

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

DENMARK

CASE STUDY 1

Liv Bjerre

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Hilfr and other platforms for cleaning in private homes in Denmark

This case study is one of two comprising the third deliverable from the Danish team to the ORIGAMI project, WP3. It examines Hilfr, one of the few domestic cleaning platforms in Denmark. While Happy Helper is the largest platform in the Danish domestic cleaning market, Hilfr has attracted the most public attention, as it became the first cleaning platform to sign a collective agreement with a union in 2018. The collective agreement will be examined in detail in the next deliverable from the Danish team (WP4). In this study, we focus on the workers and how the platform shape work practices, professional competencies, and work environment. To enrich this analysis, we will also incorporate insights from a different type of platform in the domestic cleaning sector.

This case study is based on interviews with Hilfr's management, Hilfr cleaners, a cleaner from Happy Helper, a Hilfr customer, and a representative from the trade union 3F (see also section 5 on Research design).

1. Hilfr – History and characteristics

Hilfr made its entry at the Danish platform market in 2017 – two years after the care platform Care.com was launched in Denmark, and one year after the cleaning platforms Happy Helper and Cleady¹. Hilfr was founded by a group of Danish entrepreneurs who recognized the need for a reliable and fair platform for domestic cleaning services. The founders aimed to create a platform that not only connected customers with cleaners but also ensured fair working conditions for the cleaners. According to Hilfr's website under 'About Hilfr': *"Hilfr aims to provide decent working conditions for providers of cleaning services on our platform. As the first cleaning platform in Europe we have negotiated a collective agreement with a trade union (3F)"* (Hilfr 2024).

Since its beginning, Hilfr has undergone significant changes. Initially, it facilitated freelance cleaners known as 'Freelance Hilfrs.' However, after the first agreement with the trade union 3F in 2018, Hilfrs began as self-employed but automatically gained employee status after completing 100 hours of work (called 'Super Hilfr' status), unless they opted out. In 2024, following a management change, the new leadership

¹ Cleady went bankrupt in 2019 and was bought by Happy Helper. In 2024, Happy Helper was acquired by Handyhand (formerly Pinploy) after experiencing financial difficulties and entering reconstruction due to liquidity issues.

signed the Hilfr2 agreement with the trade union 3F, which now ensures all Hilfrs are classified as employees.

Hilfr is the second-largest domestic cleaning platform in Denmark, following Happy Helper (Ilsøe, 2020: 3). However, it remains relatively small². According to the management, in the summer of 2024, Hilfr had around 60–70 active Hilfrs and fewer than 500 active customers, after recently ‘hiding’³ 4,000–5,000 inactive worker accounts (interview with management). The new management's focus is on improving Hilfr before expanding. This includes increasing the booking acceptance rate and ensuring a positive experience for new and existing customers. According to the managers, Hilfr's main competition is not other domestic cleaning platforms but undeclared work in the black economy (*'sort arbejde'*) (interview with management). Hilfr operates as a private company, with its revenue model based on service fees charged to customers for each booking. According to its website, Hilfr charges the *“by far lowest fee in the market – only 6 percent”* (Hilfr 2025). The platform currently operates primarily in Copenhagen, but also in Aarhus (the second largest city in Denmark).

The platform allows customers to book cleaning services online, choose their preferred cleaner, and schedule appointments at their convenience. Upon visiting the website, users are immediately met with the tagline “Cleaning made easy,” followed by the prompt “book cleaning in less than 2 minutes”.

The booking process goes as follows: It begins with entering a postal code. In the next step, you are brought to an overview of the profiles of available Hilfrs in your area. You can specify the date and time, the number of hours of cleaning required, and how often you would like cleaning (once, weekly, biweekly, or every fourth month). You can also search for a specific cleaner by name. You will then see a list of cleaners. In the profile overview, each cleaner's profile includes their picture, name, rating (with stars from 1 to 5 and the number of reviews, e.g., “4.3 based on 30 reviews”), hourly price, and the price before tax deductions. There are also symbols indicating if they are a ‘Super Hilfr’, a ‘Top Performer’ (without further explanation), or a ‘New Hilfr’ (which offers a 15% discount). At the bottom of each profile, you can either ‘Book Now’ or ‘Show Calendar’. You can filter search results by ‘Super Hilfrs’, ‘Top Performers’, or ‘New Hilfrs’, but not by e.g. price. When you click on a profile, you will see a personal description and the cleaner's availability for the relevant week. Some profiles include brief descriptions of e.g. work experience, while others provide more detailed information, including background, hobbies, and languages spoken. You can also read all reviews by clicking on them. All profiles display an ‘ID Approved’ label in the corner. After selecting a

² Estimating the size of Denmark's housecleaning platform market is challenging. However, based on the number of profiles on major platforms – while accounting for a significant proportion of inactive accounts – Floros (2024: 76) provides a 'guestimate' of between 1,200 and 1,600 active profiles in 2022.

³ The inactive account were set to not show up in searches.

cleaner and clicking 'Book Now', you will see a price breakdown that includes base pay, social expenses (with a dropdown menu for pension, health insurance, holiday pay, and sick pay), fees, insurance, VAT, total cost, and the total after tax deduction. You can then send a booking request, which will be automatically deleted if not answered within 12 hours of the scheduled start time. Alternatively, you can select an alternative time between 1 and 24 hours. If you are not already a customer, you will need to create an account. This requires providing your name, address, email, phone number, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, total square footage, and payment information. After the booking has been completed, you will receive an email with your booking overview and a request to give feedback on your cleaning experience (rating and a comment).

Hilfr is recognized for its commitment to fair working conditions. On the Hilfr website, under 'Why choose Hilfr' it states: "*Hilfr is a company that aims to raise the bar for the platform economy. Therefore, the provider is at the center of Hilfr, which also makes the platform attractive to the customer.*" (Hilfr 2025). The platform's transparent pricing structure can also be seen as a reflection of its social responsibility, which is important to users. An interview with one of Hilfr's users revealed that this was her main reason for choosing Hilfr over other cleaning platforms. When asked why she had opted for private cleaning through Hilfr, she explained: "*It's because they promoted themselves on a collective agreement, so I was sure that those who are hired have proper conditions and receive fair wages. That was the main thing. I'm not in favor of undeclared work, so I didn't want to find someone through that route. It was very important for me to know that they [the Hilfrs] were being treated properly.*" (Interview with Sofie, Hilfr user).

2. Platform governance

Hilfr underwent a management change in 2024. Since March 2024, the company has had a new managing director. As of July 1, 2024, the company is owned by a former board member, who also serves as the current chair of the board. The current management has great expertise in the field as expressed by a trade union representative: "*The people behind Hilfr have professional insight into the cleaning industry and the sector they are part of. These are people who truly understand this profession.*"

In addition to the managing director, the Hilfr team includes a finance director and a freelancer. A significant part of the managing director's role currently involves ensuring that workers feel secure and aligning expectations regarding the availability of work. However, this focus may evolve as the platform grows (interview with management).

The majority of Hilfr's operations relies on traditional management, such as customer support and worker assistance. The platform's primary function is to connect customers with cleaners by showing a list of available cleaners in their area. Part of this process is managed by an algorithm. The algorithm that determines which profiles appear at the top for customers plays a crucial role, as it can influence who gets work and who does not. The criteria for displaying profiles are largely based on the availability shown in the cleaners' calendars (interview with management). Algorithmic management is governed by the collective agreement with the trade union 3F (read more about this in the next deliverable from the Danish team).

3. Platform workers

3.1. Migrant labor: Easy access to flexible work with good working conditions (often for a shorter term)

The cleaners working on the Hilfr platform are predominantly women from Argentina. According to Hilfr's management, men face more challenges in securing work on the platform (interview with Hilfr's management), which may be related to gender norms and perceptions of gendered skills. Hilfr's management attributes this in part to customers' perceptions of safety, noting that many customers feel less comfortable having a man in their home. Public discussions have linked work on cleaning and food delivery platforms to the Working Holiday agreements⁴ Denmark has with Chile and Argentina (Scheel, 2019). As a result, an annual quota of 150 permits was introduced in 2021 for Chile and in 2022 for Argentina (Scheel, 2019). The workers we interviewed were also from Argentina. Both had left work and/or studies behind to go travel the world. While they both reside in Denmark with European citizenship, one initially arrived in Denmark on a working holiday visa, later discovering the possibility of dual citizenship when she found out that she could not continue to stay on a working holiday visa. Recruitment often seems to occur through strong national networks, such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups for Argentinians in Denmark. As one of the Hilfrs, Ines, puts it: "*We have WhatsApp groups and recommend jobs*". Both workers we interviewed were introduced to Hilfr through Argentinian friends.

There may be multiple reasons for choosing to work in the gig economy in the cleaning sector in a small Scandinavian country, but in both interviews, the main motivations for choosing Hilfr were easy access combined with favorable working conditions. The barriers to entry in the Danish cleaning sector are low, making it an accessible job opportunity for migrants (Rasmussen 2024: 59). Both Hilfrs had prior experience in

⁴ These agreements allow young citizens from these countries to stay in Denmark for up to one year. During their stay, individuals can work for up to six months (Chile) or nine months (Argentina) in non-permanent jobs. They are also permitted to stay in the Schengen area for up to 180 days, divided into two periods of 90 days each.

cleaning (and one in other low-skilled jobs) in Denmark, where working conditions were poorer. As Hilfr worker Isabelle explained: *"I don't know how old Hilfr is, but it was not famous at all. And as soon as I signed up, which was pretty easy, you know, you just need to have your bank account ready, CPR [Danish personal identification number] and just the basics. We didn't have interview by phone, nothing. Everything was online. And I have really nice experiences with customers there. There is a big difference from Happy Helper to Hilfr"*. The differences between Hilfr and the platform Happy Helper will be discussed below. What is important to highlight here is the emphasis on Hilfr's favorable working conditions, including the presence of 'nice customers'. The specific rights associated with being a Super Hilfr (which, at the time the workers we interviewed joined the platform, were exclusive but have since become available to all) were a priority for one of the workers, but not for the other. Nevertheless, the Super Hilfr status appeared to attract workers to the platform through word of mouth. As Isabelle explained when asked about her awareness of the Super Hilfr status: *"I was not aware. I didn't even know what a super Hilfer is. I realized the benefit when I started to have more customers. And then when many Argentinians arrived, they were all asking for it. So, I think now most of them are Super Hilfrs."* But then she concludes her stream of thought with: *"It's not a big difference"*, suggesting that, for her, the rights associated with employees status does not make a significant difference in practice.

However, the collective agreement may have considerable effects on the broader working environment beyond the rights and benefits it formally regulates, as we will discuss further below.

Workers also mentioned several other advantages, such as flexibility – the ability to choose their own working hours and, if needed, reschedule work for a different day. Additional benefits include employee status with access to a pension (both cleaners interviewed were Super Hilfrs before the Hilfr2 agreement), the ability to set their own hourly wage (above the minimum specified in the collective agreement), and the work's accessibility, even for those with limited Danish or English proficiency. Additionally, they appreciated the variety of workplaces and the fact that cleaning work is done indoors, making it independent of weather conditions (contrary to e.g. work via food delivery platforms or work experiences in Argentina, where one of the interviewees had worked in farming).

The workers we interviewed varied in skill levels and prior work experience, but they shared a common ambition for their (work) life outside of the cleaning sector. For them, working as a cleaner on Hilfr is a temporary job rather than a defining part of their identity: *"I know what I'm doing doesn't define me as a person"*, as Isabelle expresses it. This finding is echoed in the literature on platform housecleaners in Denmark (Floros 2024: 187). Both interviewees view themselves as 'travelers', uninterested in a regular full-time job, and none of them planned to stay in Denmark long term, although one

now has a Danish boyfriend. That many workers on Hilfr are on the platform for a limited amount of time, is also evident from the user interview. Sofie, a Hilfr user, has been using the platform for 2–3 years and has had four different cleaners during this time. She stopped using one due to dissatisfaction, while the others left because they moved abroad (interview with Hilfr user Sofie). This challenge is also reflected in Hilfr profile descriptions, where several cleaners highlight how long they have stayed or emphasize their intention to remain for an extended period to signal reliability and commitment to potential customers. It is unclear whether frequently finding a new cleaner is a concern for users – at least, Sofie does not seem to find it problematic. However, the temporary nature of many workers on the platform suggests that Hilfr operates within a non-standard labor market, where many workers may not seek long-term full-time positions. Long-term work can, however, still become a reality, as seen in the case of Isabelle, who has been cleaning for five years now – across different companies and platforms.

3.2. Hilfr +: Combining multiple platforms for financial sustainability

As part of the sign-up process, Hilfrs select the postal codes they are willing to work in, set their hourly wage, and indicate their availability in a calendar. One worker we interviewed described how she gradually adjusted her preferences, reducing the geographical area she was willing to cover and increasing her hourly rate after receiving a high volume of requests. However, according to Hilfr's management, labor supply tends to exceed demand. The number of hours worked by cleaners on Hilfr varies significantly. Only a few work more than 25 hours per week – and few express interest in working that much. About a quarter of cleaners do fewer than one cleaning per week. The remaining cleaners typically work between 1 and 20 hours per week (interview with Hilfr's management). The two Hilfrs we interviewed worked part time, and both worked on multiple platforms. In addition to Hilfr, both were active on the cleaning platform Happy Helper, and one also worked for the food delivery platform Wolt. Workers may engage with multiple platforms for various reasons, but for some – particularly those with fewer requests – financial sustainability seems to be a key factor. For example, Ines would prefer to work exclusively on Hilfr but currently earns just enough to cover her rent. As she explains, in order to afford other expenses, such as food or holidays, she supplements her income by working for Wolt: *"Like buying food or going on holidays or that things, I do Wolt."*

3.3. The benefit of Hilfr's wage system – hourly pay vs piecework

Like other cleaning and care platforms, reviews play a key role in the matching process on Hilfr, attracting attention from both customers and cleaners. Hilfr user Sofie mentioned ratings as one of the factors she considers when choosing which Hilfr to contact, alongside price and personal descriptions. However, we have not observed

any instances where ratings directly influence working conditions, in contrast to experiences reported on the cleaning platform Happy Helper (Rasmussen 2024: 68). The wage system of the platforms may explain this.

On Hilfr, customers book a cleaning for a specific number of hours with a designated cleaner. They are instructed to align their expectations and coordinate the details of the cleaning task. However, it is clear to all parties that once the agreed-upon hours are completed, the task is considered finished. In this setup, the responsibility for matching the time required to the cleaning task falls on the customer, and the cleaner is paid for the hours worked.

When customers book a cleaning on Happy Helper, an algorithm calculates the cleaning duration based solely on the square meters, without considering factors like how messy the space is, the number of small items to move, or the number of bathrooms (Rasmussen 2024: 65). This system operates a piecework-like wage setting, rather than hourly pay, as cleaners are compensated based on the size of the area cleaned, only indirectly on the time spent. While cleaners can negotiate with customers, research shows that they may be reluctant to do so due to their reliance on positive reviews (Rasmussen 2024: 68). Anne, a cleaner on Happy Helper, whom we interviewed, shared her experience with this system: *“They [Happy Helper] set you up to fail because... I guess psychologically it’s hard to accept something else after you’ve seen this nice little calculator. You enter your area code and square meters, but very often people lie and enter less. This whole experience... I worked there almost four years, but by the end, I started disliking people. It was very isolating. I was disappointed that people could treat others like that. You’re essentially being cheated out of your labor, because if you don’t do a good job or work extra hours to make up for it, you have the threat of a bad review hanging over you”*.

Although all workers rely on receiving positive ratings, some ‘Helpers’ on Happy Helper may be able to negotiate with customers, whereas other ‘Hilfrs’ – unlike the workers we interviewed – may struggle to meet customer expectations within the given time. The wage structure on Hilfr, however, is designed to reduce the risk of ‘dishonesty’ in bookings. Unlike Happy Helper, where cleaners may face pressure to complete tasks within an under-estimated period, Hilfr operates on a model where customers pay for a specific amount of cleaning time rather than a fixed task. This setup helps alleviate pressure on workers to rush or exceed the estimated time.

On the other hand, if you are very efficient, there is also the chance of not receiving the benefits of working fast and thoroughly. This is true for both wage models, as the time spent is a factor in Happy Helper’s system as well. While one Hilfr mentions that she might intentionally slow down her pace if she is ‘ahead’ of time, the other shared that if she finishes early at one of her regular customers’ homes, she simply leaves.

3.4. The benefits of the collective agreement: nice customers and customer care

The most recent collective agreement between Hilfr and the trade union 3F, the so-called Hilfr2 agreement, establishes that all workers are employed as employees, as previously mentioned. According to Hilfr's management, none of the workers were union members at the time of the interview. However, the workers appeared to be aware of the agreement – at least of its existence – though they seemed less familiar with its specific provisions and implications.

The interviews with workers revealed that at least the two we talked to were unaware of the specificities of the agreement. They had received information from Hilfr, but did not familiarize themselves with the content, potentially due to a lack of resources (and interest). As explained by Isabelle: *"Respecting the union thing [referring to the Hilfr2 agreement], it was a long article. And of course, just like this, I said, I will read it later. And then you never do"*. They were aware that their working conditions on Hilfr were better than on other platforms and generally described their experiences as positive, as mentioned above. However, they lacked knowledge about specific employment rights, such as paid sick leave, and one worker was unaware of her entitlement to a pension. Moreover, they did not express a strong sense of needing these rights. One possible explanation is that they viewed their stay in Denmark as temporary, which may have influenced how relevant or important they perceived these benefits to be.

The collective agreement also sets a minimum wage of 175 DKK per hour (approximately €23.50). However, most Hilfr workers already charge more than this. According to Hilfr's management, only a small number of cleaners charged below 175 DKK per hour prior to the Hilfr2 agreement, while the majority earn over 200 DKK per hour.

In addition to the hourly rate, Hilfr adds several extra costs including social expenses, a platform fee and insurance. Happy Helper charges a service fee of between 15% and 35% on top of the hourly rate (Rasmussen 2024: 65). Based on experiences from the cleaners, on Hilfr, customers end up paying significantly more for the same number of cleaning hours than those using Happy Helper.

Since Hilfr is still a relatively small platform compared to Happy Helper, choosing Hilfr – and the higher pay rate – appears to be a deliberate decision, as was the case for Hilfr user Sofie. In addition to attracting customers who prioritize workers' rights and fair working conditions, this may also appeal to a certain socio-demographic group that can afford this type of cleaning service. According to Hilfr's management, their typical customers are families with children living in Copenhagen or elderly people, whose children arrange the cleaning services for them.

Within the Hilfr platform, Isabelle explains how her customer base changed after she raised her hourly rate. Previously, she encountered "weird" clients, such as people who were overly obsessive about cleanliness and booked her to clean homes that were

already clean, or places with trash on the floor. However, she no longer has these experiences since she began 'filtering customers by her hourly rate' (Interview with Isabelle). Thus, the group of "weird" customers is likely to have decreased in size after the Hilfr2 agreement, due to the introduction of the minimum wage of 175 DKK.

Although not directly related to the collective agreement, a potential consequence of Hilfr's overall commitment to fair working conditions is its focus on worker care. This may not be true for all workers, but Isabelle, who has experience working on both Happy Helper and Hilfr, describes different experiences regarding the service levels of the two platforms. For example, she recounts situations on both platforms, where customers were not at home during scheduled appointments, and the different level of service she received: On Happy Helper, the service team asked her to wait but ultimately did not compensate her for the time spent. In contrast, the Hilfr team ensured she was paid immediately. Isabelle explains: *"They seem to be good. You know, always on our side. That's great. Something that in Happy Helper we don't have. If something happens, then it is 'I'm so sorry. Maybe next time you come...' I don't know. But they say something, making us feel like we are the ones to blame"*(interview with Isabelle).

The platform's commitment to social responsibility appears to positively impact working conditions, extending beyond fair wages and entitlements. It helps attract 'nice customers' (as reflected in the workers' reasons for choosing to work on Hilfr) and provides support to workers when needed.

4. Conclusion – the happy Hilfr (for now)

Overall, the 'Hilfrs' we interviewed are satisfied with their work and working conditions. This satisfaction can be partly attributed to Hilfr's position in the market as a socially responsible domestic cleaning platform, which attracts socially responsible customers. Another factor is the decent working conditions ensured by the collective agreement with 3F, along with its 'side effects', such as benefits and the presence of 'nice customers'. A third explanation lies in Hilfr's wage structure, which ensures fair pay for the work delivered, thus acknowledging the cleaners' efforts. Additionally, a broader explanation may involve the workers' expectations and prior experiences from their home countries or other low-skilled jobs in Denmark. As illustrated by the following quotes from Hilfrs Ines and Isabelle:

"And comparing to the other places that I work, this one [Hilfr] is like the best. The conditions, the clients, the customer service. It is supergood. I also didn't work at, I thought, proper Danish places. So maybe that's why my experience, in Denmark, haven't been, like, so great. Maybe one day when I get into like the

real Danish system, I will see the benefits. But for now, comparing to the ones that I had experienced, Hilfr is paradise.”(Interviews with Isabelle)

When asked about whether she thinks it is important that Hilfrs are covered by the collective agreement, Ines answers: *“Yes. Of course. But I have to learn this... My new condition in this country because when I was in Argentina the things are different. And always you have bad conditions. And you are used to it, and you say ‘okay.’”*(interview with Ines).

Compared to other platform or low-skilled jobs in Denmark, or working in Argentina (both skilled and unskilled), cleaning on Hilfr is considered ‘great’. However, over time, the frame of reference may shift. When platform work is no longer just a temporary job, and the new reference point becomes the new condition – life in Denmark – the perspective on working conditions can change. In addition to the platform’s frequent inability to provide full-time work, there may be long-term side effects. Isabelle, who has been working in cleaning for five years, starts to feel the loneliness of not having co-workers, and her body gradually begins to ache from the physical demands of the work. Yet, as she puts it, *“But for now, yeah, it’s fine”*.

5. Research design

The analysis is based on a qualitative approach that combines interviews with Hilfr’s management, cleaners working through the platform, and platform users, along with desk research drawing on the Hilfr website and relevant news articles. Access to both Hilfr cleaners and users was facilitated by the company’s management. The only selection criterion for participation for workers and users was prior experience either working on the platform or booking cleaners through it.

The management was approached through personal contacts. Information about participation in the research project was distributed by Hilfr’s management to all workers on the platform. As this did not result in any interviews, we decided to include an incentive in the form of two tickets to the cinema. To maintain the voluntariness of consent among the workers, we clearly explained the purpose of the research, the nature of the tasks, and the incentives offered. This transparency is crucial for participants to understand that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Additionally, the level of incentives were set at a level that compensates for time and effort without being coercive, aiming to offer a fair reward that does not unduly influence the decision to participate. In the consent process, we provided detailed information about the study, potential risks, and benefits, and gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions. We also emphasized that participation is entirely voluntary and that

declining to participate will not affect their standing or future opportunities on the platform, reinforcing this through both written and verbal communication.

Offering cinema tickets did not seem to have a direct effect on recruitment, as it still did not result in any interviews with people working on Hilfr. Instead, what turned out to be a successful strategy, was getting the contact information from Hilfr's management, and contacting individuals directly (after they had accepted that their contact information was shared). This resulted in two interviews with cleaners and one interview with a user (they were also all offered cinema tickets).

In addition, we employed a targeted recruitment strategy that included both snowball sampling and outreach via Facebook. To recruit workers, we posted in specific Facebook groups where we believed Hilfr workers might be active – for example, 'Argentinos en Dinamarca' [Argentinians in Denmark]. This approach resulted in one additional interview, with a cleaner who had experience working for Happy Helper. Given the relatively small number of active 'Hilfrs' (around 60–70 at the time where we began recruitment), reaching potential interviewees outside the platform was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. This likely explains why we only managed to recruit cleaners working through Happy Helper, which has a significantly larger workforce of approximately 4,500 'Helpers' (Rasmussen 2024). Without the assistance of Hilfr's management, it is highly unlikely that we would have been able to recruit any Hilfr cleaners for interviews.

According to the Hilfr cleaners we interviewed, other workers were hesitant to participate due to limited English proficiency. Unfortunately, we were unable to offer interviews in Spanish due to resource constraints and the lack of Spanish language skills within the research team. To recruit users of the platform, we also posted in Facebook groups where we expected there might be interest in private cleaning services. This assumption was based on two factors: the financial means of group members and the normalization of such services in their home countries, where private domestic help is more common. Specifically, we posted in the group 'Expats in Copenhagen', but this did not yield any additional interviews.

The interviews were conducted by one or two members of the project team between June 2024 and January 2025. The interviews with workers and users after the Hilfr2 agreement. The interviews were carried out in either English (for all non-Danish participants) or Danish, depending on the interviewee's language preference. To ensure participants felt comfortable and to build trust, interviews were held either in person at a location chosen by the interviewee or online via video call. This resulted in three in-person interviews and two conducted online. In line with existing research suggesting that the quality of responses in face-to-face and online interviews is comparable (Nehls, Brandy & Holly 2015: 146), both types of interviews were treated equally in the analysis. Interview locations included a university meeting room and a local coffee shop.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide tailored to each type of respondent. The interview with Hilfr's management focused on the following themes: the history and characteristics of the platform; platform governance and social dialogue; human resource management; division of labour and task complexity; technologies and data processes; occupational safety and health; the collective agreement with the trade union 3F; and the broader regulatory context.

Interviews with platform workers explored a range of themes, including their professional background, motivations for engaging in platform work and for choosing Hilfr, their use of the platform, visibility and control mechanisms, professional identity, client matching and relationships, working conditions, development of new and existing skills, interactions with trade unions and other forms of worker representation, as well as perceived risks and needs for social protection. The interview guide for Hilfr users mirrored that of the workers but was adapted to reflect the user perspective – for instance, questions addressed their motivations for using the platform and their experiences with the feedback and rating system. The interview with the representative from the trade union focused on domestic cleaning within the gig economy and the role of collective agreements and legislative tools in regulating platform-based cleaning and care work.

Two interviews were documented through written notes during the conversations, while the remaining interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All material was analysed exploratorily using NVivo. Names and other identifying details have been changed or omitted to ensure the anonymity of interview participants.

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Care.com and private long-term care in Denmark

This case study is one of two contributions from the Danish team to the ORIGAMI project's third deliverable. It examines Care.com, one of the few care platforms in Denmark. Launched in 2015, Care.com was the first platform of its kind in the Danish market and remains the largest, though its overall scale is relatively small. This is largely due to Denmark's publicly subsidized care system, which dominates the sector.

To provide a more comprehensive analysis, the study also includes private care services operating outside the platform economy. This broader perspective helps contextualize platform-based work within the wider landscape of self-employment in private long-term care and domestic cleaning. The focus is on workers – how their work practices, professional competencies, and work environment are shaped, not only by the platform but also by the general conditions of the sector.

The data collection for this case proved particularly challenging due to the limited accessibility of both platform workers and company representatives. The case study is based on interviews with a caregiver working through Care.com Denmark, a caregiver with experience from a private home care provider, two users of private, market-based home care, and a representative from the trade union FOA. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure an interview with anyone from the management of Care.com Europe GmbH. As a result, we also rely extensively on relevant articles and information from Care.com's Danish website (see also section on Research design).

1. Long-term care in Denmark

As described in the first deliverable from the Danish team (Larsen & Ilsøe 2024), Denmark's long-term care (LTC) system stands out as one of the most generous and universal in Europe, reflecting the core principles of the Nordic welfare state tradition. Anchored in what is often referred to as the 'public service model', the Danish LTC system is characterized by publicly organized, financed, and delivered care services, offered to older adults as a social right based on citizenship and need – rather than contributions or family obligations.

At the heart of the Danish model lies the principle of universal access. Care services, such as home help, personal care, and residential care, are made available to all residents who are assessed as needing them, regardless of income, employment history, or family situation. These services are primarily funded through taxation and

are administered by Denmark's 98 municipalities, which hold responsibility for both the assessment of need and the provision of care.

LTC in Denmark is delivered through a formally structured and professionally staffed system, where care work is largely performed by trained personnel under public regulation and oversight. Services are typically offered free of charge or with minimal co-payment. While care services remain heavily publicly subsidized, they are increasingly delivered by a mix of public and private providers, particularly in home care and cleaning services.

Over the past two decades, the public care approach in Denmark has shifted toward more targeted needs assessments and a prioritization of the most frail individuals. This has contributed to a decline both in the number of older people living in institutional care and in the share of older people receiving home help or practical assistance. At the same time, there has been a reduction in the time allocated to specific care tasks, leaving little flexibility for either care workers or users in organizing and adjusting daily care routines (Hjelmar & Rostgaard 2020). This development is driven by a combination of demographic pressures and fiscal constraints at the municipal level.

In parallel, the introduction of a tax deduction scheme for certain household services – including cleaning and minor personal assistance – has created space for private and market-based (supplementary) services. These are often offered by companies or digital platforms that match users with care workers, such as Care.com.

To our knowledge, there are no estimates on the overall proportion of older people using private market-based services. However, an analysis of 2017 data from the Danish Longitudinal Survey on Ageing shows that 46% of users with a for-profit home care provider purchase additional supplemental services. This accounts for 10% of all home care users (Hjelmar & Rostgaard 2020). It is, however, unlikely that a large share of users will seek supplemental services beyond their existing provider, such as through care platforms, as this would require additional effort and involve welcoming more caregivers into their homes – factors that influence the initial choice of a private provider to ensure continuity and stability of personnel (Rostgaard & Thorgaard 2007). Thus, the market for 'purely' market-based LTC services remains relatively limited. This is also reflected in the experience of a representative from FOA – the trade union representing the majority of elder care workers in Denmark. As she puts it: *"As things stand now, we don't see a large 'private-private' market [outside the publicly regulated]. There aren't many people who go out and pay for extra services"*.

2. Care.com – history and characteristics

Care.com was founded in 2006 by Sheila Lirio Marcelo and Co-founders Dave Krupinsky, Donna Levin and Zenobia Moochhala (Care.com 2025). According to venture capitalist David Skok, investors were enthusiastic about Marcelo's vision to create an online marketplace aimed at professionalizing the informal economy, which included teenage babysitters, part-time dog walkers, and freelance tutors (Farrell 2014). Since its launch in the US in 2007 with childcare, senior care, pet care and tutoring, it has expanded to include housekeeping, care for special needs children and adults and care for the unique needs of military families (Care.com 2025).

Care.com entered the Danish platform market in 2015. As of late 2024, an overview of profiles suggests that Care.com had around 150 elder care providers. The market for market-based elder care remains relatively small, as noted above. However, other platforms, such as the French Yoopies, have also entered the market. Based on a view of its website, Yoopies appears to have only a handful of elder care providers, all located in Copenhagen (Yoopies 2025).

Care.com operates in Denmark as an online marketplace connecting families with caregivers. The platform facilitates job postings for services such as childcare, elderly care (home help and practical assistance), and housekeeping, while also allowing customers to browse caregiver profiles and contact them directly. This setup indicates that Care.com does not directly employ caregivers; instead, it provides a platform that connects caregivers and families, leaving the two parties to negotiate terms. Caregivers operate as freelancers, responsible for their own taxes, insurance, and social security contributions.

Care.com operates on a tiered model, allowing users to conduct basic searches and post job listings for free. However, to initiate contact, users must purchase a subscription (premium membership), costing 290 DKK (approx. 40€) for one month, 590 DKK (approx. 80€) for three months or 1190 DKK (approx. 160€) for a year. Additionally, the platform imposes fees for private communication between both parties (Flanagan 2018).

The first step on the Danish Care.com website is to register in order to access further information. The registration process begins with selecting whether you are signing up as a private individual or a business. Next, you must specify whether you are looking for a helper or a job. If looking for help, you then choose the type of care needed from categories such as childcare, au pair services, house and garden work, pet sitting, tutoring, elder care, or special needs care. If you select elder care, you must further specify the type of assistance required, with options including home care, visiting home care (*udeboende hjemmehjælp*), household assistance, meal preparation, social companionship, help with personal hygiene such as showering and dressing, home nursing care (*hjemmesygehjælp*), mobility assistance, transportation, or errands and shopping. After selecting the necessary services, you must enter your postal code, followed by your email, password, and full name to complete the registration process.

Once registered, you can browse available helpers, but the information and features accessible depend on whether you have a free account or a Premium membership. With a free account, limited details are displayed for each helper, including their name, age, postal code, years of experience, and rating, which ranges from one to five stars. However, profiles are presented one at a time, and you must decide whether you are interested before moving on. This selection process functions similarly to dating apps like Tinder, where you either reject the profile by selecting a 'cross' or express interest by selecting a 'tick mark'. Regardless of your choice, the helper's profile disappears after selection. While no confirmation is provided, it is likely that the helper receives a notification if you express interest. Additionally, you can specify further details about your needs, including whether you require assistance on a regular basis or just once, the number of hours needed per day, week, every other week, or month (ranging from one to forty hours), the specific days of the week when help is needed, the preferred time of day – morning, afternoon, evening, or night – and the desired start date.

A Premium membership provides access to more detailed information about each helper, including their full name (if provided), age, city, years of experience, hourly wage, qualifications, spoken languages, and rating. Ratings are displayed both as a star score from one to five and as the total number of reviews, for example, "4.5 based on nine reviews", along with any written feedback. Premium users can also view details such as the tasks a helper offers, their last active status, whether they hold a Premium membership themselves, any verifications they have, the number of times they have been hired, and their personal description. In addition to viewing more information, Premium members can contact helpers directly, send unlimited messages, and unlock and read all applications. They also have access to advanced filtering options, allowing them to search for helpers based on location and radius, preferred languages, and additional criteria such as whether they own a vehicle, are non-smokers, accept pets, operate as a company, or have received reviews. Premium members also have the option to post a job listing to attract potential helpers.

Care.com is explicit about its ambition to become the "largest online care destination in the world," focusing on business expansion and "building a global marketplace for care." (Care.com's website). To support this growth, Care.com has sought strategic alignment with major private companies, most notably Google Capital, which became its main shareholder in 2016 (Mos 2021: 220–21). According to a study by Flanagan (2018), Care.com operates within a data ecosystem that is closely integrated with third-party services, including search engines, email providers, geo-location vendors, and classified advertising businesses such as Google. The platform shares personal information about job posters, along with anonymized user data collected through browsing histories, cookies, and web beacons. This enables Google to sell highly targeted advertising space both within and beyond the Care.com platform (Flanagan 2018: 63). Care.com's operations in Denmark suggest that this line of business may be

its primary focus. There appear to be no mechanisms in place to ensure that workers and users remain on the platform, as they can exchange personal contact information and continue communication outside of it (based on personal experience, see also the section on research design).

3. Platform governance

Care.com's Danish activities operate under the oversight of Care.com Europe GmbH, headquartered in Berlin, Germany, with no dedicated local office or middle management structure in Denmark. Since April 2021, Dirk Kasten has served as the Managing Director of Care.com Europe GmbH. Due to the inability to arrange an interview with Dirk Kasten or other managers from Care.com Europe GmbH, we are unable to provide further details about the governance of Care.com Europe GmbH. It is, however, clear that the platform relies heavily on algorithmic management for caregiver matching and profile management.

4. Platform workers

4.1. Types of workers and their reason for being active on Care.com

The majority of workers on Care.com are women, making up 94% of the workforce in 2019 (Fetterolf 2021: 66). A similar trend is evident on Care.com's Danish site, where most caregivers appear to be female. In addition, when zooming in on 'Elderly care', the majority seem to have some level of experience with LTC or health care. Beyond gender and experience, the platform features a diverse mix of ages, professional- and educational backgrounds, and ethnicities. Thus the hourly prices in 'Elderly care' vary across workers from 100 to 350 DKK (app. €13 – €47) per hour. Based on the publicly available profile descriptions on Care.com Denmark (accessible with a free account), we identified three distinct types of workers in 'Elderly care', each potentially driven by different motivations for offering their services through the platform:

4.2. Migrant labor: Access to work

One group consists of migrant workers who may turn to Care.com due to limited access to employment opportunities in the formal long-term care (LTC) sector. The entry barriers to platform-based LTC work are relatively low compared to the public municipal care system, where most employees hold formal qualifications: 12% are trained nurses, 28% are social and health care assistants, and 37% are social and health care helpers. Only 14% of care workers in the municipal sector are unskilled. The

municipal system alone accounts for over 90% of all employees (measured in full-time equivalents) in LTC in Denmark (Mailand 2025: 14). Care.com does not check the experience or education of workers on their platform (interview with care giver with a profile on Care.com).

Within this group of caregivers, two sub-groups can be identified. The first consists of highly skilled migrants with several years of experience in the care sector – most likely gained in their country of origin – often from work in hospitals (e.g., as a nurse) or in long-term care. While this is somewhat speculative, it is likely that some face challenges in getting their qualifications recognized or obtaining Danish authorization to work in the formal health and care sector. The second group consists of younger migrants who typically have less experience in the care sector and lack formal education or training in the field

Students: Gaining experience and income alongside studies

Another group of workers consists of students – either training for a profession in the health or LTC sector, studying in a different field (less commonly), or still attending high school. They appear to be motivated by a desire to gain relevant experience to strengthen their competencies and/or future job prospects, and/or to earn supplementary income while studying. Many already have some experience working as unskilled care workers in elder care, helping relatives, or working in cleaning or cooking.

4.3. Experienced LTC workers: Flexibility & the ability to provide decent care

The last group of workers we identified are care givers with formal education and many years of experience working in LTC or in the health care sector. The group exist primarily of social and health care helpers and social and help care assistants, but also nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. Some seem to work on Care.com in addition to their regular job e.g. at a hospital or nursing home, while others deliberately have switched from providing within the public system to the private market-based system.

