CrowdLearn

Skills in online platform work

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CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Cedefop's CrowdLearn is…

01 **FIRST** systematic studies focused on the skills of online platform workers – online freelancers & microworkers

02 **FOCUSED** explicitly on EU workers

03 **SCIENTIFIC** in-depth interviews & survey of ~2000 crowdworkers – Crowdlearn dataset

04 **ROBUST** typology of skills developed in crowdwork

05 **FORWARD-LOOKING** skills policies

Cedefop's CrowdLearn research questions

What skills do online platform workers need and develop?

Why do they engage in online platform work and how this affects skills?

How does skill development and matching take place?

With whom do online platform workers engage in skill formation?

What can VET policy do (barriers, mobility, validation etc.)?

upwork formerly oDesk twago peopleperhour amazonmechanical turk Artificial Artificial Intelligence fiverr

Cedefop's CrowdLearn research steps

Phase 1 → *Phase 2* → *Phase 3*

Literature review

Structured and **systematic** search across 3 databases:

- Web of Science
- Scopus (Elsevier)
- ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)

Stakeholder interviews

n = 30

45-60 minutes **synchronous online interviews** based on **semi-structured interview protocol**

- Target platforms Upwork, Fiverr, PeoplePerHour, Twago
- Recruitment via LinkedIn & platforms

Crowdworker interviews

n = 77

90 minutes **semi-structured, synchronous interviews with stakeholders** from

- Crowdwork platforms
- Clients
- Policy experts
- Unions/Professional associations
- Governments

Crowdworker surveys

n = 2,005

Online survey with crowdworkers

- Are ≥ 18 years
- Freelancers from 6 EU target countries (DE, FI, ES, IT, RO, UK)
- AMT microworkers follow-up (DE, ES, IT, UK, FR)
- Earned income in at least one target platform
- Tailor-made

Who crowdworks?

