact.

Matthew Coatney and Matthew Mottola
Authors of “The Human Cloud”

Introduction from the author



The popular misconception in the media, and in many political circles, is that the platform and gig economies are synonymous with slave labour: tiny salaries, bad conditions and workers who have no other options. There is also the impression the sector is characterised by “4D employment”: namely jobs which are dirty,

dangerous, dull and/or demeaning. The reality is more nuanced and often - as my research has revealed - quite the opposite.

As the Platform Economy merges more and more with the traditional economy, we are seeing a varied group of people actively choosing the Platform Economy path in search of more flexibility, choice and opportunity. This includes healthcare professionals, IT experts and lawyers as well as construction and food delivery workers. Furthermore, the gig economy is increasingly being used as a way for migrants to enter the labour market.

In the words of William Gibson, the future is already here and the labour market is going through significant changes which politicians, migrants and native Swedes need to adapt to and benefit from.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Hodgson'.

Glen Hodgson
CEO, Free Trade Europa

Spring 2021.

Executive Summary

This study begins by taking a political and historical look at the evolution of migration in Sweden as well as the development of the Platform Economy. It then goes on to highlight the need for low-skilled and high-skilled labour before underlining how the Platform Economy can support migrants' entry into the Swedish labour market. This covers the ability to make money and access the language, culture and society in Sweden.

This report also analyses and repudiates the myth that the Platform Economy is synonymous with slave labour, bad conditions, no social protection and tiny salaries.

We also provide a set of recommendations for action in Sweden. These cover the failings of previous government initiatives, recognition of education/skills and the need to match migrants to employment. The report also presents the case that collective agreements and minimum wage laws should not be mandated on the Platform Economy. It also calls for a Code of Conduct for the platform economy and promotes the benefits that this can bring to the sector, the economy and society as a whole.

Background

In this section we provide the historical and political context to migration to and from Sweden; the significance of the 2015 migration crisis; and the current need for migrants - comprising both low-skilled and high-skilled labour - in Sweden today.

The political and historical context

This context can be divided into separate elements: we begin by looking at the migration issue and then move on to analyse the Platform Economy from a European and then a Swedish perspective.

Migration

Despite its position at the north of Europe and tough climate, Sweden has always been a magnet for migrants. In the Middle Ages this was Germans from the Hanseatic League while French artists, philosophers and intellectuals moved to Sweden in the 1700s¹.

Today the issue of migration - one of the biggest and most sensitive in the political and popular arenas alike - surrounds the number of people wanting to move to Sweden but this was not always the case. The opposite was true for almost a century between the mid-1800s and 1930. Nearly 1.3 million Swedes left the country during this period. The reasons for emigrating ranged from poverty and religious persecution to lack of opportunities and the desire to move somewhere new. Popular destinations were the USA, Canada, South America and Australia.

As a result of World War II, where Sweden was neutral, the country went from being a source of emigration to a country of destination for migrants. Citizens fleeing the Baltic states and Sweden's occupied neighbours made up a significant share of this migration during the war years. This has been the general trend since then with economic migration being the main driver, while Sweden has always held a relatively open door policy towards refugees.

The 1980s saw an increase in asylum seekers fleeing oppression in the Soviet-occupied states of Eastern Europe. These numbers increased as the regimes crumbled at the end of the decade. Simultaneously, numbers of asylum seekers from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Eritrea were also increasing.

¹ <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Migration-to-Sweden/History.html>

The break up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s also saw many people flee war and ethnic-cleansing to make a new life in Sweden. This saw tens of thousands of migrants entering Sweden in a short space of time. Furthermore, once Sweden joined the Schengen² free movement area in 2001 this meant that citizens of other participating European states could travel and enter Sweden visa-free. Sweden's reputation as a popular destination country for asylum seekers and economic migrants has grown steadily over this time.

The Platform Economy

EU level context

At the European level, the European Commission issued a Communication entitled "A European agenda for the collaborative economy" in 2016 which is generally supportive of the phenomenon that we today call the Platform Economy but underlined that market access requirements, consumer protection, liability, trust in new services, labour law and taxation questions must be addressed. Similarly, the EU industrial strategy, adopted in March 2020, highlights that new forms of work are evolving which are adapted to the digital age.

At the same time, the European Commission and European Parliament - led by the Employment and Social Affairs Committee - are focused on ensuring that protection is offered to Platform Economy workers and that working conditions and salaries are fair. This ties in with their work on ensuring a minimum wage for the whole of the European Union by 2024. The European institutions want to ensure that rights, conditions and social protection are adequate, and not being eroded as technology increases. In this vein, the European Parliament voted to approve minimum rights for gig economy workers³ in April 2019. At the same time, European politicians and officials are aware that the world of work is changing and that new models which will drive employment, growth and opportunities are needed. Harnessing the economy of tomorrow and driving jobs and growth is a key factor for the European institutions.

² The Schengen Area is an area comprising 26 European countries that have officially abolished all passport and all other types of border control at their mutual borders. The area mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes, with a common visa policy.https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en

³

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190410IPR37562/meps-approve-boost-to-workers-rights-in-the-gig-economy>

Against this background the European Parliament is working on a report on the Gig economy while a social partner consultation on the working conditions of platform Workers has been launched. This will result in the European Commission adopting a proposal for legislation by the end of 2021.

Swedish context

To properly understand the Swedish context, in this section we look at the corporatist legacy; the impact of Covid-19; youth unemployment; the role of trade unions, left-wing and far right politicians; as well as the impact of digitalisation.

The corporatist legacy

In Sweden, the tripartite corporatist system characterised by negotiations between labour, business (arranged into specific groups) and the government looms large. While this has been a central pillar of the “Swedish model” since the 1930s, and collective bargaining has had a significant role in Sweden’s development in the last century, it is ill-suited to the world of today.