One of them is Karen, a 60-year-old social and health care assistant (*social- og sundhedsassistent*) (and formerly a nursing assistant (*sygehjælper*)), with experience from working in hospitals and in home care, who left her job in public home care 14 years ago to become self-employed. She made this decision because she felt she did not have enough time to provide proper care within the public system and could not fully apply her professional skills. As she explains when asked what she gains from being self-employed:

“Well, in the public sector, it's the time pressure where they say you have seven minutes to go up and put drops in Mrs. Hansen's eyes, and then you have to take off your jacket on the 4th floor and say hello, and then you have to hear how

she's doing, and then you have to be down in the car and on your way to the next one. Completely hopeless, really. And here, they pay me for coming in the time frame they want. (...) [Now, I have] a completely different amount of time, yes. And things like talking about food, which is very important with elderly people, helping with shopping to show them what has the most calories... they had never thought about that. Rehabilitation, going out for walks, up and down stairs, and things like that you don't get in the public sector anymore."

And afterwards she continues:

"I couldn't stand it [in the public sector], that a nurse had to decide. I have my education, I can think for myself. That a nurse had to be there every single time and decide everything I had to do. I couldn't stand it" (interview with Karen, active on Care.com).

Being able to use her skills and provide decent care is a motivation echoed by Kirsten, a social and health care assistant who also holds a qualification as a pedagogical assistant (*pædagogisk assistent*) and has many years of experience in psychiatry. She decided to quit her job in the public sector, and work as freelancer in a private (for-profit) company providing care within the publicly funded system. When asked about her decision to move from public to private care provision, she explained that the strain on the public sector prevented her from delivering the level of care she found professionally acceptable. Eventually, she decided she no longer wanted to be part of a system that limited her ability to provide high quality care. In addition, she highlighted the appeal of having more flexibility – both in choosing her working hours and in how to deliver care – something she had been promised when taking on freelance work. Similar arguments were shared by two users of private market-based care we interviewed – Vivian and Henry. They receive 1.5 hours of publicly funded practical assistance every other week but have chosen to supplement this with an additional 2.5 hours of combined practical and health care services twice a week. For them, it is essential to receive the support they feel they need from someone they trust. While not stated explicitly, having time for conversation also seems important. As Henry noted, he values that their caregiver is someone with whom he can have *"meaningful conversations"* (interview with Vivian and Henry).

Both Karen and Kirsten have been offered employment opportunities as employees but have declined in favor of maintaining their independence. Karen has been approached by companies through Care.com offering her a job as a salaried employee, but she has no interest in giving up her autonomy. Similarly, Kirsten prefers to remain fully self-employed rather than returning to an employee position within the publicly funded care system.

4.4. Flexibility in theory and practice – potential risks

One of the reasons for turning to private market-based care are to avoid what has been termed the ‘minute tyranny’ (*minuttyranni*) of the public LTC system, where each care worker’s visit is scheduled in strict time slots for predefined tasks (Lehmann et al., 2020; Andersen & Kruse, 2021). As Karen, a provider of private market-based care explained above, this system leaves care providers with very limited time for ‘social care’ – such as having a conversation over a cup of coffee – and offers little flexibility in how care is delivered. On Care.com, users who are interested in services beyond what the municipality has assessed them to need, can easily find care givers, who meet their criteria. In theory, this allows both the provider and recipient to enjoy the flexibility they prefer. In this context, it is important to note that care relationships are highly personal – more so than, for example, the relationship one might have with a domestic cleaner. Receiving home help or practical assistance involves more than simply allowing someone into your home; it often means allowing them into your private life. As highlighted in the interviews with care recipients Vivian and Henry, having unfamiliar people in one’s home can feel intrusive, and establishing a trusting relationship is essential. This deeply personal dynamic also poses a potential risk of discrimination – for instance, against ethnic minorities or other groups whom some older people may hold biases or stereotypes about.

While self-employment in the care sector promises flexibility, the reality can differ significantly. Although these are individual experiences, in both Karen’s and Kirsten’s case the flexible work life they envision(ed) turned out differently, for two distinct reasons: 1) the low demand for private market-based care, which makes platform work unsustainable as a primary source of income, and 2) a strong sense of responsibility toward the company and the elderly care recipients.

4.5. Platform care work as economically unsustainable – accepting lower price setting

As part of the recruitment and research process, we created a free profile on Care.com Denmark (see also research design). We were quickly contacted by several care providers who expressed interest in working for us, even though we had not described any specific care tasks. This suggests that the demand for elder care services on Care.com Denmark is limited. Additionally, the platform’s apparent lack of strict regulation regarding whether care recipients and providers continue using the platform after being matched further supports this observation. Karen also struggles to find enough work through Care.com and therefore seeks clients through multiple channels. Despite being active on the platform, she only manages to secure around 2–3 hours of work per week via Care.com. This limited workload can be attributed partly to the structural characteristics of the Danish care system, and partly to the nature of

the work itself, where care arrangements often come to a natural end. Karen, for example, shares that five of her former care recipients passed away from pneumonia in December, leaving her with only three current clients (interview with Care.com worker, Karen). A similar pattern of fluctuation in clients is mentioned in relation to private care provided within the public system by smaller companies. Kirsten describes the difficulty of planning and maintaining a stable business when the user base is unpredictable (interview with Kirsten, self-employed in private care).

As a consequence of limited demand, care providers on Care.com may feel compelled to accept lower hourly rates. Karen, for instance, lists her rate on Care.com at 350 DKK (approx. €47) per hour. When securing work through other channels, she typically charges 600 DKK (approx. €80) per hour. However, some potential clients were only willing to pay 170 DKK (approx. €23) per hour. At the time, she had no other clients and accepted the offer: *“And there I was without a job, so I thought, well, it's better than nothing”*. She only kept the job for half a year, but the experience illustrates the risk of prices falling in a low-demand market.

Another factor contributing to the relatively low prices on Care.com Denmark – which, according to Karen, are less than half of what private care providers typically charge – *maybe* a lack of transparency and recognition of caregivers' qualifications. Karen feels that the platform does not allow her to distinguish herself from less experienced care workers. As she explains, for someone without professional knowledge, it can be hard to tell the difference between a caregiver with experience in residential care, one with experience in home care, or someone with a hospital background (interview with Care.com worker Karen).

4.6. Sense of responsibility – staying despite poor working conditions

Beyond Care.com and into the broader sector of private care provision, another reason care workers may risk their flexibility is a strong sense of responsibility toward the (private) company and the people they care for. Kirsten, who became self-employed by joining a private care provider as a freelancer, ultimately found herself working under conditions similar to those of regular employees – but without the benefits that come with status as an employee – despite what was promised her. This reflects the conclusion of her case against her former employer, which pointed to a situation of false self-employment. Her decision to stay on these terms was driven by a sense of duty to both her colleagues and the care recipients. As she recalls: *“I wanted to contribute and take on my share of the work”* (Interview with Kirsten). The result was that she took on too many shifts – including night shifts – which led to burnout and eventually sick leave, before she decided to quit. According to a representative from FOA, this kind of commitment is typical among their members in the LTC sector, where many accept poor working conditions out of concern for the care recipients. As

the representative puts it: *“They work very much with their hearts and allow themselves to be pressured, because – if they don’t do it, then who will, right? If anyone even shows up at all – that is their fear”* (Interview with FOA representative).

In addition to losing the flexibility that, for some care workers, is a key reason for choosing private care work, it is important to highlight another significant cost: the lack of access to social protection. For care workers using platforms like Care.com or working as self-employed, this remains a major trade-off. Despite this, Karen, a Care.com user, does not express a need for union involvement or collective bargaining. Although she has been a member of FOA since the age of 15, she does not seem to envision a future in which the flexibility she values can be combined with social protection. For Karen, the platform primarily serves as a tool for client matching, and she perceives no meaningful difference between the clients she finds through Care.com and those she finds through other channels. Similarly, Kirsten sees no clear distinction between users of private and public care providers within the publicly funded system.

5. Conclusion: Care.com – an additional ‘source’ of client matching in a small market

Recent developments in Denmark’s public care system have opened space for private, market-based (supplementary) services. However, the market for purely market-based elder care services remains relatively small. Care.com is the largest platform offering such services in Denmark, but its role in matching care providers with users appears to be limited, with unclear activity levels on the platform. The analysis shows that demand is insufficient for providers to secure full-time work – likely not even part-time work – but rather only a few hours per week. As a result, users may feel compelled to accept lower prices, adding to the lack of social protection that is inherent in the platform’s current business model.

The care worker we interviewed expressed satisfaction with Care.com, but had limited knowledge of how the platform operates and used it as a supplementary source for finding clients, alongside more traditional methods. While Care.com may serve as an entry point for migrant workers or students, it does not seem to offer a sustainable income on its own – only as an additional supplement. However, for some, it may present a preferred alternative to self-employment in private care provision, which can carry the risk of de facto employee status without the associated benefits or the flexibility that experienced LTC workers may seek when transitioning from public to private care services. As Karen, a Care.com worker, explained regarding her future on the platform: *“I actually don’t know, because I can’t live on 350 DKK per hour.*

Fortunately, I have the others [customers]. But I still think I will read through the descriptions when they [Care.com] send me a message that there is a job that might suit me. Yeah, I think so."

6. Research design

The analysis is based on a qualitative approach that combines an interview with a caregiver working through Care.com Denmark, interviews with individuals offering different perspectives on the case, and desk research drawing on Care.com's Danish website and relevant articles. These perspectives include two users of private, market-based home care; a caregiver formerly employed as a freelancer by a company providing private home care within the Free Choice scheme⁵ (*Frit valg*); and a representative from the trade union FOA, which represented the freelancer in her dispute with her former employer.

Care.com is chosen for investigation because it is the largest and most widely used care platform – not only globally (Fetterolf 2022: 54), but also in Denmark. Although the number of workers and users remain relatively small (even in a Danish context), the platform provides valuable insight into the current role and potential of care platforms in the country. At the same time, it has the potential to serve as a prism for understanding both the opportunities and challenges associated with platform-based care work.

We were unable to secure an interview with Care.com Europe's Managing Director, Dirk Kasten, despite repeated efforts. No publicly available contact information exists for him beyond his LinkedIn profile. The project team attempted to reach out through personal German contacts on LinkedIn, but received no response. This experience mirrors that of other country teams in the Origami project, who tried to get in touch with Care.com's European management.

As a first step in trying to reach workers on Care.com, we posted in relevant Facebook groups, including those targeted at care workers – such as 'Social and Health Care Assistant/Helper: Job & Student Job [SOSU-assistent/-hjælper: Job & Studiejob]' – as well as in a group for international students: 'International Students in Copenhagen'.

Given our previous challenges with recruitment for another case study included in this deliverable from the Danish team (focused on the cleaning platform Hilfr), we decided

⁵ The free choice care model, introduced in 2003, gives care recipients the legal right to choose between at least two different providers – either public or private – for publicly funded home care services. Those who qualify for home help or practical assistance can select a provider using either a pre-paid care voucher or a cash-for-care allowance. The scheme ensures that users can access private providers while still receiving public funding, as long as they meet the eligibility criteria (Larsen & Ilsøe 2024).

to offer a small incentive – two cinema tickets – to encourage participation. To ensure workers' consent was fully voluntary, we provided clear and detailed information about the research project, the tasks involved, and the incentive. This transparency is crucial to ensure that participants understand their involvement is entirely optional and that they can withdraw at any time without any consequences. We were careful to set the incentive at a level that appropriately compensates for participants' time and effort without being so high as to unduly influence their decision to participate. Unfortunately, this strategy did not yield any responses.

Simultaneously, we created a free profile on Care.com. It only takes a name and email address to set up a profile. We used four filters: senior care, private person, all types of specified types of care, zip code of the university. First, our aim was to familiarize ourselves with the platform, but just after we finished setting up the profile, workers started contacting us directly and two left us their contact information. This resulted in one interview (she was also offered two cinema tickets).

This interviewee connected us with one (or rather: two) of her clients – an elderly couple who had hired her through their general practitioner. We included their perspective to shed light on the motivations behind paying out of pocket for (additional) private care, as well as to explore their views on collaboration and working conditions in privately organized, market-based care work.

After creating a profile on Care.com, we contacted Care.com through their customer service to inquire about the possibility of recruiting participants for research directly via their platform. In our message, we provided a detailed explanation of the research project's aims and the type of questions we intended to ask potential interviewees. We received a polite but generic reply that did not address our request directly but said that our email would be forwarded to the appropriate department. We never received a follow-up from the relevant department, and as a result, we were unable to recruit any additional participants through the platform.

Using our free account, we browsed caregiver profiles on Care.com Denmark to get a sense of the population of care providers active on the platform.

While our attempts to recruit participants through the above-mentioned channels were unsuccessful, an article was published about two FOA members who had worked as falsely self-employed in a private home care company and were later recognized as employees by the Employees' Guarantee Fund (*Lønmodtagernes Garnatifond*). We reached out to one of the individuals featured in the article, and she agreed to participate in the study. She did not wish to remain anonymous, so we have chosen to include her story openly. In addition, we interviewed a representative from FOA, the trade union that represented the two members in their case. We included their perspectives to get a better sense of both the decision-making process behind working in private care and how working conditions are shaped within the market-based model.

The interviews were conducted by a member of the project team between October and November 2024. All interviews with caregivers and care recipients were conducted face-to-face, while the interview with the FOA trade union representative was held online, in accordance with the interviewee's preference. The face-to-face interviews took place either in the interviewees' private homes or in public cafés chosen by the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted using semi-structured guides that were adapted to the specific type of respondent. The interview with the Care.com platform worker focused on several key themes, including professional background; motivations for engaging in platform work and for choosing Care.com; experiences using the platform; visibility and control mechanisms; professional identity; client matching and relationships; working conditions; skill development; interactions with trade unions and other forms of worker representation; and perceived risks and needs for social protection. The interview with the 'false self-employed' home care worker focused on her experiences with private care provision, motivations for choosing this form of work, the specific case in question – including the associated risks and benefits – support received from the trade union, and knowledge of care platforms. The interview with the trade union representative addressed the same themes, but from the union's perspective, with a broader focus that extended beyond the individual case.

The interview guide for users of private care focused on the following themes: experiences with private care providers; motivations and criteria for choosing a private market-based provider; usage patterns; types of services received; feedback mechanisms; satisfaction with services and specific tasks; and perceptions of working conditions.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All material was analysed inductively using NVivo.

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Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

FRANCE

CASE STUDIES

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Digital platforms in the domestic and care work sector in France: an exploratory study

1. Introduction

Digital labour platforms have become increasingly important in the domestic and care work sector since the beginning of the 21st century. The number of digital intermediaries operating in this sector worldwide was only 28 in 2010, and has increased to 224 by 2020 (ILO, 2021, p. 45), with new companies emerging in the last five years. As digital technologies have become a façade for a very wide range of businesses, it is difficult to determine their exact number. Through websites and apps, many companies –whose legal status and organisational forms are often opaque– offer cleaning and care services to households. Because some of them are not well-established, they tend to appear and then frequently disappear. As a result, any mapping of digital platforms represents a snapshot of their presence in the sector at a very precise moment.

Thus, between March and April 2024, through web scraping, we found fourteen digital platforms offering cleaning and care services in France. Like digital platforms in other sectors such as delivery and transportation, they all have a reputational system to evaluate the performance of workers. Additionally, the payment for the services is mostly made via the platform. However, digital platforms in this sector do not systematically use algorithmic management to assign the tasks or algorithmic systems to connect the workers with households (only five of fourteen claim to use them). In most cases, it is the clients who place the job offer on the digital platform and select the worker who applied for the job. In general, clients pay for the matching services provided by the digital platform, although there are some companies who charge also the workers.

In terms of business models, our mapping identified five on-demand platforms, six marketplaces and three digital agencies⁶. On-demand platforms do the matching between the person seeking a job and the person offering a job, but they do not take responsibility for the contractual arrangement between the client and the worker. In most cases, on-demand platforms in France require the worker to be registered as a micro-entrepreneur in order to join the platform. This means that they have to be formally enrolled as self-employed worker in the micro-enterprise regime. However, platforms don't check whether this is the case; the obligation relies almost entirely on the worker. The micro-enterprise regime is a simplified tax and social regime that

⁶ For the typology of digital platforms, see Tandon and Rathi, 2021; Rodriguez-Modroño, 2024; and Pais and Bonifacio, 2024.

allows the creation of businesses with relatively low annual profits (up to 77,700€ per year in 2024). It aims to simplify administrative formalities, and the calculation and payment of social security contributions and income tax. This regime provides social protection such as health insurance, retirement, invalidity, family allowances and the right to vocational training⁷, albeit with less coverage than in the employee status.

Marketplace platforms –which do not make the matching neither establish a contractual relationship with the workers– have also taken advantage of the status of micro-entrepreneurs. On their websites, they assimilate professionalism and micro-entrepreneurship by promoting workers registered as such. Only one marketplace – set up with social goals– promotes direct employment using the CESU voucher, even though this payment option is also available in other platforms. This voucher can be used to make payments to service providers, workers employed directly by households and both (Dussuet and Ledoux, 2019). When the household uses the voucher when employing a worker, social security contributions are automatically deducted, establishing de facto a formal labour relation between the worker and one person of the household. This means the recognition of certain labour rights (such as holidays, sick leave, extra hours, notice of termination, etc.), and social security rights (like health insurance, pension, family allowance, hazard insurance, and unemployment benefits).

Within the digital agency model –which does the matching and sets up the labour contract, digital platforms use three different contractual arrangements. First, the digital platform acts as the employer, therefore, the workers are employees of the platform (this is the so-called “*prestataire*” model in France). Second, the workers are employees of a third company associated with the platform. Third, the workers are employees of the household that purchases the agency’s service. In this case, the digital platform provides a staff management service (i.e. enrolment of the worker in the social security system, payment of the employer’s contributions, etc.). This case corresponds to the so-called “*mandataire*” model, in which the digital agency acts as a proxy agency. Having existed in France since 1990, proxy agencies are not a new phenomenon that appeared with the advent of digital technologies. However, the widespread use of these technologies is driving traditional proxy agencies to digitalise the candidates’ selection, the matching, the payroll procedures and other organisational processes. This also means that it is sometimes difficult to delineate the difference between a digital agency and a more traditional proxy agency which uses digital tools.

With regard to the services offered by all of digital platforms identified in France, four platforms focus exclusively on cleaning tasks; four offer cleaning and other services such as home support or beauty and wellness services; three offer cleaning and care

⁷ See <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/cedef/micro-entrepreneur-auto-entrepreneur>

services (both elderly and child care) and three others specialise exclusively in elderly care (although cleaning is always part of the care work in this case). The French labour market is highly regulated when it concerns home care for the elderly. Service providers in “*mandataire*” model must have an “agreement” with the subnational authorities or the state⁸ to provide services to people having lost their autonomy and beneficiaries of the social assistance scheme called APA (*Allocation Personnalisée d'Autonomie*). The agreement requires the service providers to have one or several offices⁹. The APA finances a help plan for home care; however, it cannot completely be assimilated to cash benefits since the usages of funding are controlled through varied means (Ledoux et al., 2024). Therefore, most digital platforms in France offer cleaning, home support and childcare services instead of elderly home care. These activities are less regulated and represent an easier entry point for these new actors.

Of the countries participating in the ORIGAMI project, France is the country with the second highest number of digital platforms, after Italy (with 27 digital platforms) (Pais & Bonifacio, 2024). The development of digital platforms in this sector is driven by a policy of socio-fiscal benefits for all households purchasing this type of service, which covers 50% of the cost of home help (Ledoux et al., 2024). The State pays the taxpayer 50% of the deductible services declared in the previous year in January, and in September made an adjustment, which may involve a second payment or a request for repayment of part of the advance. This tax benefit has been in place for a very long time and was transformed in 2017 into a tax credit accessible to all households (including pensioners), without differentiating the employment status of the worker. However, in 2022¹⁰, the government changed this logic introducing “the immediate advance mechanism”: this is an optional service that can be used by employers and by clients of service providers¹¹ (Ledoux et al., 2024). For those who choose the immediate advance, 50% of the tax credit is paid instantly by the government, so households do not have to wait a year to be reimbursed. Some agencies also succeeded to negotiate a direct payment to them. Thus, the price of home services appears directly reduced by half on the websites of the digital platforms or on their Apps. This creates a strong incentive to use household services supported by the tax break, such as domestic and care work, including those provided by or through digital platforms.

8 See Ledoux, C., Teke, N., and Caillaud, P. Socio-economic literature review report on care regime at country level – France, report ORIGAMI <https://origamiproject.it/reports/d2.1-france.pdf>

9 Décret no 2023-608 du 13 juillet 2023 relatif aux services autonomie à domicile mentionnés à l'article L. 313-1-3 du code de l'action sociale et des familles et aux services d'aide et d'accompagnement à domicile relevant des 10 et 160 du I de l'article L. 312-1 du même code

10 Article 13 of the Social Security Financing Act for 2022, 23 December 2021.

11 This option is offered by the URSSAF (*Union de recouvrement des cotisations de sécurité sociale et d'allocations familiales*), which is responsible for collecting social security contributions.

In this exploratory study, which aims to understand how digital platforms enter the home services market, particularly its most regulated part –home care for the elderly, we chose to focus on two different business models: marketplace and digital agency. The two digital platforms selected are local companies operating only on the French market. While literature on digital platforms has shown that these new players tend to enter the market by exploiting regulatory gaps or grey zones, our study seeks to explore how these platforms and their workers adapt and circumvent a dense regulatory framework such as that for elderly home care in France.

Based on the founders' testimonies, the information presented on the platforms' websites and press releases, this report will first present how these two models have materialised in France by adapting to the regulatory context. The second section presents the governance and organisational model of the platforms, focusing on the services provided. The third section explores, from the workers' perspective, the different experiences of using digital platforms to work as care workers for the elderly. The fourth section offers some reflexions concerning the specificities of the French case. Finally, the fifth section presents the research design, and the methodology used in this study.

2. Two different models for elderly home care: digital agency and marketplace.

As on most of the websites of digital platforms focusing on elderly care in other countries, we observed a humanitarian approach to care in the cases studied here. Both companies promote quality care, i.e. care that is adapted to the needs of the elderly and respectful of the carer. For the founders of these two digital platforms – young entrepreneurs, trained in marketing, business and digital technologies, the idea of creating a digital platform that could intervene and change the home care for the elderly sector was triggered by a personal experience. In both cases, a loved one in need of care experienced the difficulty of finding permanent caregivers. This initial insight led them to carry out a market analysis, looking at the institutions that provide care services and the mechanisms that allow for the direct recruitment of care workers. Following different paths, the founders of the two digital platforms came to the same conclusion: the main problem is the rotation of carers and thus the instability of care for the elderly. Looking at possible solutions, both stressed the importance of strengthening the employment relationship between the care worker and the household (legally known as the “particular employer”). One of the founders focused on the potential of the legal framework and public policies related to care for the elderly to ensure better care as well as better working conditions, while the other

focused on how IT could make existing institutions more effective to reach these goals.

The choice of “direct employment” –i.e. where the household is the employer of the care worker– is based on long-standing public policies of promoting a legal contractual relationship. We can for example highlight how the creation of the employment service voucher in 1995, modified into CESU in 2005, by simplifying the formalities linked to employer status, encouraged the use of this form of employment. One of the platforms studied here –the digital proxy agency– aims to facilitate direct contracting through the use of digital tools, within what the founders consider to be the most protected framework already in place: the “*mandataire*” model. The aim is to develop digital tools to better coordinate not only the selection of workers and the matching process, but also the organisation of working schedules and the monitoring of the quality of care.

The other digital platform –the marketplace– seeks to challenge the different mechanisms of intermediation in care work. The founder criticises digital platforms that mediate freelancers (micro-entrepreneurs) or casual workers (jobbing), as they promote precariousness and labour exploitation; as well as the high costs of intermediation in the case of employees in the “*mandataire*” and “*prestataire*” models, where workers have access to rights but very low wages. The aim of this marketplace platforms is to provide an alternative way of enforcing the protections guaranteed by the labour code and by collective agreements for those who are employees of a “particular employer” (Ledoux et al., 2024).

2.1. The French version of a digital agency: the “ *mandataire*” model

The digital proxy platform was created in January 2016 and became operational via a website in June of the same year, when it received the state agreement as home care provider for the elderly by using “*mandataire*” model. According to one of the three founders, the choice of this type of mediation is linked to the fact that one of the main goals for the company is to give “stability to the caregiver–recipient couple”. The business model is based on two premises: to provide better care by accompanying families and care workers, and to use digital technology to do so. The company started its operations in Paris and the surrounding areas. The year 2018 represents an important turning point for the company, as they have attracted some capital investors and are able to hire an IT team and expand to two major cities in France. The company then opens fifteen agencies. This is crucial because one of the requirements of the “*mandataire*” model is to have physical agencies open to the public. Between 2020 and 2021, despite the difficulties and uncertainties associated with the changing context during the Covid-19 pandemic, the company was able to function thanks to the level of digitalisation of administrative and management tasks. Aware of

the importance of digital technologies in management, the company raised more capital at that time to invest in the development of technological tools. The new capital allows to increase the number of IT professionals (up to 40 people) and to extend their implantation at national level in cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants. The company had 25 agencies in 2021, 45 in 2022, 90 in 2023 and actually more than 120 nationwide. Today, the company acts as an intermediary for 3,000 care workers and 6,000 households.

As established in the regulation of the “*mandataire*” model, the digital agency provides two main services: assistance in the selection of the care worker and assistance in managing the administrative tasks associated with the employment relationship. Nevertheless, the employer is the person receiving care or a family member, not the proxy agency. The employer must then sign a contract with the agency, authorising it to carry out various tasks. A “*mandataire*” agency can propose “single” or “complex proxy contracts”. In the case of a “simple proxy contract”, the agency only carries out administrative tasks such as drawing up the contract, preparing the pay slip, managing holidays and dismissals. In the case of the “complex proxy contract”, the agency adds as its duties the payment of wages and social security contributions and therefore being very close to the functioning of a service provider in “*prestataire*” model but using the “*mandataire*” model. Some actors of the sector describe such “complex proxy contracts” as “false providers” : the agencies can act as a provider in the management of the relations between the worker and the households, but legally, the employer remains the household. The digital proxy platform studied here offers a “complex proxy contract” to its clients following the regulations for the sector; meaning that the agency has the right to charge for these services.

According to the founder interviewed, the recruitment protocol for care workers has been very stable from the beginning. There is a pre-selection based on the CV. The company has set a minimum requirement of care training accredited by an authorised institution or three years’ experience. However, for those with more than 18 months’ experience but less than three years, they offer training –with a partner institution. After this initial selection, they interview the candidates by video call, focusing on qualitative issues. If the interview is satisfactory, the care worker is given “onboarding” status –i.e. they can use the app in “candidate” mode. The digital agency then contacts the references and another interview follows, this time at one of the local agencies, where the caregiver’s ability to react in a given situation is tested. If the local agent considers that the worker is a good candidate, the worker is validated in the App, and a three-month programme make available information regarding the advantages to be employee of a “particular employer”, the remainders of some operational aspects of the job, and other topics that the digital proxy agency considers important. The founder says that these three months are crucial because this is the period when most care workers leave their job or even the sector. Turnover during this period is

persistent. Therefore, based on the assumption that the turnover is triggered by the poor quality of jobs in the sector, the aim of this programme is to highlight the advantages of the jobs offered by the proxy agency, which are formal jobs with access to all labour and social security rights, including some support mechanisms (such as planning work schedules and conflict mediation).

Since the main goal of this digital proxy agency is to provide better care, the agency offers two additional services: assistance in establishing the best care plan and assistance in coordinating other kind of services such as health or administrative formalities, and services for the well-being of the elderly. As the founder explained, families tend to reduce the care plan to the minimum necessary to carry out basic tasks (such as help getting out of bed, showering, eating), neglecting the human aspect of care work (such as companionship and conversation) and the importance of recreational activities (like promenades, go to the market, etc.). So, when the family contacts the digital proxy agency, the first thing the agency does is draw up a care plan. To do this, an agent from the local agency visits the elderly person in his/her home and makes a needs assessment based on the needs expressed by the family, but also taking into account what the company considers to be “good care”. Most of the families who contact the agency are beneficiaries of the APA allowance¹². As APA is not means-tested, all elderly people can receive it, depending on their level of dependency. In fact, each elderly person has his/her own care plan, adapted to his/her needs according to the assessment made by the APA evaluators on the basis of his/her level of dependency. The dependency levels are classified as Iso Resources Groups (“*Groupes Iso Ressources*” – GIR), going from GIR1 (for the most dependent people) to GIR4 (for the lowest level of dependency). The financial benefits, notably the APA, are therefore calculated on the basis of this grid (Ledoux et al., 2024). But, according to the founder, the APA care plan only covers basic care, so the company uses it as a starting point for proposing a more extensive care plan. Families can therefore use the APA allowance to cover part of the care plan proposed by the proxy agency. The hourly rate is degressive and varies according to the number of hours of assistance per week and the location. An important difference between the two types of care plans is that the digital proxy agency does not include interventions of less than one hour. This has an impact on the quality of the service provided and reduces the work intensity for the care workers, but this assumes that the elderly people are able to pay the additional cost.

Additionally, the digital proxy agency proposes a new service that is not common in the market; that is the coordination of different services: 1) health services –such as accompanying to the medical or paramedical appointments, medication and other

¹² There are other allowances that can also be taken into account, such as the PCF (“prestation de compensation handicap”), for disabled persons, for example.

medical material's management; 2) administrative services –such as following of financial aids, bank accounts, payment of services, transportation; and 3) well-being services –such as appointments with the hairdresser, promenades, etc. It is through this comprehensive approach to care that the agency aims to differentiate itself from its competitors in the home care market.

2.2. A digital marketplace platform with social goals

For the second platform studied here, the idea of intervening in the home care sector to promote decent working conditions through the use of the CESU became concrete in January 2021, when the founder created a Facebook group aimed at connecting workers with families looking for a care worker. The Facebook group also provides tips on how to use the CESU vouchers. In October of the same year, the company offered its first training programme, called “Getting Started with the CESU”. Although the idea from the beginning was to create an app, during the first year, the company worked using a website set up by the founder, based on Google forms and sheets. Thanks to investment from “business angels”, an app was launched in August 2022 and many functions were automated. According to the founder, the company is not attractive enough for “capital ventures”, but it has been able to capture the interest of some “business angels”, who value their business model and their social goals due to the fact that they have grandmothers who have worked as caregivers and therefore feel personally involved. Currently, the digital platform is present in many important cities. As the digital proxy platform –and which is the case for most platforms–, this company does not have any presence in rural areas. It is a completely digital company, and the six women who are part of the team are based in different cities in France.

In its website, the company is presented as “the first community of home care workers who use the CESU”, functioning as a digital marketplace platform. Thus, the care workers have to post their profile which is visible for everybody who visits the website. The profiles are presented in three versions. First, the persons looking for a caregiver see a small box containing the name, the net price proposed by the worker, and the location (i.e. the name of the city). The box has two buttons, one to contact the worker and the other to view the profile. When the latter is activated, a larger box appears with a sentence written by the caregiver praising her/his skills; the number of stars the caregiver has received from the platform team; signs with different colours representing different special skills (e.g. training in caring for a person with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's); the number of years of experience in a standard manner (e.g. less than 7 years, 7 to 14 years); some key words such as “professional”, “good manners” and what she/he can do (e.g. help getting out and in bed, walking, cleaning, preparing food, etc). This new box also shows the option to read the full profile. According to the

workers interviewed, the team at the platform plays a key role in helping them to write the profile, and more widely in advising them for promoting their services. The full profile contains the same information already presented, with the addition of the date on which the care worker joined the platform, whether he or she has any accredited training, and references from previous employers. Care workers can list the tasks they carried out for their previous employers or just introduce the name and the period they worked for them. Previous employers' contact numbers aren't visible on the website because it's the digital platform team that contacts and validates references. Like the digital proxy agency presented before, the digital marketplace platform also seeks to provide care workers who have a proven track record of providing quality care. As the founder explains, they do not select *ex ante*, but *a posteriori*. They decided not to introduce specific requirements that could be a barrier for care workers without training or qualifications. "Anyone can register on the platform and then we promote some profiles by training the care worker through our training programmes", the founder said. They are targeting people who want to start a second career in the home care sector, which was the case of most of the workers interviewed. Specifically, they do not want people who do care work as a complementary job on a temporary or occasional basis –as the founder said, they don't want the "jobbing", associated with "low-cost" digital platform models considered to be unprofessional.

Thus, those looking for a care worker can go to the website, after registering in the system without any charges, or they can ask to be called by someone from the platform to present their needs, in which case they are charged a fee amounting 79,99€ (for administration and set-up). Then, if they decide to register on the website, they can contact a specific worker or several workers, or they can ask for their job offer to be visible to all workers. In the latter case, all workers can apply for the job. These services are paid by the employer. According to the founder, the team guides the families to correctly define their needs and the tasks to be performed by the worker, and the conditions under which the work will be carried out (such as the physical and mental state of the elderly person and the home conditions to take care of them). The aim is to provide the worker with all the information she/he needs to accept or refuse an offer. If she/he accepts, the client can communicate with the worker through the platform until the worker decides to give her/his personal phone number. This mechanism is designed to protect the worker from receiving messages that are not related to real job offers.

Since the digital marketplace platform only facilitates the matching, workers are free to set the price of their work, always respecting the legal minimum wage which is posted on the website and the app. The founder explains that workers use different criteria to determine the price of their work. In some cases, the price is linked to their professionalism, giving value to their experience and training in the sector. In other cases, the criterion is the local income level. Also, they frequently adjust the price

upwards or downwards when they meet the family and once they understand the financial situation of the elderly person.

As an additional service and in line with the company's mission, the digital platform offers various training courses for both workers and employers. For workers, there are "Starting in the CESU"; "Developing care practices towards a person in a situation of dependency"; "Responsible coordinator of home services (professional qualification)"; "Professional trainer for adults"; and "Rights and duties in the exercise of their profession". For employers, the company offers one seminar untitled "Being an employer in direct employment". According to the founder, the CESU voucher is a means of payment, but it is also a regulatory framework that provides protections for care workers. However, for these protections to be effective, workers and employers need to know how to use the CESU. Therefore, providing all the information they might need is one of the company's main objectives. As the founder explained: "We are a training organisation. So, we have a directory of care workers and a platform where you can contact them. But our business model is training. We sell training programs." Both, workers and employers have to pay for the training courses. In addition, workers pay a monthly fee to have their profiles displayed on the digital platform and to receive advice on various issues (such as preparing their profile, asking the documents needed to request a seek leave, or after a dismissal to enforce the right of unemployment benefits, etc.).

3. Different ways of intervening in the care work sector: direct and soft interventions

Due to the business model of each of the digital platforms studied here, their modes of intervention are very different. The digital proxy agency has a mandate from the employer to intervene in the matching process and in the administrative and financial tasks related to the employment relationship. The digital marketplace platform, on the contrary, has neither the mandate nor the intention to play a more significant role as an intermediary. However, while the digital proxy agency intervenes directly and more extensively, the intervention of the digital marketplace platform appears in a soft or indirect manner.

3.1. More of a human touch than algorithm: the direct intervention of the digital proxy agency

Although the digital proxy agency is very interested in the potential of algorithmic management, the role of humans seems to be crucial for the functioning of the company. Digital technologies are used to automate some repetitive tasks and help

the human agent with organisational work. The process of selecting a worker and the matching depend entirely on human interaction. At the beginning, when they received a request from a household, they sent their client three videos in which the workers presented themselves so that the future employer could choose the most suitable one. After a year and a half, they understood that the clients did not want to be in this position of choice but wanted the company to choose the best candidate for them. Clients trust the company to select the best worker for a given situation. Thus, currently, they only present one candidate to their clients. The algorithm provides the local manager with information about the best candidate for the job in terms of proximity and availability. However, the worker is free to accept or reject the job without any constraints.

The same happens with working schedules: the algorithm provides the local manager with the information needed to “optimise the working time and commuting between interventions”, and the manager negotiates with the worker if she/he is willing to accept a client or a temporary replacement of another worker. The founder stressed that both the worker flexibility and the ability of the algorithm to take into account multiple criteria and changing situations are very important to manage variable working hours, given that the needs of clients change from day to day. Therefore, although there are regular schedules with specific clients, changes are very frequent. During the interview, the founder always emphasises the role of algorithms as a tool for managers, as in the case of monitoring the good performance of workers. This is an important issue for the company in terms of providing the best home care. The app allows employers to evaluate and note the performance of their employees, as well as provide qualitative feedback. The workers can also give a description of the intervention every time they go to a home. All the information is automatically collected, and the system could generate an alert for the local manager. In this case, the manager can schedule a visit to the home –so-called “quality visit”– to assess the problem and find a solution. However, neither workers nor employers can see the information registered by the other party. The company believes that a care worker might fail in some situations but perform well in the long term. Also, employers may feel uncomfortable with a worker for no specific reason and that worker may perform better in another household. This is why they do not use an automated reputation system, preferring to use an “adjusting mechanism” in which the “quality visit” plays a key role because after the “quality visit”, the manager makes some recommendations to the worker or the household. Additionally, a “quality visit” can be scheduled by the manager without a formal complaint of one of the parties seeking to reevaluate the care plan and the worker’s duties.

Thus, the digital platform intervenes more than a traditional *“mandataire”* agency because it does not limit its intervention to the selection of the worker, the matching and the administrative procedures of the employment relationship, but also intervenes

in the organisation of schedules, the monitoring of the quality of the care provided and the resolution of conflicts between workers and employers.

