




Motives and expectations of platform workers in Poland

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Abstract

Motivation: Nowadays in economic literature the increasing popularity of the concept of platform work and gig economy can be observed. Nevertheless, this growth is not accompanied by a sufficient amount of empirical research into this new phenomenon, especially referring to the Polish labour market. Therefore, such studies on this issue are fundamental.

Aim: The first aim of the article was to identify the main motives why some people in Poland started rendering services as platform workers. The second one was to assess to what extent the expectations of platform workers in Poland have been met.

Results: Based on the analysis of the current world literature and using the method of the diagnostic survey, it was verified which circumstances and features of platform work were crucial to workers in Poland and what reasons led to expectations not being met. It turned out, that income, flexibility and independence are crucial motives. A concern for majority of respondents was low and unstable incomes. Many workers were also disappointed with the apparent flexibility. In general, the expectations of platform workers in Poland seem to be met to a significant extent, which may contribute to the growing acceptance of this form of work and its popularity.

Keywords: *motives for work; work labour platforms; gig economy*

JEL: *J28; J49; R23*

1. Introduction

Facing social changes and technological progress, the labour market is evolving, forcing changes in the attitudes and behavior of its various actors. These changes are fostering a new understanding of work indicating a longer trend of increasing flexibility, contingent work, and outsourcing to independent contractors (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020). In the context of these processes, an interesting phenomenon has been increasingly shaping the labour market — the exchange of services enabled and coordinated through digital platforms. Registered service providers are hired for single discrete tasks by clients matched via said platforms. Such tools permit hiring for a range of online and offline jobs, from food delivery and cleaning to IT programming. There are some controversies regarding the risks of acting as a platform worker, given the fact that neither the platform owners nor their clients take on the role and responsibilities of an employer. Many researchers both in Poland and all over the world (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 279) have exposed these negative consequences to workers in this segment of the labour market, especially in the absence of proper regulation. The emergence of this new phenomenon and its related controversies have inspired the following questions: Why do people start acting as platform workers? Is it because they want to do it or they have to? Could rendering such services be somehow satisfying for the workers or are they destined for disappointment? In order to answer these questions, a survey was conducted among platform workers in Poland. Finding some clues may allow for an assessment of the potential growth prospects of this segment (could digital platforms intermediating in the provision of labour services potentially be a permanent and resilient phenomenon in the Polish market or is it just a kind of fad?).

Based on the questions posed, two aims were set in the article. The first one was to identify the main motives why some people in Poland started rendering services as platform workers, the latter was to assess to what extent the expectations of platform workers in Poland have been met. Two hypotheses have also been formulated: 1) The complexity of the platform work phenomenon requires a broad theoretical view on the issues of the motives for providing services mediated by such platforms, 2) Despite the criticisms of digital labour platforms, their multidimensionality also affords service providers varied advantages. The focus is, as mentioned, on the Polish labour market.

The following parts are distinguished in the article: the first part of this paper focuses on the motives for work and then explains the essence of platform work. The empirical part of the paper describes the methodology, then refers to the findings from the research results obtained. The data presented here provide a unique opportunity for exploring Polish platform workers with regards to their experiences. The article ends with conclusions.

The leading research methods used in the article include a critical analysis of the scientific achievements of Polish and world literature and the method of a diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique.

2. Literature review

2.1. Motives for work

Deciphering what motivates people is a centuries-old puzzle. Some of history's most influential thinkers regarding human behavior — among them Aristotle, Adam Smith, Sigmund Freud, and Abraham Maslow — have struggled to understand its nuances and have taught people a great deal about why individuals do the things they do (Nohria et al., 2008). Such luminaries inspired researchers in fields like biology, psychology, neuroscience, management and obviously economics. Regardless of the field, a state of confusion with regard to terminology exists, especially in reference to motivation and motive. The definition hereby adopted here that motivation is the process of arousing action, sustaining the activity in progress, and regulating the pattern of activity (Young, 1961, p. 24), while motive is a kind of factor which operates in determining the direction of an individual's behaviour towards an end or goal (Drever, 1956, p. 174). One may say that the term “motivation” refers to the driving force behind human actions, an internal process, and a motive is the cause, the reason for action.

