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Spanish labour shortage

Madrid.—A Spanish law passed last year forcing food delivery companies to contract their couriers as staff has caused a labour shortage as many prefer to remain self-employed and work for rivals that flout the regulation, Uber Eats said yesterday.

The Spanish branch of Uber's online food delivery platform published on Tuesday an open letter to the Labour Ministry complaining that the contracts it offered to freelance 'riders' failed to retain enough of them to assure its services.

"Our fleets of collaborators can't find enough couriers because these prefer to be self-employed to work with Glovo,... the only company that allows it, against the Rider Law," Uber Eats said, referring to the May 2021 decree demanding firms grant formal work contracts to protect gig-economy workers.

A spokesperson for Glovo said the company, which has been taken over by Germany's Delivery Hero, did not break any law and said it had taken steps to ensure it complied.

The Uber Eats letter fuels a European controversy over the legal status of the thousands of cyclists who criss-cross city centres with oversized branded backpacks, and who generally lack benefits such as minimum wage, paid holidays and pension rights.

BOATYARDS HIT BY A LACK OF SPACE, YACHTS GOING ELSEWHERE



SEE FULL REPORT INSIDE TODAY ON PAGE FIVE

A dearer life across Europe

Madrid.— Already struggling with rising living costs, Europeans now face an even deeper hit to their livelihoods as the conflict in Ukraine pushes fuel and food prices higher and threatens to undermine a fragile economic recovery.

The surging price of crude oil on world markets has led to the biggest ever weekly jump in gasoline prices at some service stations around Europe, pushing them in some cases above 2 euros for a litre (\$8.25/gallon) of unleaded fuel.

"The problem is not the price it will be tomorrow, but how much it (gasoline) will cost 15 days from now, we think that it is going to cost much more. I think bad times are ahead of us," 76-year-old Madrid pensioner Alejandro Oterino said. That fear of prices spiralling out of control is precisely what the European Central Bank must allay at its meeting on Thursday. ECB

chief Christine Lagarde will aim to prove it can keep a lid on euro-area inflation that had already leapt to a higher than expected 5.8% ahead of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"There is a natural pressure on central banks to keep (inflation) expectations low via communication but at the same time they risk losing credibility," said Gunther Schnabl, economics professor at Leipzig University.

In Portugal - western Europe's poorest country with 10% of the population on a minimum wage of 705 euros - motorists have been rushing to fill tanks before any more price hikes come in. A diesel car with a 50-litre tank costs 91 euros to fill up.

"If the prices keep rising, I might have to resort to social services to eat and drink," said 56-year-old Uber driver Antonio Dias in Lisbon.

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