3.2. Empowering workers and educating employers: the soft intervention of the marketplace platform

The intervention of the digital marketplace platform is more indirect than in the case of the digital proxy agency. As the founder explains:

“I think we really have to try to spread information and reduce information asymmetries so that when we have a contractual relationship, everybody is on a common basis. And that’s what this is about. Nobody is doing that today. The role of a platform, as I see it, is to provide and share common minimum information, both on the expectations of the profession, the basic skills and the regulatory framework, to enable a healthy relationship.”

Following this main idea, the intervention takes two forms: first, the dissemination of information; and second, the use of digital tools to improve working conditions.

As the founder highlighted several times during the interview, the most important services provided by the digital platform are the training programs for employers and care workers. Also, the platform has an open channel of information in its Facebook page for the workers. The team frequently post content about the regulatory framework and in various occasions they do lives focus on different topics, and with the intervention of specialists. They used a Facebook group to have a better control of the audience. This group is also a tool for answering questions and discuss publicly different problematic issues bring by the workers. In this sense, the digital platform becomes a resource for workers to know and claim their rights. Additionally, the app introduces several pops up with information about working time, sick leaves, holidays, dismissals, and particularly with information about cancelations. As the founder highlighted, one of the main problems is the last-minute cancelations, because workers do not receive any payment. Normally, the employer should pay for this working time. With regular information about this issue, the company try to change this recurrent behaviour.

In this digital platform, technological development has been slower than in the digital proxy agency studied here due to the limited investment it has been able to secure. However, with the launch of the app, the company has introduced two tools to protect workers from employer abuse. The first is a pointing device that allows workers to request the payment of extra time. As the founder explains, a lot of working time in the sector is usually unpaid. When tasks are defined at the beginning of the service, a certain amount of time is allocated to each one. In practice, however, depending on the day, these tasks can take longer. The pointing device – which is declarative and not automatic – makes it possible to keep track of this extra time and reclaim the payment. The second innovation introduced by the app is a notation device that allows

employers to highlight problems with workers. Like most digital platforms, this digital marketplace has a reputation system. However, the team decided not to make the ratings and comments visible. They understand that people only fill in the qualitative part of the review when there is a problem, and then the opinions tend to be mostly negative. As also expressed by the founder of the digital proxy agency, the digital marketplace team believes that the employers' opinions may not necessarily reflect the quality of care provided by a care worker, but a conflict between the parties. However, if there are many opinions in the same direction, the team will speak to the care worker to highlight what has been identified as a problem. Although the reputation system is one-way –from employer to worker– if workers report problematic behaviour or mistreatment by the employer, the team responds by talking to the family. The founder told us that in some cases they could prevent the client from contacting other care workers from their platform.

The intervention of this digital marketplace in the labour relationship is thus ambivalent, since most of the actions tend to change a cultural notion of home care, aiming at its recognition as a regular job with rights, where the law must guide the parties' behaviour. However, this soft intervention can be combined with direct intervention when necessary.

3.3. The zigzagging working trajectories in the care sector

The majority of our respondents are women (8 out of 9), all French and over 40 years old, living in urban areas. For all of them, entering the care sector is a “second career”. Although this is a very small group to be able to trace patterns, two types of occupational trajectories can be identified. The first is among care workers who started their career in a health and care sector, such as nursing, then left the labour market –usually due to maternity, but also due to burnout– and re-entered the labour market in the elderly home care sector. The second trajectory is observed among those who started their careers in other sectors (IT, commerce, optics, etc.) and re-entered the labour market in this sector after a career break. In the case of those who have had a first career in the health sector, the choice is linked to continuing to carry out care services, but in positions with a lower level of stress and labour intensity than nursing. For those who followed the second path, entry into the care sector append often by chance. Some started out caring for a relative or a friend's relative and saw care work as a possible job. Others were referred to the sector by the *Pôle emploi* (employment service for unemployed workers) and, after a small training in the sector proposed by the same service, thought of doing care work professionally. In all cases, the workers interviewed had work experience as formal employees, so the expectation of working in the elderly home care sector is to work under the same conditions, i.e. in formal jobs with access to labour and social security rights.

The motivation to use the services of the two platforms studied here is linked to their recent experiences in the sector. In their testimonies, care workers talk about having worked in the different positions that exist in the sector, i.e.: a) working in residential care homes (known as EPHAD in France), either as an employee of the residential care home, as an employee of a non-profit association or a profit-making company providing services to the residential care home, or as a micro-entrepreneur providing services, either through an employment agency or directly; b) working in homes as an employee of “particular employers”, with or without the mediation of a proxy agency (*agence mandataire*)¹³. In all cases, workers express their dissatisfaction with working in a residential care home, whatever the status, because of the pace and intensity of the work and the poor quality of care provided, mainly because of the number of patients they have to see in a very short time. The same criticism is raised with regard to the proxy agencies that force workers to accept a large number of short interventions (half an hour at most) in different homes, setting up very heavy schedules where the client is no longer a person but a number, a source of income for the company. In both cases, the care workers emphasise that the intensity of the work comes on top of the low salaries paid by the residential care homes and the proxy agencies (the latter because of the high costs of mediation). According to the testimonies, at the moment of starting this “second career” they had two options: a) looking for a job among acquaintances through recommendations; b) sending CVs to different companies or websites. All respondents used both strategies to get their first job in the care sector. However, the negative experiences both in the residential care homes and in the jobs mediated by proxy agencies led them to look for another type of job placement. Most of the respondents found the two digital platforms studied here as a result of their internet searches and they were the ones who contacted them to publish their professional profile in the case of the digital marketplace or to be interviewed in the case of the digital proxy agency.

The care workers interviewed identified five key situations in which the intervention of these two digital platforms is important: a) recruitment process; b) planning of schedules; c) coordination of work; d) accomplishing bureaucratic tasks that give access to rights; and f) conflict resolution mechanisms.

Firstly, during recruitment process the role of both digital platforms is crucial. In the case of the digital marketplace platform, it allows care workers to make their professional profile visible and make themselves known in the areas where they are looking for work. This is particularly important for care workers who, like many of the interviewees, have never worked in the care sector before. However, as one worker said, job searching is constant because care work for the elderly is very unstable due

¹³ See Ledoux, C., Teke, N., and Caillaud, P. “Socio-economic literature review report on care regime at country level – France”, report ORIGAMI <https://origamiproject.it/reports/d2.1-france.pdf>

to the nature of the work: clients are often hospitalised and work hours and tasks change; they can be sent to a residential home if their autonomy is compromised; also, when they die, the labour contract is interrupted. As a result, the search for new jobs is never-ending, and digital platforms make it easier. In addition, the digital platform acts as a guarantee of their quality as care workers by certifying the training they have received in various aspects of care work and by verifying the veracity of references from previous jobs. In the case of the digital proxy agency, once the care workers have passed the recruitment process, they are recommended directly to families. Like in the case of the digital marketplace, the digital proxy agency also acts as a guarantee of the workers' qualifications. For the workers, both digital platforms act as a guarantee of the "particular employers", because they knew them before they start to work for them. In the case of the marketplace platform, the team has direct communication with the employers and, of course, their personal information (such as address, phone number, ID number, etc.). For care workers employed directly by a household, it is never easy to access sensitive information such as ID or social security numbers. For its part, the digital proxy agency makes a home visit and gets to know the patient in order to establish a personalised care plan. It also has direct and indirect channels for daily communication with employers through the app.

The second situation in which the intervention of digital platforms is key is in the setting of work schedules. In both cases, the platforms studied here have algorithms that allow workers to be offered jobs that are within their geographical area of intervention, in an attempt to reduce commuting time between different interventions. In addition, the algorithms allow filters to be set so that workers are only offered the type of tasks they wish to perform. Among the workers interviewed, there is a clear distinction between those who accept only companionship jobs, those who perform more complex tasks such as caring for patients with serious illnesses or severe disabilities (especially those with a degree and experience in nursing), and those who perform basic care tasks, including household cleaning. For care workers who perform various types of tasks, the digital proxy agency not only reduces transport time between patients' homes but also helps to improve the balance of working hours by splitting the number of physically demanding tasks (such as bathing patients) with less physically demanding tasks (such as cognitive stimulation exercises). Another aspect highlighted by several interviewees is that digital platforms allow them to determine when they want to work, i.e. to clearly define the times when they are available. The digital marketplace does not make the hours of availability visible, but the workers can refuse a job without any consequences if the times are not convenient for them. In the case of the digital proxy agency, the workers define the time slots in which they are available, and the agency only offers them jobs within these time slots. This pre-determination of their availability helps to reduce the frequent changes in the schedule, which is very common on hourly basis jobs.

However, according to workers, it does not reduce the number of cancellations made by employers. In summary, according to the testimonies, the fact that digital platforms can group interventions in smaller geographical areas, taking into account the type of tasks they want to perform and the time that workers are available, is a huge advantage when comparing the schedules set by digital platforms with those that workers can set when they work individually and have to negotiate working conditions directly with employers for each intervention.

The third dimension in which the intervention of digital platforms is particularly important is that of work organisation, not only in terms of working time, but also in terms of coordinating the work of the many actors involved in caring for the same person. As most caring tasks cannot be postponed, coordination of the work of different caregivers is essential for each carer to have effective access to the right of sick leave, holidays and weekly rest. For those who work for families without any intermediary, access to these rights depends on their ability to find replacements. In other words, they depend on having a network of colleagues to rely on for sporadic or regular replacements. In this sense, digital platforms play a very important role by contributing to the coordination of work teams. In the case of the marketplace, its intervention is less pronounced because it is indirect. This company encourages the creation of autonomous teams of three care workers but is not directly involved in the management of replacements or the allocation of tasks and schedules within the team. On the contrary, the digital proxy agency creates workgroups around the same client, making it easier for caregivers to rotate. Technology is at the heart of this, as the app facilitates communication between those involved in the same home caring for the same person and the agency is responsible for coordinating the work. This not only ensures continuity of care for the client but also access to employment rights for the workers.

The fourth situation in which the intervention of digital platforms is crucial is when care workers have to fill in the forms related to social protection benefits, particularly in relation to work hazards and unemployment benefits. These benefits are either provided by the social security or by collective agreements linked to the status of employee. Workers hired as employees of “private employers” are entitled to compensation for occupational diseases and also unemployment insurance in the event of termination of the employment contract. However, one of the main difficulties in accessing these rights is that workers must regularly declare the number of hours they have worked to the social security authorities and, in order to receive benefits, they must present certificates from each employer. The latter is particularly complicated in the case of workers who work for several employers, where the employer is often not the person being cared for, but a family member who does not live at the same address or even in the same city. In this respect, the digital marketplace is less involved than the digital proxy agency, as it does not carry out the

procedures for the workers but only provides constant information on how to do so. The digital proxy agency, on the contrary, takes care of all the administrative formalities related to social protection, thus facilitating access to these rights.

Finally, the workers interviewed stressed that the intervention of digital platforms in conflict resolution is very important. The conflicts they face on a daily basis are of two types: conflicts with other colleagues working in the same household and conflicts with the elderly. The digital marketplace does not play a major role here. According to some workers, they can always ask the team for advice in case of such conflicts, but there is not institutionally established any conflict resolution mechanism. However, the information that circulates on the marketplace app can be used by workers to clarify certain conflictual situations, particularly with regard to the limits of the tasks they have to perform. In contrast, in the case of the digital proxy agency, workers have several ways to report conflicts in the app, either in the space where they can report what happened during every intervention, through the specific communication channel for the group of people intervening in the same home, or through the chat that workers have with members of the digital proxy agency. According to the founder, the company has a complex ticket handling system that allows concerns and conflicts to be forwarded to the agency's specialised staff. The workers interviewed also commented that because they have fluid communication with local agents, in the event of a conflict they can call them or come to the agency to find a solution. As many of the interviewees pointed out, having a third party to help set clear parameters for the tasks to be carried out in the elderly person's home is an advantage compared to what happens when the relationship is not mediated by the platform. In the latter case, conflicts are much more difficult to solve, and workers often end up accepting poor working conditions.

The testimonies of different care workers show that their choice to work with these digital platforms is based on zigzagging trajectories in which they experience working in the care sector in different positions and with very uneven working conditions. For all of them, even if some are somewhat critical of the digital platforms, the working conditions offered by these two digital platforms are better compared to residential care homes, other proxy agencies and direct employment hired directly by the household through recommendations of friends and family.

4. Concluding remarks

This exploratory study of digital platforms focused on home care for the elderly in France reveals three main findings that need to be further explored.

Firstly, as the elderly care market is highly regulated by the state and by collective agreements, digital platforms have little margin to circumvent legislation. They must therefore adapt to the web of existing norms and try to innovate within the legal framework. This explains why the digital marketplace platform is proposing new services through the app but focusing its intervention on training. For its part, the digital proxy agency has introduced digital technology into the *“mandataire”* model, extending the services offered close to the *“prestataire”* model.

Secondly, the intervention of these two digital platforms in the home care market for the elderly shows the importance of the employment relationship as a necessary basis for better care services. Both digital platforms focus on strengthening the employment relationship because they consider that a stable, long-term relationship is the only way to guarantee the best care for their clients as well as the best working conditions for the care workers.

Thirdly, although both digital platforms have invested a lot of capital and resources in developing an app that aims to automate many organisational functions, the core of the business model includes the involvement of humans. In the digital marketplace, the founder and the team invest heavily in advising workers by phone calls or messages, developing content to inform them of their legal rights, which is accessible to all workers via the Facebook group, and providing training programmes. The digital agency, which aims to differentiate itself from other agencies in the sector, focuses on developing personal relationships between care workers and the local team in each agency across the country. Workers on both digital platforms emphasised that the personal relationship with digital platform agents was the most important aspect that made their experience significantly better than that of other jobs in the sector.

5. Research design

Using a qualitative approach, this research is based on two different types of data. First, between March and April 2024, we collected information about digital platforms by consulting their websites and apps, in particular taking into account the information presented in their “terms and conditions”. Second, between September and December 2024, interviews were conducted with the founders of digital platforms and five care workers. The interviews, conducted by two members of the French team using video conferencing software, lasted between one and one and a half hours and were recorded and transcribed for analysis. In accordance with the protocol established by the CNRS, the interviewees gave their verbal consent, which was recorded. As agreed by the interviewees, the names of the digital platforms and the individuals interviewed will not be made public. The choice of these two digital

platforms was intentional, as we wanted to study how digital platforms are established and develop within the home care for the elderly sector. We therefore contacted the founders of these two digital platforms, who were very receptive to our study and gave us the interviews, as well as access to a small number of workers to conduct the interviews. Still, during the interviews some workers referred to other workers, which allowed us to expand our universe of interviewees. Although the number of interviewees is small, the possibility of having respondents who are not suggested by the companies gives us the opportunity to talk to workers who feel freer to express their opinions. Having the workers' contact number via the digital platform is an easy way to interview a population that is difficult to reach, but as researchers we don't know if the company is giving us the names of the "ideal" workers or if the workers feel constrained to talk because the digital platforms are referring to them¹⁴.

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¹⁴ See Poblete, L., Tizziani, A., Pereyra F. (2024) and Orth, B., Baum, F. (2024)

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Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

IRELAND

CASE STUDY 1

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Home Care Direct¹⁵

1. Introduction

Home Care Direct (HCD) is an Irish-based platform that facilitates digital interaction between carers and families to allow them to work directly with each other, supported through a suite of digital tools. It allows carers to work on more of a freelance basis without the need of a traditional agency as intermediary. The platform was founded in 2018, emerging from what was previously a traditional Irish-owned and operated home care agency, Home Care Plus and was self-financed¹⁶. As it stands, HCD is a relatively unique offering in the Irish home care landscape, where digital platforms are relatively rare in the care sector. Unlike platforms of international origin operating in Ireland, HCD provides care services first and foremost, rather than the broader range of offerings found on other platforms targeted at the domestic sector. Although HCD has positioned itself as primarily a provider of care services, it still offers a greater level of flexibility in the tasks performed by workers when compared to those provided by workers coming from traditional private care agencies or home care assistants employed by the public sector.

The organisation has been a vocal advocate for changes in the design of home care services nationally, arguing that payment arrangements between the commissioning body (Health Services Executive) and traditional homecare agencies need to be more prescriptive to ensure that carers receive fair pay. The organisation has highlighted that the crisis in homecare is due, at least in part, to a shortage of well-paid positions rather than a shortage of carers per se. The platform have argued that the industry can be quite 'lucrative' for private agencies who hold tenders from the HSE, emphasising that it should not be left up to private entities to decide how the funding from care reaches employees¹⁷. The founders of HCD acknowledge that the care sector has not been an attractive offering for employees given the pay and conditions and this provided some of the impetus for the organisation to transition to a platform model¹⁸: *"One of the reasons we have a capacity issue in the home care sector with carers is that caring presently isn't a very attractive career."* (HCD, Manager). The model aims to

¹⁵ The research for this case study is based on a both secondary research (websites, reports, blogs and news articles) and qualitative interviews with management and workers conducted in 2024, comprising of two, one-hour interviews with management and online/telephone interviews conducted with four care workers.

¹⁶ <https://fora.ie/home-care-direct-online-platform-4479645-Feb2019/>

¹⁷ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41200804.html>

¹⁸ <https://fora.ie/home-care-direct-online-platform-4479645-Feb2019/>

make care a more sustainable career through providing better incomes and flexibility for workers.¹⁹

One of the foundational reasons for the platform's approach is the belief that the two important pillars of quality home care provision are one, having a well-paid and motivated carer and secondly, having the same carer all the time. The linkage between these two factors is clear, and where the former is absent, this manifests in high labour turnover which impacts consistency of care provision for clients. The platform believes that its model delivers on both of these issues. The management argue that no matter how much supervision is in place, a demotivated carer earning barely above the minimum wage will be more likely to leave the sector and look for a new job, hence traditional care agencies struggle to provide consistency in the carers interacting with clients.

2. A Sustainable Care Approach

The organisation operates on a national basis, another aspect that differentiates it from other digital platforms in the Irish market, which tend to concentrate only within the main urban areas. One of the factors that allows HCD to do this is its approach to resourcing. HCD's strategy has been to attract workers from an untapped labour market of individuals who are not currently in the workforce but would be willing to take up locally based care roles. As is the case in many of the countries examined in this project, care work tends to be undervalued and associated with low pay and poor working conditions, which limits the pool of workers attracted to work in the sector, irrespective of their vocational interests in doing so. This was to the forefront of HCD's strategy²⁰: *"We wanted to make caring a more attractive career so we can attract carers back into it. We wanted to improve the quality of home care. They were the three parameters that we set ourselves"*. The HCD model allows workers a greater level of flexibility and control over their working hours than they could command if working from a private agency or the public sector. Furthermore, workers are given the freedom to negotiate their own terms and conditions, which, for some, can result in an increased rate of earnings. This approach has enabled HCD to attract a more diverse workforce, for example, individuals who may already have held previous careers and are interested in returning to the workforce in a marginal way. The HCD workforce is still mainly female, similar to other care organisations. However, a key difference is that while HCD has both a mix of Irish and migrant workers working through their platform, the percentage of Irish workers is significantly higher than what was found in the

¹⁹ <https://www.techcentral.ie/home-care-direct-platform-launches-web-mobile/>

²⁰ <https://fora.ie/home-care-direct-online-platform-4479645-Feb2019/>

other platforms examined in this research. During the interviews, the manager noted, *"We are roughly 60/40 in favour of Irish."* This may be partly related to the organisation operating outside the main urban areas where the concentration of migrant workers may be lower. It was also noted in the interviews that many of the workers with HCD have previous care experience from roles with private care agencies in the past, bringing valuable skills. It is notable that workers with the option to remain in a contract of service/employee status opted to move to the platform model, referencing both the flexibility and potential to increase earnings through the latter model. As one worker highlighted, the pay differential was a substantial factor in attracting her to the platform mode of working:

"To be honest with you, the big factor for me was the money and the flexibility of it, and the money would have been the main thing because you're working in these other places [private agencies] doing ridiculous things for ridiculous pay, like it's such bad pay. And it just makes you not want to work." (Participant 1, female)

As self-employed carers, workers at HCD can earn substantially more than they previously made with agencies. They appreciate the stability and higher income, as well as the direct communication with clients and the multidisciplinary teams involved in their care. This direct approach allows them to become integral parts of their clients' families, fostering a more personal and fulfilling work environment. Working through Home Care Direct (HCD) offers a significantly improved experience compared to traditional agency work, as highlighted by the experiences of home care workers interviewed. Frustrated with the unreliable hours and low pay of agency work, many transitioned to HCD and found their experience of working in care transformed.

The financial benefits of working through the platform are evident in analysis undertaken by the organisation examining worker earnings after platform commissions. Analysis by the organisation published in 2025 found the average earnings of a full-time care worker stood at €50,000, with the highest earning carers reaching €70,000. The analysis by HCD found that carers were securing hourly rates of up to €37 per hour through the platform. The average hourly rate paid was €27 per hour compared with €14.50 per hour paid common in agency-based care work.²¹

For another worker, it was the flexibility aspects that prompted her to move to the platform instead of remaining as an employee in another agency:

"I was really happy for few years with the two agencies. I never turned [down] any job except, but you know, it's just like now because, of course, I have a child

²¹https://www.linkedin.com/posts/michael-harty-377a3619_the-principal-problem-facing-the-home-care-activity-7292602312945004545-W9Tm/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_ios&rcm=ACoAABK41iYB_wbDr8vS2cXt0EKZ2uudoaZTtTg

now, I like this job. It's really good when you're more flexible." (Participant 2, female)

The flexibility offered by HCD has made a significant difference in the work-life balance of carers. They can now manage their time more effectively, ensuring they can meet personal commitments while still providing high-quality care to their clients. This flexibility is particularly important for carers who have other responsibilities, such as family or further education.

In addition, others held skills in key areas such as dementia care, autism care, and peg tubing, which meant that they could provide a tailored service for clients in particular need of such services.

"I work with old people that would be peg fed and all that type of stuff." (Participant 1, female)

The ability to provide different levels of care for different needs is something that the platform views as a differentiating factor from the kind of home care packages provided through public funding. For example, those with greater needs may choose to have more specialised care where they can afford to finance that:

"Every case is different and, in an ideal world, should be priced differently should be approached differently. And so, the platform gives carers as well as families the ability to have specific pricing for their case what's involved, depending on where the case is." (Manager, HCD)

Another aspect that the carers pointed out was the flexibility to provide care services, which gave individuals a greater sense of independence and social wellbeing, with a level of freedom that they could not provide when working as an employee of an agency. As one noted:

"Me [care worker] and him [the care recipient], on a Friday or a Sunday, we go to the cinema. We go to the shops. We go get something to eat. We go for drives. We go for a walk, that kind of thing... I take him for hospital appointments you know, all that kind of stuff." (Participant 8, male)

Interestingly, while the carers referred to the flexibility the platform provided, this did not relate solely to the number of hours worked but also related to the ability to choose to work with the same clients on a repeated basis, something which also benefits the care recipients and facilitates the relational nature of care work where familiarity can be built between client and carer. As one participant noted, this facilitated the development of closer relationships between carers and the families, where the care worker became someone that clients wanted to share experiences and news with:

"they'll text me on my days off, and the people that I work with, they've got like intellectual disabilities as well. So sometimes, like, they might have gotten a new set of pyjamas, and they'll be like, show [person's name] what I got. And I'll get a text message, and I'm just like, oh, that's lovely." (Participant 1, female)

Experienced carers have noted that working with HCD has allowed them to build stronger relationships with their clients. This allowed them to feel more valued and respected, as they could spend more time with each client and provide the level of care needed, rather than a standard allocated amount of time, set by an external intermediary. This deeper connection with clients is something workers reported they found lacking in previous roles with traditional agencies.

HCD carers perform a range of tasks from care to housework, but always on the basis that care work is the primary request. They do not take on roles that solely involve domestic tasks. As one carer explained, "*The way I look at home help is I'm there to help people assist their needs around the house. They ask me to do anything, I'll do it for them*" (Participant 8, male). This flexibility in task performance is one of the aspects that can act as a differentiator for HCD in the sector.

Finally, an element not often addressed in relation to care, is the aging demographic of the care workforce itself. While the literature acknowledges that many carers are themselves older, there is little acknowledgement of the fact that under regular employment contracts care workers over the age of 70 are forced to retire from public service positions (and younger than that in the private sector if the employer determines so). Where a worker is fit and wishes to continue to engage in care work, this platform model facilitates them to do so. This can be beneficial in several ways: firstly, in alleviating the shortage of care workers, secondly in extending working life for those who prefer to remain working, and finally in allowing clients to have a wider choice of carers. This can be particularly important for older persons who may themselves prefer to have a care worker closer to their own age demographic whom they can relate to and may have had common experience with.

3. The Operational Model

The operational model of HCD relies on minimal algorithmic intervention, with the algorithmic aspect restricted to location-based matching. An ethos of the platform is a sustainable, localised approach to the provision of care, and the efforts to match people locally reflect that: "*In my experience, the best care is local care.*" (Manager, HCD)

Matching carers and clients as locally as possible has potential benefits in that local care providers are likely to be more attuned to the cultural and social contexts of their communities, which can improve patient trust and engagement between clients and carers. In addition, local care also supports environmental sustainability by reducing the need for carers to travel long distances between clients.

Clients and carers register on the platform, and all carers go through a full recruitment process which includes interviews with management, reference checks as well as identity verification and background checks, commonly referred to as Garda Vetting in Ireland. The organisation handles payments, administration and tax returns, ensuring that carers are supported, a key factor that makes the process easier for self-employed carers. This support allows carers to focus on their primary role of providing care without the added stress of managing these details themselves. One aspect often raised in relation to care work in Ireland is the informality of working arrangements; the platform offers families who have been operating under such an arrangement the opportunity to transition to the platform with their existing carer, which is an attractive offering for some. This allows families the opportunity to exit from informal, 'cash in hand' working arrangements to a situation where they can legitimately pay for care and in some instances qualify for tax credits for the costs associated with that care where a home carer is employer either for themselves or a family member²².

Initial contact between workers and clients is facilitated through the organisation, but subsequent interactions are directly between the client and the carer. This model allows for higher earnings compared to agency work, with carers able to negotiate travel time, mileage, and, in some cases, even holidays. In the case of one participant, they were able to align their holidays with that of the family and retain payment during the period:

"If I'm taking a week's holiday, I try and take that at the same time when my client's going on a week's holiday if that makes sense ... and they still pay me."
(Participant 8, male)

The hourly rate of pay that a care worker can acquire is higher than what can be earned through a care agency since they can set their own rate. While a carer profile lists their advertised rate, it is possible for families and carers to negotiate on that, for example whereby a carer works a higher consecutive number of hours the rate may be reduced, or where caring for one than one person in a home, the rate may be increased. Carers can also negotiate on aspects like travel time and costs.

"Instead of being on like 12.50 euros an hour, I'm on 30 euros an hour now and I give 16 percent to Home Care Direct" (Participant 8)

Challenges for HCD include maintaining its unique position in the market while ensuring the quality and reliability of its services. The platform reserves the right to remove any carer from the platform without having to give a reason if it receives consistent poor reports or reviews from clients to ensure the quality of carers on the platform remains high. In contrast to other platforms across a variety of sectors, the

²² Tax relief of up to 40% on care up to a maximum cost of €75,000 per year is available <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/tax-credits-and-reliefs-for-people-with-disabilities/tax-relief-for-employing-a-home-carer/>

organisation does not adopt a carer rating/review system on the site. There are no ratings for carers; instead, clients choose carers based on their qualifications, experience, and rates listed on their profiles. The absence of a rating system means that the platform relies heavily on the qualifications and experience of its carers to attract clients. Client and worker dynamics on the HCD platform are characterised by a high level of honesty and transparency. Workers felt that clients are generally very honest about the demands of the job. As one worker mentioned:

"If anything, they kind of over-prepare you. Because I think they're very kind of conscious [that] they want someone to know that look, these things can happen, but it's not all the time, and they nearly prepare you for the worst. Just so you're ready." (Participant 1, female)

This level of transparency helps in setting realistic work expectations and preparing carers for their roles. Direct communication with clients and their families also means that carers can tailor their services to meet specific needs more effectively. This personalised approach not only improves the quality of care but also enhances job satisfaction for the carers. Workers feel more involved in the care process, since they view families as personal clients rather than as clients of an agency.

A further factor that workers find supportive is that many of those working through HCD have gotten to know each other, so the isolation that often features in both platform and care work is minimised. The community and support among workers on the HCD platform are strong. It is common for workers to know each other and to swap and arrange care as a group. This community aspect is beneficial, as one worker noted, *"if I know one of the girls is looking for a few hours and I know someone who's looking for hours, it's helpful as well because you kind of put people on to each other"* (Participant 1, female). For the clients of the platform, this network of support among carers enhances the flexibility and reliability of the service provided.

While workers report that they enjoy the benefits of flexibility and enhanced earning capacity, they were also aware that the model suits them at the point in time they are in but that at different life stages, they may need a role with greater security of earnings: *"Because if I don't work, I don't get paid"* (Participant 1, female). Workers appear to understand quite well the trade-off they make between flexibility and earnings with the longer-term security and welfare benefits associated with employee status. Equally, the platform acknowledges that the model is not one that may not be suitable for all carers. The platform acknowledges that analogies will be drawn with the other parts of the gig economy but argue that the conditions of employment with traditional care agencies are already characterised by insecurity and that the platform model addresses some aspects of that for workers²³:

²³ <https://fora.ie/home-care-direct-online-platform-4479645-Feb2019/>

“In this case, it’s completely the opposite in the sense that we’re actually improving significantly the conditions of care. It’s not as if they have a great situation with their employment agency. In fact, most of them are on if-and-when-type contracts.” Very often the gig economy is associated with dragging down the situation of workers. What we’re doing here is completely the opposite”.

Indeed, it is the case that that a significant proportion of carers working with traditional care agencies have been working on what are termed “if and when” or ‘zero hours’ type contracts which basically mean they are only paid when they are working²⁴. They do not have a normal employee status that would ensure they are paid when not working.

The fact that carers working through the platform are less constrained by strict job descriptions means that they have greater scope to adapt to their services to the kind of care clients require. For example, participants noted that for some clients, the carer being able to accompany them on trips outside of the house was hugely important in allowing them to maintain social connections in their communities or to continue engage in activities they enjoy.

“Home care doesn’t end in the home at all... because of the care, you know, they do find it hard to attend events. Things like that, you know, because they have to pay from the from their pocket if they need to do things like that”(Participant 2)

Finally, while the model works well for many clients, the organisation acknowledges that the model will not suit the needs of everyone who requires care and therefore different forms of care provision suit different users. However, the current system of home care provision in Ireland is relatively limited for many. As the manager of HCD noted *“the one size fits all approach of home care provision, with choice been limited to a limited list of corporate providers all providing the same service, is detrimental to the sector. The fact is, people’s needs and circumstances are incredibly varied and as such, surely the options open to them for their care should be varied as well”.*

Equally the issue of choice was echoed by a representative of an organisation representing informal carers. The extent to which families and clients need be given more choice in relation to the balance of care provision emerged in interviews with that representative. However, so too did the importance of adequately funding public services.

“I think choice and control are important. However not everyone has the luxury of having choice and control, and they need a public service.”(Representative of informal carers association)

²⁴ O’Sullivan, M., Turner, T., Lavelle, J., MacMahon, J., Murphy, C., Ryan, L., ... & O’Brien, M. (2020). The role of the state in shaping zero hours work in an atypical liberal market economy. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 41(3), 652–671.

The possibility of greater use of personalised budgets was noted but that where such an approach may to be used, it needed to be introduced in a way that supported individuals to use those budgets effectively, and that may require the support of family. *"It's also depends on the personalised budget model. "Do I then go out and find the person to come in and care for me?.....In my experience, it absolutely requires the presence of an invested family member or friend, someone who's willing to be that advocate for you, an engaged intermediary, whatever that might be"*(Representative of informal carers).

In our research, we have pointed to the fact that care differs from many other sectors in the recipient of care it not always the individual who is taking responsibility for finding and hiring care workers, in other words there is additional nuance in the consumer relationship in care. This was echoed by the representative who noted that assuming everyone has the autonomy to manage their own care needs is problematic.

"It is not always the cared for person that manages their personalized budget."

"I think personalised budgets are wonderful in theory and where they work, they work brilliantly for people who have the autonomy to manage their own budget. But there's an assumption that they can."(Representative of informal carers)

4. Conclusion

HCD's emergence from a traditional care agency to an innovative online platform highlights the potential for digitalisation and technology to enhance care service provision when done at a pace and scale compatible with a personalised approach to care provision. By focusing on the provision of care locally, developing labour capacity in previously untapped parts of the labour market, and offering greater flexibility in working hours and determining earnings, HCD has positioned itself as a unique provider in the Irish care services market. The company's strategic approach, combined with its ability to cultivate a sense of community and support among carers, positions it well for continued success in the evolving care landscape, provided the regulatory environment does not change adversely. As noted by a manager of the organisation: *"At the moment, we don't have competition.....and we're nicely set up for-to take advantage of the market."* (HCD, Manager). However, changes to the funding model represent both opportunities and threats for an organisation of this nature. As HCD management noted, increased personal budgets could bring more clients to the platform, but the current funding model which the Health Service Executive employs does not allow for the full utilisation of this approach: *"the issue at the moment is our scalability has been blocked by the HSE because they, you know, they're not keen on*

personal budgets". On the one hand, increased access to personalised budgets and the introduction of care credits would facilitate a greater number of clients to choose HCD, however such a change could also mean that Ireland would become more attractive location for other international care platforms. International players may then opt to enter the market and scale aggressively, as is common practice among digital labour platforms in other sectors. In such a scenario, it is conceivable that an established organisation such as HCD could become a target for acquisition by a large international player. For example, this was the situation that developed in relation to the domestic cleaning services platform, Hassle.com. It was the main well-established platform in the cleaning sector in Ireland when it was later acquired by Helping, an international platform who also acquired smaller platforms in several other countries and scaled quickly as a result. Currently, HCD have a unique offering in the Irish context, however at the time of writing the future of how home care is provided in Ireland remains uncertain with a new government appointed in 2025 who have again reiterated a commitment to introduce a State backed home care scheme.

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

IRELAND

CASE STUDY 2

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Helping

1. Background²⁵

Helping is an online platform that offers a variety of cleaning and household-related services, including ancillary tasks such as gardening, window cleaning, and dog walking. The platform was founded in 2014 and is headquartered in Germany. It operates in several European countries, as well as in Brazil, Canada, Australia, and the Middle East. As a platform, Helping has been able to grow significantly by acquiring other organisations/platforms with similar business models internationally. These may be smaller or regionally based platforms but offer Helping the capacity to expand into new markets at pace. Helping has a pattern of such expansionary moves. Prior to entering the Irish market, for example, it acquired a Singapore-based organisation, Spickify²⁶. The expansion into the Irish market in 2015 was achieved via the acquisition of Hassle.com, a company in part founded by Irish entrepreneurs and operating successfully in the Irish and UK markets at that time. The acquisition of Hassle.com, which was valued at €32 million, was a strategic move as Hassle.com with its particular organisational model was demonstrating the potential to be a significant player in the domestic cleaning market in the UK and Ireland. Helping's rationale for this acquisition was arguably twofold: they were interested in the technology that Hassle.com utilised and in the established customer base that Hassle.com had already developed.

"It was especially important because the IT structure was particularly well designed, so it was acquired especially for that, and then it was of course developed." (Manager, Helping)

The acquisition was then a way to acquire Hassle's beneficial existing brand recognition in the market and join that with Helping's international footprint and access to capital, creating a stronger market proposition and making the combined organisations stronger in this space. Indeed, Gautier and Lamesch (2021) note that acquisitions can also be a way of restricting competition and consolidating the position of platforms on the market²⁷, which may represent another rationale for the acquisition.

²⁵ The research for this case study was undertaken through a mix of primary and secondary research methods. Secondary data sources included existing reports and articles on the platform. Primary data collection involved interviews conducted during 2024 with management and five care workers in one-hour online interviews.

²⁶ <https://www.thejournal.ie/hassle-cleaning-2195432-Jul2015/>

²⁷ Gautier, A., & Lamesch, J. (2021). Mergers in the digital economy. *Information Economics and Policy*, 54, 100890.

Initially, after entering the Irish market, Helpling continued to trade under the brand name Hassle, which meant that the organisation could transition into the market while drawing on the existing user loyalty to the Hassle name. Hassle did have an office based in Dublin, but over time, Helpling transitioned to managing the Irish subsidiary remotely from Italy, with no administrative team based in Ireland. This remains the case currently. This remote management approach whereby operations in one country are centrally facilitated by another international team, is not usual in the platform sector.

2. Operational Approach

In Ireland, Helpling's operations are primarily focused on domestic cleaning services, though they also offer related additional services such as gardening and window cleaning. While Helpling provides a broader array of services in other markets, the Irish operation remains concentrated on domestic cleaning. This focus may be partly due to the company's strategic decision to concentrate on its core offerings in a new market before expanding its service range. However, other factors could also play a role, such as restrictions in the Irish market on the funding of care-related services. Such funding is very much limited to personal care work that does not include domestic cleaning or ancillary household management support, which may be available in other contexts where cash for care/personal budgets are widely used. For example, in Germany, Helpling markets itself on senior care support, which extends beyond the home, also facilitating older persons with attending their leisure activities. Therefore, while Helpling in Ireland appears much like its offering in other countries, it is, in fact, more limited.

Helpling's presence in Ireland is mainly in the two largest urban areas of Dublin and Cork, with a significantly higher concentration in Dublin, the capital city.