Beyond the motives determining human actions, one can look forward to, anticipate or have a belief about what might happen related to the activity undertaken. The fulfillment of these expectations makes one willing to continue the given activity, while disappointment discourages an individual from taking action. Cessation is not always possible, but, nevertheless, the individual may be discouraged or reluctant in the future.

In the article, the focus is on the motives for taking up work, narrowed down to the reasons for taking up work as a platform worker. In general, motives for working are determinants of individual decisions about the supply of labour services. These motives are the subject of interest of various approaches in economics, including many thoughts inspired by the neoclassical theory perspective of labour supply. The theory considers income and leisure as the source of individual utility. Work is seen as a bad necessary to create income for consumption (Rätzel, 2009, pp. 1–28, Vercherand, 2014, pp. 53–74). This “standard” analysis of work-leisure choices implies a positive substitution effect and a negative income effect on the response to hours of work supplied to variations in the wage rate. An increase in the real wage rate makes leisure time more expensive and tends to elicit an increase in hours of work. Although the neoclassical model, due to its simplicity and surprising timeliness in terms of ideas, has become a solid foundation for understanding the formation of labour supply, it is not able to explain the complicated system of benefits, dependencies and institutional conditions that determine behavior on the labor market. For this reason, economists began to ponder the mechanism of choice made by the employee, among other factors/variables. One of the precursors to multidimensional analysis of employment decisions were Mincer and Becker

who created the foundational modeling framework for virtually all modern household level analyses of consumption and time use, in what was sometimes called the ‘New Home Economics’ (Chiappori & Lewbel, 2015, pp. 410–442). Mincer (1962, pp. 63–105) reflected on a married woman’s time trade off between housework and paid work, claiming that a predicted change in hours of leisure may imply different changes in hours of work in the market depending on the effects of the causal factors on hours of work at home. If one is to derive the market supply function in a residual fashion, not only the demand for hours of leisure but also the demand for hours of work at home must be taken into account. The latter is a demand for a productive service derived from the demand by the family for home goods and services. Becker (1965, pp. 493–517) emphasizes that there are many different types of time use, just as there are many types of consumption goods, and that different types of time use and consumption goods combine in different ways to yield commodities. He then draws a variety of important implications from the observation that various types of time and consumption combine into a single household objective function with a single overall budget constraint (Chiappori & Lewbel, 2015, pp. 410–442). The theory was developed and enriched with other factors determining choices in the labor market i.a. by Gronau (1977, pp. 1099–1123).

In turn, according to Akerlof and Yellen (1990, pp. 255–283) and their fair wage-effort hypothesis, workers proportionately withdraw effort as their actual wage falls short of their fair wage. Such behavior causes unemployment and is also consistent with observed cross-section wage differentials and unemployment patterns. Speaking of wage differentials, Rosen (1986, pp. 641–692) noticed that these divergences are required to equalize the total monetary (vacations, pensions, and other fringe benefits) and non-monetary advantages or disadvantages (risks to life and health, exposure to pollution, crowding, special work-time scheduling and related requirements) among work activities and among workers themselves. Unlike the neoclassical model, the loss of utility is caused not only by the loss of free time to the employer, but also by some features of the given occupation. Thus, payment is supposed to compensate for some measurable job attributes. Assuming that work (like a product) can be described by many attributes for which employees (similar to consumers) have specific preferences (Lancaster, 1979, pp. 939–956), there is space for multidimensional optimization. The use of such a view for the analysis of employment preferences requires a priori, clearly-defined dimensions of the work for which the employee has well-defined preferences, which is very difficult since there is no consensus on the catalogue of attributes describing employment (Gajderowicz, 2016, pp. 7–22).

In addition to various job attributes, it cannot be forgotten that every choice made by an individual, including actors on the labour market, is determined by a multifaceted labyrinth of norms, rules, requirements, conditions and market transactions, both formal and informal, which remain embedded in the institutional sphere. In such an environment, a person tries to achieve the optimal

level of benefits from the transactions in which they participate. The types of institutions may evolve, but institutional determinism remains (Kirdina & Sandstrom, 2010). Thus, individual decisions about the supply of labor services can be determined, *inter alia*, by the value of work in a given culture and society, attitude to leisure time and family, and perception of social roles by gender.