The Swedish labour market has been marked in recent times by increased flexibility, individualisation and informalisation in working life. Flexibility is being demanded by businesses and Swedish workers alike. This is characterised by physical working environment flexibility, organisation of time and moving away from a 9 to 5 model. It is also linked to the development beyond a traditional employer-employee relationship in order to improve efficiency, productivity and competitiveness.

Individualisation means a larger focus on entrepreneurship and individuals taking more responsibility for their own futures, with a shift in focus from the collective to the individual. This reality can account for the rise of the Platform Economy in Sweden, yet it is fiercely resisted by trade unions and left-wing political parties who are wedded to the past and willingly blind to the realities and limitations of the current labour market in Sweden.

The impact of COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has had a global impact at the levels of society, the economy and health. With regards to Sweden and the Platform Economy, however, this will also be a catalyst for growth.

Many people have been made redundant in Sweden and migrants are particularly suffering from a lack of employment due to the changes forced by COVID-19. At the

same time, job opportunities in the Platform Economy are rising due to the pandemic. This impacts low-skilled and high-skilled jobs alike. Since the beginning of the crisis in March 2020, the demand for drivers, food delivery personnel and health care workers as well as programmers and IT professionals has increased significantly. Increased digitalisation - and comfort among the Swedish population in using online services - has been a significant driver of this growth too.

Youth unemployment

Linked to the unemployment that has been created by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a trend of rising youth unemployment in Sweden which began long before the advent of the coronavirus. Figures from the Swedish national statistics office show that this stood at 20%⁴ in 2019 and these figures have increased dramatically in the past year. Many are deciding to study longer due to the lack of job opportunities.

Government policy and initiatives by the Swedish Public Employment Service have been relatively unsuccessful and youth unemployment continues to grow. When we look at the figures for areas in Sweden with high immigrant populations like Kista, Rinkeby and Tensta in Stockholm⁵ and Rosengård outside Malmö⁶, these rates increase dramatically. The Platform Economy therefore offers a window of opportunity where personal choice and entrepreneurship can thrive where state-led policies and centralised matching services have failed. The Platform Economy is creating jobs and opportunities for young people to enter the world of work, supplement their studies with some extra cash and gain valuable employment experience.

The role of trade unions, left-wing and far right politicians

In the Swedish context, left-wing⁷ and far-right⁸ politicians as well as the trade unions are against change in the Swedish labour market. Despite the current labour

⁴ SCB figures:

<https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/samhallets-ekonomi/ungdomsarbetsloshet-i-sverige/#:~:text=Under%202019%20var%20ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%2020,heltid%20och%20inte%20s%C3%B6ker%20jobb>

⁵ <https://www.mitti.se/nyheter/rinkeby-kista-har-flest-arbetslosa-i-coronakrisens-spar/lmtdv!8438097/>

⁶

[https://malmo.se/Fakta-och-statistik/Sysselsattning.html#:~:text=Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20i%20Malm%C3%B6,Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20minskar%20i%20Malm%C3%B6.&text=Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20i%20Malm%C3%B6%20%C3%A4r%20h%C3%B6gre,\(december%202019\)](https://malmo.se/Fakta-och-statistik/Sysselsattning.html#:~:text=Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20i%20Malm%C3%B6,Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20minskar%20i%20Malm%C3%B6.&text=Ungdomsarbetsl%C3%B6sheten%20i%20Malm%C3%B6%20%C3%A4r%20h%C3%B6gre,(december%202019))

⁷ By left-wing we mean the Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) and factions of the Socialdemokraterna (Social Democrats)

⁸ By far-right we mean Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats). Although not extreme by European and global standards they are a nationalist and populist political party.

market failures and rising unemployment as well as problems in accommodating immigrants into the Swedish workforce, trade unions and left-wing politicians are wedded to a model that served Sweden in the 20th century. Through collective bargaining agreements, high barriers to entry and excessive bureaucracy, job creation for immigrants (as well as native Swedes) is being stifled.

Because the Platform Economy disrupts the Swedish labour market, and the established order, left-wing and far-right politicians as well as trade unions are worried about losing influence, power and control. As such, they do not want this development and are trying to prevent its growth. The tight links between the ruling Social Democratic party and trade unions compound this fact. With this understood, trade union membership is falling in Sweden⁹ and the relevance and power of unions will be further eroded and undermined as the economy changes. We are witnessing a growth in technology-driven services and businesses while traditional industries decline.

Against this background, though, politicians are expressing concern about the conditions of gig workers, the salaries that they are paid, the payment of tax and the status of platform operators as “employers”.

The role of digitalisation

Digitalisation and globalisation have contributed to new ways of working and altered how the labour market is set up in Sweden. Despite Sweden having a digitally literate population¹⁰ and almost universal high-speed internet penetration across the whole country, the policy and regulatory framework is taking a longer time to catch up.

On the first point, digitalisation does not only affect how we buy, sell and share goods. It has also fundamentally changed our interactions with other people. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn have therefore impacted the personal and professional environments. They have also made businesses and workers more comfortable in using digital channels to find the talent/the jobs that they are looking for. Both groups can now reach a much larger audience through digital means for a fraction of the price. Both new and traditional

⁹ Trade union membership has dropped by over 10% in the last 15 years and union’s are failing to attract young people (16-24 year olds) as well as being unpopular in big cities (particularly in Stockholm).
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2015/sweden-fall-in-union-density#:~:text=Sweden%20has%20a%20tradition%20of,unionisation%20is%20declining%20most%20rapidly.>

<https://www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial-Relations/Countries/Sweden/Trade-Unions>

¹⁰ This is true for all ages, city and rural dwellers, and levels of education. Despite Prime Minister Stefan Löfven stating in January 2021 that he does not engage in e-commerce or digital platforms, studies show that most senior citizens in Sweden are comfortable with technology. Gothenburg University study:
<https://news.cision.com/se/handelshogskolan-vid-goteborgs-universitet/r/kraftig-okning-av-e-handel-hos-aldre-under-coronakrisen,c3137033>

employers and service providers can use platforms to create fresh demand and reach new audiences and potential employees. This therefore presents immigrants with more opportunities.