YOUNGER (MW) TO MIDDLE AGED (OF) MALES

MOSTLY **HIGHLY EDUCATED**

1/3 **IMMIGRANT** BACKGROUND

SECOND JOB FOR MOST CROWDWORKERS

>50% INCOME FOR 1 IN 5 OF; 87% OF MW 0-20% INCOME

Figure 5. **Educational attainment of microworkers and online freelancers**

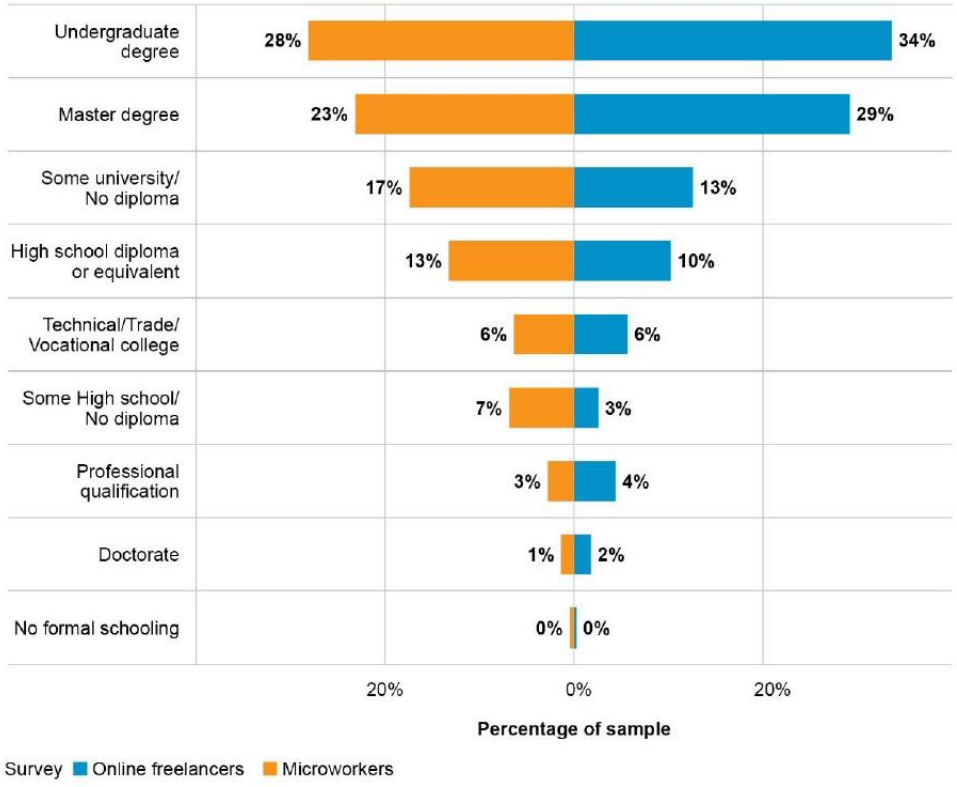
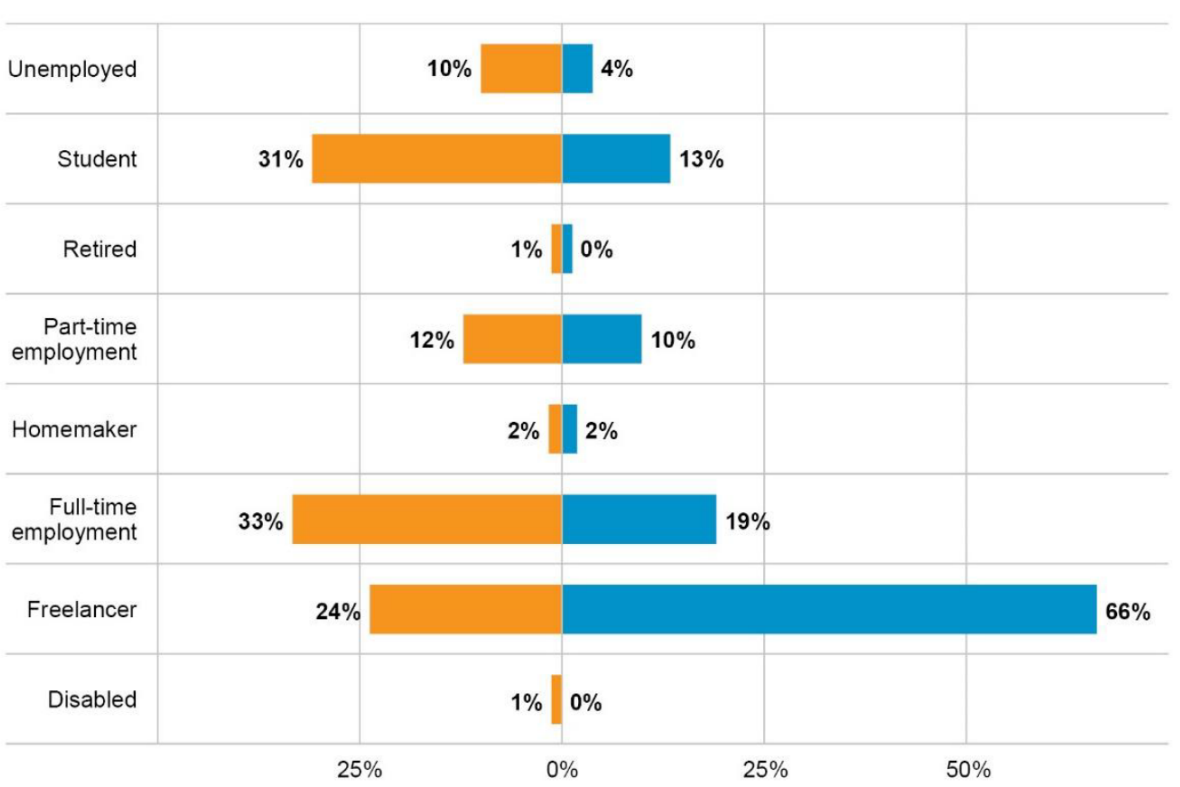


