

## DiFree Newsletter- Issue 4, November 2023

In this Issue: Francesca Maffei, Research fellow in Labour law at the University of Tuscia, discusses the need for an update of existing labour laws to better protect digital workers and self-employed professionals and Sabrina Francesconi, Associate Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Trento, introduces a framework of analysis for Video-CVs.



The last two months have been full of events. In October UNITUS, organized its first Learning, Teaching and Training Activity (LTTA), a two-day workshop with speakers discussing aspects of the gig economy, the pros and cons of freelance and entrepreneurial jobs and successful strategies for personal branding

The DiFree project was presented at ICERI, the 16th annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, held in Seville, Spain on 13-15 November. Soon after, DiFree University teams gathered in Cadiz for their 4th TPM. There, the Greek partners presented the future structure of the Freelance HUB they will create at Panteion University: a career Office and entrepreneurship and Innovation office, called Creative +. It will work as a Virtual Freelancers' Hub with a link to the DiFree Project website and to partners' Universities' websites. UNITUS illustrated its model for a CV/ Resume/ Portfolio Template Database: an open-source multimodal library and a content repository (also presented at ICERI), a database which already contains 48 resumes, 12 CVs, 5 portfolio sample and 42 video-CVs, and is bound to expand with multilingual translations. UCA validated its self-assessment tool, a platform for vocational skills self-evaluation, which was launched at the Multiplier Event arranged in Cadiz soon after the TPM. This was an occasion to present the project and its tools to the general public and attending students and to introduce them to the life of digital nomads with the help and participation of Idamor Fernández, a Creativity and brand strategy consultant at Cientochoentagrados.

The issue includes extracts from the papers of two of the speakers who contributed to the success of the LTTA held in Viterbo last October and who have generously allowed their publication.

A.R.

## The need for evolving legal frameworks to better protect digital self-employed workers

Francesca MAFFEI

The rapid growth of the digital economy and the increasing reliance on remote and platform-based work have transformed traditional employment relationships, giving rise to new forms of self-employment. While digital labor offers flexibility and autonomy, it also introduces significant challenges for workers, including economic dependence on platform providers, lack of social protection, and heightened health and safety risks. These evolving dynamics necessitate a rethinking of existing labor laws and protections to ensure that workers in the digital realm are not left vulnerable or excluded from essential rights and benefits. Key areas of focus include the identification of new forms of subordination, the recognition of economically dependent self-employment, the provision of social security and income support, the addressing of digital work-related health risks, and the extension of collective bargaining rights to digital workers. I will explore these key areas in the following paragraphs:

1. **Recognition of New Forms of Subordination:** Legal frameworks need to adapt to the emerging forms of dependency in the digital labor market. Many digital workers, particularly freelancers, experience new types of subordination and dependence on clients or platforms. Legal systems must recognize these dependencies, train regulatory bodies to identify them, and establish mechanisms that allow workers to assert their correct legal status, such as the presumption of dependency mechanisms used in countries like Spain, France, and the Netherlands.
2. **Economically Dependent Self-Employed Workers:** Many digital freelancers, while technically self-employed, are economically dependent on clients or platforms. This creates a form of "precarious digital self-employment" where workers need social protections typically associated with dependent employment. Countries like France, Germany, and Spain have introduced regulations that provide protections to workers based on their economic dependence, beyond traditional employment relationships.
3. **Social Security and Income Support:** Digital self-employed workers, especially highlighted during the pandemic, often lack social protection. While there are some international guidelines, most European countries still exclude self-employed workers from many social assistance programs. Some protections exist (e.g., maternity leave), but unemployment benefits are generally reserved for employees. A comprehensive reassessment of social welfare is necessary, taking into account the blurred lines between self-employment and salaried work in the digital economy.
4. **Health and Safety Risks:** Digital workers, particularly platform workers, face unique health and safety risks due to the individualization of remote work. These risks include stress, cognitive overload, and social isolation, as well as physical and psychological issues like harassment and exploitation. The digital work environment requires specific regulations to address these challenges and ensure worker wellbeing.
5. **Right to Collective Bargaining:** Traditionally, collective bargaining was reserved for dependent employees, but there is a growing recognition that economically dependent self-employed workers should also have the right to collective representation. This is particularly important in the digital economy, where competition among workers and platforms can undermine worker protections. European legal systems are increasingly recognizing the right to collective bargaining for self-employed workers, particularly those who are economically dependent on platforms or clients.

As digital self-employment continues to reshape labor markets globally, it is essential for legal frameworks to evolve in response to the unique challenges faced by workers in this sector. The growing prevalence of economically dependent freelancers and platform workers calls for the recognition of new forms of subordination, such as digitally-mediated jobs, which are not adequately captured by traditional employment classifications. Moreover, as the lines between dependent and independent work become increasingly blurred, the right to collective bargaining must be recognized for all workers, including those in precarious digital self-employment. By creating a more inclusive regulatory framework that accounts for these emerging realities, and takes into consideration international trends, governments and policymakers can ensure that digital labor is not only an opportunity for economic growth but also a space where workers' rights are respected and protected.

### The video curriculum for digital self-promotion

*Sabrina FRANCESCONI*

Within recruitment discourse, the video curriculum (VC) has a great the potential for digital self-narrative and self-promotion. From the perspective of genre analysis (Bhatia, 2004, 2017; Swales, 1990), the VC can be analysed as a concise audio-visual message that can be used by job seekers to accompany a written curriculum at the earliest screening stage of a particular application process, or for a permanent self-presentation on their LinkedIn profile (Goel and Awasthy, 2020: 138; Hiemstra and Derous, 2015: 45).

As for text structure, a number of recurring moves (i.e., textual segments that fulfil a particular function) can be identified, that can be arranged in the following or in similar ways: Introduction, Who we are, Aims, Educational background, Work experience, Soft, linguistic and hard skills, and Conclusion.

In the audio-visual text, the multiple generic moves (Swales, 1990) are multimodally framed; they derive from the simultaneous use of a range of modes and modal resources to make meaning and negotiate identity (Hiippala, 2024; Kress, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006). A metafunctional paradigm (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) may be adopted to examine and discuss video curricula. As regards what students tell or show about themselves, the ideational metafunction can be realised in the VC via speech, accessories, and setting, among other modes. The interpersonal metafunction is focused on social relations established between the applicant and the prospective recruiter via semiotic systems such as eye contact, size of frame or perspective. Involved in textual construction in terms of cohesion and coherence, the textual metafunction regards both intra-textual consistency among modes, and extra-textual consistency between the VC and the job position. If background instrumental music accompanies the self-narrative, gestures may be used to punctuate the spoken narrative, and keywords and icons may anchor relevant information.

Knowing the functions and efficacy of these elements and how to better analyse their generic structure will surely help teachers help students create more attractive and informative self-presentations, which in turn may well land them a job interview.

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