As can be seen, the theories refer to various job attributes, as well as conditions that have an impact on workers decisions. None of them embrace a complete or universal set of determinants. Another problem is that these theories refer to “typical” employees, not taking into account all the motives of a potential platform worker. To some extent, a management (Ashford et al., 2007) or organizational psychology (Spreitzer et. al, 2017, pp. 473–499) approach to nonstandard work may be helpful here. However, they often study the relationship between individuals and organizations and consider such work as jobs that occur outside of a traditional employment context with the expectation of a long-term contract, which is unrelated to platform work. The scope of alternative work arrangements also varies by country and therefore needs to be analysed from such a perspective.

The problems described above and the novelty of the phenomenon of platform work make it necessary to analyse literature on platform work in order to formulate a range of reasons for taking up such work, which to a large extent result from the advantages it provides. By analogy, reasons for dissatisfaction stem mainly from its disadvantages. However, where humans are involved, subjectivism plays a role and what is generally considered an advantage may be perceived as a disadvantage by another.

2.2. The main characteristics of platform work

Digital (internet) labour platforms are classed under the term “the gig economy”. It means that work is enabled by a technological platform that connects workers directly with customers (consumers or businesses) for a specific “gig”, defined as a short-term job coordinated very often through a mobile app (Farrell & Greig, 2016, pp. 1–44). They should be distinguished from the general concept of internet platforms, which may in themselves provide a range of services such as communication (Skype, Zoom) or electronic payment (PayPal) or can be used to coordinate services on assets (e.g. Airbnb). Some researchers define the DLP and gig economy more broadly than the approach taken here, including also an additional range of economic activities such as unpaid tasks or goods rented out in the “sharing economy” (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020, pp. 525–545).

There are at least four groups of actors involved in the operating of digital labour platforms: architects (builders) and/or owners of platforms, clients (customers, buyers), service providers (platform workers, independent contractors) and managers (business organizers). The group which is the object of interest here encompasses a large, highly varied group of workers. Depend-

ing on the type of services provided one may distinguish individuals rendering services online (architects, technologists, consultants, but also workers involved in micro-tasking who undertake human intelligence tasks that computers cannot perform and that are part of the process of machine learning) or offline (workers whose services are engaged via platforms but performed physically, as in ride-hail, food delivery, home repair, and care work) (Vallas & Schor, 2020, pp. 273–294). Respectively there can be mentioned several types of platforms (ILO, 2021), namely:

- web-based, including freelance platforms (Upwork, Freelancer), contest-based platforms (99designs, Designhill, Hatchwise), competitive programming platforms (HackerRank, Codeforces, Kaggle), and microtask platforms (Amazon Mechanical Turk, Appen);
- location-based (Uber, Deliveroo, Glovo, Task Rabbit, Lieferando, care.com, Hilfr, Rappi).

Aside from two main types mentioned above, some hybrid platforms, combining remote and offline work, have also emerged (Jumia).

Despite the diversity of platforms, they share many common characteristics:

- tasks are often broken down into separate subtasks and work is remunerated exclusively for single task or subtask;
- service providers work only if their service is purchased quickly, with no guarantee of continued engagement;
- payment corresponds to an individual effect and usually does not depend on the time involved;
- the platform is responsible for commissioning a task, evaluating its performance, transferring it to the end user, and paying out remuneration (Ostoj, 2021, pp. 451–462);
- monitoring, tracking and evaluating workers take place through digital tools and algorithms;
- commission fees and subscription plans are integral to the platform revenue model (ILO, 2021);
- digital platform companies do not employ their workforce (Zipperer et al., 2022); except for business organizers.

The workforce may benefit from this form of cooperation, enjoying the advantage of entrepreneurship with more flexibility than workers classified as traditional employees. The desire for flexibility may result from a preference concerning lifestyle or a necessity related to caring for other family members or any other reasons.

As for the income motive, apart from treating it the “typical” way, it is worth recalling that platform workers often struggle to find other sufficient well-paid work to earn a decent income, creating a looming threat of poverty. Some individuals are also marginalized in the “traditional” labour markets (such as the disabled, refugees and migrant workers). The platforms offer them more income-generating opportunities or they provide an avenue for workers to complement their earnings from low-paying or seasonal jobs. Although



platforms are also sometimes perceived as “accelerants of precarity” (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 279), they often remain the only way workers can earn income and make a living.