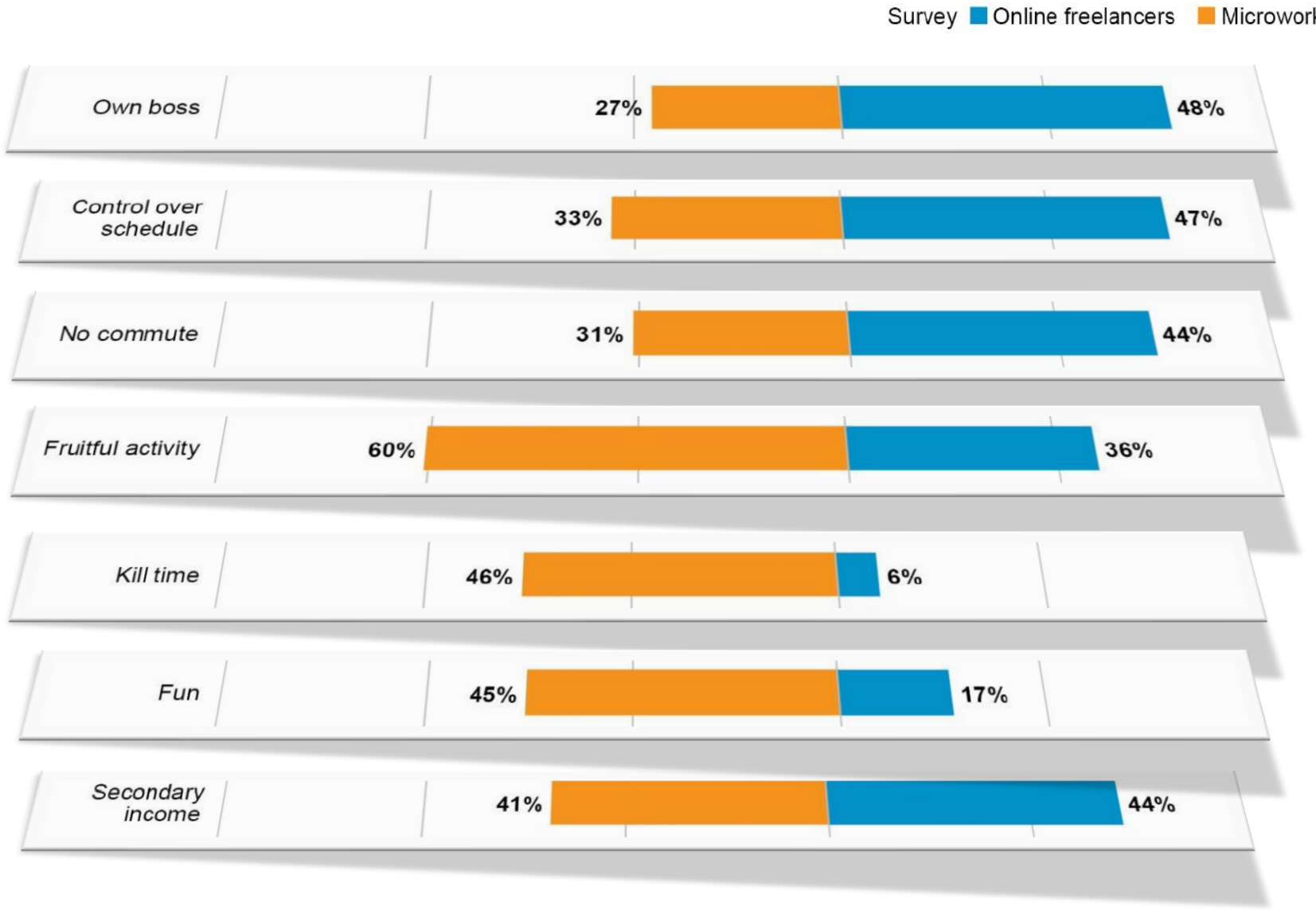
Figure 7. **Main employment status of microworkers and online freelancers**



Why crowdwork?