On the second point, digitalisation is having an impact on society and the labour market but legislation, rules and practices are struggling to keep up and can often create barriers and prevent the development of the Platform Economy sector. Old definitions and rules still dominate today on what constitutes a job; what is the definition of an “employer” and an “employee”. Furthermore, work environment laws are tailored to a period when people worked 9 to 5 for one employer in a factory or an office. These rules are focused on a reality that is decades old while the new work environment has evolved. Today the approach of the Swedish Public Employment Agency (Arbetsförmedlingen)¹¹ and the Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket)¹² are dated at best and hinder the creation of new jobs at worst.

2015 migration crisis

The Migration crisis of 2015 was a tipping point and an event which has set the framework for the current discussions around migration and migration policy. The fact that migration is a major and divisive issue in Swedish politics and society today stems from the events of 2015. The European migrant crisis was a period characterised by high numbers of people arriving in the European Union (EU) from across the Mediterranean Sea and overland through Southeast Europe. At the height of the crisis in 2015, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) observed that the top three nationalities among over one million refugees arriving from the Mediterranean Sea were Syrian (46.7%), Afghan (20.9%) and Iraqi (9.4%).

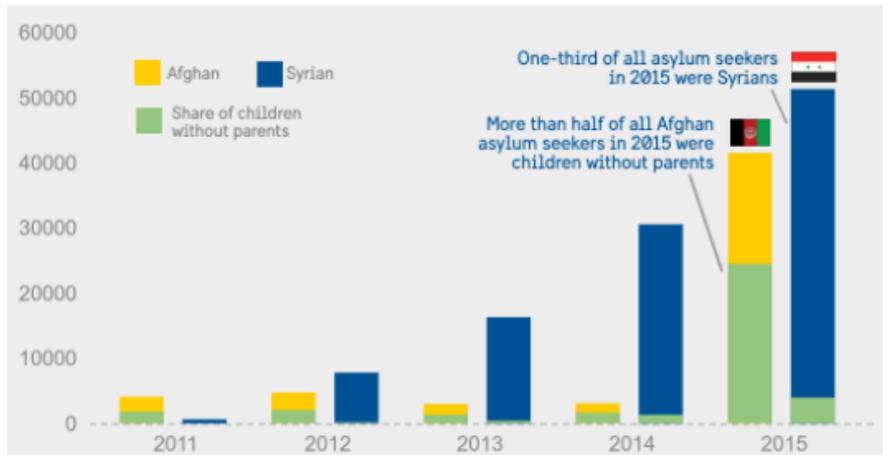
Sweden began the crisis with an open door policy but the strain on social services, local communities and budgets meant that public opinion turned against migrants. This resulted in the country introducing temporary border controls in November 2015. The aim was to reduce the number of asylum seekers. At the end of the year 162,877 persons had applied for asylum in Sweden, with many - over 50,000 - coming from war-torn Syria¹³. By 2016, and a number of steps taken by the government, Sweden went from having some of the most liberal and welcoming asylum laws in the world to purely meeting the European Union minimum.

Figure 1: Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers coming to Sweden 2011-2015

¹¹ Swedish Public Employment Service <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/>

¹² Swedish Work Environment Authority <https://www.av.se/en/>

¹³ Migrationsverket figures.



Source: SCB

The crisis has set the tone for the current approach to migration in Sweden where the image of migration is turning to a more negative one. The media is full of stories of migrants involved in gang violence, struggling to accept or follow Swedish culture and the local way of life. There is an increasing perception that migrants do not work, claim state benefits and strain the Swedish system and social infrastructure. The reality is far from this image, but it is one that is being spread across social media and in the popular press.

The need for low-skilled and high-skilled labour in Sweden

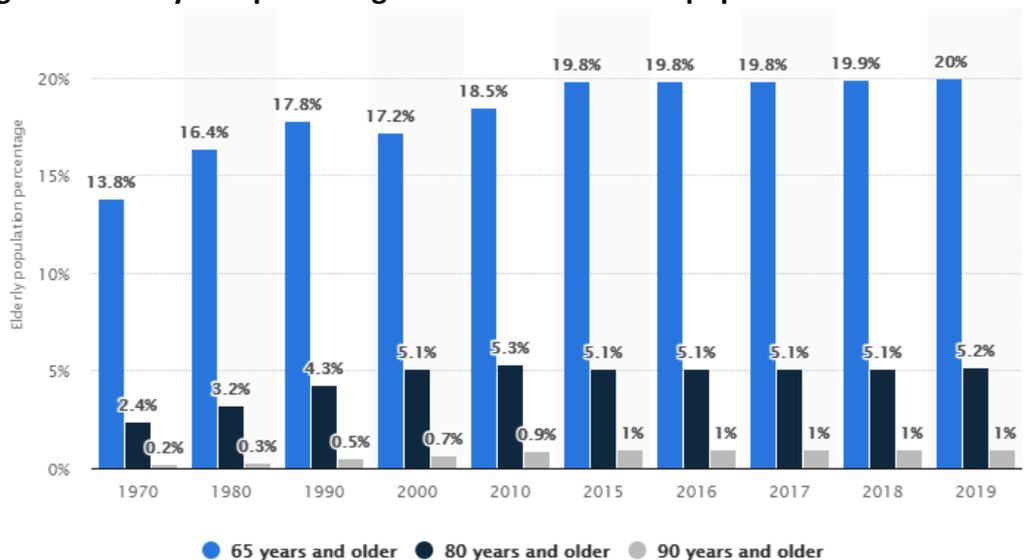
Despite the negative connotations attached to migration by the media and politicians, the reality is that migration has - and does - play a crucial role in sustaining the Swedish society and economy.