"Active at the moment, it's like around 500 people in Dublin, and yeah I also add Cork; it's really like it's very small percentage compared to Dublin." (Manager, Helpling)

This may partly reflect the larger population of the city or the more diverse demographics, which provide a wider pool of workers from which to draw. An interview with the manager explored plans to expand the range of services offered in Ireland, but territorial expansion beyond these major cities was found to be limited. The limitation in expanding is also due to the high costs associated with marketing outside of the larger cities and the potential lack of labour supply, given the core demographics already working on the platform (discussed in the next section). The strategy suggests that it is more cost-effective to introduce new services in existing markets rather than expand into new territories. This approach allows Helpling to leverage its existing

customer base and infrastructure, reducing the costs and risks associated with entering new markets.

"I think this is not easy, actually, because the-the national, like the territorial expansion, it's very connected to how much money you can spend on marketing outside of the big city. On the other side, if you already have a presence in the city and you add new services, you are spending less than having to conquer bigger, bigger space and in terms of like territory. So, I think it could be easier to offer new services instead of going like in different cities."
(Manager, Helpling)

3. Joining the Platform

Hassle had in place a five-stage vetting process in order for cleaners to register on the platform. Helpling also requires workers to answer a set of questions when signing up to verify their identity during the registration process, and on their website, Helpling stresses that workers should have *"the relevant right to work"* documentation in place. *"The first thing, there's ID verification that is done through the platform and external provider that work on the verification of the documents for the entire company."*
(Manager, Helpling)

The platform stresses the ease with which workers can register on the site and provides a sample income calculator where potential workers can estimate their earnings through working on the site. *"Register on our site in just a few quick and easy steps! Answer a few questions to complete your profile and upload a photo of your ID."* The platform is more involved in providing guidance to workers on how to develop their profile: *"so the agencies are in charge of the documentation and the ID verification and after that they go through the building of the profile"* (Manager, Helpling). The website states, *"to attract more potential clients and make your profile stand out, we recommend you upload a friendly profile picture!"*. The platform arranges a call with the worker, and after that, the worker's account is activated, and they can begin taking bookings:

"After the welcome call, they are officially active on the platform, and that is where I said that we want them to understand what the platform is, how it works." (Manager, Helpling)

The manager explained how workers are shown how to boost their visibility and profile to get more work:

"Like getting reviews from the customers or like not cancelling appointments after accepting them, it's part of how they are more visible and more appealing"

for the customers. So we explained to them these kind of things, of course, in the end it's in their hands."

At one point, Helpling offered another method through which individuals could register on the platform. As part of a premium, those employed by agencies could register on the site, but this was not maintained, as the manager explains:

"Also tried business model that was [like] called premium where the providers were employed by an agency and they were only working for Helpling customers, but in the end, it was not working so well, so it was excluded (an agency exclusively working with Helpling)."

The manager went on to explain that the premium offering involving agencies is still offered in other countries:

"While Singapore and France have a different business model where they work with agencies, so they stay on the premium, they always developed the premium idea of working with agencies that employ the provider and then have the exclusivity with Helpling."

The profile of workers on the Helpling platform in Ireland is predominantly migrant. The workers tend to fall into two main categories. The first category consists of people from Brazil, both male and female, many of whom use the platform to find work while studying in Ireland. The worker profile was described as *"very young, like, between 23 years old and, I wouldn't say, more than 35."* This group tends to come to the platform by word-of-mouth recommendations, with new arrivals in Dublin quickly learning about Helpling and registering on the platform. These students typically do not stay on the app for long, viewing the job as a temporary means to support themselves while focusing on their primary goal of studying English. As noted at the manager interview, it is *"intended by them as a job that you use for maximum year. The main goal is studying English, and then they need something to support that- the time they are studying English here. Normally, they arrive, like, not with a family, like, not with a partner and kids. But it's more like a sibling or with a friend, so it's this kind of a single person. Normally, they are studying for half of time and the rest of the time, they are working with platform like Helpling, or they are doing other job."*

The second category includes individuals from Africa, both male and female, who use the app to earn additional income while balancing other work or caregiving responsibilities. Many of these workers had been part of a wave of migration that occurred around fifteen years ago. They are often more integrated into the local society, with families and partners, and use Helpling to supplement their income.

"Then there's another group actually, that is like older people that are the, I would say there's a big group coming from Africa that I've because I interviewed a couple of them and yeah, they-they were from, I don't remember like Congo. And I know I don't remember exactly from where, but it-it's like a-wave of migration that it's like 15 years ago. So they have kids, they have

partners. They are already more integrated in the society of the city." (Manager, Helpling)

Some of the workers spoke about how their connections helped them get started working with Helpling, and this made the processes easier for them:

"It was the friend who invited me in that majorly taught me how to do everything there. He was [on the platform] there for longer period than me. So I think I had it, it was quite easy for me because I had someone holding my hand." (Participant 12, male)

4. Workers' Experiences

Workers' next step after registering on the platform is to complete one event/task with a customer. After that, they become active and visible to a wider number of clients:

"They have one first step that is getting one customer and executing with that one customer, and after that, it opens up to all the customers and all the offers. It's like a first step to ensure that the person is actually active on the platform and doing the first event." (Manager, Helpling)

Clients on the Helpling platform can select a worker for a task, which the worker can then accept or refuse within a given window of time. As described, *"the customers book an appointment, decide if it's a recurring or a one-off, and then sees all the persons in their area that match the same time that they selected."* (Manager, Helpling)

This system ensures that the decision to accept a job is always on the provider's side. *"So, in any case, this decision is always on the provider side. If you're selected, you say yes or no. The other case, you are the one applying for that bid, so you are the one deciding that you are interested in that bid."* (Manager, Helpling)

It is important for workers to engage with the platform regularly to accept bids (client jobs are referred to as bids); if they do not, then the bid is open and could be taken by another worker.

"But after 6/8/ hours, I think the bid goes on like it's open to anybody who wants to be a candidate for that bid." (Manager, Helpling)

"I'd say that period whenever I wake up, the period, before getting into the into the bed. So I'd say daily I'd have to look at it." (Participant 12, male)

"The customers book an appointment, decide if it's a recurring or a one-off, and then sees all the person in their area that match the same time that they selected. And they can see like the- like a card that, it's the profile of the provider with a picture, if the provider decided to put the picture. And the description that the provider decided to put and then the prices, and if they are OK with pets, for example, if they are OK cleaning windows. These kind of things. And they can

select the persons that they want to add to their bid. Then they'll be started, and the person– the person selected or the first one receiving this offer, and the first one that accepts the offer is the match provided." (Manager, Helpling)

The main algorithm at work is geographic matching based on area matches between clients and workers. To increase their opportunities for jobs, workers can opt to expand their geographic scope:

"So you if want to go even if it's outside of your area, you can decide, but normally you see the ones that are in your area... you can change the filter." (Manager, Helpling)

"If they have some way of transportation so they can have a bigger area, but in the case they are using public transportation, we normally say start with something that is not so far away so you are sure that you can arrive in on time and stuff like that." (Manager, Helpling)

For the platform, ensuring that workers follow through after accepting jobs from clients is vitally important, as the reputation of the platform suffers if jobs are cancelled. This is something that is also addressed in the welcome call and follow-up communications with the workers:

"Normally, it's we send an email with like the same recommendation and something like, remember, if you accept an offer that, it's important to actually go. If you have problem, contact the customers like explain what's happening, that it's maybe easier to move the appointment instead of disappearing." (Manager, Helpling)

The typical job posting is for 2.5 hours of cleaning, and these tend to be recurring weekly/fortnightly, with a 3-hour booking associated with fewer recurring clients: *"The minimum that we have is 2.5 for recurring and three hours for one-off." (Manager, Helpling)*. *"And actually, for one-off, sometimes we also have like the entire morning, like 5 hours or the entire afternoon because it's normally one of the ones where you have, I don't know, big cleaning, spring cleaning. So it's not standard cleaning." (Manager, Helpling)*

Commission rates on the platform vary, ranging from 7% to 12%. The commission is higher for one-off jobs, so repeat jobs from clients are important.

"For each event, there's a commission that is calculated based on if it's a re-occurring order or one-off order. And it's a commission, a percentage-percentage commission. And it's variable because provider can set their prices so they can decide what is the price that they want– want the customer to pay so that they get after everything paid, the commission Helpling, they get what they think is their right price." (Manager, Helpling)

Where a client wants a specific worker for a task, there is a way for the platform to accommodate that: *"They can send to a previous provider that they already know a direct request, that it's not going through the normal booking funnel, but it's a*

requested inside the platform, but without going through the like the normal basic funnel." (Manager, Helpling)

The platform actively encourages workers to maintain all their communications inside the platform app: *"We say during the call, remember to use the chat so that every communication is inside the app." (Manager, Helpling)*

The platform also makes it clear to workers that reviews are an important element of boosting their visibility on the site: *"Getting reviews from the customers or like not cancelling appointments after accepting them, it's part of how they are more visible and more appealing for the customers." (Manager, Helpling)*

However, there is dissatisfaction with the narrative rating system among the workers, as one worker on the Helpling platform noted, *"A star rating is much better because I think clients spend less time actually writing reviews and basically rate you based on whatever they felt. For the writing feedback in terms, it's not as accurate." (Participant 3, female)*

The platform, though, points out that they are aware that some narrative ratings are not reflective of a worker's typical work and may be one-off in nature. They try to counteract this by not making such comments visible: *"so if you get three one stars, of course, your total is getting lower, but we don't leave the bad comments on the on their profile because it's really most of the time it's something that happened with that customer, and maybe another three customers gave five stars." (Manager, Helpling)*

Some workers, though, noted that not all public reviews were positive:

"It's happened once, but I didn't really act on it. I just felt like maybe the review wasn't fair, and because it's public, it was kind of like for me, but I didn't really act on it. I just went on with other tasks that I had, and the other reviews kind of helped me get over that." (Participant 12, male)

The manager also noted that if a pattern of poor reviews occurs, workers may be deactivated: *"It happens that we had to deactivate people after like three very bad situation, very bad the reviews because if you get three bad reviews one after the other..... So it can happen and, but if it's something like that, then of course the point is the platform is based on reputation. If the reputation goes down, of course, we cannot."*

The platform did note, though, that clients can also be excluded from the platform where there are multiple reports of incidents with providers and those clients are labelled with a "Do not serve tag".

"Think the social skill is the is the most important part: how you communicate with them, how you how you talk to your clients. You have to be kind, even you have to be patient, even when even when your when your client is kind of rude or or or such kind of things. You will end of have to be patient to talk them because you're the one, you're the one who needs the job. So I think that's the most important thing." (Participant 12, male)

Workers noted that they would like the review system to work both ways and allow them to rate clients who are dishonest or rude in their dealings with workers. This was something echoed by management: *"What we don't have is yet same thing on the customer side. That is something that I would much like to have because considering that they are both our customer and they're both our user, I think it would make total sense that also the customer are evaluated by the providers."*

There is also frustration when posts that are no longer active or hiring are left active on the app, leading to wasted time responding to roles that are no longer available or genuine.

Additionally, there are instances of jobs not being as described and last-minute cancellations, which the platform does not always resolve despite having a cancellation policy in place. The platform notes that workers are encouraged to report issues to them, and they will try to resolve them. For example, the platform may try to broker a solution to a client's complaint by discounting the price but covering the cost, so the worker is not penalised: *"Like listening to both the people try to find a solution. If there's no way on the customer side to find to accept a middle ground solution, it's normally something that we cover with a discount. So we cover part of the payment with a discount. So the customer pays less, but the provider still receive the amount that is supposed to receive. Normally, this is what happens because most of the time doesn't seem to be actually provider fault, but more and then a misunderstanding of what was the customer expecting compared to what the provider actually did."* (Manager, Helpling)

It is common for workers to have 2–3 recurring clients weekly. Some workers also use multiple platforms to maximise their earnings, performing both care and cleaning work. As one worker noted, *"A housekeeping job in care.com, which offers higher pay as opposed to a cleaning job in Helpling. I may be more inclined to the housekeeping job."* (Participant 3, female)

The platform is aware that workers balance jobs on the app with other activities and that they may remain on the app but not active for long periods: *"I mean, some people that are I interviewed in the past were like already 5 or 6, 7 years in Dublin and they started with Helpling or maybe with Hassle. Even so, people that were still keeping Helpling as a backup plan. They were doing other jobs but still having their profile there with their reviews, everything still alive. If they needed to come back and there's someone that is like in some period during their other job, I don't know there was for example, one person that lost their job. So in the time she was looking for a new one, she used Helpling just for one-off. So she didn't build new relationships, longer relationship because she was looking for other jobs, but she used the platform for one-off."* (Manager, Helpling)

"Helpling, I started [working with] this year. I had my account a good few years, but I started only this year, working only as a cleaner." (Participant 10, female)

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

IRELAND

CASE STUDY 3

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Funded by DG Employment, Social
Affairs and Inclusion – EMPLA –
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industrial relations –
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1. Background

Care.com is the world's largest care platform with operations across the globe. The platform provides a range of care services from senior care and babysitting to pet care and domestic tasks²⁹. Care.com was launched in the US in 2007 as a matching service for care providers and clients. The owner, Sheila Lirio Marcelo, brought Care.com public in 2014³⁰. Earlier in 2011, the platform developed a new enterprise solution, Care For Business, whereby companies could offer Care.com as a benefit to their employees³¹. One of the customers of the Care@Work service was Google. In 2016, while Care.com was valued at €364 million, Google Capital made a \$46.4 million investment in Care.com Inc. The investment has made Google Capital the platform's largest stakeholder and secured a seat for the company on the Care.com board.³² The question has been raised of why an organisation such as Google Capital would invest in an organisation linked with offline services? Arguably, the rationale that has been proposed is that forays into such markets drive customer connection. Brumley (2016) argues that the Google Capital investment reflects the activities of Amazon in their Amazon Home Service venture: *"If a consumer comes to Amazon.com seeking a housepainter, it's just one more way Amazon keeps that consumer connected to Amazon. If they have enough of those connections, eventually it'll drive revenue Amazon's way."*³³

In 2019, the share value of Care.com declined significantly after a Wall Street Journal investigation questioned the online marketplace's vetting process for its caregivers. The investigation found that over the previous six years, caregivers who had police records were recommended on Care.com and later were accused of committing crimes while caring for members' children or their older relatives.³⁴ The investigation noted that Care.com did not confirm caregivers' claimed credentials and instead, the company recommended that families buy supplemental screening that cost from \$59

²⁸ The research for this case study is based on secondary research from new articles, reports and existing academic work relating to Care.com. Primary research is based on online interviews conducted with 5 care workers registered on Care.com in Ireland in 2024. Management of Care.com were invited to participate in the study but declined to engage.

²⁹ <https://www.iac.com/press-releases/iac-announces-agreement-to-acquire-care-com>

³⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/gemmaallen/2024/02/22/carecom-founder-launches-ai-startup-aimed-at-109-trillion-labor-gap/>

³¹ <https://www.care.com/c/apolitical-technology-care-work/>

³² <https://investorplace.com/2016/07/googl-goog-crm-google-stock-care-com/>

³³ <https://investorplace.com/2016/07/googl-goog-crm-google-stock-care-com/>

³⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/care-com-puts-onus-on-families-to-check-caregivers-backgroundswith-sometimes-tragic-outcomes-11552088138>

to \$300. Care.com require workers to complete a background check (known as CareCheck) in order to interact with families but note that their “eligibility standards for caregivers may differ from your hiring standards”.³⁵

In 2019, Care.com was bought by IAC, a holding company for digital brands, in a deal estimated to be worth €500 million³⁶. Providers have reported difficulties related to the platform’s algorithm. Visibility on Care.com is influenced by factors like connectivity, response time, and positive reviews, often mirroring pre-existing social inequalities. Although the specifics of the algorithm remain undisclosed, studies suggest that providers who engage frequently and respond quickly are more likely to be visible, creating pressure for providers to remain constantly active to secure job offers³⁷. Additionally, despite care providers’ efforts to establish credibility, research indicates that Black-presenting workers may experience lower visibility, affecting their perceived trustworthiness and opportunities for employment.

More recently Care.com faced significant challenges, including allegations from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that the platform misled care providers about job availability and potential earnings while making it difficult for clients to cancel paid memberships. The complaint highlighted that Care.com exaggerated earnings potential without tracking actual pay rates. Despite receiving a Notice of Penalty Offenses from the FTC in 2021, Care.com continued these practices. Additionally, the FTC alleged that Care.com used “dark patterns” to make cancelling subscriptions difficult by including multiple steps and confusing language. The settlement aims to stop these practices and ensure a fair marketplace for caregivers and families³⁸. Although Care.com did not admit to any wrongdoing, it agreed to an \$8.5 million settlement that required the company to substantiate its earnings claims, accurately represent the number of available jobs on its site and simplify the subscription cancellation process for users³⁹. Under the proposed settlement terms, Care.com must:

- Pay \$8.5 million to the FTC for consumer refunds due to their unlawful practices.
- Ensure all earnings claims are truthful and supported by evidence.
- Only advertise job listings from users who can genuinely hire workers.
- Clearly explain how site communication works before charging consumers.

³⁵ <https://www.care.com/about/safety/background-checks/#importantLimitations>

³⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/20/iac-to-acquire-carecom-in-500-million-deal.html>

³⁷ Fetterolf, E. (2022). It’s crowded at the bottom: Trust, visibility, and search algorithms on Care.com. *Journal of Digital Social Research*, 4(1), 49–72.

³⁸ <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2024/08/ftc-takes-action-against-carecom-deceiving-caregivers-about-wages-availability-jobs-its-site>

³⁹ <https://www.pymnts.com/news/regulation/2024/ftc-accuses-care-com-misleading-job-seeking-caregivers/>

- Offer a straightforward cancellation process for any negative option subscriptions on the site.

2. Operational Model

It is unclear how long Care.com have operated in Ireland. The care workers interviewed had varying years of experience working via the platform, but none worked on the platform preceding the pandemic. So, whether or not Care.com operated in Ireland prior to 2020 is unclear. The organisation appears to share the same operating model in Ireland that it has in other locations, operating as a matching service between clients and care workers. The extent to which it operates on a national basis is unclear as all of those interviewed worked in main urban areas, such as Dublin. The website however does list carers in other regions of the country but is restricted to seven urban areas. When asked how they initially found out about Care.com, one worker noted that they have found it via Facebook and Reddit advertising and groups:

“I found out about it after researching various caregiving platforms. Yeah, and then I signed up for an account and created a detailed profile showcasing my experience and qualification. And through the Reddit and Facebook. I found more information about it, and I decided that maybe I should try it out. Yeah, that's how I found about it”(Participant 4).

Another worker noted that she first found out about Care.com through word of mouth at a jobs fair for migrant workers that she attended *“Actually, after I moved to Ireland, I attended a fair. And it was at the fair, a job fair for immigrants”*(Participant 9).

3. Experience of workers

All of the workers interviewed were originally from outside of the EU. Some reported having third-level qualifications, not related to care work, suggesting that engaging in care work was by necessity rather than choice. One female participant noted that securing a visa for work was a problem. Although she held a third level qualification, working in care or domestic work seemed to be the only option available to her due to being from outside the European Union: *“migrant issues, like migrant workers, like myself, particularly in terms of like actually we are securing visas to actually work other than like work environments”*(Participant, 15). While another male participant noted that care and domestic work was also the only work he engaged in since coming to Ireland *“It's the only work I've done”*(Participant, 4).

Workers also noted that the platform model provided them with flexibility to manage their own care needs: *“The platform because it offered flexibility, so I would be able to care for my child and also work an income at the same time. This is actually the first platform I found when I first moved here, and currently, I just learnt that there are other platforms I could actually try my hands on. I just wanted to gain a level of experience using the platform and also build my profile enough on this platform before I move to something else”*(Participant 9).

On joining the platform, workers noted that they were asked if they had previous experience and, where this was the case, to indicate in what area. But as far as one participant was aware this information was never verified: *“There was no verification from my previous work. But I had to include if I've had previous experiences in childcare services”* (Participant 4).

Some of the workers interviewed seemed unclear about their employment status in relation to the platform. *“Basically, how the platform works is you register your profile on the platforms, and the platform basically connects you to your clients. Although the payments are done through the platform, so, in a way, I'd say the platform is basically my primary employer. But it also gives me the flexibility to decide the number of hours I'm willing to work and to also negotiate my pay.”*(Participant 4).

Workers though were aware of the extent to which they faced insecurity as a result of the nature of the work and its model: *“I call in sick, and sometimes if you're sick for maybe a number of days and you're unable to, you know, go back to work. Usually, your clients can relieve you of your current job, and that's where the job insecurity issue comes in. Because there's no form of security. And also, because of that, you tend to have inconsistent income”*(Participant 4).

4. Issues for Workers

Workers indicated that they performed other work outside of the Care.com platform or were listed on more than one platform concurrently in order to ensure continuity of work and maximise earnings: *“I might be more inclined to pick a platform or a job that has a higher pay. So, I might kinda [kind of] earn a value like jobs from one of that platform”*(Participant, 15).

The regularity of work was a concern to workers with very few regular client appointments: *“there's one that I always care for on regular basis”* (Participant 4). Therefore, workers noted not having sufficient level of work and expressed a preference for more: *“I'll say that I'd like to get more work. Yeah, (...) I can't say like my earnings [are] stable. Depending on how I get my work. There's times I don't get the work.”*(Participant 4).

The decision to move across platforms or take work outside of a platform seemed to relate more to the type of job on offer, or the number of hours attached to it, rather than being directly related to the commission fee charged by different platforms. As interviewees noted, although there were some differences, it was by and large a small difference: *"The fee is not the same, it's about 10– 12%"* (Participant 15). However, rejecting a job on the platform, workers realised had implications for future offers of work, noting that *"so, your rejection offers... kind of like pushes you down the list. Visibility, you're like your visibility, is kind of affected because of your responsive time"* (Participant 15).

Participants were also aware that the system's algorithm was linked with recommendations and therefore a lack of recommendations would reduce the likelihood of finding work no matter how much the profile matched what a client was seeking: *"You might have difficulties getting jobs because the platform sort of recommends you to your clients where your skills and needs matches. It makes a recommendation, and I realised from other users, too, that if you have low ratings that, you tend to get few client recommendations"* (Participant 9).

Workers were asked about the type of domestic and care work undertaken in terms of whether or not they encountered difficult or stressful situations due to the nature of the work. Some noted that working with clients could create "emotional exertion" which *"can have an emotional toll and also affect your mental health"* (Participant 15). When asked if there were any supports available to workers in relation to dealing with stressful or challenging situations they may encounter, one worker noted that she was aware that platform had articles that gave guidance, but that these were quite generic and did not give advice that was always relevant to a specific context: *"This platform specifically offers like resources and articles. It's an international website not specifically for Ireland."* (Participant 15).

Workers also tended to see their involvement with the platforms or indeed care and domestic work as a transitory phase. One participant noted: *"I'm actually trying to save up money to go back to college, so it's this childcare and housekeeping services is what's going to, you know, pay the bulk of my college fees. So, for now, I'm going to keep at it. And I'm hoping by next year, 2025, I'm going to go back to college and get a degree in nursing"* (Participant 9).

Others noted that they have moved from the platform to more stable forms of employment in care, though that too involved the use of digital placement agencies but with more regular or live-in care roles : *"From this year, I changed the job, and I came back to be a home carer this year in January, but it's private. Actually, I found this job on; it's not an app, but it's on a website"* (Participant 10).

5. Conclusion

Overall, only limited information could be ascertained about Care.com's operation in Ireland. Although the platform lists a variety of services and has active profiles, accessing workers was quite difficult. Management did not engage when invited for interview in relation to operations.

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

ITALY

CASE STUDY 1

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Baze

1. History and characteristics of the platform

Baze is an Italian platform that intermediates services in domestic cleaning, babysitting, and, to a lesser extent (5% of its total services), elderly care. The platform was founded in May 2023 by three young entrepreneurs with professional backgrounds in various areas of the technology sector, including consulting firms and startup incubators. The launch of the platform was made possible through an investment from Nana Bianca, a startup accelerator based in Florence.

Currently, Baze operates primarily within the metropolitan area of Milan, in the province of Monza–Brianza and, exceptionally, in other cities. Nevertheless, there are plans to expand into additional cities in northern and central Italy in the coming years, with a particular focus on Turin, Rome, Bologna, and Florence.

What differentiates Baze from traditional digital marketplaces is a more comprehensive approach towards the management of clients' and workers' needs. The platform not only connects clients with domestic workers but also centrally manages crucial phases of the service. This includes overseeing the recruitment process, matching labour supply and demand, providing administrative support to clients, and ensuring the regularization of workers' employment. In this way, as we will further elaborate in the next section, Baze epitomizes what has been termed a *digital agency* model (see Deliverable 3.2).

The platform business model is based on two main revenue streams. The first is a one-off subscription fee paid by the client, which ranges between €250 and €400 depending on the number of weekly hours required. The more hours requested, the higher the fee, as the search for an available worker becomes increasingly complex. The second revenue stream consists of a monthly subscription fee that grants clients' access to additional services such as workers' regularization, payroll management, and, most importantly, worker replacement in case of holidays or illness. While the payment of the one-off subscription fee is mandatory for accessing the platform's core service, the monthly subscription is optional. This allows clients to continue their collaboration with workers independently, outside of the platform, once the worker search is completed, although this also means losing access to the platform's administrative support and worker replacement services.

The interview with the CEO revealed that Baze is not currently engaged in monetizing user data or forming advertising partnerships. These business strategies are considered premature at this stage of the platform's development. The company is

presently prioritizing the refinement of its core services and the expansion of brand recognition among both service providers and users.

2. Platform governance

Baze is registered as a limited liability company (Srl). The internal organisation of the platform consists of seven people. Among them are the three co-founders, who also serve as the company's administrators, each overseeing a specific domain: administrative management, product development, and marketing. Additionally, two full-time professionals, engaged under a partita IVA (the Italian tax identification system for self-employed individuals), are responsible for technological development and workforce recruitment. The team is further completed by two full-time interns who assist in recruitment activities and community management.

Recruitment constitutes a core organizational function of the platform. To adequately describe this process, it is necessary to distinguish between two key stages: the worker profiling and selection phase, and the subsequent matching phase with the client requesting the service. The selection process is fully automated and based on a comprehensive questionnaire designed to gather an extensive array of information. This includes sociodemographic data – such as age, gender, and country of origin – as well as professional qualifications, previous work experience, references from former employers, and preferences regarding work hours and geographic availability. The questionnaire also includes an aptitude assessment designed to profile applicants' behavioural traits—and, in some cases, to restrict access to the platform. As the CEO explains:

“[...] For example, one of the questions might be: ‘How would you react if your employer gave you critical feedback?’ There are no strictly right or wrong answers, but if someone replies with something like, ‘I’d insult them and walk out,’ that would be flagged as a concern for the family. These kind of answers could immediately restrict their access to the platform. So, we definitely see it as a real selection process.” (Baze CEO)

Workers who complete at least the mandatory sections of the questionnaire enter the Baze database and become eligible for inclusion in the client-worker matching process.

The matching process is managed through a partially automated system, customized for each job offer. Clients submit job advertisements that include essential information required for candidate selection, such as the location, the nature of the service requested, and a detailed list of specific tasks (e.g., grocery shopping, deep cleaning, household maintenance, gardening, running errands, tidying rooms, laundry, terrace

care, driving, engaging with children, homework support, child accompaniment, and assistance with personal hygiene). Clients also indicate the number of working hours required, categorized into five ranges (<12; 12–19; 20–25; 26–40; 41–54 per week), as well as the preferred time of day (morning, afternoon, or evening). Compensation is specified within one of four salary brackets (<€7; €7–8; €9–10; >€10 per hour) and also foresees an option for negotiation. These job advertisements are published on a dedicated section of the platform's website and are also disseminated via a WhatsApp chat accessible to workers. However, this chat does not permit direct communication either between workers or with clients. Workers can review the advertisements, which provide comprehensive information regarding job type, location, remuneration, and other relevant details, and apply – via the website or WhatsApp – for those matching their preferences and availability.

Once workers' applications have been collected, the platform initiates the matching process, which is made of three distinct phases. The first is the *scoring* phase, which aims at identifying the most suitable candidates. This includes not only individuals who have actively applied for the position but also collaborators within the platform's database whose profiles align with the client's requirements. The second phase of the matching process, the pre-screening stage, is powered by an AI-based conversational model. This system verifies the availability of shortlisted candidates, ensures they are not concurrently engaged in other selection processes, and assesses their alignment with the client's specific requirements. As the CEO of Baze explains:

“This phase of the process is based on a conversational model powered by ChatGPT, which conducts interviews via WhatsApp with all candidates who have passed the scoring phase. The model is informed about the family's needs and relevant aspects to highlight for the worker. It simulates an online interview, ultimately producing an assessment of each candidate, indicating their suitability to the job position or any specific concerns. This pre-assessment significantly simplifies the recruiter's final check, as it provides them with numerous information, so that they already know whom to contact.” (Baze CEO)

Following the automated phases of the process, a human recruiter conducts a final interview with the shortlisted candidates to evaluate their suitability for the position. Based on this assessment, the recruiter selects three candidates to be presented to the client, who then conducts individual interviews and makes the final hiring decision. Each candidate is accompanied by a profile containing personal and professional details, references from previous employers, and user-generated ratings from the platform. In contrast to conventional digital marketplaces, where reviews play a decisive role in determining workers' visibility and their access to job opportunities, on Baze, these reviews serve a supplementary function. They provide clients with

additional information to validate the evaluation of candidates proposed by the platform.

In this vein, while the matching process relies on a significant degree of technological automation, it still involves human oversight and validation. In the next months, as stated by the CEO during the interview, “the platform aims to replace this final human interview with an AI-driven video interview process, which emulates recent innovations introduced by large employment agencies, such as Adecco and Synergie”. The explicit reference to traditional employment agencies, as opposed to other digital platforms, highlights Baze’s strategic positioning. This is further exemplified in the following statement from the CEO, who explicitly rejects categorizing Baze as a digital marketplace or platform, instead describing it as a “digital agency with an automated recruiting process”:

“Baze is not a marketplace... I want to make it clear... We are not a marketplace; we are trying to innovate the traditional agency business model. In other words, we are an agency with an automated recruiting process. When a family comes to us, they do not browse worker profiles; instead, they explain their needs, and we present them only those candidates who are both a suitable match and available. This is what is usually lacking in digital platforms: they do not provide immediate information on whether workers are available for a specific job offer. Instead, clients must reach out, message, or even call workers themselves. We eliminate this entire step by managing it on their behalf [...] Clients only need to select the most suitable candidate. Additionally, we verify references and worker identities, and we administer an aptitude test that outlines behavioural profiles. This entire process serves as our differentiating factor compared to traditional platforms. [...] Unlike most digital platforms, where anyone can gain access, we conduct a specific selection process for each job offer.” (Baze CEO)

As demonstrated by this interview excerpt, the centralized management of recruitment and matching processes serves two key purposes. First, it ensures that only candidates who meet predefined criteria are included in the platform’s database, thereby contributing to the overall quality and reliability of the services offered. Second, it aims to enhance the efficiency of the matching process by reducing the effort and time required by clients to identify suitable candidates – the platform guarantees completion of the entire matching process within 72 hours. In this context, although the Terms and Conditions document (Article 5.4) explicitly states that the platform “does not intervene at any stage of the selection process or in the establishment of the employment relationship,” Baze nonetheless assumes a higher level of accountability toward both workers and clients compared to traditional platforms. By virtue of these organizational mechanisms, the platform legitimizes itself as a provider of high-quality services.

The centralization of organizational functions is also evident in the management of contractual regularization, payments, and worker replacement. As noted in the previous section, these are supplementary services that workers can opt to purchase through the payment of a monthly fee. The employment relationship is formally established between the client—acting as the employer — and the domestic worker—serving as the employee – in accordance with the National Collective Agreement for Domestic Work (CCNL). Baze is not legally registered as an employment agency and, therefore, is not authorized to provide staff leasing services. The platform facilitates the regularization of employment relationships between the parties; however, it is the client who assumes the role of the employer.

The platform facilitates payment management by generating monthly payslips. At the end of each month, the client indicates on the app the amount of hours worked by the domestic worker, including any deviations from the contractual agreement, such as vacation days, leave, or overtime. The platform then issues the corresponding payslip to the client, who is responsible for making the payment to the worker via bank transfer. In this way, while the platform aids in the regularization of employment relationships, it cannot fully verify compliance with payment obligations, which ultimately remain the responsibility of the client. As the CEO of Baze explains, this arrangement can give rise to potential issues:

“Bank transfers are always not completed. In many cases, clients pay in cash or workers request weekly payments, limiting the platform’s ability to monitor transactions. To address this, Baze is developing a secure, automated in-app payment system. [...] at the end of the month, the client records the worker’s actual hours, reporting any leave, illness, or overtime. They then receive a payslip, which they can review directly within the app to verify the payment details. Once the payslip is approved, the worker’s payment is processed automatically. This ensures immediate payment for workers, which is not always guaranteed otherwise. Additionally, all transactions are tracked within the app.” (Baze CEO)

As highlighted in this interview excerpt, the implementation of in-app payment management promises to strengthen worker protections. First, by enabling the tracking of payments, it will allow Baze to intervene in cases of complaints from domestic workers regarding non-payment or delays. Secondly, it supports the regularization of trial periods, which Baze currently struggles to monitor and which, as the CEO explains, are typically handled informally:

“By intermediating payments through the app, we can also regulate trial periods. At present, all trial periods are paid under the table. We propose three candidates to the clients, who then interview them and typically conduct at least a one-week trial period off the books. By managing payments directly within the app, we can enable occasional employment contracts for just that

trial week, allowing workers to be legally compensated based on the hours they have actually worked.” (Baze CEO)

The direct management of payment via the platform does not only ensure that workers receive appropriate compensation for their time but also to provide a legal framework for trial periods, thereby reducing the risks associated with informal agreements. In this way, as expressed by the CEO, technological automation seems to play a positive role in enhancing workers' protections. Additionally, the CEO indicated that the introduction of in-app payment management will be accompanied by a partial revision of the Baze business model. The current monthly fees for replacement and administrative services will be substituted by a transaction fee applied to each paid working hour. This change aligns Baze more closely with other platforms operating in the sector – such as Helping – and, beyond marking a transformation in the platform's business model, serves as a key lock-in mechanism designed to retain users within the platform even after the selection process has concluded. On one hand, workers are incentivized to continue using the platform to keep their protections in terms of secure and reliable payments. On the other hand, clients are encouraged to use all the services provided by Baze – not only the recruiting domestic workers but also the management of payroll and administrative tasks.

3. Platform workers

On its website, the platform states to collaborate with over 12.000 verified domestic workers⁴⁰. According to the CEO, this number refers to those who have registered on the website uploading basic information but have not necessarily completed their profiles nor have already found clients through the platform. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that the number of collaborators who have actively worked through the platform is approximately equal to the number of families who have already used the service, which, according to the website, is around 1,500.

The collected data does not allow us to precisely reconstruct the composition of the workforce. However, based on the interview with the CEO, we know that the platform's workforce is predominantly female, with approximately half of the workers having a migrant background. These workers primarily come from the Philippines and Sri Lanka, with smaller groups from South America and Eastern Europe.

The four workers interviewed (three women and one man) have substantial experience in the Italian domestic work sector. The male worker, originally from Sri Lanka, has worked as both a home cleaner and caregiver since his arrival in Italy 20 years ago. The three female workers (two Italians and one Brazilian) have more diverse

⁴⁰ <https://www.bazeapp.com/>

professional backgrounds, but all have extensive experience in domestic work, which is a central part of their professional journeys. They have primarily worked as cleaners, babysitters, or elderly caregivers, and identify these activities as their main sources of employment. Interestingly, only one worker mentioned having had several experiences with informal work, citing the intermittent nature of the job as a main reason. The other interviewees reported limited experience with informal work in this sector, having been formally employed for years by the same clients. They also emphasized the value of formal employment relationships, viewing it as one of the key strengths of Baze.