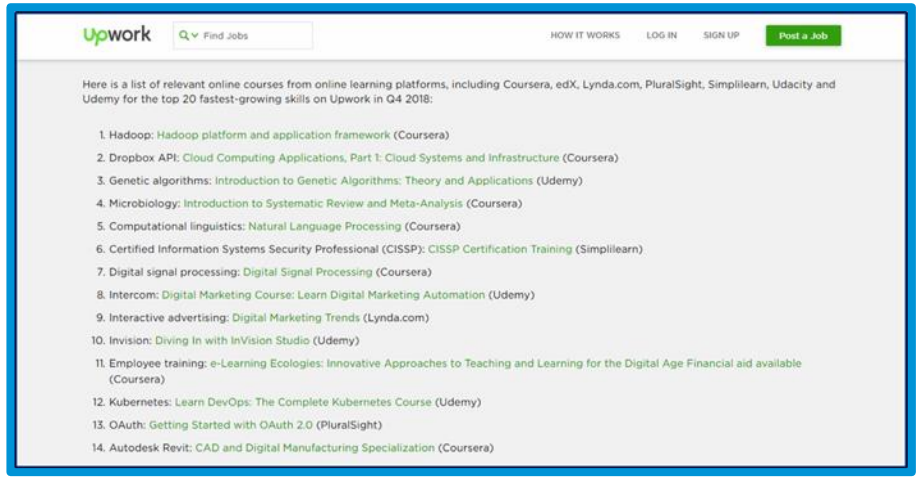
Online freelancers

Micro-workers

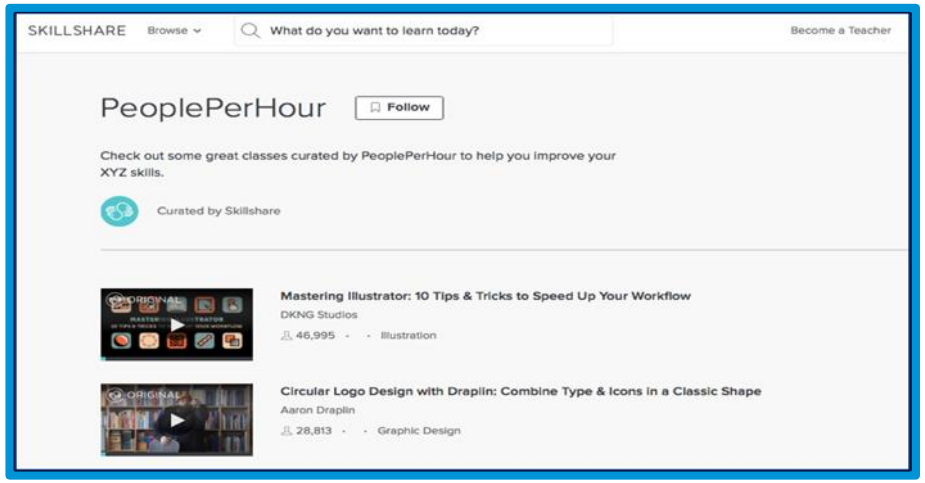


Reluctant platforms but new training market?

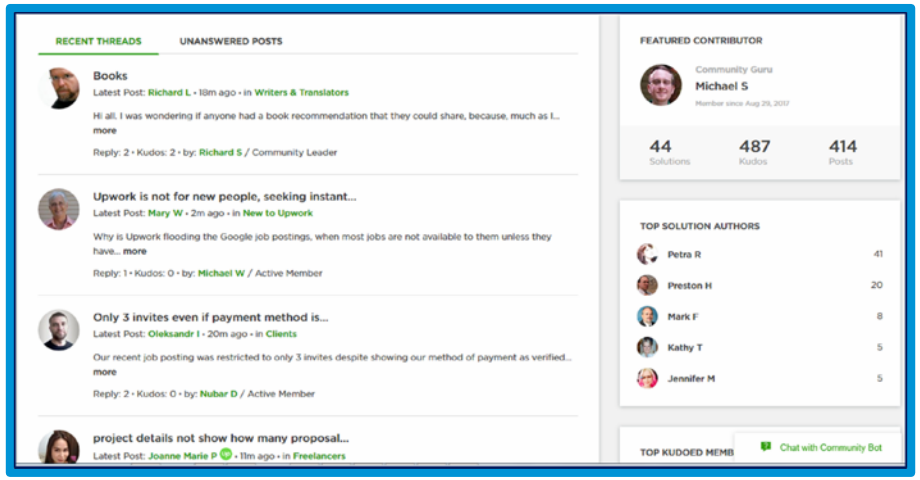
Providing information on in-demand skills