Furthermore, stories of migrants taking Swedish jobs are misplaced. Many low-skilled and high-skilled jobs in Sweden actually remain unfilled and migrants are needed to fill the gaps. Many Swedish employers across a range of sectors complain that they cannot find the talent and workers that they need. In Sweden today, the health care system, bus, rail and metro infrastructure and restaurant sectors - to name but a few - would not function without migrants. When other European nations, and countries globally, are closing borders and making it difficult for migrants, there is an opportunity for Sweden to attract the people with the right skills from a global talent pool. This would be a huge opportunity to contribute to Sweden's economic growth and innovation potential.

Rather than being a drain on Sweden, migration in fact adds to society financially¹⁴ and culturally. The increase in theatre productions, literature and art as well as new cuisine offered in restaurants, cafes and shops is testament to this. At the same time, statistics show that migration adds to the overall size of the economy as well as its diversity. The image painted of busloads of migrants coming to Sweden in order to claim benefits and live off state handouts is completely false.

In addition - and although the population has risen significantly in recent years - Sweden is still a relatively large country (450,295 km²) with a relatively small population (10.2 million)¹⁵. Moreover, the population is ageing. In 2019, 20 percent of the Swedish population were 65 years of age and older, up from 13.8% in 1970. What is more, 5.2 percent were 80 years and older and one percent were 90 years or older¹⁶.

Figure 2: Elderly as a percentage of the total Swedish population



Source: SCB

The figures show that there is a clear need for migration in order to maintain a sufficiently large working age population and also help the economy to grow. Linked to this, Swedish birth rates have fluctuated in recent decades, with the fertility rate currently at 1.9 children per woman. This change can be illustrated in the following graph¹⁷.

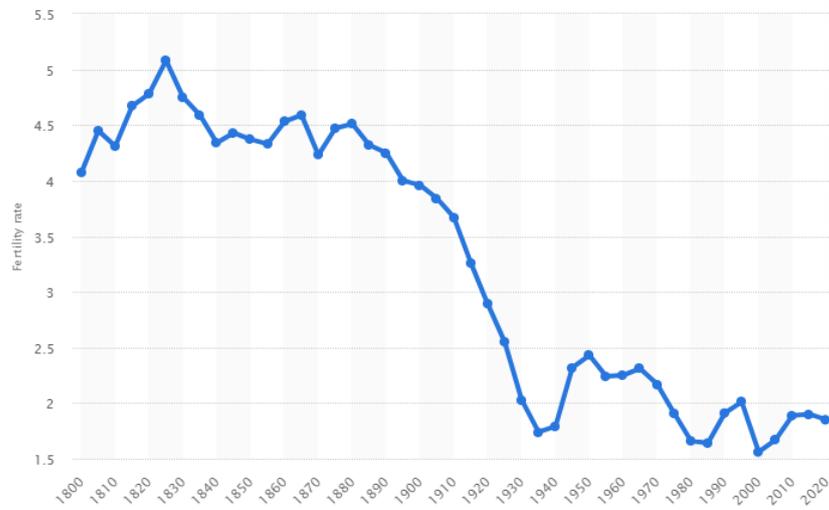
¹⁴ Figures show that since 1950, Sweden has taken in an average of SEK 65 billion per year from taxes paid by immigrants <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6202705>

¹⁵ Eurostat figures from 2019.

¹⁶ Statista figures. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/525637/sweden-elderly-share-of-the-total-population-by-age-group/>

¹⁷ Statista figures. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1033535/fertility-rate-sweden-1800-2020/>

Figure 3: Fertility rate in Sweden (1800-2020)



Source: SCB

There is a trend globally, as well as in Sweden, that immigrants spot market opportunities and possibilities that local-born populations miss. This has resulted in a number of start ups springing up around Sweden, founded by migrants. A significant amount of innovation is being led by non-native Swedes too. Migrants are good at finding new angles, coming up with new ideas and finding fresh approaches to existing problems. This means that growth and jobs are created by migrants, which in turn creates tax money which pays for schools, hospitals and social services.

How the Platform Economy and gig economy can help migrants

Given the large and growing number of immigrants in Sweden and the challenges associated with an ageing population, Sweden cannot afford to waste the valuable skills embodied in immigrants and their children. There is a vast amount of talent which is not being used and the Platform Economy represents an opportunity to harness this.

Context: the two-tier society of today

While Sweden likes to portray an image of openness, equality and opportunity for all, the reality can often be a stark contrast to this. Migrants find it very difficult to enter the Swedish labour force on account of prejudice as well as a myriad of rules and barriers.

Cultural differences play a significant role here since Swedes are happier to work with, and employ, people with similar backgrounds to themselves. Employers also know what they are signing up for when a native-born Swede who has followed the Swedish system takes a job. They understand their grades from school and university as well as the licenses, diplomas and training that they have received. When a migrant has qualifications from another country then it is very difficult for employers to fully understand or trust what the other person can bring to the organisation. There is also a heightened risk that this might not work out. As a result - and given the high costs associated with firing workers in Sweden - employers are less likely to hire migrants. The issue has been intensified by the current Coronavirus pandemic: unemployment is rising and qualified Swedish workers are looking for jobs. These are the candidates that Swedish employers will naturally turn to first.

This hypothesis is borne out by the evidence. People with non-Swedish names are less likely to be called to interviews. A study carried out by Lund University found that people with an Arabic sounding name were fifty times less likely to be called to an interview than those with a typical Swedish name¹⁸.