For tasks performed online, an important advantage of platform work is the lack of a need to travel or commute. Apart from the elimination of travel costs, contact with people is also limited, which can be important for people struggling with various fears, disabilities and suffering from discrimination.

A number of disadvantages can also be identified. Levels of remuneration very often appear insufficient to serve as a primary source of income (de Stefano & Aloisi, 2018, p. 24) since it is relatively lower than if platform workers did the job without the mediation of platforms. There are various reasons for low prices of services rendered in a such business model, including related commissions (transaction fee to the benefit of the platform) and the status of workers who are not protected by labour laws (including minimum wage). Social security contributions mostly fall to the responsibility of the platforms workers alone. They are also responsible for equipping their own workplace, which applies both to the space where the service is rendered and other elements of equipment such as appliances (a computer) or means of transport (a car, a bike etc.). A reason for lower prices of services also stems from the competition observed in various dimensions. It takes place between workers registered on a given platform where practically everywhere supply exceeds demand but also between various platforms, which are growing in numbers. The downward pressure on the prices of the services is greater for online tasks. In such an environment both clients and workers from different countries are able to participate. This dispersion puts workers from developing countries, who in particular tend to accept extremely low wages, into global competition.

The flexibility mentioned as an advantage for some workers might prove to be deceptive. They are usually paid for a task performed, but also spend invisible and unbillable hours waiting for an order, searching for projects/tasks or upgrading their skills (Berg et al., 2018, p. 67). This can not only be frustrating in itself, but also affects work-life balance.

Comparing the achievements of the literature on the motives for taking up work (section 2.1.) and on platform work, a knowledge gap can be identified. The former does not refer to all the features of the new type of work. For this reason, it is impossible to embed research in any model. Hence, the characteristics of platform work described in the literature on the subject turned out to be helpful in conducting the research. The disadvantages of platform work are more exposed in various works than its advantages. However, the phenomenon is relatively new and not well recognised, especially on the Polish market. It seems that the balance of pros and cons may vary depending on national conditions.

3. Methods

The article uses the results of research not previously conducted on Polish residents concerning the provision of services coordinated via digital platforms and their opinions on this work. The study was designed by Izabela Ostoj and the author of this article. The study used the method of a diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique via the internet and was commissioned to a specialized company with access to a research panel that allows for the selection of a representative sample of the population of adult Poles (in terms of sex, age and place of residence). The study was conducted on July 2–6, 2021.

The initial sample was set at the level of 3,165 respondents — adult Poles aged 18–70 in correspondence with the general population; including 51% women and 49% men. According to the age criterion: 13% were people aged 18–24; 23% were respondents aged 25–34; 38% were people aged 35–54; 26% were aged 55–70. As to their place of residence: 38% were residents of large cities — those containing over 50 thousand residents; 25% were city dwellers up to 50,000 inhabitants, and 38% were inhabitants of the countryside. The structure of the sample in terms of the level of education was as follows: 41% of people with higher education, 24% with post-secondary or secondary vocational education, 21% with general secondary education, 11% with vocational education and 3% with lower secondary, primary or incomplete primary education.

In the first stage of the study, those respondents who had heard about the possibility of earning income from the provision of coordinated services via digital platforms were selected. The essence of this type of activity and the method of earning income has been described in the introduction to the study. Sixty-six percent (2099 respondents) answered in the affirmative to this question.

The questions referred to in the article were directed only to selected respondents who within the last year generated income from work (online or offline services) coordinated via digital platforms. These were 523 people, i.e. 24% of the group of respondents who had heard about this possibility and 16.5% of the entire initial sample corresponding to the general population. Due to the fact that the research was carried out with the use of an internet survey, i.e. among active internet users, this figure may be regarded as slightly overestimated in relation to adult Poles in general.

In this group, online services were provided by 74% of respondents, including 46% — small crowdwork jobs and 28% projects; 30% declared the provision of offline services, and 20% as a car driver; 13% declared the provision of online and offline services; 9% chose the answer “other”. The answers do not add up to 100% due to the possibility of indicating a wider variety of activities.