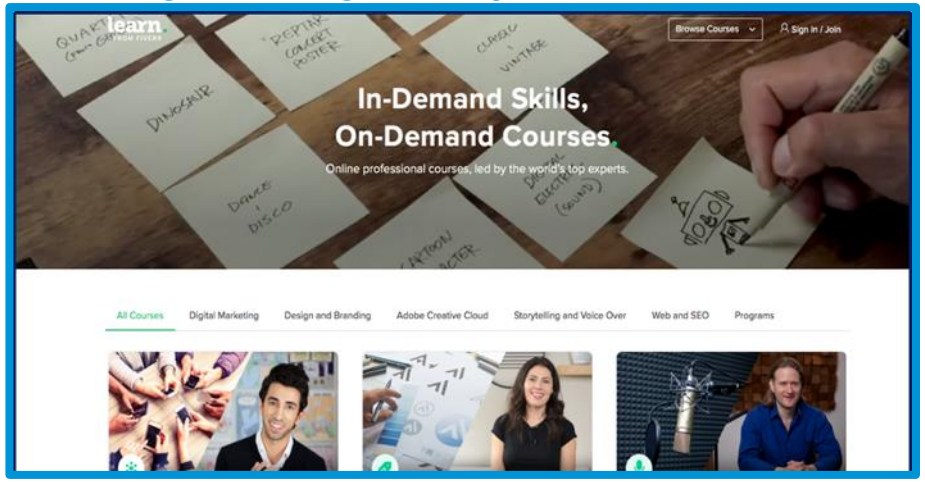
Recommending training courses



Facilitating peer-to-peer learning

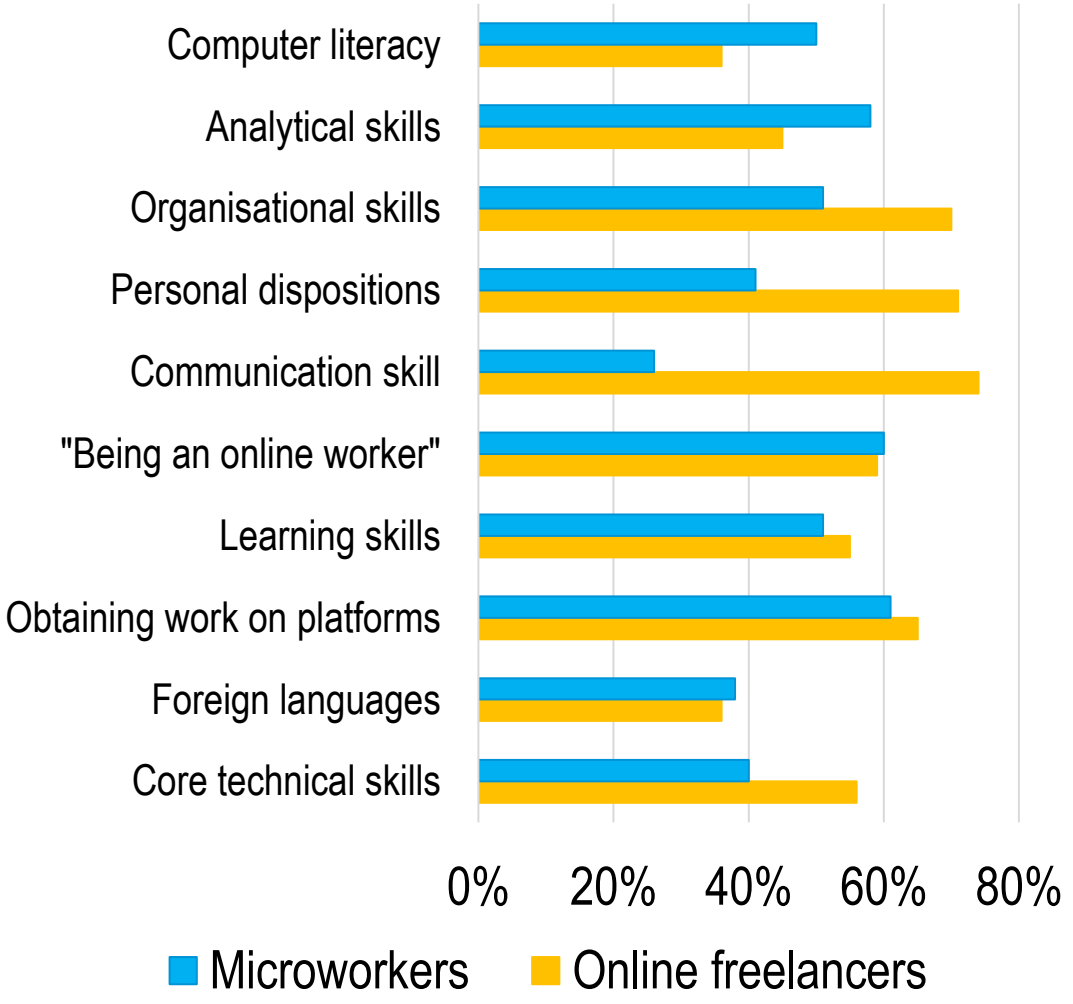