In addition, high barriers to labour market entry - fostered by strong trade unions and ruling centre-left governments - in Sweden mean a cosy, protected environment for those on the "inside" as part of a collective agreement and shielded by a vast social security net. However, the flip side of this arrangement means that there are

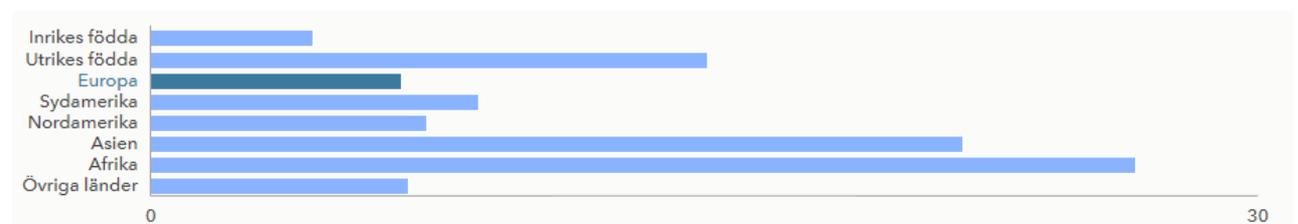
¹⁸ Rickard Karlsson, Lund University <https://www.lu.se/artikel/forutfattade-meningar-avgor-vem-som-far-jobbet>

significantly less opportunities and benefits for those on the “outside”. This situation is leading to a two-tier society and an increase in the gap between the “haves” on protected, long term contracts and those who do not have anything: excluded due to rules, regulations and not having attained all local licenses and permits.

The Platform Economy is therefore playing a role in creating new opportunities in a labour market which does not function perfectly and is in need of greater flexibility from an employer and an employee perspective.

Overall, there is a significant problem when it comes to integrating migrants into the Swedish labour market. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the difference between unemployment among Swedish-born compared with those born outside Sweden was stark and among the worst in Europe, as this graph shows¹⁹.

Figure 4: Unemployment rates, local and foreign born (percentage of 15-74 year olds in 2019)



Source: SCB

Migrants with lower levels of skills are particularly affected and suffer more vis-a-vis their native born counterparts. Granted, many immigrants come to Sweden from countries with failing education systems and some lack even basic qualifications and skills. Others have tertiary qualifications but often acquired in a very different context. This raises issues about the transferability of their credentials.

This aside, the statistics clearly show that a multitude of government programmes and initiatives have been launched which have had a limited impact on this reality. Furthermore, the Swedish Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) has spent vast amounts of money on schemes which have failed to deliver any results on helping migrants into the Swedish labour market²⁰. As a result, the platform and gig economy offer opportunities and possibilities where centralised planning and schemes from politicians and bureaucrats have failed.

¹⁹ <https://www.ekonomifakta.se/fakta/arbetsmarknad/integration/arbetsloshet-utrikes-fodda/>

²⁰ Swedish establishment scheme

<https://arbetsformedlingen.se/other-languages/english-engelska/stod-och-ersattning/att-delta-i-program/etableringsprogrammet>

A way to make money and limit the need for government benefits and support

The platform and gig economy allows migrants to enter the Swedish labour market very quickly and simply. This is positive for financial reasons and the cost of entry to the sector is low. If migrants sign up, undergo a few checks, and own often inexpensive equipment—such as a bicycle for delivery services or tools for contractor apps —migrants can hit the ground running and find a job relatively quickly. Such apps in Sweden include UberEats, Wolt, Foodora, Bolt, and Taskrunner.

By earning money migrants can pay bills, make purchases and not need to access financial benefits and subsidies from the government. Similarly, their self-esteem grows since they are working and contributing. Migrants want to work and the image that migrants want to come to Sweden and live off benefits is a fallacy, as stated previously.

Looking at current trends, there are increasing demands for food delivery, transportation and health care work, to name but a few, in the gig and Platform Economy. While exact figures are difficult to come by, a significant percentage of the gig economy is made up of migrant workers. Iraq, Syria, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan are common origin countries. This set up suits many migrants who want to be their own boss and choose when and where to work.

A route into the language, culture and society

With significant barriers in place to entering the traditional Swedish labour market, the Platform Economy offers an opportunity for migrants into the world of work and society. This is important since Sweden has one of the highest percentages of humanitarian migrants (around 20%) of any country in the OECD²¹.

While free language courses are offered to migrants in Sweden²², this positive policy can be backed up by immersion into a Swedish-speaking work environment. Moreover, the provision of this language service falls to Swedish municipalities and therefore the quality can vary from area to area. Often there is insufficient focus on the goal of labour market entry. Real-life situations and mixing with the local population in a work environment is shown to aid success in learning Swedish and

²¹ OECD figures <https://www.oecd.org/migration/swedish-migrant-integration-system.pdf>

²² Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) is the national free Swedish language course offered to most categories of immigrants. All persons (except Danes and Norwegians) who have emigrated to Sweden are entitled by law to Swedish language education.
<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.472714ce16b70ab982719b8/1570018131726/Kursplan%20sfi%20engelska%201.pdf>

feeling more comfortable in using it. Studies have also shown that language training is often more effective when combined with vocational training or work²³. The Platform Economy therefore offers these opportunities.

In the same vein, the Platform Economy allows migrants to meet new people, work with local born Swedes and learn more about the society that they are living in. Through interactions they also get to know more about Swedish culture, norms and practices. In this way, they can gain the knowledge and soft-skills which will also allow them to enter employment in the traditional economy too. The Platform Economy is therefore offering work and cultural experiences that can aid immigrants' overall education and understanding of Sweden through vital contact and interactions.

The fallacy of the gig economy as a route to dead-end jobs

Critics of the gig economy like to highlight that the jobs available are low-skilled, poorly paid and offer no possibilities of advancement. Once in this parallel world, the narrative goes, immigrants will become stuck and unable to leave. The truth is quite different.

The Platform Economy can enhance the supply of services, improve productivity, reduce costs, reduce inefficiencies in existing markets, help create entirely new markets, increase flexibility and labour market accessibility for immigrant workers. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and European Commission, for example, have spotted this potential and Sweden should not miss out. Countries and industries that are quickest to adopt new platform technologies are the ones which will achieve the fastest and most sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the impression that jobs in the Platform Economy are low-skilled and poorly paid is incorrect. Immigrants in finance, IT and architects, for example, are choosing this route and earning good money as well as gaining more flexibility and a better work-life balance. Almost a third of doctors in Sweden trained abroad, for example.

In addition, experience and skills gained in the Platform Economy are often a springboard to entering the regular economy. This element of the gig economy being a stepping stone to something new and/or different is often overlooked and certainly ignored by critics of the Platform Economy.