From the workers' point of view, one of the primary motivations for using the platform seems to be the lack of social capital. The four workers interviewed stated that they registered on Baze after relocating to a new city, which resulted in the loss of their previous clients and the informal networks they had typically relied on for job referrals. As demonstrated in the following interview excerpt, Baze helped mitigating the loss of social capital by connecting them with new potential clients:

"[...] When I registered on Baze, I was in the process of relocating from Milan to Monza Brianza, and I was looking for something closer. [...] In Milan, everything works through word of mouth, right? Through friends. But here, I didn't know anyone, so Baze was very helpful." (Interview 3, F, 50-54, Monza)

Beyond facilitating connections with clients, the perceived utility of Baze, as described by the interviewees, extends to the platform's assistance with administrative tasks and payment management. This support is seen as a crucial factor in reinforcing labor protections and promoting the formalization of their working conditions. In this context, one interviewee characterized her work with Baze as a "real job" compared to her previous experiences in informal work:

"The platform is much better because... between two private individuals, unless one of them knows how to handle things from an administrative and contractual perspective, it's difficult to understand how to formalize the contract, what is owed, and what is not. With Baze, they handle everything. So, it's better, in a way, if there is an agency involved. [...] With families, you face the usual risks. They might tell you not to come at the last minute, or suddenly say they don't need you anymore... which basically means losing money. [...] But in this case, it's a more stable job. You get paid vacation, paid sick leave, and... it's a real job, a normal job, let's say. It's what I was looking for after maternity leave when my child started school. Because doing gig works was useful for a while. [...] But having a child, being of a certain age, I need something stable. I can't keep going with... without knowing if I will work or always fearing that next week, I may lose a family and have to find another one. I need something more stable, something secure, and I think Baze helps in this respect" (Interview 1, F, 50-54, Monza)

Beyond contributing to the formalization of employment conditions – including the contractual agreements, job duties and remuneration – the interviews also suggest that Baze plays a key role in enhancing the public recognition of domestic work. One interviewee used the word “*seriousness*” to highlight how Baze’s rigorous selection process sets it apart from other work contexts, providing benefits both to workers and clients, who can frame it as a provider of quality services:

“[...] Baze works to find people who can provide a certain level of service quality. There are always people who post ads or flyers in mailboxes, but you never know who you’re letting into your home, and it becomes risky [...] Those who want better service to know they can get it through Baze” (Interview 1, F, 35–39, Province of Milan)

The platform’s reputation appears to yield indirect benefits for the workers themselves. For example, one interviewee notes that her work experience with Baze can be regarded as a more reliable reference than those provided by private individuals, potentially improving her future employment prospects and opportunities for professional development:

“[...] Having worked with this agency is not the same as having a reference from a private person. A private reference carries some weight, but only to a limited extent. Perhaps this is because there is skepticism about whether it truly comes from a family—someone could, for instance, give their mother’s phone number and instruct her to say: ‘Tell them I’m good.’ But with an agency, it is more credible. It’s like when a store contacts your previous employer for a reference, rather than calling, let’s say, a colleague (Interview 1, F, 35, Province of Milan)

The aspiration for professionalization expressed by the interviewed workers is grounded in their subjective recognition of the value of this work and the skills necessary to perform it effectively. For instance, one interviewee emphasized the relational nature of the work, arguing that:

“It is not just about cleaning, [but also about] “how to communicate with people to avoid a small misunderstanding from ruining a job to which you have given 100% of your effort and the client’s trust.” (Interview 4, F, 41, Province of Bologna)

Additionally, the interviewees highlighted that domestic work often entails a significant degree of responsibility, particularly when caregiving duties are involved. This aspect of the job demands not only technical skills but also emotional intelligence and reliability, especially when entrusted with the care of vulnerable individuals:

“It’s a job that seems so trivial, but it’s really... a huge responsibility, you know? Taking care of an old lady or a child... it’s not something trivial. It’s very important. You need seriousness, a lot of responsibility, because, in my opinion, it’s not trivial, you know? It’s not an object. It’s a big responsibility...” (Interview 1, F, 50–54, Monza)

The workers also voiced concerns that clients often fail to recognize the complexity of the work involved, frequently undervaluing it both economically and symbolically. However, a prevailing perception exists that the clients intercepted by Baze are more attuned to these aspects. This is exemplified in the following interview excerpt, which suggests that the platform may contribute to increase the social recognition of domestic workers:

"[...] The fact that people using Baze want someone with experience and not just 'the first person available' shows that families are beginning to understand that this job requires a certain level of competence." (Interview 4, F, 41, Province of Bologna)

The growing formalization of working conditions does not undermine the autonomy that domestic workers retain in managing their own job. This is a crucial aspect to emphasize, as the dichotomy between the formalization of working conditions and autonomy is often framed as a trade-off in the debate on platform labour regulation. Workers utilizing Baze retain the ability to select job offers that align with their preferences and professional needs, as well as to accept or decline offers proposed by the platform's management. Various factors influence these decisions, including salary, the geographical location of the client, and the specific tasks outlined in the contract. This is exemplified in the following interview excerpt, in which a worker explains her decision to reject a job offer due to its demanding nature:

"I declined the first job offer because I didn't feel suited to the client's expectations. [...] Although it was nominally a babysitting role, it also involved cleaning a large house... I didn't want that kind of commitment anymore. I wanted a calmer job, even if it involved working with elderly people, but something less demanding, where I didn't have to do too much cleaning, you know? I was looking for something more manageable" (Interview 1, F, 50–54, Monza)

Finally, it is worth noting that none of the workers interviewed made any explicit reference to previous experiences with trade unions or other organizations representing workers' interests. Moreover, despite their heightened awareness of the formalization of the employment relationship, when directly questioned on the matter, only one interviewee indicated that she viewed trade unions and similar organizations as useful actors in addressing potential work-related issues.

4. Clients

As with the workers, there is insufficient data to accurately reconstruct the demographic profile of the clients. According to Baze's CEO, the platform primary target of clients includes:

"People who have previously had formal employment relationships with domestic workers and do not question the importance of formalizing these arrangements. They require assistance with payroll management and administrative procedures. [...] Our advantage is that, in addition to handling payroll, we also find the worker for you, replace them if they are not a good fit, and provide another one if needed, etc." (Baze CEO)

The ideal type of an *ethical client* depicted by the CEO is aligned with the experiences shared by the interviewed workers in the previous section, as well as with the perspectives of two clients interviewed. Both clients emphasize the importance of having a formal employment contract for domestic workers, highlighting not only the legal and fiscal implications but also the protections it offers to the workers themselves. One client, for instance, underscores the risks associated with domestic work and the necessity of formalizing the employment relationship:

"I have had previous experiences and have always ensured that my domestic worker was formally employed. I have never hired anyone off the books because, in my opinion, it is not fair—not just from a fiscal standpoint, but also for the worker's own benefit. Working in a private household is not without risks; in fact, there are likely even more hazards than in a company, where safety protocols and occupational health officers are in place. Domestic work, in my view, is significantly dangerous. The idea of having someone working in my home without proper legal protections has never appealed to me because anything could happen. As far as I'm concerned, there is no advantage to employing a domestic worker without a formal contract". (Client interview 1, F, 45–49, Province of Turin)

It is noteworthy that, while the issue of the physical and emotional risks associated with domestic work emerges in this interview with a client, it was not a predominant concern in the interviews with the four workers. Instead, the workers expressed greater concern regarding contractual guarantees, particularly those related to the reliability and timeliness of wage payments.

The two clients interviewed accessed the platform for distinct reasons. The first client (Client 1) primarily utilized Baze to find a domestic worker, managing the administrative procedures independently, as outlined in the previously cited interview excerpt. In contrast, the second client (Client 2) initially sought assistance from Baze to formalize an existing employment relationship and subsequently used the platform to secure a temporary replacement for the domestic worker employed by her.

5. Conclusions

The Baze platform exemplifies a hybrid organizational model that integrates elements of digital marketplaces with the more structured framework of traditional employment agencies. Unlike standard digital marketplaces, which primarily serve as intermediaries connecting clients with workers, Baze plays an active role in managing critical phases of the service process, ranging from recruitment to employment regularization. Notably, the platform leverages innovative AI-driven tools for pre-screening and evaluating workers.

Interviews with workers, clients, and the CEO of the platform converge in recognizing Baze as a key facilitator in enhancing the social recognition of domestic work and potentially fostering professionalization pathways within this sector.

Although the formalization of employment conditions ultimately depends on the contractual regularization of domestic workers, the central management of key organizational functions – such as the payment management system – contributes to increase workers' social protections. In this regard, Baze demonstrates that technological innovation can play a pivotal role in improving working conditions within a historically informal sector. However, it also reinforces the idea that technology alone is not the solution; rather, the key lies in how technology is integrated into a broader organizational framework. Baze's model appears to validate the effectiveness of the digital agency model—defined as a platform that manages both the processes of matching labour supply and demand and the regularization of employment relationships. This model is demonstrated to combine service efficiency with worker protection, in contrast to other platform models where responsibility for service management is entirely delegated to users and their personal ethics.

It is important to note that the clients interviewed seem to belong to a relatively high socio-economic group, accustomed to regular forms of employment, which contrasts with broader trends observed in this sector. This may be attributed to the platform's specific positioning, as well as the limited number of interviews conducted. The findings discussed here should be interpreted as part of an initial exploration of the field, highlighting the need for further research and deeper investigation in the future.

6. Research design

The Baze case was analysed using the methodological tools outlined below. The interviews were conducted online.

- Desk analysis of the platform
- Two interviews with the CEO of Baze (*Interview 1*, 25 October 2024, 45 minutes; *Interview 2*, 17 March 2025, 55 minutes)

- Interviews with 4 workers of the platform (*Interview 1*, F, 50–54, Monza, date of the interview: 15 January 2025; duration: 53 minutes; *Interview 2*, M, 45–50, Milan, date of the interview: 24 January 2025; duration: 58 minutes; *Interview 3*, F, 50–54, Monza, 14 February 2025, duration: 44 minutes; *Interview 4*, F, 41, Province of Bologna; 3 March 2025; duration: 65 minutes)
- Interviews with 2 customers of the platform (*Interview 1*, F, 45–49, Province of Turin, 14 January 2025, duration: 38 minutes; *Interview 2*, 40–44, Milan, 15 January 2025; 34 minutes)

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

ITALY

CASE STUDY 2

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Helping Italy

1. History and characteristics of the platform

Helping GmbH & Co. KG was founded by Philip Huffman and Benedikt Franke in March 2014 in Cologne, Germany. The headquarters are in Berlin. Since the first year of operations, following a loan of 56.5 million euros from Mangrove Capital, Lakestar, APACIG, Rocket Internet and Unilever Ventures, the platform has opened in numerous European and non-European countries.

After an initial phase of rapid expansion, which saw the platform launch in 12 countries within its first year, Helping also pursued a series of acquisitions such as Hassle.com in the UK and GetYourHero in France in 2015, Book a Tiger in Switzerland in 2018, and Tiger Facility Services in Germany in 2019. In recent years, however, the company has progressively closed many of its offices. In 2025, it keeps the operations in France, Germany, Ireland, Singapore and Switzerland. The most recent closure occurred on March, 2025, when all operations in the UK ceased. In the same month, Helping Italy was acquired by Easyfeel, an Italian company established in 2014, the same year as Helping. It operates primarily in major urban centers such as Milan, Rome, Turin, Bologna, Monza, and a few surrounding municipalities. Like Helping, Easyfeel functions as a marketplace platform: it intermediates domestic cleaning services without directly managing employment contracts, which are left to the discretion of clients and workers. The platform provides only limited protections, such as liability insurance for damages.

Over the years, Helping has evolved from a platform primarily offering domestic cleaning services to a comprehensive "super app" for home services. By 2023, its offerings expanded to include window cleaning, painting, gardening, dog sitting, air-conditioning servicing, elderly care, technical repairs, plumbing etc. However, this repositioning has not affected Italy, where it has consistently maintained an exclusive focus on cleaning services.

2. Platform governance

Helping Italia Srl was established in Italy in 2014 and, until March 2025, the company employed a team of five staff members responsible for operations (including customer support, partner support, and platform customization for the Italian market), offline marketing and partnerships, as well as HR. Online marketing, finance, IT, and product development were instead handled by the Berlin headquarters. In

recent years, the Head of Operations for Italy also oversaw the UK and Ireland markets.

Helping operates in three major cities in Italy: Milan, where it has the largest presence (55%), followed by Rome (30%) and Turin (12%)⁴¹. This territorial distribution has been stable for several years now, while in the early years of operation, Helping had expanded to 14 cities.

Since the pandemic, Helping Italia has experienced a significant decline in the number of active cleaners, decreasing from 310 in January 2019 to 160 in June 2023. The manager attributes this drop mainly to a decrease in families' spending capacity. There has also been a significant decline in new workers applications. As a result, about half of the workers active on the platform in 2023 were already employed before the pandemic, and 30% have been with Helping since its early years, from 2014 to 2017. Since initiating negotiations for the acquisition by Easyfeel, the management has not shared any more data, but it can be assumed that the trend has further strengthened, especially since the company had decided to halt all marketing investments in Italy as of June 2023.

Since its inception, the company's rhetoric has focused on offering a model for legalizing services that are traditionally provided without a contract. In a September 2024 interview, the CEO Philip Huffmann stated: "We have also become a real competitor to the black market. It was always one of my biggest concerns to legalise domestic cleaning and offer an alternative. And today I can say that I have accomplished this"⁴²

This occurs, in some countries, through different models. In Switzerland, for instance, cleaners are directly employed by the company. In Germany, a Premium service is offered, where clients can book household professionals employed permanently by cleaning agencies within the Helping Premium partner network at a fixed price.

The literature⁴³ has already shown that Helping initially attempted to implement a single business model across Europe, but soon began adapting to the specific regulatory contexts of each country.

In Italy, Helping operates as a marketplace platform. It is explicitly stated in the General Terms and Conditions of Use of Helping: "HELPLING provides users with information and digital tools useful for booking cleaning services from third-party providers. Therefore, it does not independently offer such services but instead operates as a so-called marketplace where user demand can meet the supply of

⁴¹ The data was provided by Helping Italy and refers to June 2023.

⁴² <https://www.iamexpat.de/lifestyle/lifestyle-news/celebrating-10-years-helping?utmsource=chatgpt.com>

⁴³ Koutsimpogiorgos, N., Frenken, K., & Herrmann, A. M. (2023). Platform adaptation to regulation: The case of domestic cleaning in Europe. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 65(2), 156–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221856221146833>

service providers” (<https://static.helping.it/Helping-Italia-Srl-Condizioni-general-di-utilizzo-di-HELPLING.pdf>).

The platform refers to cleaners as “partners” and specifies on its website: “Our partners are all independent, experienced professionals who choose to use the platform to manage their own business.” (<https://www.helping.it/come-funziona>).

The screening of partners to be included in the platform is based on three criteria: previous experience in domestic cleaning, the availability and ability to use of a smartphone, and proficiency in the Italian language. Language proficiency is a distinctive feature of the Italian market: in Germany and other countries where the service operates, there is no requirement for knowledge of the national language. According to the manager interviewed, in Italy, it is customary for clients to be present in the home during the service. This, of course, introduces a relational aspect that has implications both for the skills required from the workers and for the criteria used to assess their performance.

Initially, the platform required workers to apply for a VAT number, but this requirement was dropped in 2016. In recent years, the platform has not conducted any checks regarding the formalization of employment contracts. By June 2023, only 14% of workers had registered for a VAT number. According to some workers, they choose not to issue invoices to families booked via the platform, whereas they do so for clients they find independently. This choice is often motivated by a desire to offset the fees charged by Helping.

Furthermore, it has gradually automated procedures, reducing interactions between management and workers. Initially, Helping management team personally met new workers, but now uses phone calls. Organizational branding – such as t-shirts – has been eliminated.

Helping Italia does not provide training services, which sets it apart from other countries. Specifically, MySkillAcademy, a part of the Helping group, offers development and training for housekeeping staff employed under the Premium program in Germany. In a response to a customer on Trustpilot (a platform for employer reviews), Helping writes:

“As you can imagine, our clients require a certain level of experience to ensure that they receive a service that meets their expectations. It is not possible for Helping to be the place where a worker is trained and gains experience from scratch, as every partner must be ready to manage cleaning tasks and the relationship with clients from the very first day on the platform.” (Trustpilot, October 4, 2018).

Regarding the matching process, it is designed in such a way that the client can select the cleaners to whom they wish to send an offer. The selection is based on an algorithm that takes into account several variables, including but not limited to: distance from the appointment location; rating; number of completed appointments;

number of cancellation requests; client selection rate; response rate to offers; activity on the profile. It was not possible to determine the exact weight of each factor. After the client's selection, if the cleaner does not accept the offer, Helpling will propose other profiles within the same price range.

In the early years, any changes to appointments were handled by customer service. Recently, however, Helpling has implemented direct contact between clients and workers for scheduling and cancellations, limiting the platform's intervention to unresolved issues. This reduced coordination by Helpling increases the workload for both workers and clients.

After each service, clients are asked to rate their experience on a scale from 1 to 5 based on three criteria (cleaning quality, reliability, and ease of communication), and they can add a public or private comment. In a response on Trustpilot to a client who complained about not seeing their negative review posted on the worker's profile, Helpling stated: "All reviews, including of course negative ones, contribute to the total star rating of each worker, although not all comments (even many excellent ones) are displayed on the profile at the same time" (Trustpilot, November 13, 2024). Since November 2019, cleaners can also review clients, but these evaluations are saved in the system and are not visible on the website.

The most critical issue concerns the potential penalties related to the algorithmic evaluation. The manager interviewed explained that no single behavior would result in a worker being removed from the platform's list. Instead, there is a mechanism of "temporary suspension," which may be triggered if a pattern of problematic situations emerges and the platform is unable to contact the partner to address the issues. Once these issues are discussed, several outcomes are possible: the worker may be fully reinstated, may continue working only with existing clients without receiving new offers, or may have their profile closed due to incompatibility with the platform's operations. The manager also noted that, at an automatic level, behaviors also affect the partner's ranking in terms of visibility during the booking process, depending on the coefficients set by the algorithm.

3. Platform workers

In terms of demographics, Helpling employs more men (23%) compared to the general 11% in domestic work, and a larger percentage of italians (43%) than the sector's average of 31%⁴⁴. While the proportion of male workers has slightly increased

⁴⁴ The comparative data are drawn from the INPS Observatory on domestic workers and refer to the year 2023.

compared to 2020 (from 21%), the share of Italian workers has seen a drop (from 51%). However, it still remains higher than in other intermediation channels.

Among the foreign workers interviewed, instances of ethnic disadvantage emerged. These manifested both in forms of occupational segregation—where highly educated individuals were confined to low-skilled roles—and in episodes of discrimination.

"My son says to me: 'Dad, you have a degree, you've taken courses, and you're cleaning other people's bathrooms.' But if I don't do it, we don't eat... (...) Even the clients, when I tell them I have a degree, they're shocked. They say: 'Why are you doing cleaning?' I say, 'Because I need the money, that's why I'm doing it (...) It happened that I went to clients, they saw that I was foreign, and they didn't let me in! I called Helpling... they said 'you have to be patient.' It happened to me several times... but if you want the money, you have to work, you have to be patient." (Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome)

"There are few Italians on the platform, and that works in my favor, because many people still tend to look for Italians, not foreigners. Many, when I ask why they chose me, say it's because I'm Italian. They don't trust foreigners." (Cleaner 4, woman, 56–60 years old, born in Italy, Milan)

Similarly, male workers also report experiencing discrimination.

"This is the first issue we face with every client, from the first to the last—every single one. There hasn't been a single person who didn't act surprised... 'A man, really?' They say, 'Well, you know, women are usually more suited for this kind of work.' But then, in the end, they let you do the job, and once they see it's done well... now, one of my clients even says, 'You actually do it better than a woman.'" (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

The workforce is, on average, younger than the broader population of domestic workers in Italy: those over 60 make up 9% of the total compared to 24% in the sector, workers aged 51 to 60 represent 28% versus 43%, and those between 46 and 50 account for 9% compared to 17%. However, as in the broader sector, Helpling has experienced a gradual rise in the average age of its workforce in recent years. Moreover, unlike in countries such as Germany, university students are absent from the platform's workforce.

Among the interviewees, one worker reported that he started working with Helpling precisely because it allowed him to find employment despite being over 50.

"In supermarkets, despite my nearly 20 years of experience in the deli sector, they always said the same thing: 'sorry, you're too old for us, we can't hire you.' So I entered the cleaning world instead, since Helpling didn't care about your age—whether you're 20, 50, or 60, like I am, and I'm still working with them." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

From this perspective, a particularly valued design feature is the option to omit a profile photo, which is perceived as a measure to reduce discrimination based on demographic traits. .

In relation to service prices, in the early years of operation they were fixed: €10.5 per hour for recurring services and €12.5 for one-off services, with cleaners receiving €8 in both cases. Since March 2017, cleaners have been allowed to set their own hourly rate, starting from a minimum of €8. However, the platform provides a recommended price. According to the management, this suggested rate is based on an analysis of the average cost of similar services in the local labour market, using informal (non-contractual) work as the main benchmark. This also prevents Helpling from expanding into areas—such as Southern Italy—where the cost of such services is typically below €10 per hour.

Workers appreciate not having to interact with clients regarding payments, as the funds are automatically credited to their bank accounts every 15 days. Moreover, Helpling can assist the cleaner in recovering unpaid fees, but if this attempt fails, the loss is incurred by the worker.

"Helpling tries to urge, talk to these clients in a way that they pay. But only up to a certain point. In the end, if they don't pay, Helpling doesn't do anything. They write to you: 'It was not possible to get the money from these clients.'" (Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome)

"(The client) moved abroad and decided not to pay. So I never saw that money because he probably removed his credit card. Maybe he got a new card in the country where he went to live, so there was no way to get the money." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

In relation to price, it is also worth noting that the transaction fee retained by Helpling has increased over the years.

"The hourly rate was much better at the beginning — we used to earn around €10.90 per hour, while now we don't even reach €10... (...) Now the client pays €13, €14, even €15 per hour, but we still get paid less than €10." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

Among the interviewees, some reported that — in agreement with their clients — they continued the working relationship outside the platform after the initial contact, specifically to save on the transaction fees for both parties.

"They book you for one time, and then right after, they ask if you want to come privately. (...) I accept, because it's more convenient for me, since I earn more." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

Moreover, workers associated longer tenure on the platform with greater autonomy—both in setting their hourly rates and in choosing whether or not to accept job offers.

"At the beginning, I worked seven days a week—at least until Sunday midday. Starting from zero, in a month and a half, I got up to 18 clients. I was so booked

that I couldn't take on any more jobs. Back then, I accepted everything, but now I've slowed down a bit." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

"Well, initially there was a price limit set by Helping. Then, little by little, as I gained more experience on the platform, the price increased as well. (...) Now the minimum rate for me to accept is 16 euros, because that way I get 10 " (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

This seniority is acknowledged in the market through the platform's reputation system, which tends to create a divide among workers—favouring those who have been active on the platform the longest.

One interviewee noted that the increasing automation of the job assignment process—where offers now come exclusively through the app—made it easier to turn them down. In contrast, having to respond directly to Helping staff previously made refusal more difficult:

"When I started, there were two staff members, (names), who would even call on Sunday afternoons and evenings. I told (name), 'Have mercy, I have a family too, let me rest a bit.' (...) Now it's different. I don't work Saturdays or Sundays. Everything goes through the app now: job offers arrive there, and you either accept or reject them. It's up to you." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

Another noteworthy insight from the interviews is the emphasis workers place on the range of skills required for this job, including interpersonal abilities.

"Many people think it's an easy job, but it's not, because you're constantly dealing with different people (...) When I talk to friends or others, they say, 'Oh, you just do cleaning, how hard can it be? You just sweep and mop and that's it.' But keeping a house clean involves a lot more than that." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

"Charm matters a lot... If you're not friendly, if you're grumpy, they'll say, 'This one won't come back.'... Charm is one of the tools to work. Even if you're not skilled, if you show that you're friendly, flexible..." (Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome)

The analysis of reviews on Trustpilot reveals that the most common complaint from clients concerns cleaners not showing up for appointments or cancelling on short notice. The platform stipulates that if a client cancels a service less than 24 hours in advance, they must pay a penalty equivalent to one hour of service, while no immediate penalties are applied to cleaners for similar behaviour.

From the workers' perspective, the main source of dissatisfaction is the request to clean large apartments within unreasonably short timeframes. In the early years, Helping used to collect information from clients about the size of their home and verified whether the number of hours requested was appropriate. This feature has since been removed.

"One time I had a client who booked me for two and a half hours for a two-story house. I immediately told him: 'Look, unfortunately, this entire house cannot be cleaned in two and a half hours. You choose what you want me to focus on.' His wife insisted: 'You also have to wax the floors.' I told her, 'Ma'am, you have 20 windows. Just those will take up the whole time.' That ended up being the only negative review I ever received." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

"They book you for two hours and want you to do a job that takes 3 or 4 hours. And so, this girl left me 3.7 points..." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

Domestic cleaning work involves specific risks, primarily due to the fact that it takes place in private households—risks that are further amplified by the platform-based model. Workers are typically provided with very limited information about their clients. In addition, they operate in isolation, despite the platform's potential to foster connections among them. In practice, however, the company's strategy deliberately avoids facilitating any form of interaction between workers.

Another distinctive aspect of this type of work—further intensified by the platform model—is the fragmentation of working hours. Only those workers with high ratings are in a position to decline short-duration assignments.

"I don't accept anything less than three hours. Even when someone offers me three hours, sometimes I don't accept it — it depends on the rate." (Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome)

The absence of formal employment contracts through Helpling has clear implications for workers' access to social protection. Until 2019, a private insurance policy had been arranged in favour of workers for accidents and illness. Currently, only the insurance against property damage remains valid. No form of protection is provided for illness, injury, maternity, retirement, or similar situations.

"I had to stop for a month due to some illnesses... You don't earn anything..." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

"Right now I want to stop, and I get nothing—no kind of severance, nothing at all... In terms of pension rights or severance pay, everything you gave to the platform as a percentage of your earnings—there's nothing you get back." (Cleaner 4, woman, 56–60 years old, born in Italy, Milan)

The critical issues stemming from the lack of social protection became dramatically evident during the Covid-19 emergency. Lacking a formal employment contract, platform workers were not eligible for public subsidies or income support measures. Helpling's only intervention was to allow families to continue paying their regular workers without any commission fees. Additionally, the platform temporarily suspended the onboarding of new workers in order to reduce competition for those already on the platform during a period of decreased demand.

"There was a family that continued to pay for the service during the Covid period even though I wasn't actually working, it was their decision (...) For that period, I can only thank private households, who ensured my survival. Because from the State, we received no help at all — zero." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

The interviewed workers stated that they accepted these working conditions due to a lack of alternatives.

"I had a family to support, and you still have to provide for them—even without a formal job, the family still needs to get by." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

"Because of my age and my background, it wasn't easy to get a job. Helpling helped me because it provided me with clients. That is the most important thing. (...) Helpling saved my life during a difficult time. They provided me with work" (Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome)

"I always think about finding a regular job, even now, but I don't know how to find it. I don't even know where to start. As for the employment centers, don't even get me started, I've been registered for years, and nothing. Then, reading online that at my age it's difficult to find a job, I get a bit discouraged, so I just make do with what I have." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

Among the interviewees, there is a public employee who works for a municipality and, due to financial necessity, started working on Helpling as a supplement to her income. Helpling does not collect data on individuals who perform this activity as a second job, but available studies on platform work highlight that it is a widespread phenomenon. In this case, the work on Helpling was chosen specifically because it is under the table and untracked.

"I did it because it was a time of financial difficulty, so I needed to increase my income and I relied on this app. (...) I had just separated, my ex-husband left me with debts, and I had to intervene because my name was also on the tax bills, so I had to deal with it myself... The only way was this, because public employees' salaries are not high... (...) Word of mouth didn't work because asking my friends or colleagues didn't appeal to me, so I preferred to rely on the internet (...) and this way, I didn't have to ask for permission from the administration, I didn't have to ask anyone for anything." (Cleaner 4, woman, 56–60 years old, born in Italy, Milan)

The cleaners interviewees also mention an aspect that will be explored further in the next section: they report that their clients often believe they are employees of Helpling.

"On the platform, it says that we are insured. But we are insured only in case of damage to an object. I spoke with some clients about this, and they were honestly surprised (...) In August, I went once or twice to a couple's house, and

they were really convinced. They told me: 'We prefer to call you through the platform because you are insured.' To them, I said, 'Yes, that's fine, it's better,' because they were so sure about it..." (Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan)

Among the interviewees, no one turned to a trade union for issues related to platform work. However, previous experiences emerged that have led to a general distrust toward union representation.

"Well, the unions... let's say I don't have much admiration for them. If I need something, I go through a lawyer, because I turned to the union only once, when the concierge job ended (...) and the union made me pay the membership fee, 50 euros, but then they said, 'There's nothing we can do.' I brought the document they asked for and it just sat there, they didn't even look through it (...) I'm against the unions." (Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome)

"When I needed the union, I was told, 'You join the union and we'll protect you.' Unfortunately, that didn't happen with just one union—it was the same with almost all the unions I turned to at that time in my life. So I turned to a lawyer instead, and I won a lawsuit for workplace harassment. By now, I believe that unions are no longer on the side of workers, but on the side of politics. They've lost the true meaning of being a union, which is the fight for workers." (Cleaner 4, woman, 56–60 years old, born in Italy, Milan)

4. Platform clients

Helpling Italia Srl did not provide information regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of its clients.

As previously noted, Helpling operates exclusively in large urban areas. According to the management, this focus on major cities is largely driven by client characteristics: in urban settings, users tend to be more open to using digital platforms and are less likely to rely on personal networks or word of mouth to find domestic help, due to a lower level of local social capital. This hypothesis is supported by client interviews.

"I live and work in Milan, but I'm originally from Naples. I basically didn't have any contacts here, because in my past experience, whenever someone needed help around the house, it was always through word of mouth. In Milan, I didn't have any references, so my flatmate and I started looking for a solution. We just searched on Google and found this platform." (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

At the same time, the interviews highlight territorial differences even within the same city. One client living in a peripheral area reported having fewer options to choose from, as workers tend to prefer central districts with denser demand and shorter travel times:

"I'm in a somewhat peripheral area, almost at the edge of the municipality of Milan, and probably in this area there are fewer people available to work. (...) I believe that even if a cleaner lives in the outskirts, if they list the city center as their area of interest, they'll definitely find more—there's a wider client base. So probably fewer workers indicate (name of the peripheral area) as their preferred area, because in fact, there may be fewer people who use the service here. In my area, for example, there were only two or three profiles showing up when I filtered by address and time slot." (Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan)

The interviews also confirm both the role of the reputation system as an important factor in selecting a cleaner and clients' reluctance to leave negative feedback.

"It's always a bit of a gamble to find someone reliable (...) When I was looking at the available people, I definitely paid attention to the reviews left by other clients (...) I never left a review because... I didn't feel like penalizing these people. I always think these are very particular kinds of jobs (...) and maybe there was something wrong on our side too (...) but, again, nothing serious ever happened—if something serious had occurred, maybe I would have reported it." (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

In addition to reputation, another criterion considered particularly relevant is length of service. As previously noted, this can disadvantage newcomers and create forms of lock-in.

"Especially when you see that there are people who have been working on that app for a long time, you tend to think, well, this person probably won't cause any problems." (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

The most significant issue emerging from the client interviews is the lack of awareness regarding the employment status of the cleaners. The fact that the platform displays worker profiles and provides liability insurance contributes to confusion about the existence of a formal employment relationship. Both interviewees have professional expertise—one is a legal consultant, the other a labour sociologist whose husband is a labour lawyer—and a personal sensitivity to these matters. Nevertheless, they reported choosing Helpling under the assumption that the platform ensured proper protection for its workers.

"They are insured through the platform. I checked that it wasn't an informal arrangement. (...) Since in my case the person comes once or twice a week, I don't have such demanding needs at home that would make me think, 'okay, I'll draw up a contract myself'... This way, it seemed like a more structured setup—not necessarily more formal, but more organised in some sense. So using the

app, it seemed to me that some of these aspects were taken care of.” (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

“The emergence of these platforms was also a key factor in our decision to use this service in general. I am an economic sociologist and am deeply interested in workers' rights, and my husband is a labor lawyer, so he defends workers' rights. When we thought about getting domestic help, we weren't sure how to ensure some basic protections, as creating an employment contract is quite costly. So, when we decided to try one of these services, the fact that these platforms allowed us to do so without paying under the table made all the difference. If it weren't for the possibility of paying legally, we probably would never have used such a service—neither under the table nor by any other means. We would have continued doing the cleaning ourselves” (Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan)

The issue that clients express particular concern about is the safety of the workers.

“I wanted to make sure it wasn't something under the table and that it also offered some protection for me, in a way, because... I don't know, if they get injured or something happens, honestly I'd rather avoid problems at home” (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

“For us, it was very important not to engage in something that resembles undeclared work, which lacks protection, especially from the perspective of insurance. What if something happens at home? Even just a silly example, but he was also dusting the chandeliers, so he was climbing the ladder—what if something went wrong...” (Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan)

This has particularly influenced the decision to continue using Helpling for the service, even after establishing a continuous and trusting relationship with a particular cleaner.

“In fact, yes, honestly, I had even considered over the years, I thought, “Well, maybe I'll stop using the app—by now I know (name of the cleaner), she can come directly, and I'll just pay her myself...” I did think about it, but in the end, I never decided to stop using the app, because I'm happy with it and it gives me peace of mind (...)” (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

From the customer interviews, there is confirmation of the workers' reluctance to discuss their contractual situation and any potential issues associated with it.

“Since she has been coming for three years now, if she had any issues, she would have told me by now. She hasn't, so it means that, at least for the moment, there are no problems” (Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan)

“I always told him, “Have you ever been to a union? Have you ever gone to CGIL or anything like that? You know, they might be able to help you with certain things.” (...) I even sent him all the links and told him to reach out to them, but he was reluctant to talk about it... you could tell... not that he was annoyed, but I didn't want to pressure him, because in the end, I'm still the employer — even if

it's technically the platform — I'm still part of that relationship. So I didn't want to push, but I did try. And he would say, "Thanks, thanks." Then I even wrote, "If you want, I can go with you." But after that, he stopped replying as much, so I just let it go." (Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan)

This also sometimes occurs when clients become aware of the lack of certain protections and try to compensate directly.

"From the very first summer, I told him: 'Look, in August we go on vacation,' and it was during the same period he usually went on holiday too. I said, 'Let's not cancel the service so we can still pay you once a week anyway, because in theory... holidays are a right; so we believe it's fair to pay you even if you don't come in, because holidays are a right.' He was really happy and said, 'Oh, thank you, thank you so much.' But over the years, it happened that he would say, 'No, don't worry. No, no, just cancel.' I would respond, 'But no, I'm not canceling.' And in the end, he was the one who insisted on canceling those appointments." (Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan)

5. Concluding remarks

Helpling exemplifies the case of a matching platform that reinforces informal market logics.

In terms of recruitment and selection, Helpling can represent an opportunity especially for individuals with limited social capital and, as we have seen, may help overcome certain forms of discrimination, such as those related to age. Nevertheless, other forms of discrimination persist: the selection process do not rely solely on the worker's performance, and identity-based factors (such as the gender and nationality) could distort recruitment outcomes. Similarly, performance-based criteria tend to reward platform loyalty, raising concerns about lock-in mechanisms.

Regarding the platform as a form of labor organization, the most critical issue is that of regulation and, therefore, the protection of workers. Like most labour platforms, Helpling does not assume responsibility for managing the employment relationship. This decision brings with it not only the complex issue of how to legally define the employment relationship, but also a communication ambiguity that—as we have seen—can mislead platform users. In fact, when customers book a service through the platform, they may assume that the workers are contracted by the platform itself. The workers cope with the situation via individual strategies. In fact, they individually negotiated their position vis-à-vis the families by changing the hourly rate, while protections from social risks (illness, maternity, pension, etc.) are excluded.

6. Research design

For this case study, the following interviews were conducted:

- Cleaner 1, male, 60–64 years old, born in Italy, Rome, 14 november 2024, 1:02 hours
- Cleaner 2, male, 60–64 years old, born in Nigeria, Rome, 14 november 2024, 1:11 hours
- Cleaner 3, woman, 51–55 years old, born in Bulgaria, Milan, 21 november 2024, 1:05 hours
- Cleaner 4, woman, 56–60 years old, born in Italy, Milan, 9 december 2024, 1:02 hours
- Client 1, male, 31–35 years old, Milan, 14 march 2024, 00:31 hours
- Client 2, female, 41–45 years old, Milan, 22 march 2024, 00:41 hours
- Informal exchanges via email with the Head of Operations of Helping Italy.

The data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the workers were provided by Helping and refer to June 2023.

The case study also builds on previous research conducted by one of the authors of the report, carried out through several interviews with the Head of Operations at Helping Italy starting in October 2018; 3 interviews with cleaners in 2018; 3 interviews with cleaners in 2023; 8 interviews with trade unionists and one with a labour inspector in 2023.

The findings were published in:

- Pais, I. (2019). Helping e il modello piattaforma. Le nuove frontiere del recruiting. *Sviluppo & Organizzazione*, (289), 60–67.
- Pais, I. (2021), Le piattaforme di lavoro domestico: il caso Helping, in Pais I., Ponzellini A.M. (a cura di), *Il tassello mancante. L'intervento organizzativo come leva strategica per la transizione tecnologica*, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 155–176.
- Pais, I., & Marcolin, A. (2024). Digital platforms in the Italian domestic care sector: The emergence of an unprecedented corporate logic and its implications for workers' social protection. *International Labour Review*, 163(3), 397–415.

Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

THE NETHERLANDS

CASE STUDY 1

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HomeWorks

1. Introduction

Digital platforms are playing an increasingly significant role in organizing domestic labor, particularly in home care and cleaning services. In the Netherlands, HomeWorks represents one of the longer-standing platforms in this field. As part of the Origami Project, this report offers an in-depth case study of HomeWorks to explore how it structures platform-mediated domestic work and governs relationships between workers and clients.

This research examines HomeWorks' organizational design, including its matchmaking process, management of worker-client interactions, and regulation of employment conditions. The study pays close attention to its business model, use of contracts, reputation systems, and payment structures, as well as the extent to which algorithms influence platform activity. Through this lens, the report investigates how HomeWorks navigates its dual role as facilitator and regulator of domestic labor.

In addition to assessing the internal operations of the platform, this report delves into the experiences of workers and clients who use HomeWorks. It explores how workers engage with the platform, maintain their visibility, and secure work, along with their motivations for joining and remaining on the platform. Managerial and client perspectives are also included to capture the broader dynamics of platform labor as it is experienced across different roles.

The report begins with a description of the methodology used for data collection and analysis. It then introduces HomeWorks' platform features, including its history, user onboarding process, terms and conditions, and the interface presented to workers and clients. A closer examination of platform governance follows, covering algorithmic management, contractual relations, and working conditions. Testimonies from workers and clients bring depth to this analysis, shedding light on everyday realities and challenges. The report concludes by reflecting on the role of HomeWorks within the broader context of platform labor in the Dutch domestic services sector.

2. Methodology

2.1. Initial plan

For this project, two initial platforms were selected: the international platform Care.com (Betreut.de) and the national company Hups. However, despite multiple attempts to contact management, workers, and clients of Care.com through LinkedIn, email, Facebook, and other social media channels, the company declined to participate, and no responses were received from the contacted workers or clients. Consequently, a new platform was selected: HomeWorks, another national platform. While management at HomeWorks also chose not to participate, it was possible to reach some workers and clients who were willing to contribute to the research.

