# AMZN

## Working conditions
## Amazon A–Z: "Last Mile"

**It is undeniable that Amazon is introducing innovative technological solutions – both directly visible to customers and at the back of its operations. The management of the corporation and its image specialists love to highlight innovations as exciting as autonomous drones providing express delivery. However, they often overshadow the reality of a company whose logistics chain is still mainly made up of people, and the innovations introduced are not neutral towards them at all.**

"[Amazon] has captured the public imagination with press releases about futuristic drone delivery, which does not yet exist," as noted by Caroline O'Donovan and Ken Bensinger from "BuzzFeed". "But it's this homegrown network that makes it possible to offer the amazing convenience of next-day and even same-day delivery that has become a cornerstone of its market dominance. By some estimates, nearly half of Amazon's packages in the US are now delivered this way. And the Seattle-based giant dictates almost every aspect of that operation, down to what drivers wear, what vans they use, what routes they follow, and how many packages they must deliver each day."

This structure of "last mile" logistics, i.e. final deliveries directly to customers, has not been introduced overnight. Over the years, Amazon has built up this network of small and medium sized companies to gain total control of the entire process, cut costs, and collect precise data on courier movements and performance, while passing on all legal responsibility to third parties. Everything that would be difficult to swallow for large, independent logistics companies like UPS, FedEx and DHL. An article from 2014, in which Artur Włodarski from a Polish newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" quotes a letter from a Polish reader, a labour migrant living in England, gives an insight into the work of a subcontractor deliveryman:

"I have to be in the Amazon depot at 5.30. Managers and supervisors are assigning the routs. Each driver gets a so-called 'gun', i.e. a converted Samsung Galaxy S3 smartphone with a list of addresses and package numbers. All I have to do is to insert the addresses into GPS and off we go. I call the doorbell and say with a smile: 'Amazon delivery please!' ... generally you don't return to the depot until all the packages are dispatched. The

'gun' has a GPS module and shows not only the exact history of the parcels, but also whether I actually got to the address indicated.
[...]
It's been months. I'm getting faster and better. I know the routes and I have no mistakes on the 'gun'. It would be beautiful if the bar did not go up every now and then: in February the daily standard is 120-140 parcels, in March – 140-160, in April – 150-170, in May – 170-200 parcels a day. If I work 12 hours – I am lucky. Because it's usually from 13 to 15. And without any breaks: a sandwich on the run, only a quick "good morning", "thank you" and "see you later" to customers. And only because the English are so cordial and polite, even for a deliveryman with a Polish accent, I can stand 14 hours of such work. 'Be happy'? I can't."
The image shown in Ken Loach's film Sorry We Missed You from 2019 is painted in a similar way.

O'Donovan and Bensinger from "BuzzFeed" describe in detail the structure, the way the employees are pressured, as well as road accidents involving Amazon's delivery subcontractors. As they note, the driving force behind the change in delivery was the situation before Christmas in 2012. The number of orders went so high that UPS, FedEx and the U.S. Post Office couldn't deliver all on time. In line with the logic of rapid growth and "customer obsession," Amazon did not want to see a repeat of this crisis.

As befits an innovator, the Amazon is also busy with machine learning algorithms: not only to plan the routes of delivery subcontractors, but also to manage a network of completely "independent" gig workers. This includes the Amazon Flex application launched in 2015, which operates on a similar basis to Uber and other gig economy apps. An individual with an appropriate car can use the app to become a deliveryman. Amazon makes available several blocks of hours at different times of the day and with different wages, that you can subscribe to. Parcels are then picked up from the location given and delivered as indicated in the application.

Alana Semuels from "The Atlantic": "Amazon has rolled out Flex in more than 50 cities, including New York; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Memphis, Tennessee. The company doesn't share information about how many drivers it has, but one Seattle economist calculated that 11,262 individuals drove for Flex in California from October 2016 to March 2017, based on information Amazon

shared with him to help the company defend a lawsuit about Flex drivers."

Just as on other Uber-esque platforms, here, too, everything is the responsibility of the employee or worker, although – according to this logic – we should not use this word at all. Costs of car repairs, fuel, health and safety issues (e.g. handling large and heavy shipments) or possible accidents at work: none of this is the responsibility of the companies commissioning the service. Health insurance, pension contributions, hourly minimum wage – none of these things apply.

**sources:**

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