²³ OECD <https://www.oecd.org/migration/swedish-migrant-integration-system.pdf>

The opportunity cost of hindering the Platform Economy

This section gives another perspective on the myth that the Platform Economy is reducing wages and social security protection before moving on to look at the need for Platform Economy workers and freelancers to have access to financial services.

Rebutting the myths of slave labour, bad conditions, no social protection and tiny salaries

Politicians and commentators who are against the gig economy state that platforms are the harbingers of a dystopian nightmare. These sceptics paint pictures of workers with less freedom, less options and less money: humans becoming slaves to algorithms and monopoly-seeking companies based in a far off country, paying no tax.

The truth in Sweden is a long way from this dark image. Rather, the Platform Economy is helping to address a number of the problems and shortcomings faced in the Swedish economy.

Helping to address over-qualification

A large proportion of the highly-educated foreign-born in Sweden – over 30% – are overqualified for their jobs, compared with just over 10% of the native-born population.

If a migrant is employed in a job for which he/she is over-qualified, there is no public support available for training/education with the aim of finding a job appropriate to their formal education level. Research in Sweden has found that few of those who are in jobs for which they are over-qualified are able to move into more appropriate jobs. The Platform Economy therefore offers these migrants an extra channel of opportunity and possibility to fulfill their potential outside the strict confines of the traditional labour market.

Furthermore, the Platform Economy provides migrant talent with validation of formal and informal competences which is rare or completely lacking in the regular economy.

Slave contracts and low salaries

Workers in the Platform Economy have the possibility to work when they want and where they want, rather than be tied to a traditional 9 to 5, five days a week working cycle. This flexibility is what workers in the sector are looking for and this is why they actively make this choice. The evidence suggests that it is not right to presume that immigrants are being forced to accept contracts which they do not want and cannot leave. The reality is quite the opposite.

Furthermore, immigrants working in the platform economy represent a broad church. The sector includes delivery drivers, nurses and carers, gym instructors, social media influencers, lawyers and IT professionals. It is impossible to label Platform Economy workers as having one specific salary. The span is as broad as it is in the regular economy.

The valuable role of self employment companies

Companies like Billfactory, Cool Company, Gigger, Upgig and Workamo provide a service on the Swedish market and allow individuals to send invoices without needing their own company. This is very well received by consumers in the self-employment sector and subscription rates are growing.

Self-employment companies take care of all the social contributions, tax payments, insurance and pension contributions, for a fee, so that individuals who do not want to be involved with these activities do not have to. Immigrants therefore benefit from social protection that they would not otherwise enjoy.

Their services are increasingly being sought by companies too, who want a third-party expert to deal with all the administration involved in utilising freelancers and project workers.

Facilitating “side hussles”

Given that the traditional world of work is becoming more unstable, as the COVID-19 crisis has further demonstrated, many are feeling that having several sources of income spreads the risk. It also allows for more diversity: people can follow more than one passion or interest. This can take the form of a side job, starting a new project or buying/selling goods and services over a digital platform. This brings in

extra money - as well as creating a source of new interest - and is a trend that we are seeing increase among all age groups.

Many migrants like to try several new activities in their chosen country of destination, and the gig economy provides them with a number of options and possibilities.

Combating the black economy

There are a number of jobs in Sweden which are paid with black money²⁴ and are part of the Swedish shadow economy. Migrants in particular are susceptible to being dragged into this black economy and therefore opening themselves up to work where they do not have any social provisions, sick pay or pension cover. It also means that potential tax money does not enter state coffers to pay for schools and hospitals. Rather than perpetuating this reality, the Platform Economy can actually address these issues.

In the same way that “ROT avdrag” and “RUT avdrag”²⁵ were brought in to make building and cleaning jobs legal and bring these jobs out of the shadow economy, the Platform Economy can do the same thing. The details of employers and workers are known, payments are made by electronic means so there is an audit trail and migrant workers can also come under the umbrella of the Swedish social security system.

One size does not fit all

The Platform Economy is a broad term which covers a whole host of professions and activities, as described earlier in this study. There are immigrant workers with limited language skills carrying out low-skilled jobs in Sweden, while there are a significant number of people wanting to supplement their income as well as have the flexibility that a traditional 9 to 5 job would not offer.

At the same time, there are also a high number of digital nomads and affluent users of the Platform Economy. This segment often passes under the radar, yet is a rising phenomenon. Moreover, the sectors covered in the Platform Economy are

²⁴ This refers to income earned surreptitiously or illegally, usually in cash, and not reported to the government so as to avoid paying taxes on it.

²⁵ In Sweden, a person who hires someone to do ROT (Repairs, Conversion, Extension) or RUT (Cleaning, Maintenance and Laundry) work may get a tax reduction – a ROT or RUT deduction for the labour cost.

extremely diverse, from IT and technology through marketing to construction, health care, cleaning and delivery jobs. There is no single area of work that is more popular than another and the range and diversity of tasks is expanding all the time.

From our research and first-hand discussions, 70% of immigrants we spoke to working in the Platform Economy said that did not want to earn an income the traditional way via a 9 to 5 job and one permanent employer. In addition, most migrants reported higher happiness and satisfaction levels with their work than people in traditional full-time employment, despite the fact that they were more likely to work more than 45 or even 60 hours a week, and to earn slightly lower salaries. Furthermore, we did not find any evidence of migrant-exploitation or people living in misery because of the Gig Economy.

Financial institutions need to accept the gig economy reality and provide workers with a route to credit and loans

Another barrier to Gig workers taking more than just a marginal role in the economy is that the banking sector and finance infrastructure is geared towards strict, traditional structures in Sweden. The financial sector is currently dominated by four large banks who have a stranglehold over the Swedish market.