2.2. Recruitment methods

To recruit participants, different methods were employed for managers and for workers/clients. For managers, the recruitment process began by identifying CEOs, management team members, and other relevant personnel through the platforms' websites. If available, they were contacted via their company email or LinkedIn. If these attempts were unsuccessful, outreach was conducted through the company's general email address, phone number, or even via Facebook.

For workers and clients, recruitment relied on a combination of direct outreach and online engagement. The researchers utilized their personal networks, reaching out face-to-face if colleagues or friends had experience using one of the selected platforms. Additionally, an advertisement was circulated on social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok), initially without an incentive and later offering a €25 incentive. Direct messaging was also employed on Facebook and Instagram to connect with workers and clients who engaged with targeted ads from the platform or who interacted with the platform's official social media accounts. Once a worker was identified, snowball recruitment was used to reach additional participants through personal referrals.

2.3. Data Collection

This study utilized multiple methods of data collection to gain a comprehensive understanding of the selected platforms.

2.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

The initial goal was to recruit one manager, four workers, and four clients per platform, totaling 18 participants across both platforms. However, recruitment efforts yielded fewer participants than anticipated. One worker and one client were interviewed. However, the client used a different platform with the same spoken name (de witte werkster vs. de Witte Werkster).

These interviews provided insights into the workings, challenges, and experiences of the platforms from different perspectives. The interview guidelines were constructed

by the Italian team in collaboration with the rest of the Origami project, and later translated and adapted to be suitable for the Dutch context.

2.3.2. Platform Analysis and Non-Generated Data

To better understand the platforms from a user perspective, a thorough investigation of the platforms' websites, terms and conditions, and policies was conducted. This included:

- Website Analysis: Examining how platforms present themselves and what information is available to workers and clients.
- Account Creation: Creating worker and client accounts on both platforms to assess the registration process, data input requirements, and the platform's interface.
- Email Correspondence: Where participants were comfortable sharing, emails between clients, workers, and the platform were analyzed to understand communication processes and interactions.

2.3.3. Data Processing and Analysis

All collected data were uploaded into Atlas.ti for systematic content analysis. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used to analyze the data:

- Deductive coding was applied based on pre-established themes related to platform work, worker-client relationships, and legal frameworks.
- Inductive coding was used to identify emerging themes that arose from participant experiences, platform interactions, and legal case studies.

This case study includes one worker and one client. HomeWorks Worker 1 is a 70-year-old woman originally from Spain, currently residing in the northern Netherlands. She holds an LHNO-level education, is married, and, like her Hups counterpart, has extensive experience in household services via platform work. The client associated with HomeWorks (via De Witte Werkster) is a 39-year-old Dutch woman living in the western Netherlands. She holds a university-level (WO) degree, is married, and has three children. These participants reflect the platform's reach among both migrant workers and higher-educated families seeking domestic services.

2.4. AI statement

This report has made use of OpenAI's ChatGPT (version 4o) to support the writing process. The AI was used to suggest more concise or consistent naming codes (e.g., for participants or sections), assist with translations, and check the spelling and coherence of the text. All final content was reviewed and edited by the authors.

3. History and characteristics of the platforms

3.1. HomeWorks: Overview and Evolution

HomeWorks is one of the largest mediation and service organizations for domestic helpers in the Netherlands, facilitating household cleaning services nationwide (HomeWorks, 2025e). Established in 1994, it operates as a Besloten Vennootschap (B.V.), a private limited company, rather than a cooperative. The platform distinguishes itself from gig-based cleaning services by providing structured cleaning appointments and administrative support rather than an open marketplace where clients and workers arrange terms independently.

Unlike some platforms that offer on-demand cleaning services, HomeWorks operates on a model that emphasizes consistency and recurring appointments (HomeWorks, 2025d). Clients are assigned a household helper for weekly or biweekly services, with replacements arranged if necessary (HomeWorks, 2025b). The company also employs coordinators to oversee operations and assist both clients and workers.

HomeWorks is entirely self-funded through client fees and does not receive government subsidies (HomeWorks, 2025e). It maintains a presence in multiple cities across the Netherlands and positions itself in the market as a service for clients who prioritize reliability and structured cleaning arrangements. Workers who register with the platform undergo ID verification, experience checks, and trial sessions. Through the platform, clients can register, outline their cleaning needs, and receive a matched worker (HomeWorks, 2025b). The platform also facilitates automated invoicing, customer support, and optional insurance coverage. Since its founding, HomeWorks has evolved significantly. Originally a smaller-scale mediation service, it expanded to achieve nationwide reach, benefiting from digitalization and structured worker management. The introduction of an online booking system allowed for greater convenience, while maintaining human support through coordinators. Over time, the company reinforced worker screening processes, ensuring high-quality service and reliability. HomeWorks has also expanded its operations under multiple trade names, including Company Works, De Witte Werkster, and HC Holding B.V (KVK, 2024).

3.2. Summary of HomeWorks Terms and Conditions

HomeWorks operates under a service agreement where it commits to providing household help on a recurring basis at the client's requested times. Clients pay HomeWorks directly, and the platform assigns workers accordingly.

Key Points:

- **Scheduling & Cancellations:**
 - Clients can cancel appointments at least 72 hours in advance without charges.

- Late cancellations (less than 72 hours in advance) result in full payment.
- Agreement & Termination:
 - Agreements are open-ended but can be terminated with one week's notice via email.
 - If the agreement is canceled within 60 days, a €250 short-term fee applies.
 - If termination is not done properly, a €500 mediation fee is charged.
- Worker Restrictions:
 - Clients cannot directly hire HomeWorks workers during their contract or within 12 months after termination.
 - Violating this rule incurs a €500 penalty.
- Payment & Billing:
 - Clients pay monthly in arrears via direct debit or manual payment within 7 days.
 - Late payments may result in legal action and additional fees.
- Liability & Insurance:
 - HomeWorks is not liable for damages caused by workers unless due to its own gross negligence (capped at €100 per claim).
 - Clients can purchase optional worker insurance (€1 per worked hour) covering damages up to €2.5 million (with a €250 deductible).
- Complaints & Responsibilities:
 - Complaints about cleaning must be reported within 24 hours.
 - Clients must provide access to cleaning areas, necessary instructions, and cleaning supplies.
- Confidentiality:
 - Both HomeWorks and its workers must keep client information confidential.
- Legal Framework:
 - Dutch law applies, and disputes are handled in Amsterdam courts.

HomeWorks reserves the right to update its terms and conditions, notifying clients of changes. If the changes significantly affect service, clients can reject them.

3.3. Worker Registration on the HomeWorks Platform

Workers can register on the HomeWorks platform by completing a multi-step process, which gathers essential information about their work preferences, availability, and contact details. The registration consists of three pages:

3.3.1. Step 1: Work Preferences

On the first page, workers are asked to fill out the following details:

- Preferred work location: Postal code and house number of the area where they want to work.

- Maximum travel distance: Between 1 km and 25 km, with an option to view the selected distance on a map.
- Desired working hours: Between 1 and 40 hours per week.
- Minimum and maximum hourly wage: Workers can set their own rates, with a minimum of €11.85 and a maximum of €40 per hour. The platform provides the following advice and explanation regarding wage selection:
- Your rate
 - You can enter your own desired hourly wage here. We advise you to initially set it around €14 per hour to increase your chances of getting more clients.
- HomeWorks costs
 - The service HomeWorks provides you, such as new clients, guaranteed payment, and personal support, is charged on top of your rate to clients. You will not notice this.
- Availability: Workers can select the days they are available and specify timeframes per day.
- Languages spoken: Standard options include Dutch, English, French, and German, with an option to add additional languages.
- Work restrictions: Workers can indicate whether they prefer not to work in households with dogs or cats or do not wish to iron clothes.

3.3.2. Step 2: Terms, Privacy, and Introduction

The second page requires workers to read and agree to the privacy policy and the terms and conditions for workers before proceeding. Additionally, workers are asked to write a short introduction, with a warning not to share their last name, phone number, email address, or other contact information in this section. The platform also suggests uploading a profile picture; however, this option is not provided within the form itself.

3.3.3. Step 3: Account Creation

On the third page, workers can create a personal account by entering:

- First name
- Last name
- Email address
- Phone number
- Password

Alternatively, workers have the option to register via Google, though this does not complete the registration automatically — the standard registration process must still be completed manually.

3.4. Worker Dashboard on the HomeWorks Platform

The HomeWorks worker dashboard consists of multiple sections, allowing workers to manage their availability, appointments, clients, payments, and profile settings. The dashboard includes the following tabs:

1. Main Dashboard
2. Meetings
3. Requests
4. Hours
5. Clients
6. Payments
7. Profile

3.4.1. Main Dashboard

The main dashboard provides an overview of the worker's availability for the week, showing:

- Maximum desired hours
- Planned hours
- Remaining available hours

Workers can also see new client requests, which include:

- Requested hours per appointment
- Appointment frequency (weekly, biweekly, etc.)
- Street name and distance from the worker's home

To secure their first appointment on the platform, workers must complete a trial appointment. The following explanation is provided:

"Trial Appointment

Select your first client.

Once the client informs us that the appointment went well, you will immediately be able to select all clients for your schedule! Good luck!"

Below this section, workers can click "More" to view all available requests and open them on a map in a new window.

The dashboard also includes a list of future appointments, if applicable.

3.4.2. Ratings & Performance

A 5-star rating system is displayed, along with the number of received reviews. Workers receive the following advice on improving their ratings:

How do you improve your ratings?

1. *Greet the client politely upon arrival.*
2. *Hang up cleaning cloths after use, for example, over a bucket.*
3. *Return everything to its original place after cleaning.*

4. *Empty all trash bins in the house.*
5. *Ask the client how they feel about the cleaning.*

3.4.3. Managing Availability

Workers can indicate when they are unavailable by selecting a start and end date for their absence. The system provides the following message:

When will you be unavailable?

Enter the first and last day of your absence.

Appointments canceled more than 72 hours in advance will not be charged.

Workers can select a reason for unavailability (vacation, illness, or other) but do not need to provide additional details. An overview of all recorded unavailability periods is also provided.

3.4.4. Profile & Useful Links

A worker's profile can be updated at any time. In addition to the basic profile information, workers can now:

- Upload a profile picture
- Indicate gender
- Enter date of birth
- Upload bank details for payments

A FAQ section is available with information on:

- Being a domestic worker
- Payment details
- Insurance, screening, and warranties
- Working for HomeWorks
- HomeWorks as a company
- Managing the worker's personal HomeWorks account

3.4.5. Meetings Tab

This section provides an overview of all scheduled appointments and a calendar view of the worker's schedule.

- Workers can see how to change structural appointments by contacting the helpdesk.
- For incidental changes, workers should leave the schedule unchanged and report hours afterward.

At the end of this section, a link to the unavailability page (described in the dashboard) is provided.

3.4.6. Hours Tab

This section tracks hours that still need client approval to confirm worked hours. The following explanation is provided:

How do I report my hours?

In the overview, you will see the date and the scheduled number of hours for each appointment. Approve or adjust these hours. Confirm each appointment immediately after making any changes.

Appointment didn't happen?

If no work was done, enter "none" in the "actual hours" column and confirm.

3.4.7. Clients Tab

This section provides a list of all clients the worker has agreed to work for.

- A quick-access link to the Requests page allows workers to add new clients.
- A chat function is available for communicating with clients.
- Clicking on a client's name opens additional client information.

3.4.8. Payments Tab

The Payments tab provides an overview of earnings, savings, yearly statements, and employment fee settings.

Earnings

Payments are processed between the 22nd and the end of each month.

Savings & Financial Planning

Workers can set aside a portion of their earnings for:

- Sick pay
- Vacation pay
- General absence pay
- Taxes

Workers can tag the categories they want to save for and specify an amount to set aside each month. The platform provides the following message:

Saving money

At HomeWorks, you can set aside money for illness, vacation pay, leave, or taxes. You can allocate part of your salary to these "savings pots" every month.

If you choose to save, we will automatically allocate 8% of your hourly wage to your selected savings pots each month.

These savings belong to you. You can withdraw them at any time, and they will be paid out with your next salary.

If you do not wish to save, you will receive your full earnings immediately!

Yearly Statements

A dedicated section provides access to an overview of all yearly statements for tax purposes.

Employment Fee

Workers set their own hourly rate, but HomeWorks advises against setting rates too high. The following message is provided:

At HomeWorks, you determine your own hourly wage. The minimum rate is €11.85 per hour.

To receive more client requests, it is advisable not to raise your rate too much.

A rate increase only affects new client requests. For existing clients, HomeWorks must be contacted.

During the first 6 months of working with a new client, the rate cannot be adjusted.

3.5. Client Registration on the HomeWorks Platform

The HomeWorks client registration process consists of four steps, allowing clients to set their preferences, browse worker profiles, and create an account to finalize their request.

3.5.1. Step 1: Service Request Details

Clients begin by filling in the details of their request, including:

- Location: Postal code and house number
- Service duration: Between 1 and 8 hours per appointment
- Frequency: Weekly or biweekly
- Maximum hourly rate: Between €16.50 and €40
- Preferred days and time frames for the worker's visit
- Worker language preferences: Dutch, English, French, or German, with the option to add others
- Household details: Indicate if the home has a dog, cat, or requires ironing services

3.5.2. Step 2: Worker Selection

After entering their service preferences, clients are shown a list of available workers, each displaying:

- Profile picture
- First name

- Hourly rate
- Option to view full profile
- Rating and reviews
- Experience: Number of past assignments on the platform
- Last online status
- Most recent review (displayed directly)

Clients can select up to 5 workers or choose to proceed without selecting a worker.

Viewing a Worker's Full Profile

If a client clicks on a worker's profile, additional details are provided:

- Account creation date
- Total appointments completed through the platform
- Last online date
- Personal introduction (if provided by the worker)
- Selection of past client reviews

Notably, during the last website check, all listed workers showed the same account creation date (12-01-2019), indicating potential profile inactivity or a system limitation.

3.6. Step 3: Finalizing the Request

The third step differs based on whether the client selected a worker or not.

If a Worker Was Selected, a confirmation message is displayed:

Almost there... Have you already selected your preferred workers? Great! The first recurring appointment will soon be scheduled with one of the workers you just selected. Coordinate the starting date with the worker via the chat, which will appear once the worker is scheduled.

If No Worker Was Selected, clients are shown a nearly identical page, with the following message:

Was your preferred worker not available, and you didn't select anyone? Keep an eye on your email—we will introduce you to new workers soon.

In both cases, the client is asked to write a message to the worker(s), including:

- Information about themselves and their household
- Specific expectations for the job

Clients are also warned not to share personal or contact information at this stage. Below the message box, an overview of the request details and the selected worker(s) is displayed.

At this point, clients can create an account and proceed to booking an appointment.

3.6.1. Step 4: Account Creation

The final step mirrors the worker registration process, requiring clients to:

- Manually enter their details (first name, last name, email, phone number, password)
- Or sign up via Google

3.7. Client Dashboard on the HomeWorks Platform

The HomeWorks client dashboard is simpler and more limited than the worker dashboard, focusing on appointment management, worker selection, payments, and invoices. It includes the following tabs:

1. Main Dashboard
2. Future Meetings
3. Requests
4. Time Sheet
5. Workers
6. Invoices
7. Profile

Main Dashboard

The main dashboard provides a basic overview, displaying:

- Upcoming appointments
- Quick links to:
 - Reporting unavailability
 - Profile settings
 - Open requests
 - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Unlike the worker dashboard, there is no job selection or rating system.

Absence Management

The absence page mirrors the worker version, allowing clients to:

- Select start and end dates for unavailability
- Cancel appointments more than 72 hours in advance without being charged

Profile Settings

The client's profile page contains:

- Basic demographic information (photo, name, address, contact details)
- Payment settings
- Optional worker insurance

Worker Insurance Option

Clients can toggle on/off an insurance plan from Nationale Nederlanden, covering damages caused by their domestic worker.

Insurance

In most cases, damage caused by "household staff" is covered by your own home contents or liability insurance. We advise you to check your own insurance policy first!

Through HomeWorks, you can purchase insurance from Nationale Nederlanden for accidental damages caused by your worker.

- *Cost: €1 per worked hour*
- *Deductible: €250*
- *Maximum coverage: €2.5 million*
- *You can activate or deactivate this insurance at any time for future appointments.*

Payment Settings

Instead of adding a bank account, clients can choose their payment method:

- Automatic direct debit
- Manual bank transfer
- iDEAL payment (within 7 days of receiving the invoice)

Future Meetings Tab

This tab provides a calendar view of all scheduled appointments, mirroring the worker version.

Requests Tab

- Displays all open service requests
- Clients can create or edit a request
- Worker selection is suggested based on the request
- Clients can choose a new worker directly from this page

Time Sheet Tab

Clients must approve worked hours submitted by their worker before payment is processed.

Approval & Editing Process

How do I check and approve my worker's hours?

This overview shows the hours submitted by your worker. Approve or adjust these hours.

After 48 hours, HomeWorks will automatically pay your worker on your behalf.

If an appointment did not take place, the client should enter:

"None" in the actual hours column and confirm.

This ensures that the worker is not paid for the missed appointment.

Workers Tab

Displays a list of all workers the client has hired (including those who have recently stopped working for them).

- If no workers are available, a button directs the client to the request page to find new workers.
- Unlike the worker dashboard, it is unclear if a chat function is available for contacting workers.

Invoices Tab

- Lists all past invoices

4. Platform Governance

4.1. Organizational Structure

HomeWorks is organized through a structured management team based in Amsterdam, consisting of a CEO, a general manager, and four service coordinators. This team plays an active role in the day-to-day functioning of the platform, particularly in matchmaking between workers and clients, addressing problems as they arise, and collecting client feedback on worker performance. The service coordinators offer direct oversight and support, ensuring consistent quality and smooth operations for both clients and workers. This hands-on approach reflects a relatively traditional management structure, where human involvement remains central to platform governance and user experience.

4.2. Use of Algorithms

HomeWorks minimally integrates algorithms into its matchmaking process. The worker selects their availability, location, and preferences, but it is ultimately the client who chooses their worker from a list. While the platform may facilitate matches, the final selection is left to human decision-making rather than automated recommendations. HomeWorks' approach prioritizes manual coordination, with service coordinators playing an active role in reviewing and adjusting matches based on client feedback and availability.

4.3. Contracts and Employment Structures

HomeWorks operates under the RDAH framework. Workers are not employed by HomeWorks but are instead matched with clients, who technically become their

employers. Workers receive a fixed hourly wage (set by HomeWorks) plus an additional client-paid service fee, and clients can request replacement workers if needed. Although HomeWorks does not offer direct employment, it provides administrative support by handling work agreements, matchmaking, and client-worker communication. Workers do not have formal employment benefits like pensions or paid sick leave, but HomeWorks offers optional insurance coverage for workers in case of damages.

5. Worker and client experiences and motivations

5.1. Demographics of the Workers

Using a client account created for this project, it was possible to view the demographics of workers on the platform. HomeWorks presented a limited selection, showing only seven workers in the area. Of these, six were female, and only two had a profile picture. Two workers did not provide a bio, and only one disclosed her age (40). Among the available profiles, one female worker identified as a student, while the 40-year-old mentioned having children. Additionally, two of the workers had non-Dutch names, suggesting some level of diversity.

5.2. Occupational trajectory

The career path of HomeWorks Worker 1 reflects a longstanding personal affinity for care-related work, shaped by shifting opportunities and structural constraints. *“This kind of work, care in general, has always attracted me,”* they explained, recalling an initial desire to build a career in home care. However, changes in job availability led them to work in factory production for a time, a role they appreciated for its technical aspects. Despite this, they eventually returned to the care sector, where they found deeper emotional satisfaction through building bonds with clients: *“You really build a bond. It’s much more about people. In production, it’s machine work.”* Their attempt to pursue a hybrid care and domestic support role was hindered by bureaucratic barriers, such as the need for specific diplomas, which were not available in their region. As a result, they remained limited to domestic work roles and eventually had to stop working due to health issues: *“I had to stop because of my health.”*

5.3. Platform work motivations

HomeWorks Worker 1 was drawn to platform work because of the autonomy and stability it offered. They valued being able to set their own schedule without needing to coordinate with colleagues and appreciated the freedom to take vacations whenever the client agreed: *“At HomeWorks, you didn’t have to take other colleagues*

into account. If I wanted to go on vacation and the client approved, I could just go." Their decision to join the platform was also shaped by previous experiences of insecurity in contract-based employment: *"At Zinn, my contract was always being renewed temporarily, but at HomeWorks, that wasn't the case. That was my main reason for choosing it."* In addition to flexibility, they emphasized the platform's support structure, such as clearly defined agreements on payment and systems for addressing client issues. Occasional events and gatherings helped create a sense of community among workers, despite the independent nature of the job. The ability to negotiate directly with clients on tasks and scheduling further reinforced their preference for the platform.

The client using HomeWorks (De Witte Werkster) emphasized the importance of legality and trust in their decision. Their primary motivation was to hire a cleaner through formal, tax-compliant channels: *"I wanted a cleaner, and I thought... I want to do it legally. I don't like working under the table, so I figured I'd sign up there."* Although their initial reaction to the platform's name was mixed—*"At first, I thought the name was really kind of racist"*—they later understood it was meant to refer to legal, declared work rather than informal labor. This realization reassured them, aligning with their desire for a legitimate and trustworthy service.

5.4. Platform use

The experience of using HomeWorks was shaped by a structured and supportive platform environment. HomeWorks Worker 1 was assigned clients based on their location and preferred working hours. While they had an online profile, it required minimal maintenance and was not publicly visible. As they explained, *"You didn't have to put a photo or any information that others could see. There was a site where you made an account and could adjust your hours, but it wasn't something visible to clients."* The platform handled client assignments directly, and the worker's involvement was largely limited to adjusting their availability when necessary. HomeWorks also provided a stable infrastructure, including client payment processing, a vacation savings option, and mediation services in case of conflicts. The worker appreciated these features and found the platform to be *"well-organized,"* particularly in terms of timely payments and structured support. Additionally, the platform hosted occasional events and gatherings, which offered opportunities to connect with colleagues and helped create a modest sense of community within an otherwise independent form of work.

The client using De Witte Werkster expressed surprise at the amount of information provided about potential workers. *"I got their name, address, birth date, bank account number, phone number, and email address,"* they recalled. This degree of transparency felt excessive to them, especially given that the workers were not given equivalent information about their clients. Beyond concerns about privacy, the client also noticed

discriminatory patterns in the platform's rating system, observing that *"people of color were often rated lower than the white workers, even when their profiles looked just as good."* These concerns raised questions for them about fairness and equity in how the platform was structured and how users were evaluated.

5.5. Introduction meetings

Before beginning a working relationship, HomeWorks Worker 1 participated in an introduction meeting (*kennismakingsgesprek*) to align expectations with the client. These meetings served as an opportunity to clarify tasks, schedules, and the overall arrangement. Describing the process, they explained, *"You tell a bit about yourself, they explain their situation, and then we go over the tasks."* The meetings were generally straightforward and practical in nature. In cases where the client would not be home during working hours, logistical details such as key access were also discussed during the meeting to ensure a smooth start to the collaboration.

The client found the introduction meeting to be an essential part of the decision-making process. After receiving the worker's information, they scheduled a meeting to assess compatibility and confirm the arrangement. *"After receiving the candidate's details, I scheduled a meeting. If there was no click, I could let them know, and they would send someone else."* This flexibility allowed the client to make an informed decision before committing to a long-term work relationship, providing reassurance and control over the selection process.

5.6. Connections and Relationships Between Workers and Clients

HomeWorks worker 1 worked with a fixed set of six clients, maintaining consistency in scheduling and routines. This structure helped build familiarity and a professional relationship with clients, though there were clear boundaries regarding personal information: *"You weren't supposed to share personal details about yourself, but clients told you everything."*

5.7. Reviews, feedback and reputation systems

HomeWorks worker 1 did not have a visible rating system affecting their work, as the platform primarily managed assignments. Clients could provide feedback, but it was not structured in a way that would publicly influence future job opportunities. Instead, the platform facilitated structured interactions with clients through work agreements and mediation if issues arose. De Witte Werkster client noted that her platform did not have a structured review system at the time she used it. While she received detailed personal information about workers before hiring them, there was no formal mechanism for leaving public feedback. Looking back, she found this surprising: *"It's strange that aside from knowing they were part of 'Ik zoek een witte werkster,' you*

actually knew nothing about them.” She provided feedback directly to the workers she hired. She preferred to discuss tasks openly and ensure that expectations were clear: *“I always told them right away if something needed to be done differently”*.

5.8. Working conditions and the organization of working time and space

HomeWorks Worker 1 experienced a high degree of autonomy in organizing their working hours and tasks, with scheduling coordinated directly between the worker and the client. *“You could decide independently—together with the client, of course—what your tasks would be,”* they explained. Clients were responsible for providing cleaning supplies, though there was room to request personal items or alternatives when needed: *“If you wanted to use your own gloves or something else, you could bring that, or ask if they had it.”* The platform also had clear health and safety guidelines, such as prohibiting the use of bleach to protect workers from harmful exposure. While the platform offered certain institutional supports, such as mediating issues or attempting to find substitutes during illness or holidays, these were not guaranteed. *“If I had to cancel, they tried to send someone else. But sometimes, the client just had to wait.”* The worker emphasized that the sense of safety and emotional comfort in the job came primarily from the clients themselves, describing their appreciation as deeply motivating: *“People were so happy when you came. That really pulls me in.”* HomeWorks also offered limited social protections. Health and accident insurance were the worker’s own responsibility, although there were suggestions that options might be accessible through the platform: *“There was standard liability insurance, but that was your own responsibility. I think you could get insurance through them, but I’m not sure.”* Notably, HomeWorks allowed workers to voluntarily contribute to a pension scheme. *“I finally got to build a pension—36 euros a month. It’s very little, of course, because of the few hours and short time, but it’s something.”* Vacation pay was not automatically provided but could be saved up: *“You could save for it, but otherwise, if you didn’t work, you didn’t get paid.”* This was confirmed by the client, who explained, *“A portion of the pay was withheld as holiday pay—they did get it, just not during the time off.”*

5.9. New and old skills

HomeWorks Worker 1 brought a substantial background in care work to her role, having previously assisted individuals with dementia, cooked meals, and worked collaboratively in shared living environments. This prior experience provided a strong foundation for her household support tasks through the platform. Upon joining HomeWorks, she completed a short training course designed to establish basic professional boundaries and safety: *“There was a little course, and you’d get a certificate. It included things like how close you should come to a client—to learn about*

boundaries, for your protection and theirs.” Beyond this initial orientation, she saw most learning as embedded in daily practice—developing the ability to recognize clients’ needs and identify signs of trouble: *“As a household help, you see a lot. If something’s wrong with a client, you have to report it.”* She also spoke about navigating informal aspects of the job, such as maintaining appropriate boundaries despite clients often oversharing: *“There were rules about not sharing personal information, but of course they’d tell you everything. You just had to use your judgment.”* In this way, her professional knowledge was largely experience-based, rooted in observation, relational dynamics, and ethical decision-making on the job.

5.10. Perceived Risks and Vulnerabilities in Platform Work

Workers and clients using HomeWorks reported a variety of risks tied to the nature of domestic platform work, ranging from environmental health hazards to emotional strain and boundary violations. HomeWorks Worker 1 recounted several situations that directly affected her physical well-being. In one case, she worked in a household where the client allowed several cats into the bedroom, which exacerbated her asthma: *“There was hair everywhere... I love cats, but I have asthma, so I couldn’t really handle that.”* In another situation, a client resumed smoking indoors despite an earlier agreement not to, forcing her to end the working relationship: *“She told me, ‘It’s my house, I decide if I smoke or not.’ That was too much for me.”* Although HomeWorks offered limited training and guidance for handling such challenges, most decisions were left to the worker’s own judgment. As she explained, *“You’re really on your own. That was part of the challenge, but also what made the job interesting.”*

Clients also reported feeling vulnerable, particularly around the issue of inviting strangers into their homes. The De Witte Werkster client described a situation in which a cleaner began acting suspiciously and eventually stopped responding, prompting her to file a police report. *“It was only because I had her data from the email that I could do that. If I’d hired her through Facebook, I wouldn’t have known anything.”* For this client, the platform’s data transparency offered a sense of protection—but the experience still revealed the risks inherent in trusting someone without an established relationship.

5.11. Contact with Unions and Worker Representation

Despite being a member of a trade union in the past, HomeWorks Worker 1 had not engaged with any union or labor representation body since starting work through the platform. *“Yes, I was [in contact with] a union in [previous city of residence], but I never had to use it,”* she explained. After relocating and beginning her work with HomeWorks, she did not maintain that connection, nor did she seek support through alternative channels. Similarly, the HomeWorks (De Witte Werkster) client had never

reached out to a union or representative organization in relation to domestic work. When asked about this, she responded plainly: “No.” This lack of engagement suggests that while some awareness of labor representation existed, it did not translate into active involvement or reliance in the context of platform-mediated household services.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The HomeWorks case illustrates a platform model that combines structure and human mediation with elements of worker flexibility and client autonomy. Workers benefit from being able to set their own hours and negotiate tasks directly with clients, while the platform provides backup in the form of payment processing, dispute mediation, and occasional opportunities for community-building through events. HomeWorks’ more hands-on management style, supported by a team of coordinators, offers a degree of organizational reliability often absent in more automated or minimally governed platforms.

Nevertheless, the case also reveals critical limitations in social protection and worker representation. The platform does not employ its workers, nor does it provide robust benefits such as sick pay, formal insurance, or pensions beyond optional savings schemes. Workers remain responsible for managing their own risk, insurance, and long-term financial security. Despite these gaps, neither the worker nor the client reported engaging with unions or worker organizations, reflecting the broader individualization of platform labor.

The platform’s data practices also drew mixed responses. While the worker appreciated not needing to publicly manage a profile, the client expressed discomfort with receiving extensive personal information about the worker without providing the same in return. This imbalance in transparency, combined with informal racial bias observed in ratings, highlights ongoing concerns around equity and accountability.

Ultimately, HomeWorks positions itself as a more stable and professional alternative within the Dutch domestic service landscape. However, the platform’s ability to truly improve working conditions and offer sustainable support to workers will depend on future efforts to formalize protections, address power imbalances, and engage more meaningfully with worker needs.

For a broader (comparative) analysis of HomeWorks, see the overarching report by Hesselink & Been (2025).

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Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

THE NETHERLANDS

CASE STUDY 2

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Hups

1. Introduction

Digital platforms are reshaping the landscape of domestic labor, particularly in home care and cleaning services. Among these, Hups stands out as a key player in the Dutch platform economy. As part of the Origami Project, this report examines Hups as a single case study to better understand how one platform operates within this rapidly evolving sector.

The research investigates Hups' organizational model, its approach to matchmaking between workers and clients, and the ways it manages employment relations. Special attention is paid to its business model, algorithmic systems, reputation mechanisms, payment structure, and contractual arrangements. Through this, the study explores how Hups governs its platform, defines roles and responsibilities, and shapes the working conditions of those using it.

In addition to analyzing Hups' internal functioning, this report considers the lived experiences of platform workers and clients. It examines how workers navigate visibility, secure assignments, and perceive the benefits and constraints of working through Hups. The perspectives of managers and clients complement this analysis, offering insight into the broader impact of Hups on the organization of care and cleaning work.

The report begins by outlining the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. It then presents a detailed profile of Hups, including its history, terms and conditions, onboarding process, and platform interface. A closer look at platform governance follows, focusing on algorithms, contracts, and working conditions. Worker and client narratives provide texture to this analysis, revealing motivations, strategies, and challenges. The report concludes with a reflection on what Hups' case tells us about the future of domestic platform labor in the Netherlands.

Disclaimer: This document is based on the overarching comparative report on Hups and HomeWorks (Hesselink & Been, 2025).

2. Methodology

2.1. Initial plan

For this project, two initial platforms were selected: the international platform Care.com (Betreut.de) and the national company Hups. However, despite multiple attempts to contact management, workers, and clients of Care.com through LinkedIn, email, Facebook, and other social media channels, the company declined to participate, and no responses were received from the contacted workers or clients. Consequently, a new platform was selected: HomeWorks, another national platform. While management at HomeWorks also chose not to participate, it was possible to reach some workers and clients who were willing to contribute to the research.

2.2. Recruitment methods

To recruit participants, different methods were employed for managers and for workers/clients. For managers, the recruitment process began by identifying CEOs, management team members, and other relevant personnel through the platforms' websites. If available, they were contacted via their company email or LinkedIn. If these attempts were unsuccessful, outreach was conducted through the company's general email address, phone number, or even via Facebook.

For workers and clients, recruitment relied on a combination of direct outreach and online engagement. The researchers utilized their personal networks, reaching out face-to-face if colleagues or friends had experience using one of the selected platforms. Additionally, an advertisement was circulated on social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok), initially without an incentive and later offering a €25 incentive. Direct messaging was also employed on Facebook and Instagram to connect with workers and clients who engaged with targeted ads from the platform or who interacted with the platform's official social media accounts. Once a worker was identified, snowball recruitment was used to reach additional participants through personal referrals.

2.3. Data Collection

This study utilized multiple methods of data collection to gain a comprehensive understanding of the selected platforms.

2.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

The initial goal was to recruit one manager, four workers, and four clients per platform, totaling 9 participants. However, recruitment efforts yielded fewer participants than anticipated. One manager, one worker, and two clients were interviewed.

These interviews provided insights into the workings, challenges, and experiences of the platforms from different perspectives. The interview guidelines were constructed by the Italian team in collaboration with the rest of the Origami project, and later translated and adapted to be suitable for the Dutch context.

2.3.2. Platform Analysis and Non-Generated Data

To better understand the platforms from a user perspective, a thorough investigation of the platforms' websites, terms and conditions, and policies was conducted. This included:

- Website Analysis: Examining how platforms present themselves and what information is available to workers and clients.
- Account Creation: Creating worker and client accounts on both platforms to assess the registration process, data input requirements, and the platform's interface.
- Legal and Media Review: Where available, documents related to legal cases involving the platforms were reviewed, along with news reports covering the platforms' operations. In addition to legal arguments, these documents provided insights into user and worker experiences, including disputes over contracts, employment conditions, and interactions with the platform.
- Email Correspondence: Where participants were comfortable sharing, emails between clients, workers, and the platform were analyzed to understand communication processes and interactions.

2.3.3. Data Processing and Analysis

All collected data were uploaded into Atlas.ti for systematic content analysis. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used to analyze the data:

- Deductive coding was applied based on pre-established themes related to platform work, worker-client relationships, and legal frameworks.
- Inductive coding was used to identify emerging themes that arose from participant experiences, platform interactions, and legal case studies.

This case study includes one worker and two clients, each with distinct backgrounds and experiences. The worker, referred to as Hups Worker 1, is a 70-year-old Dutch woman living in the northern Netherlands. She has a MAVO-equivalent education, is married, and has a long history of working in household services through platform-based arrangements. The two clients bring different perspectives to the platform. Hups Client 1 is a 40-year-old Hungarian man with a PhD, living with his partner in the northern Netherlands. Hups Client 2, a 36-year-old Dutch man with a scientific educational background, also lives in the same region and cohabitates with his partner.

Together, these participants provide insight into how Hups is used across different demographics and household settings.

AI statement

This report has made use of OpenAI's ChatGPT (version 4o) to support the writing process. The AI was used to suggest more concise or consistent naming codes (e.g., for participants or sections), assist with translations, and check the spelling and coherence of the text. All final content was reviewed and edited by the authors.

2.4. Hups: Platform Overview, Functioning, and History

Hups is a platform that provides a broad range of home-based services, including domestic help, personal care, and home maintenance (Hups, 2025b). It operates as a combination of a publicly funded care service and a privately run platform for domestic helpers. The platform connects clients with service providers through an online system, allowing users to book services as needed, whether on a one-time or recurring basis. Hups claims to be the only entity in the Netherlands offering a structured legal and fiscal framework for home-based help, ensuring workers have various employment options, including the *Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis*, (RDAH, a Dutch law that allows private individuals to hire domestic workers without formal employer obligations like paying social security contributions, (Belastingdienst, 2025)) formal employment contracts, and self-employment arrangements.

Hups operates on a national scale, with 34 physical locations across the Netherlands where clients and workers can receive personal assistance and guidance. According to its CEO, it currently has around 3,000 clients and 1,500 service providers on its platform.

Clients seeking assistance can browse through the platform to find service providers that match their needs (Hups, 2025a). They can book help for household tasks, garden help, or personal care either online or in person at one of Hups' physical locations. The platform provides tools for managing bookings, payments, and additional services such as liability insurance and administrative support. Workers, on the other hand, can register on the platform, specify their skills, and set their availability.

Hups has undergone significant transformations over the years, with multiple mergers shaping its current form. The platform's origins date back to 2013, when it was initially founded as HuisCleaning, a domestic cleaning service that allowed clients to book household help online (HuisCleaning, n.d.). HuisCleaning initially expanded from the city of Breda to major cities like Tilburg and Eindhoven, targeting urban centers before reaching nationwide coverage. The company CEO describes this expansion, stating *"We first focused on the larger cities, moving from Breda to Tilburg, Eindhoven, and so on. Now we have 34 locations across the country to maintain personal contact and facilitate financing services."*

However, in 2018, the company faced scrutiny following complaints from workers about unfair working conditions (De Regt, 2020). Two workers filed complaints, stating that they were forced to pay €2.50 per hour to the platform for each hour they worked and faced a €100 daily fine if they worked directly for clients outside the platform. The investigation determined that HuisCleaning effectively operated as an employer, despite presenting itself as a simple matchmaking service (Pagter et al., 2019). This meant that it had legal obligations toward its workers, which it had not fulfilled.