Providing a training marketplace



Skills for digital workers

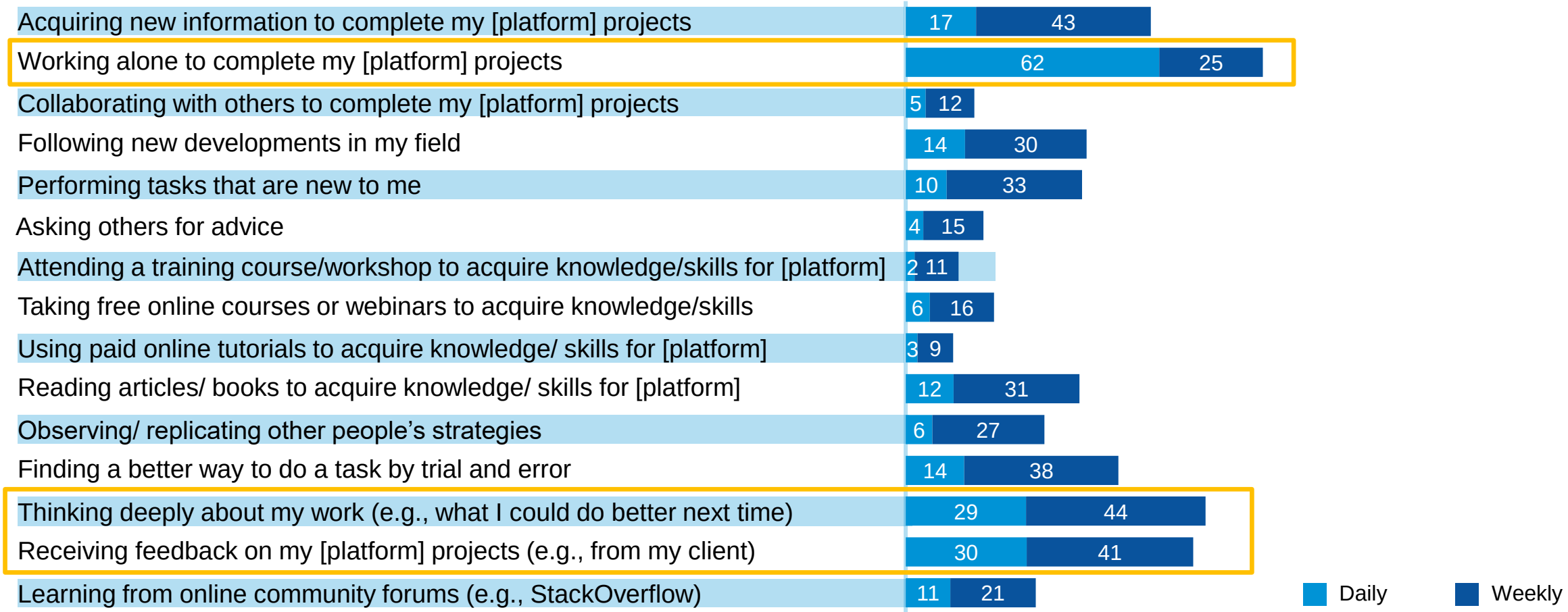
Skills developed in online platform work