This article presents some of the results obtained on the basis of the analysis of responses to the three questions concerning the motives for undertaking platform work, as well as an assessment of the degree of satisfaction with performing this activity and reasons for possible dissatisfaction. Responses to two questions were expressed on a five-point Likert scale: from 1 — *I agree completely*, to 5 — *I*



disagree completely. The question referring to the level of satisfaction was a closed one with only one answer to choose from.

4. Results

First, the respondents were to declare the main reasons for taking up such a job. The question was: *To what extent do you agree that the following motives were important for you when starting to provide services via digital platforms?* The results are presented in Table 1. Three working areas were distinguished, but the respondents were not aware of them as the sentences were mixed up in the question and the split was made after the survey was conducted.

Analyzing the data, it can be stated that income motive (understood as complementary or better pay) is the most important reason since, summing up the number of responses: *I totally agree* and *I agree* the number is 60% and more. The fewest number of respondents (5%) indicated *I totally disagree* here. More than 50% of platform workers considered flexibility, autonomy, care responsibilities management and no need to commute to be very important or important motives. Greater efficiency and a preference to work alone were not so crucial for the respondents. While respectively 31% and 26% agree that they were important, there is nevertheless a significant proportion of undecided and disagreeing answers. The responses are the most evenly distributed when it comes to addressing the motive “Not being able to find traditional work” therefore it cannot be considered a significant factor. Generally, life circumstances rather did not trigger the decision about starting to render services in such a model. Also anonymity and avoiding discrimination are less valid than the motives discussed above (23% of respondents do not agree that they were important).

Summing up, platform workers in Poland are motivated mainly by income (higher or complementary) and job flexibility, autonomy and managing care responsibilities. The least important are: medical condition, anonymity and avoiding discrimination. The lower importance of the health factor may result from the fact that platform work in Poland is mainly performed by young people who are usually in relatively good shape and simply want to earn some additional money to meet their needs. Discrimination (especially on the grounds of nationality) could be ranked higher in countries with a more ethnically complex society and a higher share of immigrants in the group of respondents.

It was also checked whether the expectations of platform workers were met. They were asked: *How do you assess the level of fulfillment of the expectations you had regarding work in the form of providing services via the platform before starting it?* 10% of respondents declared fulfillment of expectations or even exceeding them. Most respondents (36%) assessed that their expectations were mostly met while 31% declared half fulfillment. People whose expectations were met to a small extent accounted for 10% and 3% felt that none of their expectations were met. Compared to other studies cited in the article (e.g. ILO, 2021), platform workers in Poland seem to be more satisfied.

In the next step, platform workers whose expectations were to some extent not met had the opportunity to respond with the reasons for this disappointment. The survey took into account the disadvantages of the gig economy from the perspective of contractors who could comment on the extent to which their specific situation applies to them. Once again, there were some fields distinguished provisionally after the research. They do not coincide with the areas separated above (in the case of motives), since it was considered as far-fetched—for example, a life situation could have forced someone to take up such a job, but still such a person may have positive expectations related to, for instance, flexibility. The results are presented in Table 2. The reason for the greatest disappointment turned out to be too low and unstable income. More than 40% of respondents choose *I totally agree* and *I agree* in both cases. This is commonly emphasized, not only in Poland. Other aspects related to income such as high financial uncertainty, long working hours and lack of perks were less disappointing. Quite a few (respectively: 23%, 28%, 30%) disagreed that this was a significant reason for disappointment. One can also observe a relatively large number of neutral (*hard to say*) answers — (even up to 41%). Similar patterns can be seen in the next area — resources required. Costs that are often highlighted in the literature as a significant disadvantage of platform work are also not perceived as key reasons for disappointment. Although around 20% agreed that they are important, undecided and denying statements prevail here. Perhaps platform workers already had some devices and access to broadband Internet before they took up this activity, therefore it was not so problematic for them. The level of economic development of the country may be of importance here. In the field of work-life balance, “flexibility myth” and “invisible hours” turned out to be the most disappointing (*I agree* is respectively 22% and 24% of responses). However, once again middling answers and *I disagree* were prevalent. More than 50% do not feel disappointed with the scale of the negative impact on their family life. On the topic of self-management compared to other answers, “stress related to a potential negative and unfair opinion provided by the customer” turned out to be the main reason why expectations were not met (24%: *I agree*), however, 25% of platform workers declared that *disagreement* here. A similar structure of responses occurs with regard to the lack of team or superior support. The least disappointing was *social isolation*. Also in the case of this area, neutral answers predominate. Generally, a significant proportion of such responses in this part of the study may, among other things, result from the fact that the provision of services in this way is a relatively new phenomenon and is difficult to take a position on.