As a result, HuisCleaning settled with the workers, although the financial details remain undisclosed (De Regt, 2020). The company denied the findings but dissolved the HuisCleaning brand soon after, merging with TuinKlusHulp in 2020, forming Hlprs, which expanded its scope beyond cleaning to include gardening, childcare, and general home maintenance. Then, on May 1, 2024, Hlprs merged with UwAssistent and Mantelaar, leading to the launch of Hups as a broader home services platform. This consolidation brought all services under one system, streamlining operations but also creating challenges: *“We merged all the labels into one system, but that doesn’t mean the platform itself advanced significantly—it actually took two steps back before moving forward again.”*

Like many service-based platforms, Hups was severely impacted by COVID-19, causing a near-total collapse in demand for household services. The CEO recalls: *“Before COVID, Hlprs was bigger, but when the pandemic hit, the entire market collapsed. Nobody wanted people in their homes, and we had to start over.”* Despite setbacks, Hups sees long-term potential in providing a legal alternative to the large informal ‘black market’ for household help in the Netherlands: *“In the Netherlands, almost all household help is arranged under the table—99% of it. We aim to be a solution for that, offering a better-regulated and fairer alternative.”* However, due to shifts in internal priorities, the platform side of Hups has received less focus recently, as the company expands into financed care services such as traditional respite and elderly care: *“Right now, the platform side is a bit less of a priority for us, but we see a huge opportunity there. We believe that regulated household help can be done better and more fairly.”*

Concerning their market position, the Hups CEO feels the company is mainly competing against the informal black market. *“No, by far the biggest competitor is simply the black market. Because, in fact, that is still the biggest risk for us. Someone signs up on the platform, finds a household help through us, but then, a month later, both the client and the service provider cancel. We have no way of controlling whether they just continue working off the books.”*

2.5. Summary of Hups Terms and Conditions

Hups operates as a platform that connects workers (Dienstverleners) and clients (Klanten), but it is not an employer. Instead, it facilitates connections where clients hire workers directly under the RDAH.

Key Points:

- Platform Function & Legal Standing:
 - Hups does not employ workers—it only provides a platform for clients and workers to connect.
 - When a worker and client agree to work together, a legal employment contract (Arbeidscontract) is formed between them, not with Hups.
 - Hups is not responsible for ensuring that workers find jobs or that clients find suitable workers.
- Worker–Client Agreements & Restrictions:
 - Once connected, the worker and client sign an employment contract based on RDAH.
 - If a client hires a Hups worker outside the platform, they must pay a €750 penalty, unless they move the contract back to the platform within 14 days.
 - Workers set their own hourly rates, which include vacation pay and taxes.
- Payments & Fees:
 - Payments go through an external payment provider (Online Payment Platform).
 - Clients must pay invoices within 7 days after receiving the payment summary.
 - If clients fail to pay on time, workers can suspend their services, and legal action may be taken.
 - A one-time €24.95 service fee is charged to the client when hiring a worker through the platform.
- Liability & Insurance:
 - Hups is not responsible for any issues between clients and workers, including missed appointments, payment disputes, or contract violations.
 - Workers and clients must handle any damages or disputes themselves.
 - Workers can access liability and accident insurance through Alicia Benefits B.V., but claims are subject to an excess (€75) and must first be rejected by the client's insurance.
- Reviews & Complaints:

- Clients can rate workers using a star system and leave written reviews, but Hups may remove inappropriate reviews.
- Complaints must first be resolved between the worker and client directly before Hups will intervene as a mediator.
- Account Management & Termination:
 - Both clients and workers can cancel their accounts at any time, but they cannot delete their accounts while an active contract is in place.
 - Hups can suspend accounts if users violate the terms, fail to meet financial obligations, or if legal changes make continued operation impossible.
- Intellectual Property & Data Privacy:
 - All content on Hups is owned by the company and cannot be copied or modified without permission.
 - Hups processes personal data in compliance with GDPR and does not share private messages or stored data unless legally required.
- Legal Jurisdiction:
 - Dutch law applies, and any legal disputes will be handled in the Zeeland–West–Brabant court (Breda location).
 - Hups reserves the right to update its terms at any time, with changes taking effect when announced.

2.6. Worker Registration on the Hups Platform

Workers who wish to register on the Hups platform must complete a multi-step process providing personal details, work preferences, experience, and hourly wage expectations. The registration process consists of several pages, each collecting specific information.

2.6.1. Step 1: Personal Information

On the first page, workers are required to fill out the following details:

- Gender (Male, Female, Other)
- Initials, First Name, Last Name
- Confirmation of being 18 years or older
- Date of Birth
- Email Address and Phone Number
- Home Address (Postal Code, House Number, Street, City)

2.6.2. Step 2: Motivation and Interests

Workers are prompted to describe themselves in two sections: motivation and interests. The platform provides the following guidance:

Put yourself in the shoes of the person requesting a service. This person chooses a service provider based on what they read here. In a way, you need to convince them to choose you. Be creative, and it's better to say too much than too little. Good luck!

Why should I choose you?

You can talk about your motivation, personality traits, availability, flexibility, and how mobile you are (e.g., if you travel by car or bike).

For the interests' section, the worker is encouraged to write a short personal introduction under the prompt:

"Write a fun and concise story about yourself."

Below this, workers can indicate their availability by selecting specific time slots for weekdays and weekends:

- Early morning (07:00 – 09:00)
- Morning (09:00 – 12:00)
- Afternoon (12:00 – 18:00)
- Evening (18:00 – 22:00)
- Night (22:00 – 07:00)

Workers are also asked to specify:

- Total hours available per week
- Whether they have a driver's license
- How they first heard about Hups
- Language proficiency, with preset options: Dutch, English, Arabic, Chinese, German, French, Italian, Spanish, or Turkish (no option to add additional languages).

2.6.3. Step 3: Profile Picture (Optional)

On the third page, workers are given the option to upload a profile picture, but this step is skippable.

2.6.4. Step 4: Work Preferences

Workers can select the type of work they wish to perform, categorized into:

- Domestic help
- Garden help
- Home assistance
- Companionship
- Carer

For companionship, additional tasks can be toggled, including:

- Keeping company
- Doing groceries

- Cooking/eating together
- Daily practical assistance
- Accompaniment to appointments
- Playing music together
- Administrative support

For carer, additional tasks include:

- Bathing
- Dressing
- Assisting with or on the toilet
- Wiping after a toilet visit
- Handing over medication without administration
- Lifting/transferring
- On-call night shift (Slaapdienst)
- Vigil shift (Waakdienst)
- 24-hour shift

2.6.5. Step 5: Work Experience

Workers are asked to describe their work experience and skills using the following prompt:

This is your chance to present yourself and convince clients. Describe your work experience and skills with concrete examples. Be specific and persuasive to increase your chances!

2.6.6. Step 6: Hourly Wage Selection

Workers must indicate their hourly rate per type of work, divided into:

- Domestic help
- Garden help
- Home assistance
- Companionship
- Carer

By default, the wage is set to €0, and workers are encouraged to set a realistic rate with the following message:

Fill in your standard hourly rate in euros for the services you offer. Keep your hourly rate realistic. Click here for more information on determining your hourly rate. The rate, along with your experience and motivation, helps clients make a choice. This rate can be adjusted in consultation with the client, depending on the specific tasks. If you do not offer a service, leave the rate at €0.00.

A separate tab links to an article providing guidance on setting hourly rates, including the following recommendations (2024):

Hourly Rate

Under the Home Service Regulation (Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis), you determine your own hourly rate. This rate, together with other factors such as your experience and motivation, helps clients choose between available service providers. Therefore, keep your hourly rate realistic. If you set your rate too high, you are unlikely to be selected.

In some cases, a Hups employee will act as an intermediary between you and the client. You can ask for advice to determine an hourly rate that suits your age, experience, and the availability of service providers in your region. Note: Make sure your hourly rate meets the legally required minimum wage.

On average, you earn:

- Domestic help: €15 – €20 per hour
- Garden/handyman help: €17 – €20 per hour
- Care assistant: €17 – €25 per hour

Additionally, the page explains:

- Vacation pay (8%) and paid leave compensation (7.7%) are included in the worker's chosen hourly rate.
- Income tax and healthcare contributions (Zvw) are the worker's responsibility.

Regarding employment, the platform provides the following explanation:

Hups offers you the flexibility and opportunities to work in a way that suits you.

Online: After registration, you can start working immediately via our online platform. You will work under the "Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis" (Home Service Regulation), which is ideal for working flexibly for private individuals.

Branch: You can also choose to work via a local Hups branch, giving you access to even more jobs. You will have a fixed contact person and can work under both the Home Service Regulation and as a salaried employee. You can decide this later in the process.

2.6.7. Step 7: Agreement to Hups Rules

The final page requires workers to agree to the Hups platform rules, which include:

1. Clear communication:

Always communicate clearly with clients about your skills, availability, and arrival times. Overcommunicating is better than undercommunicating to build trust and ensure clarity.

2. No exchange of personal contact information:

It is not permitted to exchange personal details or schedule appointments outside of the platform. Clients must first accept the worker's application via Mijn Hups before direct contact is allowed.

3. All payments must go through Hups:

After completing a service, the worker must finalize the transaction via Mijn Hups. Any repeat bookings must also be processed through the platform. A box to agree to the terms and conditions needs to be filled out. Violating these rules may result in temporary or permanent removal from the platform.

Workers must accept the rules and terms before finalizing their registration. Once completed, they can begin applying for jobs through the platform.

2.7. Worker Dashboard on the Hups Platform

The Hups worker dashboard provides multiple sections for managing work-related activities, including job opportunities, profile settings, appointments, and communication with clients and platform employees. The dashboard consists of the following tabs:

1. Main Dashboard
2. Connections
3. Jobs
4. Profile
5. Chats
6. Help Center

Main Dashboard

The main dashboard serves as the central hub for workers, containing quick-access links to:

- Jobs
- Profile
- Agenda (calendar)
- Connections
- Planning a new appointment
- Help Center
- Password settings

Additionally, if a worker has not yet verified their identity or bank details, the platform prompts them to do so, linking to a personal verification page.

Identity and Bank Account Verification

Hups requires workers to verify their identity and bank account in compliance with financial legislation. The verification process includes:

- Bank Account Verification
 - Workers select their bank's country and bank name.
 - Verification is completed via iDEAL by making a €0.01 payment to confirm ownership.
 - Alternatively, workers can upload a copy of their debit/credit card or a bank statement.
- Identification Verification
 - Workers select their country of residence and can verify their identity using iDIN, a system that extracts personal information from their bank.
 - The worker is redirected to their bank's page to log in and consent to share their identity details.
 - If iDIN is unavailable or undesirable, workers can upload a copy of their ID or passport.
- Phone Number Verification
 - Workers enter their mobile phone number, but no additional verification (such as SMS confirmation) is required.

Setting Fees for Services

If a worker has not yet set their hourly rates, a notification prompts them to do so. Clicking this leads to the RDAH page, where workers can select their employment type:

Verification Status with Online Payment Platform (OPP)

- *Identity: Not Verified*
- *Bank Account: Not Verified To work via Hups, you must verify your identity and bank account.*

This introduces OPP (Online Payment Platform), a third-party payment processor used by Hups, headquartered in Germany with an office in the Netherlands.

On this page, workers can toggle whether they are working under the RDAH and are shown the following explanation:

Under the Home Services Regulation, you determine your own rate, working hours, and clients. You work directly for the client. This offers flexibility for you as a service provider.

Below this, workers can set individual hourly rates per service type, similar to Step 6 in the registration process.

Referral Program

Workers can refer friends to Hups, earning €25 once the referred person has completed two jobs.

Jobs Tab

The Jobs tab displays all potential client opportunities, with an option to view them on a map.

Each job listing includes:

- Client gender (if specified, shown via gendered honorifics)
- Client code (for anonymity)
- City and distance from the worker's address
- Type of work needed
- Whether the job is managed via the platform or directly by the client
- Whether the Home Services Regulation (RDAH) applies
- Frequency of work (weekly, biweekly, or every four weeks)
- Job description (including who the job is for, available workdays, and other details)
- Button to request an introduction meeting

Profile Tab

The Profile tab contains multiple sub-tabs:

1. Your Profile
2. Files
3. Reviews
4. Employment Status
5. Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis (Home Services Regulation)

Your Profile

The Your Profile section displays a worker's business card with a clickable link to their bio, containing:

- Motivation statement
- Interests
- Experience
- Language knowledge
- Profile edit option

Workers can update the following personal information:

- Gender (Male, Female, Other)
- First name, initials, and last name

- Date of birth (not editable)
- Country of residence
- Full address (postal code, house number, street, and city)
- Phone number & email
- Possession of a driver's license

Other options include:

- Indicating willingness to work in specific areas
- Agreeing to take short shifts (less than 4 hours)
- Editing the public bio (visible to potential clients)
- Setting availability (weekday/weekend, divided into time slots: early morning, morning, afternoon, evening, and night)
- Selecting languages spoken (preset options: Dutch, English, Arabic, Chinese, German, French, Italian, Spanish, or Turkish – no option to add custom languages)

Workers must also specify which types of services they offer:

- Domestic help
- Garden help
- Home assistance
- Companionship (toggleable tasks: keeping company, grocery shopping, cooking/eating together, daily practical assistance, accompaniment to appointments, playing music, administrative support)
- Carer (toggleable tasks: bathing, dressing, toilet assistance, wiping, handing over medication, lifting/transferring, on-call night shift, vigil shift, 24-hour shift)

Files

Workers can upload documents, including:

- Profile pictures
- Passport copies
- Declarations of good conduct (Verklaring Omtrent Gedrag, VOG)

Reviews

Workers can view reviews, including:

- Date and time of the review
- Rating (star score)
- Client comments

Employment Status

This section shows whether the worker is directly employed by the platform or working independently.

Agenda Tab (Calendar)

Workers can view their monthly, weekly, daily, or four-week schedule, including:

- Appointments set by the worker

- Appointments scheduled by the platform
- Client birthdays

Connections Tab

Displays all client connections, showing:

- Client status (undefined)
- Whether an appointment can be scheduled

Once verified and connected, workers can schedule introduction meetings with clients.

Chats Tab

The Chats tab allows workers to:

- Communicate internally with platform employees
- Receive job opportunity notifications
- Get updates on their sign-up process

Help Center Tab

The Help Center contains:

- A FAQ section for both clients and workers
- An option to submit feedback about the platform

2.8. Client Registration on the Hups Platform

The Hups client registration process is more detailed and structured compared to HomeWorks, focusing on care needs, funding options, and insurance details. The process consists of eleven steps, guiding the client through service selection, payment possibilities, and personal details before Hups personally reaches out to discuss available workers.

2.8.1. Step 1: Introduction & Guidance

The registration process begins with an introduction from Fleur, a virtual assistant guiding the client. A message is provided:

"After answering a few questions, we will have a clearer picture of your situation and financing options. We can assist you better if you have your insurance details on hand."

At this stage, clients can also:

- Apply as a worker instead
- Sign up a client if they are a (care) professional

2.8.2. Step 2: Who Is the Worker Needed For?

Clients must indicate who requires care, choosing from:

- A patient/client
- Themselves

- Their partner
- A friend/acquaintance
- A family member
- Other (with a text box for further clarification)

Regardless of the choice, all options lead to the same next step.

2.8.3. Step 3: Type of Support Required

Clients must choose the general level of care needed, with the following options:

1. Someone to provide companionship and occasional assistance during the day
2. Someone to provide companionship and help throughout the entire day
3. Someone to be present at night, available to help if needed
4. Someone to provide both daytime and nighttime assistance

Regardless of the selection, all options lead to the next step.

2.8.4. Step 4: Type of Work Required

Clients must specify the exact services needed, using the same service categories as worker registration:

- Domestic help
- Garden help
- Home assistance
- Companionship (with toggleable tasks like shopping, cooking, playing music, administrative support, etc.)
- Carer (with toggleable tasks like bathing, dressing, assisting with the toilet, lifting, overnight shifts, etc.)

A text box is provided for clients to add any specific requests related to the work.

2.8.5. Step 5: Duration of the Service

Clients must indicate whether the work will be:

- Temporary
- Structural (long-term/ongoing)
- Not yet known

All options proceed to the same next step.

2.8.6. Step 6: Number of Days Needed

Clients enter how many days per week they require assistance (0–7 days).

2.8.7. Step 7: Start Date

Clients must indicate when they would like the service to begin. A message is displayed:

"There are currently no waiting lists. We will contact you on the next business day to discuss the possibilities. You can adjust the start date later if necessary."

2.8.8. Step 8: Payment & Financing Options (For Respite Care)

Clients are introduced to the different ways to finance respite care services. The following information is provided:

"How do I pay for caregiving support? These questions help us assess your options. Hups services can be financed in multiple ways, including:"

- *Private payment*
- *Through health insurance*
- *Via a Personal Budget (PGB)*
- *Through municipal funding*
- *Via a partner organization*

Additionally, clients are informed that:

"The investment you make in Hups can be deducted from income tax, which can make a significant difference."

2.8.9. Step 9: Indicating Insurance Provider

Clients can select their insurance provider from a dropdown list. This step is optional and can be skipped.

2.8.10. Step 10: Insurance Coverage for Respite Caretakers

A follow-up question asks if the care can be covered through the respite caretaker's insurance policy. This step is also optional and can be skipped.

2.8.11. Step 11: Personal Information & Contact Preferences

Clients must fill in their personal details, including:

- Gender (Male, Female, Other)
- Initials & Last Name
- Postal Code & House Number
- Street & City of Residence
- Phone Number & Email

If the service is for a respite caretaker, their details can also be added—or the client can mark the option as Not Applicable.

2.8.12. Final Steps:

- Who will be the main contact person?
 - The client
 - The respite caretaker
- Agreement to Terms & Conditions

Once completed, the platform will personally reach out to establish contact and discuss service options.

2.9. Registration for Care Professionals (Requesting Care for a Client)

For care professionals signing up on behalf of a client, the entire process is condensed into a single page, requiring:

- Client demographics & contact details
- Insurance provider
- Type of work needed
- Hours & weekly appointments
- Financial options
- Preferred work schedule
- Temporary or structural service request
- Respite caretaker details (if applicable)
- Who will be the main contact person?
- How the professional learned about Hups

2.10. Client Dashboard on the Hups Platform

The Hups client dashboard is more detailed than the HomeWorks client dashboard, offering more control over job conditions, worker contracts, and payment structures. It includes the following tabs:

1. Main Dashboard
2. Workers
3. Seeking a Worker
4. Chats
5. Invoices & Files
6. Terms & Conditions
7. Profile
8. Job
9. Help Center

Main Dashboard

The main page provides quick links to:

- Seeking a worker
- My profile
- Agenda (calendar)

- Planning a new appointment
- Invoices & files
- Help Center

It offers a structured navigation experience, allowing clients to quickly manage workers, appointments, and payments.

Seeking a Worker

The worker search page displays available workers within a 30km radius of the client.

Each worker profile includes:

- Profile picture & first name
- How often they have worked on the platform
- Distance (in km) from the client's location
- Introduction, interests, experience
- Languages spoken
- Types of services offered
- Hourly wage per service type

Key Difference from the Worker Dashboard:

- Unlike the worker dashboard, client reviews of workers are not displayed here.
- If a client finds a suitable worker, they can immediately send a message to connect.

Profile Tab

The client's profile page is simpler than the worker version, containing:

- Demographic information (gender, name, date of birth, address, phone number, email)
- Payment method selection
- Invoice delivery preference (by post or email)
- Record of terms & conditions agreement (including date & time of acceptance)

Unlike HomeWorks, no worker insurance toggle is available here.

Job Tab (Editing the Job Request)

Clients can edit job details, including:

- Job type (household help, companionship, caregiving, etc.)
- Whether the job should be online or offline
- Start date
- Frequency (one-time, weekly, biweekly, every four weeks)
- Preferred days & time slots
- Job description
- Presence of pets in the home

- Specific services requested

This section gives clients flexibility to modify job conditions even after hiring a worker.

Agenda Tab (Calendar)

A month, week, or day view of appointments is displayed, helping clients track upcoming sessions with workers.

Planning New Appointments

Clients can:

- Select one of their connected workers
- Indicate date & time of the appointment
- Set the number of working hours
- Choose appointment frequency
- Add any special circumstances

This structured system ensures clear communication & scheduling between clients and workers.

Invoices & Files Tab

Clients can view all invoices and documents received. However, unlike the worker dashboard, clients cannot upload files themselves.

Workers Tab

The Workers' section is divided into two tables:

1. All Workers

- Displays worker number, name, service type, and an unspecified "characteristic"
- Allows clients to:
 - Write a review
 - Plan a new appointment

2. Workers Employed Under RDAH (Home Services Regulation)

- Shows signed contracts between the worker and the client
- Provides legal & insurance information about RDAH employment

To clarify RDAH employment, Hups provides the following information:

Hiring a Worker Under the Home Services Regulation (RDAH)

You can easily hire someone for household jobs under the Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis (RDAH). View the terms of this regulation [here](#).

To simplify things, Hups prepares an online labor contract under RDAH.

Additionally, through Hups, you are insured for damages, accidents, and worker disability.

This section includes a detailed comparison between RDAH employment and full employment contracts under Hups.

3. Platform Governance

3.1. Organizational Structure

Hups operates with a limited and decentralized structure. The platform relies on a centralized customer service team that handles all incoming inquiries, including those from clients, workers, potential users, and external partners. Rather than actively managing worker–client relationships, the team adopts a more reactive role—responding to questions and monitoring platform activity without significant intervention. As the CEO of Hups explains, “Yes, actually, it is very limited. We have our own customer service team, but they simply handle all inquiries centrally—clients, service providers, potential clients, potential workers, and partner organizations. They also keep an eye on what happens on the platform, but in practice, their role is very limited.”

3.2. Use of Algorithms

Before the merge, Hlprs used to work with algorithms, but Hups does not rely on algorithms for worker selection. As the CEO of Hups explains:

“Look, we used to have algorithms, but they are no longer in place. At Hlprs, we did have an algorithm that used various criteria to determine how clients saw service providers. This could be based on factors such as when someone last logged in, distance, or reviews. However, that is no longer included. [...] In the end, our platform’s use of algorithms is quite limited. We don’t really work with specific algorithms. Instead, what’s important to us is that a service provider can create a profile themselves—who they are, what they do, how they work, where they want to work, and what they want to earn.”

Rather than an automated recruitment process, workers sign up freely, creating their own profiles and setting their own conditions. The only formal verification process in place is ID verification, done in collaboration with the platform’s payment provider, to confirm that users are real individuals and prevent fraud. “

What we do require is an ID verification. We do this in cooperation with our payment provider so that we know that Peter is actually Peter. That way, we can be sure that the people active on our platform are real, and if something happens, we have accurate data.” Unlike HomeWorks, Hups does not conduct formal interviews or screenings for workers on the platform, though those hired under an employment contract do undergo an intake process. However, employees under contract with Hups can still take on private clients through

the platform, without restrictions. *"No, there is no specific hiring process on the platform. If someone joins us as an employee, then there is an intake process with one of our staff members. But that doesn't mean they can't also work with private clients through the platform—it's separate relationships."*

3.3. Contracts and Employment Structures

Hups also operates under the RDAH framework, meaning clients are considered the legal employers of workers hired through the platform. As the CEO of Hups explains. *"We work with the Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis. This legal framework applies to household-related work and provides workers with some security. It's certainly better than working off the books, but it's not the same as a full employment contract. We ensure that workers receive at least the legal minimum wage, as well as vacation pay and vacation days. They also have the right to six weeks of paid sick leave."* Hups provides a standard employment contract template that clients and workers can use to formalize their arrangement. However, the CEO emphasizes that clients do not have to pay full employer contributions as long as they comply with the RDAH's three-day-per-week limit per worker:

There is a standard employment contract that clients and workers can use, ensuring that clients understand that they are the employers. However, they do not have to pay employer contributions as long as they follow the three-day-per-week limit. For household help, that's generally not a problem."

However, the employment status of workers can be ambiguous, as highlighted by a Hups client who noted confusion about whether a worker was employed by the platform or by them directly. *"I think the worker was employed by the platform, but I'm not entirely sure. She wasn't a freelancer, so she must have been employed somehow. But there was no employment contract between us directly."* (Hups client 1). Similarly, the workers also expressed uncertainty about their employment status, in the end determining it should be with the client. *"Yes, that was through [the platform], because those people pay directly. So that's still, yeah... Because they are actually intermediaries, right? That's what they are. Yeah, they're just sort of in between. They're intermediaries. So, you were actually more employed by the client."* (Hups worker).

This reflects the broader uncertainty in the domestic work sector, where platforms facilitate work but do not always provide clear employment structures for workers. While Hups ensures that workers meet legal wage requirements and receive sick pay, its employment framework remains decentralized, with clients bearing the legal responsibility for their hired workers.

4. Worker and client experiences and motivations

4.1. Demographics of the Workers

Using a client account created for this project, it was possible to view the demographics of workers on the platform. Hups displayed a significantly large and diverse pool of 132 workers in the same area. Few profiles had unfilled bios, and the majority included detailed descriptions of their experience, skills, and motivation for working on the platform. Almost everyone had a picture included, but not everyone of themselves (or a person). While the majority were still female and of Caucasian descent, a broader range of ages (from 18 to 70) and nationalities were represented. More workers indicated their age and country of origin, providing additional insight into their backgrounds. Similar to HomeWorks, some workers identified as students, while others highlighted extensive experience of over 15 years and noted family responsibilities such as having children. This diversity of workers was not always the case on Hups. A former client states: *“I found it completely uncomfortable. I really found it uncomfortable. It’s normally like a kind of catalog—this one, not that one. And the reason I found it uncomfortable was also because, at that moment, I was a man living alone. I found it a bit unsettling to see that only women were available for care and household work. That in itself isn’t necessarily a problem, but it created a certain discomfort in me that I wasn’t used to. Growing up, I was used to having help at home, but that was always within a family context. And here I was, a man living alone. And I know how creepy other men can be. I didn’t want that—I wanted to make sure I presented myself as a client in a way that didn’t come across as creepy. So, I thought about it for a long time, maybe longer than necessary. But I found it a very fascinating experience as well.”*(Hups client 2).

Not only does this show a change in the demographic of the platform, perhaps since the merge, but it also shows that not everyone is comfortable selecting workers, especially in the case of gender or other demographic disparities. The development of a more diverse crowd could make the platform more preferable in the current times.

4.2. Occupational trajectory

Hups Worker 1 approaches platform-based cleaning work from a practical and personally fulfilling perspective, rather than as part of a larger career plan. For them, the job provides movement, income, and a sense of usefulness. *“I found the work quite pleasant; it gave me a sense of fulfillment,”* they shared. A key motivator is the appreciation they receive from clients: *“Because, generally speaking, people were very satisfied.”* Unlike their HomeWorks counterpart, their commitment to the work is not driven by a long-term vocation in care but by the ability to stay active and contribute

meaningfully. They plan to continue for as long as their health allows: *“Well, I’m trying to do it for as long as I can.”*

4.3. Platform work motivations

Hups Worker 1 viewed platform work through a practical lens, seeing it as a way to stay active and supplement their income. They described the work as fulfilling and appreciated the positive feedback from clients: *“I try to keep doing this work as long as possible, not only for the extra money but also because it keeps me moving.”* Their choice to join Hups was motivated by the ease of accessing new clients, noting that the platform responded when they reached out for more work. They also expressed an affinity for the name “HuisCleaning,” finding the Dutch–English combination appealing. Their overall motivation was based on convenience, physical activity, and straightforward access to job opportunities.

Clients who used Hups also highlighted accessibility and simplicity as key factors. Hups Client 1 explained that they didn’t have personal connections to cleaners, and the platform filled that gap effectively: *“I couldn’t find someone via personal networks, so in that sense, it made everything more accessible.”* They admitted to not doing extensive research and were drawn to the platform partly because “the name sounded good.” Hups Client 2 shared a similarly pragmatic view, using the platform as a one-time tool to connect with a cleaner: *“I paid 25 euros to be connected with someone, and after that, I suggested we continue outside of the platform.”* Their decision was based on a quick comparison of prices and reviews, and Hups stood out as a reliable and well-reviewed option.

4.4. Platform use

Experiences with Hups revealed a more minimal and transactional platform structure. Hups Worker 1 created a visible profile during registration, which was used by the platform to match them with potential clients. While this visibility was intended to support the matching process, the worker did not feel the need to update the profile after signing up, explaining that they primarily relied on direct contact with clients. Their engagement with the platform remained limited: *“I registered once and didn’t change anything after that.”* They described the platform as *“functional,”* emphasizing that while it worked well for finding clients, they did not make use of additional features and did not find the platform especially engaging beyond its basic functions.

Clients using Hups reported varied experiences. Hups Client 1 found the system straightforward but lacking in choice: *“I had no choice. You didn’t get to see a profile or anything; you were just given a name.”* This strict form of algorithmic matching limited the client’s agency in selecting a cleaner and contributed to a more passive experience. Hups Client 2 described the platform differently, saying, *“It was strange, as if you were opening a catalog of people. They had ratings and reviews, and it felt unsettling to*

judge other people in this way." This marks a rather significant change between HuisCleaning and Hlprs, being the precursors of Hups. This discomfort, combined with the additional platform fees, led them to discontinue platform use after securing a cleaner.

4.5. Introduction meetings

For Hups Worker 1, the introduction meeting served as a moment to align expectations and get to know the client. However, the process included a formal step requiring documentation on the platform. As the worker explained, *"The introduction meeting had to be recorded in the app. You had to enter when it took place and confirm afterward."* While they found this requirement somewhat bureaucratic, they acknowledged that it contributed to tracking and accountability within the platform structure.

Clients on Hups had mixed perspectives on the necessity of these meetings. Hups Client 1 found them helpful but not always essential: *"I could already tell from our first messages whether it would work or not. But I understand why it's part of the process."* For them, the meetings were sometimes a formality, though still useful for ensuring mutual understanding before moving forward with the working relationship.

4.6. Connections and Relationships Between Workers and Clients

Hups worker 1 had multiple clients, but not all arrangements were successful. While they eventually found stability with a set of regular clients, they had previously cycled through several others due to various reasons, including scheduling conflicts and the temporary nature of the work: *"Technically, I had four. One never showed up, the second had to stop after one session, and another left after one or two visits"*

4.7. Reviews, feedback and reputation systems

Hups worker 1 received ratings from clients but did not actively seek higher scores, treating it as a background feature rather than something that directly influenced their work. They noted that receiving a high score was a sign of client satisfaction but did not strive for perfection: *"I got an 8-plus rating. I thought, well, that means they're satisfied. I'm not going to try for a 9 with this kind of work."* Despite the presence of ratings, Hups worker 1 did not report any direct impact on their ability to secure jobs. While clients were encouraged to provide feedback, workers did not always receive direct responses about their performance. The platform periodically sent out surveys to clients, but Hups worker 1 was unsure if these impacted their opportunities: *"Maybe they asked clients about their experience, but I don't know. At some point, clients received a questionnaire, I think."* Hups client 1 confirmed that while they provided occasional verbal feedback, they did not formally review their worker online: *"Of course, I gave feedback directly to her"*

when she asked for it. But on the platform? No, I don't think so". At one point, he received a questionnaire from the platform requesting feedback, but by then, he had already stopped using the service and chose not to fill it out. Others, like Hups client 2, disliked the entire concept of rating workers online, stating: *"I hate reviews. I find them dehumanizing. People can have a bad day, and others will write a bad review over one small thing. It's this distancing of people from each other that I don't agree with".*

4.8. Working conditions and the organization of working time and space

Hups Worker 1 also described a high level of independence in how they managed their time and tasks. They arranged work directly with each client and typically had three clients at a time, working about three hours per visit. The frequency of visits varied depending on the client's needs—some were weekly, others bi-weekly. They appreciated the freedom of working in homes where clients were absent during their shifts: *"In the last few years, I mostly worked at homes where no one was there. I liked that—it gave me real freedom."* While the worker felt confident managing tasks and time, they noted that institutional support from the platform was limited.

The emotional experience of working through Hups was largely shaped by the nature of the client relationships. The worker reported mostly positive interactions, saying, *"It gave me peace. It's work where you can think clearly, you're alone, and you get things done."* However, there were occasional challenges, such as working with clients who were forgetful or had high expectations, which could be mentally tiring. While the worker didn't report feeling unsafe, they managed emotional boundaries on their own, with little formal support from the platform. Like in other cases, tasks were typically discussed during the initial introduction meeting, and work rarely extended beyond the agreed-upon hours. If they had to cancel, the platform could try to find a substitute, but this was not always guaranteed. Overall, the job offered flexibility and solitude, but little in the way of structured protections or benefits.

4.9. New and old skills

Hups Worker 1 approached the platform work with an emphasis on continuing to be active rather than acquiring new skills. Drawing on a lifetime of experience, she did not express a strong intention to pursue further training or development within the platform. As she put it, *"At my age, no... I don't think that's realistic anymore. I'll keep doing this work as long as I can, but not with the idea of developing new skills."* Her focus remained on sustaining her current routines and client relationships rather than evolving professionally within the platform framework. For her, the work was about maintaining consistency, earning income, and staying physically and mentally engaged, rather than growth in a traditional vocational sense.

4.10. Perceived Risks and Vulnerabilities in Platform Work

Hups Worker 1 identified several physical and environmental risks associated with her cleaning work. These included physically demanding tasks and unsafe home environments. One recurring issue involved outdated or unstable equipment provided by clients. *“Sometimes they had these really old ladders... then I thought: I’m not going to climb that!”* The physical strain of the work, combined with occasional disregard for safety, meant that the worker had to regularly assess what was acceptable and when to refuse certain tasks. Unlike more structured employment environments, the platform offered minimal support in such situations, leaving decisions about risk entirely in the hands of the worker.

While the worker did not report emotional or interpersonal harm, she—like many in domestic work—had to balance care, caution, and assertiveness without institutional backup. The autonomy she appreciated in the job also meant she had to navigate any uncomfortable or hazardous situations independently, with limited recourse to formal platform protections or interventions.

4.11. Contact with Unions and Worker Representation

Hups Worker 1 reported no contact with trade unions or worker representation bodies and expressed neither a need nor a desire to reach out, even when faced with limited social protections such as the absence of paid sick leave or employer-provided insurance. Although she acknowledged the lack of structural support, she did not consider union involvement as a potential avenue for addressing these gaps. Likewise, none of the clients interviewed through Hups had interacted with any form of labor representation in the context of hiring or managing cleaners. This overall absence of engagement underscores the individualized nature of platform work and the relative invisibility of collective support structures in the domestic service sector.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The case of Hups reveals the complexities and contradictions inherent in platform-mediated domestic labor in the Netherlands. On one hand, the platform offers workers a degree of autonomy, flexibility, and a practical route to secure household-based employment. Workers appreciate the ability to manage their time, select clients, and maintain independence in task execution. At the same time, however, the decentralization of Hups' structure limits the level of institutional support available. Workers navigate risks, boundary management, and emotional labor largely on their own, with minimal formal protection or mediation from the platform.

From the client perspective, Hups is valued for its accessibility and ability to match household needs with available service providers. Yet this convenience sometimes comes at the cost of transparency and personalization. Clients expressed discomfort with aspects of the matching process, particularly the reliance on profiles and reviews, and several moved off-platform once a stable relationship with a cleaner was established. These dynamics underscore how platform efficiency can coexist with unease, particularly when it comes to trust, privacy, and interpersonal compatibility. Hups' current model, rooted in the Regeling Dienstverlening aan Huis (RDAH), positions the platform as a facilitator rather than an employer. While this model allows for legal compliance and minimal administrative burden, it also results in blurred lines of responsibility and limited social protections for workers. The absence of union engagement or collective organization further reinforces the individualized, and often isolated, experience of both workers and clients.

Despite these limitations, Hups remains a significant actor in the Dutch domestic labor sector. Its evolving form, from HuisCleaning to Hlprs to Hups, reflects broader trends in platform work: consolidation, diversification, and growing tension between regulation and informality. Whether Hups can fulfill its stated aim of offering a “better-regulated and fairer” alternative to the black market depends on future efforts to improve support structures, clarify roles, and ensure mutual accountability for those who use the platform.

For a broader (comparative) analysis of Hups, see the overarching report by Hesselink & Been (2025).

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Work Package 3 – Deliverable 3

SPAIN

CASE STUDY 1

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1. Introduction

Spain's long-standing reliance on familial and informal care models has been progressively reshaped by demographic aging, female labor participation, and state underinvestment in public care infrastructure. In this vacuum, digital care platforms have rapidly expanded, offering new forms of intermediation between caregivers and households. While promoted as technological solutions to care scarcity, these platforms raise several questions about algorithmic governance, labor precariousness, and the reconfiguration of employment relations in the care sector.

This report analyses three of these platforms: Cuideo, Care.com and Senniors. These platforms have been selected after a mapping exercise of platforms in Spain and they represent different types or models. Despite their focus on care provision, they nonetheless exhibit differences along several dimensions, including the range of services offered, the role of algorithmic management, the way in which the employment relation is formalised etc. The comparative analysis serves to highlight the diverse landscape of digital intermediation in the care market and its impact on care provision and employment conditions.

The analysis of the platforms should be put at the light of legal developments in Spain. The Spanish Rider Law (Law 12/2021) was introduced to address the misclassification of platform workers as self-employed, especially in sectors like food delivery. Its implications extend to other digital platforms, including those in the care sector. Platforms such as Cuideo, Care.com, and Senniors have responded by refraining from directly dictating employment conditions. Instead, they present themselves as intermediaries, leaving employment formalities to families while maintaining significant control over matching, scheduling, and evaluations. This strategy allows them to circumvent employer responsibilities, raising however concerns about legal accountability and the protection of care workers in increasingly algorithm-driven environments.