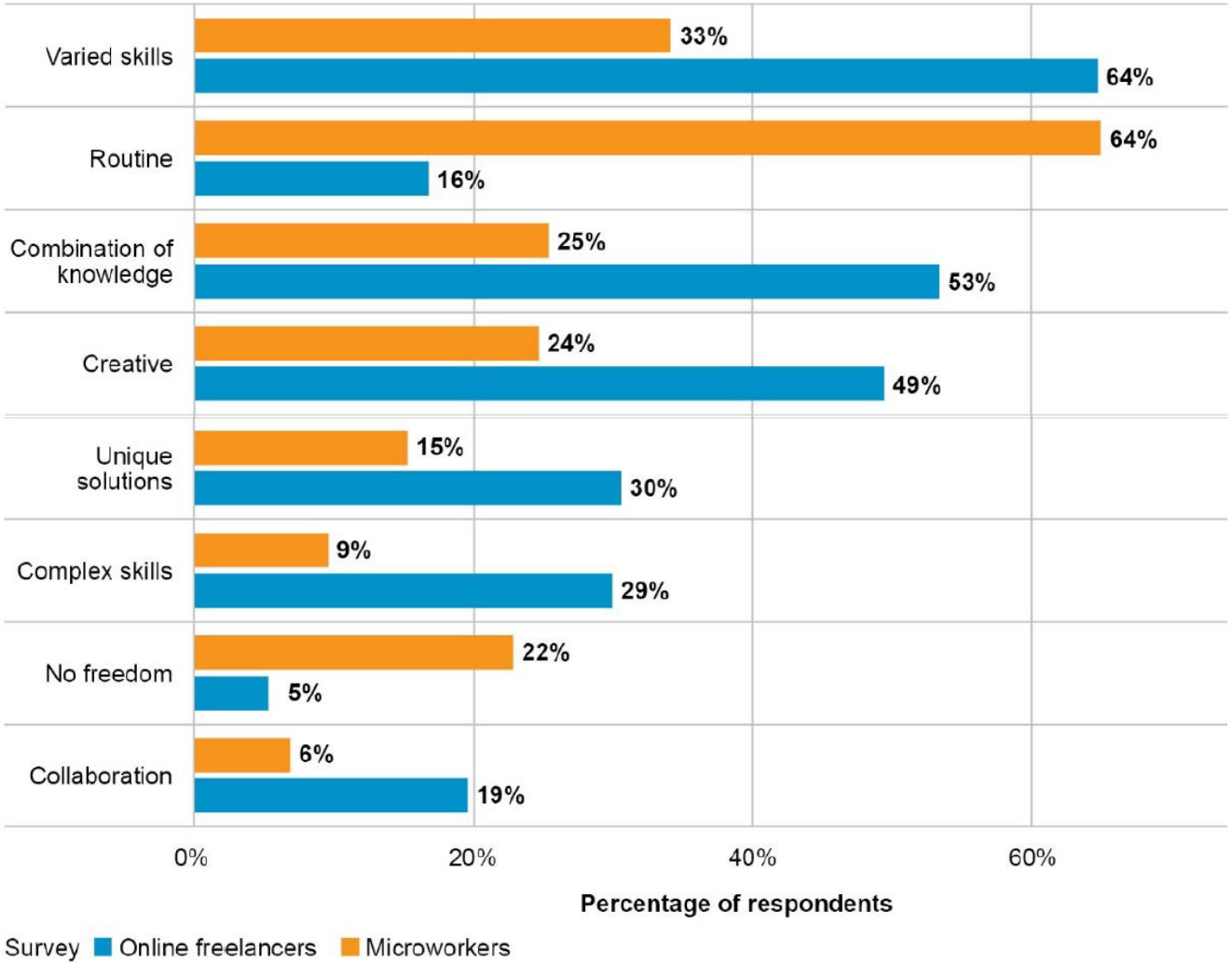
Learning largely informal & self-directed

% of respondents

Frequency of use of workplace learning activities over the past 3 months



Artificial intelligence at what cost?



Microworkers subject to routine work

- standardisation
- task dis-embedding
- functional downgrading
- communication void

Routine work inhibits learning/skill formation

Hidden face of AI ('ghost work')

