



**COVID-19 IMPACT ON PLATFORM  
ECONOMY:  
A PRELIMINARY OUTLOOK**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

PLUS project investigates the multiple effects of four digital platforms (Airbnb, Deliveroo, Helping and Uber) on work, social protections and everyday life in seven European cities (Barcelona, Berlin, Bologna, Lisbon, London, Paris and Tallinn). While focused on specific case-studies, the project aims to investigate ongoing transformations in a larger perspective, considering platform economy as a testing ground for a more general redefinition of industrial relations, productive processes and social wellness challenges.

With different degrees of diffusion and seriousness, Covid-19 pandemic spread all around Europe (and beyond) with a direct impact on the research field we are pursuing within the PLUS project. Generally, as researchers registered a general and remarkable growth for services digitalisation, where platforms represent a leading business model. Nevertheless, such push cannot be generalized to all kind of services, but we may report a split. On one hand, platforms like Airbnb, Uber or Helping experienced a sudden breakdown due to pandemic related restrictions in place in most European countries, on the other hand platforms like Deliveroo suddenly experienced an unexpected relevance, so much so that *riders* have become “essential workers” both in mainstream media and political narrative. Furthermore, PLUS targets urban spaces as fundamental dimensions for platforms development and policy regulation. Urban life has been affected by lockdown measures with empty streets and few workers guaranteeing social reproduction services. Thus, *labour digitalisation* and *urban approach* represent PLUS features that appear very useful to frame Covid-19 impact. With the aim to sketch a picture on the overall situation of the seven cities, PLUS consortium decided to write this report discussing measures adopted at local level to face the emergency and exploring potential outlooks for next months.

With this report, PLUS consortium wants to contribute to a large debate on the role of platform economy and on how to deal with labour transformations after Covid-19 outbreak. Considering the ongoing very unpredictable situation, the observations contained in the report should be considered as explorative to further investigations. In any case, we would suggest to avoid framing Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 as outstanding event clearly dividing what occurred before from what will occur shortly after. Rather, one of the purposes of this report is to test if some of the hypothesis we produced during the first year and half of the project are still persuasive even after virus appearance. At first sight it seems that Covid-19 pandemic highlights and, if anything, emphasizes very well some platforms characteristics we had already identified: the lack of social protections for platform workers, the becoming essential infrastructures of platforms, the digitalization of services, the changing nature of urban economies.

The report tries to answer to a grid of several common questions for every city, in order to depict a comparable analysis of the overall situation. Firstly, we will frame the “*platform economy urban background*” in order to present the general conditions in every city before Covid-19 breakthrough. This section will take advantage from the investigation that all PLUS partners already did in the previous months. Secondly, we will describe the “*Covid-19 impact*” in each country and the measures implemented by institutions. Due to the courses of infections, government and sometimes local measures have been heterogenous and

calibrated case by case, so that it is crucial to be aware of the variety of local conditions. Thirdly, we will focus on *“platforms reaction”*. As stated above, platforms suffered from the pandemic impact in very different manners. Furthermore, same platform reacted differently according to the city. Thus, this section aims to depict an in-depth snapshot of each PLUS city. Eventually, fourth section is centred on *“looking forward”* to potential scenarios opened up by the pandemic and containment measures. It will implement hypotheses on how platform economy will change in each city during the next months and years, which new structural features concerning *“platforms worlds”* Covid-19 impact disclosed, which public debates are following the pandemic crisis, and beyond. Finally, we will sketch some conclusions both to underline differences and commonalities between case studies, and to hypothesize some general tendencies.