Although the research results show a picture of platform workers in Poland, they also have their limitations. Apart from the typical imperfections of direct research, the limitation of the study is the potential impact of the pandemic on some responses (which the respondents themselves may not have been aware of).

5. Conclusion

The hiring of workers for single discrete tasks, where the buyer and service provider are matched via a digital platform has emerged as a form of business model and is increasingly reshaping not only the global market but is also noticeable on the Polish labour market. Considering the characteristics of the phenomenon and its complexity, there can be various reasons why people start rendering services in such a model. This is proved by not only a review of various theoretical concepts (which focus only on selected motives) but also on the basis of the conducted study. Among the platform workers in Poland, income, flexibility and independence (related to working time combined with other duties, especially family ones) are crucial motives. An important motive when working online is also a lack of obligation to travel. While online work saves time and money spent on tickets or fuel, this theme seemed to gain particular importance during the pandemic. The decision to become a platform worker was therefore aimed at improving one's living situation — in the sense that an increase in income and benefits resulting from independent work and time management were expected. A concern for many respondents was low and unstable incomes. Many workers were also disappointed with the flexibility myth. The majority of respondents did not complain about issues related to self-management and required resources. In general, the expectations of platform workers in Poland seem to be met to a significant extent, which may contribute to the growing acceptance of this form of work and its popularity.

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Acknowledgements

Author contributions: author has given an approval to the final version of the article.

Funding: this research was fully funded by the University of Economics in Katowice.

Note: the results of this study were presented at the *5th Scientific Conference 'Institutions: theory and practice'* (15–16 September, 2022, Toruń, Poland).



Appendix

Table 1.
Motives for taking platform work (%)

Area	Motive	Structure of responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
income	complementary pay from other income sources	30	33	20	12	5
income	better pay than in other available jobs	24	36	25	11	5
needs & preferences	job flexibility	24	35	24	13	5
needs & preferences	autonomy (a preference for self-management of tasks and time)	24	33	24	16	4
needs & preferences	managing care responsibilities	22	32	26	13	7
needs & preferences	no need to leave home and commute (online services)	21	31	26	16	5
needs & preferences	greater efficiency	12	31	33	18	6
needs & preferences	a preference to work alone	14	26	29	22	9
needs & preferences	anonymity, avoiding discrimination	10	20	35	23	12
life circumstances	medical condition	9	19	32	26	14
life circumstances	not being able to find traditional work	10	25	30	25	10

Source: Own preparation.

Table 2.
Reasons for unmet expectations of platform workers in Poland (%)

Area	Reasons	Structure of responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
income	too low income/unsufficient pay	12	31	33	21	3
income	unstable income (irregularity of orders)/worried about having enough work	12	30	34	19	6
income	high financial uncertainty facing the incapacity for work	6	21	41	23	10
income	long working hours to achieve satisfying level of income	7	22	36	28	8
income	lack of perks	5	22	36	30	8
resources required	too high maintenance costs (equipment, vehicle, insurance, software and hardware)	4	22	38	27	9
resources required	lack of sufficient work space	5	20	35	28	12
resources required	problems with broadband and/or reliable internet access	4	17	34	29	16
work-life balance	negative impact on family life	3	12	33	35	16
work-life balance	flexibility myth (feeling of permanent work)	4	22	31	30	12
work-life balance	organisational problems and lack of motivation	3	14	37	33	13
work-life balance	invisible hours (“readiness to work”, searching for tasks, upgrading skills)	6	24	35	27	7
self-management	dealing with awkward customers	4	16	38	29	12
self-management	stress related to a potential negative (and unfair) rating	5	24	36	25	10
self-management	enforcing payment for the service provided	4	19	32	35	10
self-management	social isolation	4	17	36	29	13
self-management	no team problem-solving and/or superior support	6	21	33	27	13

Source: Own preparation.