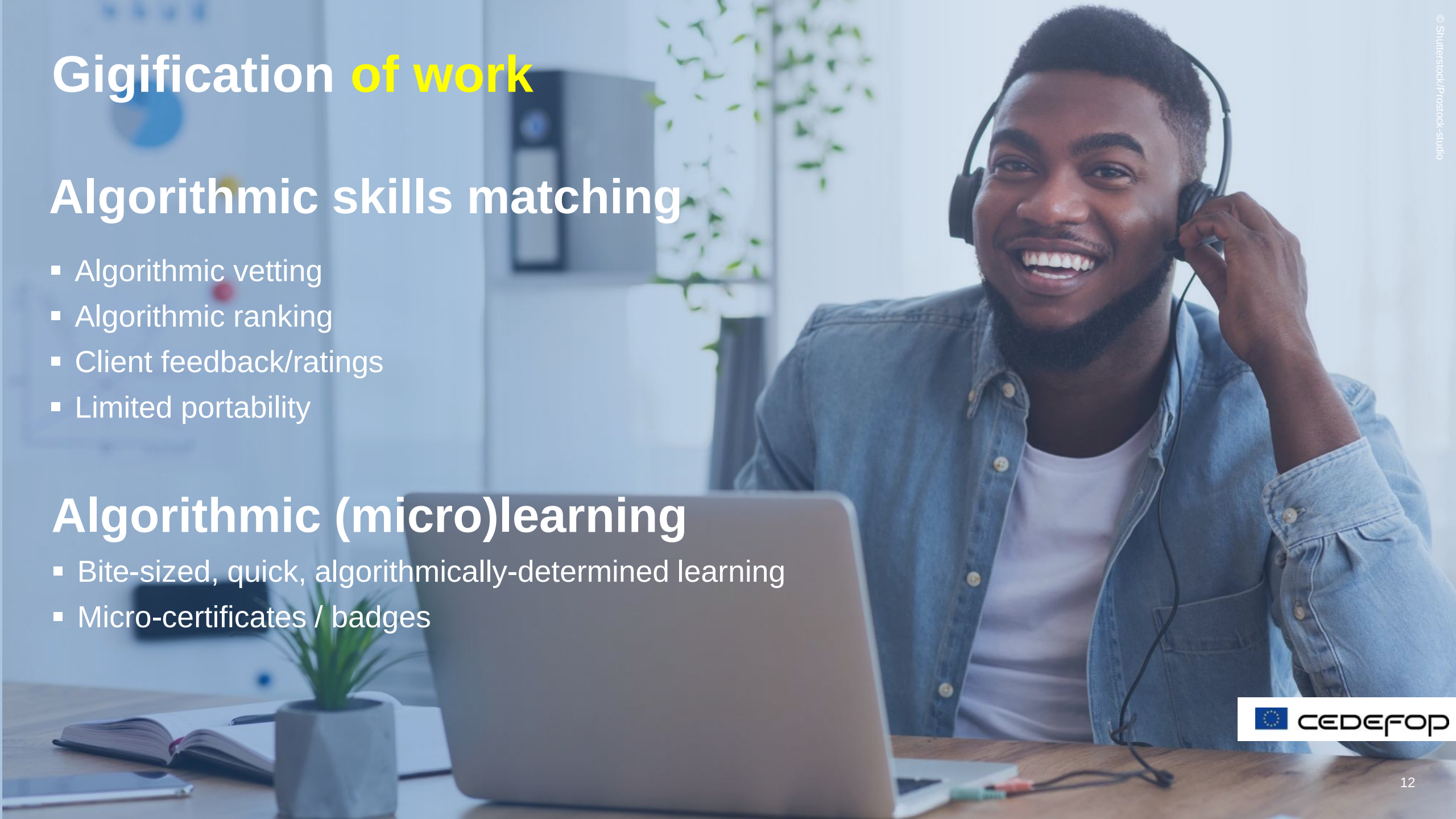
Gigification of work

Algorithmic skills matching

- Algorithmic vetting
- Algorithmic ranking
- Client feedback/ratings
- Limited portability

Algorithmic (micro)learning

- Bite-sized, quick, algorithmically-determined learning
- Micro-certificates / badges



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Lock-in effects of platform work

% of respondents (online freelancers)

I could easily switch to another platform without negatively impacting my income

5%	12%	25%	41%	16%
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

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Policies to promote skills in crowdwork

Labour market integration

- Policy-makers should collaborate with platforms to experiment with **subsidized 'micro-internships'** in platform work

Continuing professional development

- VET providers to offer short online courses and workshops that meet crowdworkers' **'just-in-time' learning needs**

Education & vocational training

- Focus on **developing people's' self-regulatory learning skills**, capabilities and mindsets
- **Continued focus on digital skills** in formal education

Skills matching

- Consider adopting **portable portfolio functions** to allow workers to display/advertise/transfer qualifications and work experiences
- Engage with platform companies to examine ways of **overcoming obstacles to cross-platform portability**

Thank you

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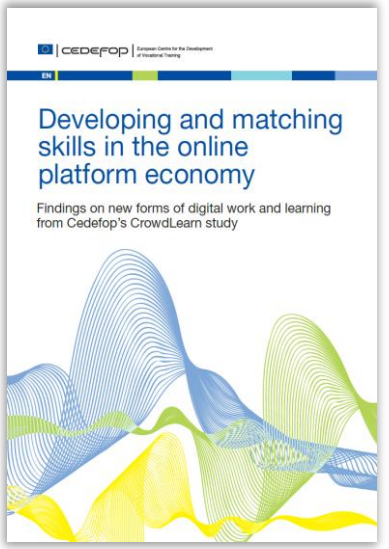

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