Moreover, bank customers are either classified as “private” or “corporate” customers. The issuing of loans to individuals is based on them having a fixed term employment contract and a regular, stable source of income. This is something that Gig workers cannot provide and therefore securing a loan to buy a car or an apartment is extremely difficult. As such, many Gig workers see themselves as being marginalised from society. This means that earning money from the Platform Economy remains a necessary sideline rather than a realistic full-time option for many and migrants are hit hardest in this regard.

This reality however creates an opportunity for new players in the financial services sector - from banks to insurance companies and credit institutions - to offer new services and cater for this growing audience in Sweden. New challenger banks like Nordax, Lunar and Revolut are trying to disrupt the current cartel but are not fully aligned with the needs of gig workers. Rather they are replicating the approach of Nordea, SEB, Swedbank and Handelsbanken but with increased digitalisation. There is a glimmer of hope with the upcoming launch of Gee Bank in the Nordics and insurance companies like Itello, Cachet and omocom. These organisations are tailoring their services to the needs of all actors in the Platform Economy.

Recommendations for action in Sweden

Changes in technology, the goals of workers and companies, as well as the labour market as a whole means that the Platform Economy is growing and evolving. Within this changing paradigm, the Platform Economy is here to stay and offers a route for migrants to find jobs and enter society in a meaningful way. As such, it should be embraced. Swedish politicians, authorities and stakeholders should harness a trend and natural shift in the labour market, rather than trying to block it. They can do so by welcoming the Platform Economy, do more to match migrant workers with jobs and develop a new framework updated to include the new work reality and the Platform Economy.

Welcome the Platform Economy

The Platform Economy covers a number of operators who are constantly improving their range of services and functionalities - as well as reducing their fees - in order to meet the demands of customers. Regulators, politicians and decision-makers need to catch up while trade unions are trying to hold back the tide in vain.

With corporations and the public sector accelerating digitalisation and creating infrastructure to support remote work and new digital products, skills in demand range from IT specialists and project managers skilled at artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and big data to engineers and business and strategy consultants. At the same time, health care workers, delivery drivers and musicians are increasingly part of the Platform Economy and migrants make up a significant part of this mix.

The inevitable growth and sophistication of the Platform Economy means that it will adapt and evolve, but it is here to stay. It is therefore important for all stakeholders to get together in order to shape the future and establish the correct regulatory and policy framework.

Government migrant initiatives have not worked

A number of schemes and initiatives have been launched in Sweden ranging from paying 80% of migrants' wage costs to apprenticeship schemes and tax relief. These have generally been met with little enthusiasm. The take-up of these initiatives targeted at increasing employer demand for migrant skills has been low. Employers will not enter the scheme - particularly SMEs - since they know if things do not work

out they will be stuck with the wrong worker and it will cost hundreds of thousands of Swedish Crowns to get rid of them. Both elements would be disastrous for a small company.

The Platform Economy - and the private sector - should be involved and used to provide opportunities. Using the Platform Economy would give employers a way to “test” migrants and see if their knowledge, skills and abilities are a good fit with their business and their specific needs. At the same time, migrants will have an opportunity and an incentive to showcase their talents.

With unemployment rising as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the Platform Economy will offer huge opportunities for all stakeholders. The establishment of public private partnership between the Swedish employment service and potential employees via a Platform should be explored. A workable solution would see the Swedish employment service standing for half the wage of the worker, while the employer would pay the other half. The administrative burden should be reduced too since a significant part of the process should be automated since platform companies have the technology and the competence here already. As stated, this arrangement would allow immigrants to gain experience and show their abilities to potential employers. If things did not work out, then the employer would not be liable and could end the relationship. This flexibility would benefit all parties and replace the current unsuccessful establishment scheme.

Education and training

Education and training pathways for adult migrants is an area where current approaches and solutions fall short. Adult learning is currently confined to either short Arbetsförmedlingen-administered courses or long-term adult education programmes. For many this arrangement is too inflexible and does not meet their personal needs. As a result, flexible training pathways - including on the job training - could be developed offering migrants the chance to pursue, alongside work, their longer-term aspirations and gain skills relevant to the Swedish labour market. There is currently no funding available beyond the introduction benefit for formal adult education. This situation could be looked at and the Platform Economy would be an ideal place for migrants to pick up, learn and utilise new skills.

Recognition of education

Across the OECD²⁶, education acquired outside the OECD is strongly discounted in the host-country labour market. Indeed, the analysis of wages and the reality of over-qualification suggests that, in most countries (Sweden included), the country in which the highest qualification was obtained matters more than the country of birth.

Given the large number of Swedish immigrants who obtained their education and work experience abroad, there is a strong need for efficient and credible recognition of their qualifications and validation of informal competences. While this needs to be addressed, the Platform Economy has a significant role to play in allowing migrants the opportunity to prove themselves and display in practical terms that their knowledge and skills are valuable.

Matching migrants to employment

As highlighted in several places already in this study, Sweden is currently not very good at finding jobs for migrants. The Swedish Employment Service runs the website Platsbanken²⁷ but despite costing a huge amount of money is widely recognised by all stakeholders as not being fit for purpose. Information and opportunities are often out of date and the system is difficult to use while the matching capabilities of the system are extremely poor. The Swedish labour market instead relies on networks and informal contacts which limits the ability of immigrants to gain access to all job offers in the marketplace.

Platform Economy companies, on the other hand, have systems which electronically match opportunities with talent in a much more detailed and developed way. This is something that should be supported and the Swedish Employment Service should learn from the example set by the private sector and the matching services that are available. Rather than trying to set up a “me too” system it would make more sense for Swedish agencies to partner with private companies in order to offer the matching services that would allow them to provide value to immigrants and improve their tarnished image in the eyes of citizens, businesses and politicians alike.

²⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) <http://www.oecd.org/>

²⁷ Platsbanken is the job database of the Swedish Employment Service which is a portal which aims to match workers with jobs, but has been heavily criticised for its quality and effectiveness. <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/platsbanken/>

The need for a new framework

Given current developments in the labour market - as well as the needs of immigrants - the old Swedish paradigm is out of date. Policy, rules and laws were written in the nineteen seventies and need to catch up. This has been recognised by the Swedish employment ministry who are looking at developing and rolling out changes ²⁸. Three areas which need looking at are: 1) the definition of employer/employee; 2) work environment; 3) taxation.

Definition of employer/employee

Since there is currently a great deal of confusion about whether Platform Economy companies are employers and if Gig workers have a direct employee relationship with them, this situation should be clarified in Sweden.

If a platform company require exclusivity, provides uniforms and demands a commitment from workers then they are employers and the people who work for them employees. This is also tied to the degree of control that the platform exerts over the employee and the overall execution of the work.

With this understood, however, platforms offering “matching” services should not be classed as employers. The platforms are facilitating an economic transaction but should not be weighed down by irrelevant rights and responsibilities just to shoe-horn their activities into an outdated Swedish labour market concept. Many workers want to be independent contractors and earn more money by adopting this model.

Similarly self-employment companies (egenanställningsföretag) carry out an important role in allowing workers to invoice for their activities without having their own company. They carry out an administrative service (ensuring that all taxes are paid and providing the individual with cover within the Swedish system) for a fee. As such, they take on the responsibility for the individual as an employee from a tax and benefits perspective. However, they should not be held responsible from a work environment perspective (see next section).

²⁸ Minister Eva Nordmark looking at new rules to cover work environment:
<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/nya-regler-om-arbetsmiljo-vantar-app-foretag>

Work environment

Linked to the point above, platform and self-employment companies should not be held responsible for the work environment. This relationship is between the freelancer and the company requesting the service. The self-employment company is just a third-party who often only has a relationship with their customer shortly before an invoice is sent. This is a situation that needs to be understood by the Swedish Work Environment Agency (Arbetsmiljöverket) and the rules updated accordingly²⁹.

A common barrier to the operation of the Platform Economy currently comes in the shape of the rules, regulations and decisions from Arbetsmiljöverket. While this authority has the worthy objectives of ensuring a good quality and safe work environment, their line of thought is very much focused on traditional and heavy industry. The authority finds it difficult to adapt its role to that of the new labour market reality and a lack of knowledge of the workings of the Platform Economy results in barriers to the sector's development.

Taxation

While there should be no special treatment for the Platform Economy from a tax perspective, it should be possible to have a clear situation for individuals carrying out assignments outside Sweden but using a Swedish self-employment company. Similarly the ROT-RUT system³⁰ helps to make traditionally black jobs white, yet the system is often cumbersome and the annual ROT-RUT allowance can take time to check³¹. It would be simpler, quicker and more efficient to establish an electronic system and an Application Programming Interface (API) in order to automate and streamline the whole process.

No collective agreements

While the Swedish model is build on a corporatist system made up of strong unions and collective bargaining agreements, the changing world of work means that new

²⁹ A new work environment policy is being planned to cover the Swedish labour market up to 2025.

³⁰ In Sweden, a person who hires someone to do ROT (Repairs, Conversion, Extension) or RUT (Cleaning, Maintenance and Laundry) work may get a tax reduction – a ROT or RUT deduction for the labour cost.

³¹ It is up to the service provider to apply for the client's preliminary ROT and RUT tax deduction and request a payout from the Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket) for that amount. The client pays the remaining amount to the service provider by way of the bill that is invoiced to him or her.

approaches are needed. There is a place for collective agreements in Swedish society but it cannot be the only approach. Trying to shoe-horn the Platform Economy into an outdated framework will hinder the growth of the sector and innovation in Sweden as well as the development of the economy as a whole. As such, collective agreements should not be mandated.

Ensuring fair salaries and good conditions for workers - including migrants - can be achieved through competition within the sector, codes of conduct, transparency on salaries and cooperation between honest actors in the sector through stakeholder initiatives like Plattformsföretagen³².

No minimum wage laws

Just as collective agreements will not be a panacea for the salaries and working conditions of migrants, neither will the introduction of a minimum wage at the Swedish and European levels. This would be artificial, ineffective and would drive up costs for platform companies and prevent more jobs for migrants being created. As a result, this would not help migrants or the labour force as a whole.

Policing the industry

Ensuring that the Platform Economy is a success, avoids bad conditions for workers and maintains a quality service for consumers is best achieved via a Platform Economy Code of Conduct. Legitimate actors in the Platform Economy therefore need to come together and develop this Code of Conduct in cooperation with other stakeholders like the tax authority, employment agency and politicians in local and national government. By tailoring this to the Swedish market, the Code of Conduct can act as a trust mark for actors who meet the required standards. In turn, this should drive business and grow market share for these honest actors.

³² <https://www.plattformsforetagen.org/>

Conclusion

There is a need for high-skilled and low-skilled labour in Sweden, as well as a more dynamic “on demand” workforce. Both companies who want to hire the best talent for specific projects and workers who are demanding change and more flexibility and variety are pushing in the same direction. Moreover, digitalisation is making this possible.

Far from being a terrible race to the bottom characterised by slave labour, bad conditions, no social protection and tiny salaries, the Platform Economy represents a way for migrants to make money, enter society and reduce their need for government benefits. The Platform Economy also addresses some of the limitations imposed by the current labour market.

Welcoming the Platform Economy is a potential route to success for migrants, companies and the Swedish economy as a whole, while matching migrants to jobs needs to be done better. The Platform Economy can assist in this regard. At the same time, the definition of “employer” and “employee” needs to be updated as do the laws and policy surrounding the Swedish work environment. Similarly, collective agreements and minimum wage laws should not be forced on the Platform Economy and a Code of Conduct for legitimate operators is the right approach.

Those who adapt will be best placed to handle this new reality and harness the benefits of the Platform Economy. This rising phenomenon will also provide advantages to migrants who are looking for a way into the Swedish labour market.

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We do hope that this study contributes to the debate at the Swedish and European levels since we are embarking on a new period of dialogue and cooperation to shape the future Platform Economy and create a policy and legal framework that is fit for today's world of work.

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