This has three important implications for the way in which care platforms operate in Spain. First, they've predominantly adopted the placement agency model, with a specialisation in care provision, taking advantage of the accessibility that digital platforms allow. This explains why the use of the word 'platform' in the interviews referring to the phenomenon studied was received with some perplexity and generated confusion. Care workers in these platforms do not perceive themselves as platform workers and don't see Cuideo, Senniors or even Care.com as platforms along the lines of delivery food platforms like Glovo, Deliveroo or Just Eat. Secondly, the role of the platform as employer is limited to a small number of employees, usually the most skilled or those operating under public funding. Thirdly, forms of algorithmic

management in these platforms are soft and mostly limited to matching and selection process. However, some other instances of algorithmic control are also appearing.

1.1. Digital Care Platforms in Spain: the cases of Cuideo, Care.com and Senniors

Several studies have analysed the rapid expansion of digital platforms in Spain's care sector as a consequence of socio-economic transformations that include a growing demand for home-based eldercare, reduced availability of unpaid female labor, and insufficient long-term care (LTC) public provisioning (Galí 2021, Martínez-Buján 2024, Rodríguez-Modroño 2025). These conditions have fostered the emergence of many of these platforms, that can be categorized into:

- On-demand platforms (e.g., Familiados)
- Marketplaces (e.g., Sitly, Care.com)
- Digital placement agencies (DPAs) — including Cuideo, Senniors, and others

Among these, Cuideo and Senniors have pioneered the integration of technological tools with traditional care agency models. Care.com, by contrast, is a global marketplace offering minimal intermediation and emphasizing user self-selection.

Both Cuideo and Senniors function as digital placement agencies, directly involved in the recruitment, vetting, and management of caregivers. Their business model involves an upfront payment by families and recurring administrative fees. Caregivers are usually hired under Spain's special domestic employment regime, which offers fewer protections than general labor law. Cuideo handles administrative tasks such as social security registration. Senniors follows a similar model to that of Cuideo, but positions itself as a "home health" caretech startup, offering both traditional care and clinical services. In contrast, Care.com represents the marketplace model, with minimal oversight or support for employment formalization. It simply connects users through digital interfaces. This model thrives on scalability and low operational overhead but provides little worker protection.

Across all three platforms the concept of algorithmic management (AM), understood as the reliance on algorithmic systems that use tracked data and other information to organize, assign, monitor, supervise and evaluate workers (ILO 2024) can only be applied to some areas. Compared to food delivery platforms, which would be close to the AM ideal type, the reliance on algorithms in the case of care platforms in Spain is more limited. In the cases analysed, algorithms are used mostly for matching between clients and caregivers and performance monitoring via client ratings. For example, Cuideo uses Affinity, a semi-automated matching system that shortlists workers for each request. Senniors applies algorithmic control in multiple layers, ranging from the pre-selection of caregivers using a scoring algorithm to the collection of care activities data through the Senniors app. Moreover, AM tools like rating-based penalties, and availability-based rankings are commonly used by platforms including Cuideo and Care.com. For example, a low rating may lead to fewer job offers or even exclusion

from the platform. Care.com ranks caregivers by response rate, review score, and premium subscription leading workers to compete in a visibility-based labour market.

1.2. Employment and working conditions: stepping stones towards formal employment or perpetuation of precarity?

The three platforms analysed stand in different points in relation to its role in facilitating the formalisation of employment in the care of sector and guaranteeing decent working conditions. Both Cuideo and Senniors claim a semi-formal or formal approach towards the employment relation, where workers are hired either directly (Cuideo's Felizvita) or through verified matches that result in employment contracts (Cuideo Selección). Cuideo relies strongly on AI-based matching (Affinity algorithm) and provides administrative services like payroll and contract formalization. Its growth strategy includes public-private partnerships and acquisitions like Felizvita. Senniors, meanwhile, integrates healthcare professionals in the care planning process, requiring digital literacy and often certified qualifications for caregivers. It uses predictive analytics via its Florence platform. Both Cuideo and Senniors present themselves as formal intermediaries, facilitating contracts between families and caregivers. Yet, legal responsibility remains ambiguous. Workers are technically employed by the families, not the platform, creating a grey area of legal accountability. Unlike the other two, Care.com is a non-intervening platform, offering no contract support or worker vetting. Its monetization relies on premium subscriptions paid by workers and clients in order to gain visibility and enhance the possibility to be hired. This model places the full burden on users (care seekers and caregivers) to determine contract terms therefore externalizing all responsibility and fostering informality.

The differences between employment relations models have a reflection on working conditions. Cuideo and Senniors maintain some formal employment channels, ensuring at least minimum wage compliance in most cases. However, delayed updates, underpayment, or unpaid extra hours remain frequent complaints. Care.com workers, by contrast, often operate in the informal economy, with huge disparities between workers and precariousness.

Across all platforms, the tasks to be performed remain a highly contentious issue. Cuideo workers for instance, especially those under the Selección scheme, report being asked to perform unrelated tasks like heavy cleaning or furniture moving. Senniors caregivers must document all care activities, effectively extending their job burden into digital and emotional labor. Care.com caregivers often accept expanded roles without renegotiating compensation, due to client pressure and reputational fear.

Finally, the issue of skills and training plays a key role in the context of digital care platforms. Here the three platforms also exhibit significant differences. Senniors demands higher credentials, especially for specialized roles (e.g., speech therapy), and

partially invests in skill development. Cuideo prioritizes experience but does not enforce training. Finally, Care.com accepts self-reported skills without any validation, reducing the incentive for formal qualification. None of the platforms offers systematic upskilling or long-term professional development pathways. Table 1 provides a summary of the differences between the three platforms in key dimensions.

Table 1: Summary of key dimensions between the three care platforms analysed

<i>Platform</i>	<i>Business Model</i>	<i>Employment Role</i>	<i>Algorithmic Control</i>	<i>Employment relation</i>
<i>Cuideo</i>	Digital placement agency	Mixed (family or platform)	Medium (matching, reviews)	Semi-formal, minimum wage, admin support
<i>Senniors</i>	Digital placement agency with healthcare integration	Mixed, with de facto control	Medium-High (matching, real-time care data through app)	Higher requirements, better organization
<i>Care.com</i>	Marketplace	None, full user discretion	Moderate (rating, nudges)	Informal, unprotected, wide pay range

Source: Own elaboration

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this report has combined several strategies in order to do the fieldwork. But before entering into the different methods and the steps followed as well as the difficulties faced in this process, it is important to make some considerations about the activity and target group. (Long-term) care workers are by definition dispersed, except for those in residences. This already introduces a first difficulty due their isolation and fragmentation. The ways to overcome these obstacles and get in touch with them are many, and several of them have been used in order to elaborate this report. However, things get significantly easier if the group believes there is a unfair treatment and they start engaging into some form of collective organisation. When this is the case, as it happened for instance with the food delivery riders (that created some grass-root organisations like Riders x Derechos, Asoriders etc. but that also were organised by general trade unions like CCOO or UGT), getting in touch with the organisation representing this group was an relatively easy since

they already shared some spaces of collective organisation. Moreover, riders had also meeting points in the large cities that also facilitated this task.

Compared to riders from food delivery platforms, care platforms in Spain lack these two characteristics. First, care platforms workers in Spain have so far exhibited a very limited, not to say inexistent organisation. As showed in the interviews done so far, there is no engagement with trade unions nor collective organisation, beyond what can be seen in traditional care work companies. Part of the reason for this is the absence of a sense of injustice among care workers in these platforms (except perhaps for Care.com), but also lack of a professional / occupational identity. Secondly, these workers remain dispersed and due to the long working days, usually combining two or even three jobs, it's really hard for them to physically meet. But these workers haven't developed virtual space communities in Facebook or other social networks facilitating this type of exchange.

The strategy followed in order to reach out to care workers at the selected platforms has combined different strategies and channels, depending on the target group. Interviews have been carried out for three groups: trade unions, representatives of employer organisations representing care companies, management of platforms, care workers at platforms.

The first strategy consisted in contacting trade unions with a twofold aim. First, to do some exploratory interviews as well as to see whether they've been organising these workers. The interviews revealed limited engagement of trade unions with workers in these platforms and didn't help much to get contacts with workers. On the case of Sindicato SAD, a couple of interviews were made with workers that had worked for Cuideo but were now working for a similar platform operating at Catalan level (Qida).

Table 2: Trade unions contacted

Trade union	Person	Position	Interview (Yes / No)
CCOO	Irene Galí, Mariña Couceiro	Researchers at the Research Foundation Cipriano García	Yes
CCOO	Liliana Reyes	Head of the New Realities of Work Departament	No
Sindicato SAD	Esther Sagues	Head of Communication	Yes

Sindicato de Trabajadoras del Hogar y Cuidados	No specific person contacted	–	Contacted by email. Never got a response
Sindicato de trababajadoras de cuidados sin papeles de Barcelona	No specific person contacted	–	Contacted by email. Declined the invitation for an interview because they don't have resources to attend researchers

Regarding employer organisations, none of the platforms analysed are members of employer associations. The interviews to the employer were made in order to understand the logics of collective action in the case of employers. Two employer organisations were contacted. The first was ADIGITAL, an employer organisation representing the interests of companies in the technological sector. The second was one of the employer organisations signing the national-level collective agreement for the care sector.

Table 3: Employer Organisations contacted

Employer organisation	Person	Position	Interview (Yes / No)
ADIGITAL	Miguel Ferrer	Head of Public Policy	No – declined to do an interview
ASADE	Javier Sigüenza	Director	Yes

The third group of actors has been the management of care platforms analysed. Also in this case, it has been hard to get in touch with some of the platforms. The strategy followed to get in touch with has been through LinkedIn and email contacts. In the case of Cuideo and Senniors, contacts with founders and CEOs of the platforms have been made through LinkedIn. In both cases, short online interviews were held.

Table 4: Management of Care Platforms

Platform	Person	Position	Interview (Yes / No)
Cuideo	Guillermo Molina	CEO of Cuideo	Yes

Care.com	Contacted to a generic email from the webpage	Unknown	No
Senniors	Claudia Gomez	Founder of Senniors and CEO	Yes

Finally, when it comes to contacting workers at the platforms, several mechanisms have been used. After noticing that contacts through trade unions didn't work as expected, other strategies were used. First, social networks were used. In particular, using the Premium subscription of LinkedIn, a search of profiles reporting themselves as workers of these platforms was made. This worked in the case of Cuideo and Senniors, where contacts were made with 16 and 13 workers respectively. To all the workers contacted, a message was sent through messaging service of LinkedIn explaining the project and offering a 30 reward for an interview. Only in a limited number of cases, workers replied back showing interest; 5 in the case of Cuideo, 4 in the case of Senniors. After writing back them, only in some cases a response was obtained and an interview was arranged (See table 5).

Banner used in social network

¿Ofreces servicios de cuidados y limpieza doméstica a través de Care.com, Cuideo o Senniors?

Desde el Centro de Estudios Sociológicos sobre la Vida Cotidiana y el Trabajo de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona estamos colaborando en el proyecto europeo ORIGAMI (<https://origamiproject.it/>) para estudiar las plataformas de cuidados y servicios a domicilio en España.

🔍 Buscamos **trabajadoras del hogar y cuidadoras** que hayan prestado servicios a través de las plataformas **Care.com, Cuideo o Senniors** para participar en una entrevista anónima.

Detalles de la entrevista:

- ✓ Duración: Máximo 1 hora
- ✓ Totalmente anónima y confidencial
- ✓ Flexible y adaptada a tu disponibilidad y ubicación
- ✓ Opción de hacerla online
- ✓ Remunerada con **30€** 💰

Si te interesa participar o necesitas más información, puedes contactarme por correo electrónico en **Irina.Casanovas@uab.cat**.

¡Muchas gracias!

UAB
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The other strategy followed was to join Facebook groups of care workers. Three active groups were identified and contacted. Only in two cases, the moderators of the group accepted to publish an announcement similar to that used for LinkedIn, where the project was explained and a 30 euro reward was offered. No reply was achieved in the case of Facebook

- Empleadas de hogar/cuidadoras en España con Contrato (Domestic workers/caregivers in Spain with a contract)
- Empleadas de hogar, cuidadoras y niñeras en España (Domestic workers, caregivers, and nannies in Spain)
- Cuidadoras Latinas en Barcelona (Latin American caregivers in Barcelona)

Table 5: Interviews with trade unions

Platform	Contact channel	Date	Characteristics
Cuideo	Linkedin	March 2025	Woman, Migrant Origin, 50s
Senniors	Linkedin	April 2025	Woman, Spanish, 40s
Cuideo	Personal network	February 2025	Woman, Migrant Origin, 40s
Qida	Trade union	March 2025	Woman, Spanish, 60s
Qida	Trade union	March 2025	Woman, Spanish, 60s
Care.com	Premium subscription Care.com	May 2025	Man, Migrant, 40w
Care.com	Premium subscription Care.com	May 2025	Woman, Migrant, 50s

A third strategy consisted in using personal networks in order to contact workers. Relying on contacts from the researchers involved, it was possible to arrange one interview with a Cuideo worker.

A fourth strategy was used only for Care.com. Contrary to Cuideo or Senniors, Care.com workers do not have any presence in social or professional networks like LinkedIn or Facebook. Moreover, it was also impossible to contact workers from this platform relying on personal contacts. It was decided to register in the platform and pay the Premium subscription in order to have access to workers' profiles and reach

them. Contact with workers was made in two occasions, offering also a 30 euro reward.

A relevant finding, which confirms some of the insights already mentioned has been the impossibility to snowballing in any of the channels used. Whenever a contact was made through any of the channels / strategies mentioned above, and we asked workers whether they could provide us with contacts from colleagues working for the same or similar platforms, the answer most of the times was that they didn't know anybody. And when they knew someone, contacts didn't work because they no longer worked for the platform, which suggests a high rotation.

Information coming out from interviews has been complemented with other sources, including reports, and academic papers. Moreover, pages containing reviews by either workers or clients of care platforms have also been analysed.

3. The case of Cuideo

3.1. Introduction to the platforms and main characteristics

3.1.1. General characteristics of the platform

Cuideo is a privately owned company that operates in the personal and domestic care sector, particularly long-term care for elderly and dependent persons. It provides in-home services including full-time, part-time, and 24-hour care, though it is rapidly expanding the number and type of services provided. It is officially registered as a placement company. Hence, the platform operates as a digital agency that intermediates between families in need of care services (as well as other domestic services) and a pool of vetted caregivers. Although some of its functions resemble those of a placement agency, recent legal decisions (STSJ Catalunya 1/3/2022; Social 15 Barcelona 20/06/2023) indicate that in many cases, Cuideo assumes characteristics of an employer, especially when it manages payments and determines pricing (see below).

Cuideo was founded in 2016 by Adrià Buzón and brothers Roberto and Alejandro Valdés in Barcelona, where it has the headquarters. The idea arose from a personal experience where the founders struggled to find professional care for a relative. They identified inefficiencies in traditional agencies and decided to apply technology to improve matching and care delivery. It rapidly became the largest company in the sector, growing thanks to several (so far successful) crowdfunding rounds. A notable €5 million round in 2022 included investments from Atresmedia, Inderhabs Investments, and Mundi Ventures. Previously, in 2020, it secured €1.6 million led by Alma Mundi Ventures. The capital has supported territorial expansion, branding, and

technological investment, especially in AI matching systems like Cuideo Affinity (PlantaDoce, 2022). But it has allowed to increase staff and open new physical offices. Initially based in Barcelona, Cuideo has expanded nationwide with operations in Madrid, Zaragoza, Málaga, Sevilla, Bilbao, Vigo, and Valladolid. It was also active in France, specifically Paris, aiming to establish a wider European presence that however doesn't seem to be happening soon. The company announced intentions to have 20 physical offices by the end of 2025 (Bertero, 2024).

Cuideo claims to be the largest care platform in Spain, aiming to reach 10% market share by the end of 2026 (Juárez 2023). Despite strong growth, Cuideo only covers approximately 1.5–2% of the Spanish private eldercare market.

As part of the expansion that the company is experiencing, it is also adding new services to its portfolio. The goal is to acquire new companies or establishing partnerships that can expand Cuideo's range of services and provide customers with a comprehensive home care service. Thus, the company is looking for including financial services, wellness, leisure, products, technology, and anything else that can improve the care of individuals and families.

In its goal of expanding its home care services, Cuideo is also developing new services internally. The company plans to begin providing legal services to manage various legal procedures that families may require, from dependency laws to wills and powers of attorney. Another development Cuideo is implementing is psychological support services for the families of people who require care.

Cuideo offers three main models of care provision and management:

- **Cuideo Selección:** The family contracts the caregiver directly, but Cuideo selects the caregiver and handles administrative tasks, including drafting a contract that is made under the domestic worker social security regime and that can be full-time or part-time internal care. Cuideo is in charge of selecting the caregiver and carrying out all the procedures, but the contractual relationship is established with the family.
- **Felizvita (acquired in 2022):** Caregivers are employed directly by Cuideo, especially in services regulated under public care schemes in Madrid and Barcelona. which focuses on needs with less dedication (only in Madrid and Barcelona), and that are regulated within the framework by public programs of support to dependent persons. In this case the staff is employed by Cuideo.
- **Cuideo Assist:** A remote care solution offering telecare, fall detection, and emotional support via mobile technology.

3.1.2. How It Works

The way the platform works is very similar to other care or domestic service platforms in Spain. On the one hand, workers have to register in the platform. In the registration

process, workers are required to upload their CVs and Identity documents. Once registered, the person can have access to the database of job offerings.

On the other side, families enter the platform via the website or phone, stating their care needs. There are two main modalities, as explained in the previous section, depending on who is the employer and whether it is compatible with public funding through the Dependency Law (see table 6). In the case of SAD (Home care services), the employer is Cuideo.

Table 6: Different modalities of service provision at Cuideo

	Cuideo Selección – Family Management	Cuideo Felizvita – SAD (Home Care Service)
Who employs the caregiver?	The family	Felizvita (by Cuideo)
Is it compatible with the Dependency Law or service voucher?	No	Yes
In which areas is it available?	All of Spain	Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, Bilbao, Seville, and Málaga
Is there a permanence commitment?	No	No
Can it be live-in care?	Yes	Yes
Can it be one-off services?	Yes	Yes
What are the caregivers like?	Mandatory experience and references. Specific training depending on the case	Mandatory experience and references. Specific training depending on the case

Source: extracted from Cuideo.com

In order to match families and workers, Cuideo's relies on an AI-powered system, Cuideo Affinity. This algorithm matches suitable caregivers from its database. The algorithm preselects candidates based on factors like proximity, experience, and availability. A bot contacts them via WhatsApp, and interested caregivers are flagged to human managers who finalize the selection.

Contracts and legal documentation are managed digitally. A personal manager is assigned to each family to support onboarding and address subsequent concerns. For

Cuideo Selección, although caregivers are not directly employed by the platform, Cuido handles social security registration and payroll services. In exchange, the family pays a monthly fee.

3.2. Platform governance

3.2.1. Employees and Carers

Cuido employs approximately 150 internal staff, focusing on operations, HR, client services, and technology. These numbers have been growing thanks to the expansion in services, but also to the opening of physical offices in different cities.

Moreover, it directly employs about 1,000 caregivers, especially under the Felizvita model (publicly-funded home-care assistance). The broader database includes over 100,000 profiles, although only a fraction are verified and active.

Workers are mostly women (approx. 80%), with a majority being migrant women from Latin America, aged 40–55. These workers often bring experience but may lack formal care certifications. Entry into the Cuido database is more selective compared to platforms like Care.com, and requires a two-step validation: CV submission and video interview.

3.2.2. Contracts and Communication

Cuido caregivers may work under different arrangements:

- In Cuido Selección, they are contracted by the families but managed via the platform with the legal support of Cuido
- In Felizvita, they are formal employees of Cuido.

All relationships established through Cuido are formalised into a contract, so that there is no room for informal practices / contracts.

In the case of Cuido Selección, working conditions are negotiated with the family. Even though Cuido doesn't oblige to follow a predetermined salary scale, working conditions should be in line with the statutory minima included in the Special Social Security Regime for domestic workers. Workers in this case are generally paid the statutory minimum wage. In the case of Felizvita, working conditions must comply with collective agreements signed at national, regional and local levels.

Communication between the families and Cuido occurs via integrated tools, including WhatsApp bots and phone support. There is no dedicated mobile app for caregivers.

3.2.3. Organizational Structure

Cuido is led by CEO and co-founder Adrià Buzón. It follows a functional structure with departments dedicated to technology (including AI development), customer service, HR, marketing, and operations. The acquisition of Felizvita has added local

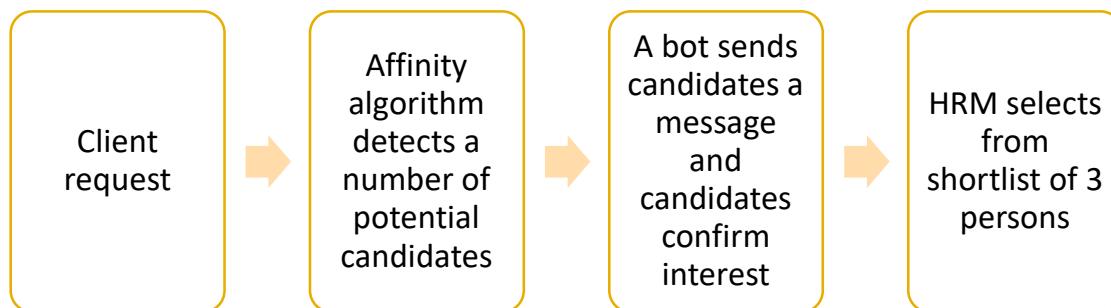
management units in the largest cities in Spain, including Madrid and Barcelona. Guideo also has a legal-administrative team handling contracts, compliance, and relations with social security.

The company works to integrate care managers (“gestoras personales”) who follow up with families and act as liaisons with caregivers. This hybrid structure allows for scalability while maintaining service personalization.

3.2.4. HRM and Algorithmic Management

As has been mentioned previously, there is no app for caregivers nor a direct oversight. However, the use of algorithms and forms of algorithmic control are present. The management of the company is particularly proud of its selection process, which gives them their competitive advantage over other platforms and ensures client satisfaction. The key for the success of this process is that it combines algorithmic tools with human oversight. The Guideo Affinity algorithm preselects caregivers based on compatibility with clients and user preferences / demands. Integration with WhatsApp bots allows rapid outreach to preselected candidates. Then HR managers assess candidates CVs, confirm suitability, have interviews and make the final selection.

Figure 1: The matching and selection process at Guideo through the Affinity algorithm



Source: Own elaboration

From the interview with management it has become clear that Guideo hasn't undergone any form of algorithmic consultancy on the Affinity algorithm. According to management, the algorithm takes into account demands by the client as well as the characteristics of the candidate, including the rating it has obtained, with no in-built bias. According to management, selection is officially based on experience, references, and, where applicable, training. However, they also admit that in practice, experience remains the most valued criterion; having worked before and having got a good rating enhances the probability of selection. This reputational system puts caregivers under algorithmic visibility pressures as negative feedback from clients can reduce future work opportunities, even in cases of minor conflict, as we'll see in section 3.

When it comes to contracts and payroll, they're all automated, enabling a small administrative team to manage thousands of monthly transactions.

3.2.5. Division of Labour and Complexity of Tasks

Tasks vary depending on the care model and the client's needs. They range from companionship and domestic tasks (light cleaning, cooking) to complex care (medication, mobility assistance). Workers often perform multiple roles simultaneously.

There are concerns about task overload — caregivers report being asked to perform cleaning duties or night shifts without prior agreement. Lack of formal job descriptions in many contracts exacerbates this ambiguity. Training is not mandatory, though Cuideo encourages professionalization and offers public educational materials.

3.2.6. Role of Technologies and Data Processes

Cuideo heavily integrates digital technology into its operation. The Cuideo Affinity algorithm uses data from profiles, geolocation, and historical matching to optimize candidate selection. Matching processes are semi-automated, combining algorithmic filtering with human judgment.

The platform handles administrative processes (social security, payroll) digitally, streamlining service delivery. It also uses data to monitor service quality through customer feedback and flags issues for follow-up.

Concerns exist over data asymmetry: caregivers have limited insight into how their profiles are ranked or penalized. Additionally, reputation systems are client-dominated — workers cannot rate clients, contributing to potential power imbalances.

3.3. Platform workers

3.3.1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Workers on Cuideo

Cuideo's workforce primarily comprises middle-aged migrant women, a demographic profile that aligns with broader trends in Spain's care sector. According to internal data and interviews, around 35% of Cuideo caregivers are Latin American women in their 40s and 50s, with the rest being a mix of other migrant groups and a minority of Spanish nationals. The socio-demographic composition reveals a deeply intersectional profile—characterized by gender, migratory status, race, and age. There seems to be some differences depending on the type of service. In the case of Cuideo Selección, there is a higher prevalence of migrant profiles compared to Felizvita. In that sense, platforms replicate existing segregation patterns of femised care work as most workers are women performing caregiving, domestic cleaning, and emotional support services under precarious conditions. This situation often results in "triple marginalization": as women, as migrants, and as low-income workers.

3.3.2. Occupational Trajectories of Cuideo's Workers

Most Cuideo workers have extensive experience in informal or semi-formal employment before joining the platform. As reported by multiple workers' organizations and legal documents, prior careers often include domestic work, child-rearing, or unregistered elder care roles in Spain or their countries of origin. Few possess formal qualifications in geriatric or sociosanitary services. Cuideo itself values experience over credentials, making formal education optional rather than mandatory. The occupational history of many Cuideo caregivers is shaped by precariousness and exclusion from the formal labor market. For migrant women, their work trajectories often begin with unregulated caregiving or cleaning, followed by gradual inclusion into legal employment via intermediaries like Cuideo. Nevertheless, Cuideo offers slightly more regulated pathways compared to the wider informal market, although significant gaps in labor protections persist. The platform partially formalizes labor through employment contracts for selected caregivers, but does not provide structural mechanisms for long-term career progression or formal qualification paths. Still, workers interviewed report intentions to remain working at the platform before the lack of more attractive alternatives.

Within Cuideo there are also differences between Cuideo Selección and Felizvita. In general, workers in Felizvita have a longer experience in the care sector, report higher qualifications and skills and have enjoyed more stability than workers in Cuideo Selección.

3.3.3. Motivations for Choosing Cuideo

The decision to work with Cuideo, rather than other platforms, is driven by a mixture of economic, practical, and reputational reasons. Interviews reveal its reputation for higher job security compared to unregulated alternatives like Care.com, as the main reason for selecting Cuideo. Cuideo's commitment to formal contracts and better client matching is a major appeal in a sector where informality is high. Formal contracts, though often with low wages, together with access to social security are pointed out as key motivations for choosing Cuideo. Low wages come out as the main shortcoming, but since this is the norm in the sector, it doesn't become a motivation not to choose the platform or to leave it.

In comparison to platforms that merely function as digital marketplaces (e.g., Care.com), Cuideo presents itself as a more structured intermediary. From that point of view, many workers see Cuideo as a good way to continue or start a career. For starters, Cuideo gives the possibility to get in touch with potential employers / families that may look to establish long-term employment relationships outside the platform.

But if this doesn't happen, most of the workers interviewed see Cuideo as a good alternative to informality or unemployment.

3.3.4. Nature of Work Conducted via Cuideo

Another aspect that remains controversial at Cuideo, as came out from interviews, is the type of tasks to be performed by the worker. As pointed earlier, Cuideo offers three main service lines: Cuideo Selección (long-term internal or part-time external care), Felizvita (light care tied to public dependency programs in the largest cities in Spain), and Cuideo Assist (remote monitoring via mobile devices). In principle, under the care label, workers may perform a broad range of care-related tasks, including bathing, feeding, medication supervision, emotional support, and light domestic tasks. Depending on the line of service, the load of care tasks maybe different. In the case of Cuideo Selección, since workers are hired by families, they may ask for a wider range of tasks to workers. However, in the case of Felizvita, since the relationship is established under public funding scheme, there is in principle less room for discretion. The classification of these tasks under "domestic" versus "professional" care roles has direct implications for wages, training requirements, and legal protections. While Cuideo asserts that it distinguishes between profiles, in practice, the roles blur, often to the worker's detriment.

Despite the service labels and what is established in the announcement and the contract, there is often a mismatch between advertised duties and actual tasks performed. Many caregivers (especially under Selección) report taking on cleaning, laundry, and other labor-intensive tasks without prior agreement or training. In some instances, they are responsible for individuals with severe pathologies like Alzheimer's or terminal conditions without any formal medical preparation. As a matter of fact, Cuideo is now launching special care lines for persons with these pathologies, in order to ensure that they can provide skilled assistance to these persons.

3.3.5. Platform Control and Reputation Mechanisms

One of the most controversial issues regarding platforms is the type of employment relationship. At the heart of the so-called Riders' Law in 2021 was precisely the need to recognise work carried out in the platform fitting into a dependent employment relationship where both working conditions and the organisation of work were determined by the platform. In a similar vein, domestic service platforms have been accused of similar practices and have been investigated by the Labour Inspectorate. In the case of Cuideo, especially for Cuideo Selección, the platform doesn't directly oversee nor manages the worker. The employment relationship, including the tasks to be performed, working conditions etc., is established between the client (family) and

care worker. There is accordingly no direct algorithmic control over the worker, nor any app whereby the workers' performance is registered.

However, there are indirect forms of algorithmic control, as pointed out by interviewees. Cuideo exercises algorithmic control over workers primarily through the Affinity system, which matches caregivers with clients based on criteria such as availability, proximity, and client preferences. However, the key control mechanism is the client feedback system. Workers face ongoing pressure from reviews—both explicit and implicit—which shape their access to future jobs. Negative ratings or the threat of a poor review serve as an indirect form of discipline for the workers. Such reputational threats disproportionately impact women with low skills and more limited alternatives in the labour market, hence reinforcing patterns of self-censorship and emotional labor.

The weight that ratings and clients' feedback have on the algorithm is unknown. However, from the interviews it has become clear that is probably the most important dimension when assigning care workers to families, even compared to experience and seniority in the platform.

3.3.6. Professional Identity and Worker Communities

The development of a professional identity among Cuideo caregivers is in general weak among workers in the platform. While Cuideo markets itself as fostering professionalism (by stressing the need for care workers in their platform to have the adequate skills, promote training etc.), workers often report a sense of marginalization due to the lack of formal recognition (as care workers), minimal interaction with other colleagues, and the platform's transactional orientation which may produce a high rotation. Similarly to other workers in the care sector, poor working conditions, also contribute to a sense of limited professional recognition, where care work is often considered just as domestic work. The platform offers some professional support through digital materials and training opportunities, but this remains insufficient for building a cohesive occupational identity among workers in the platform.

Another point raised by interviewees is the high rotation in the platform as well as the simultaneous work at several platforms, which precludes creating strong links among Cuideo workers. This is especially the case for Cuideo Selección, since there is a high variance in the type of contract and duration, due to different family needs. However, the lack of structured peer support or regular coordination from Cuideo hinders long-term identity development. As pointed out by in the interviews, Cuideo doesn't provide any phora to reflect about their experiences or get feedback.

Moreover, some of the workers interviewed have stressed that the platform is often taken as a stepping stone towards a more stable employment as home-in carer.

In recent years there has been an increase in Communities of practice among caregivers are largely informal and driven by grassroots organizing. Some of these platforms have been created out of discontent by care workers regarding working conditions and lack of attention by the most representative trade unions. Platforms like Territorio Doméstico and new unions like Sintrahocu or Sindicato SAD have gained importance in giving voice to care workers, very often in informal employment relationships. Moreover, they've contributed to help care workers to create networks, share resources, and asserting collective identity. These communities foster solidarity, particularly among migrant women who face linguistic and racial barriers. For instance, there is a specific trade union for undocumented care workers in Barcelona (Sindicato de Mujeres Cuidadoras sin Papeles). Yet, the involvement of care platform workers in these communities remains very limited.

3.3.7. Matching and Client Relationships

Cuideo's matching system relies on its proprietary algorithm (Cuideo Affinity) which as showed in Figure 1, works in tandem with human input from the HR team. This process begins with the digital vetting of CVs, followed by interviews and geolocation matching. There is no specific information about the metrics used by the algorithm or the weight assigned to the dimensions considered in the matching process. However, the perception of workers suggests that experience and ratings obtained from clients and families often outweighs skills and qualifications. Moreover, they believe that personal characteristics (e.g., nationality, demeanor) significantly influence final selections.

In some review portals, Cuideo clients (families) have pointed out to difficulties related to the selection and quality of caregivers provided by Cuideo. Some comments highlight that the assigned professionals did not have the appropriate experience or training to care for people with specific needs, such as the care of Alzheimer's patients. For instance, one user mentioned that they asked to change several caregivers and, apart from not complying with what was agreed, they all lacked the skills necessary for the person they had to take care of.

In the matching process, clients retain veto power, making the final decision on caregiver acceptance. While Cuideo emphasizes quality and personalization of the process, which is presented as providing guarantees for both clients / families and workers, there is some evidence of the process perpetuating discriminatory practices / preferences. Migrant caregivers, especially those of black African descent (there is a predominance of South American migrant workers in the platform), report being rejected due to racial bias or linguistic accents. With the available information it's impossible to say whether this is due to the way the algorithm is designed, or to the human participation in the last part of the selection process.

Regarding the development of the employment relation, there is a sense of lack of protection by care workers. It has been reported how clients frequently attempt to renegotiate responsibilities or impose extra tasks not outlined in the initial job description. These informal redefinitions of roles are seldom mediated by Cuideo, leaving caregivers to navigate conflicts alone, in a context where there is a strong disequilibrium between the two parts.

3.3.8. Working Conditions and Organization of Labor

As showed in sections I and II of this case, one of the aspects that Cuideo has used to promote the platform is the guarantee of a formal employment relation between the family and care worker. However, this doesn't preclude from workers experiencing abuses and precariousness.

Working conditions for care workers in the platform must comply with existing regulations, both legal minima but also collective agreements. For workers under Cuideo Selección, there are the legal minima established under the Domestic Work Social Security Regime introduced in 2011. This type of contract establishes an employment relationship between the caregiver and the family, with the user responsible for employment arrangements and legal contracting. Working conditions in this contract should comply with the existing statutory minimum wage, the right to 12 annual holidays, plus two local holidays; right to leave for marriage, maternity, or civil duties; right to leave for serious illness and for the accident or death of a close relative and the right to be paid for holidays or leave at the regular hourly rate, if they are worked. These days can also be paid as vacation time.

Furthermore, the latest regulations for domestic workers specify that the maximum working day for caregivers will be 40 hours of effective work per week. The minimum working week is 20 hours.

According to interviews, the vast majority of workers typically earn around the statutory minimum wage (SMI), which stands at € 1.184 per month (14 monthly payments). The law also establishes an hourly minimum wage for domestic workers at 9,86 per hour.

The main complaints of workers in Cuideo regarding working conditions don't refer to the lack of formal employment, but to the actual conditions and the difficulties when the family aims to renegotiate pay. Regarding the first aspects, the interviews have pointed out to a persistent gap between expected and actual compensation. This is because the Workers often face delays or ambiguities around pay updates despite public changes to the statutory minimum wage (SMI).

Regarding renegotiation, three types of complaints have been made. First, regarding the minimum wage, care workers have very often found themselves asking their employers to raise their wages after the minimum wage has increased. Especially in

the context of the increases in recent years, this has often led care workers to find very often fighting with the family and Cuideo to make sure their wage was updated. So, even though this should be automatic, the reality is that it is far from being the case. The other most frequent source of conflicts regarding working conditions is related to working time and the hours effectively made. It has been reported how care workers often spend more time that is established in their contracts. When this becomes a practice, they try to renegotiate with families to increase working time (in case they have a part-time contract) or to get pay overtime work. When this happens, families often threat workers, contributing to maintaining abuse. Finally, another problem related to working time refers to irregular scheduling. Even though the contract should establish working hours and the schedule, work very often is organized on a just-in-time basis, with scheduling dictated by platform-client dynamics. This leads very often to irregular hours, inconsistent schedules, and limited ability to negotiate terms.

3.3.9. Skills and Training Support

As pointed out earlier, accredited skills are in principle required in order to work at Cuideo, which claims to support the professionalization of caregivers through selective training and informational materials. However, the reality is that many workers can't provide formal proof and yet get employed through the platform. As a matter of fact, there is some indirect evidence that the Affinity platform (but also the HR department involved in the matching and selection process) favours caregivers with demonstrable experience and references over certified skill credentials.

One of the problems encountered by some of the workers has been the need to care for persons with particular pathologies and needs, without having been advised or established in their contracts. This has often obliged care workers to learn by doing. Despite these demands, Cuideo does not provide structured upskilling or certification pathways. Training, when offered, is minimal and ad hoc, with no formal progression or accreditation. This lack of investment limits caregivers' long-term prospects and reinforces systemic deskilling.

Another problem reported by workers is that the required skill set is complex and evolving—ranging from physical assistance (e.g., moving immobile patients), emotional intelligence, medication management, and increasingly, digital literacy (for mobile telecare tools like Cuideo Assist). Again, workers found often themselves having to acquire these skills as they work.

3.3.10. Relations with Trade Unions and Interest Groups

None of the workers interviewed reports having a direct engagement with trade unions. Here there are some differences between those workers in Cuideo Selección and Felizvita. In the case of Felizvita, workers seem to have a stronger relationship

since they work under publicly funded scheme and have a more stable relationship. However, they don't report any trade union section operational at Cuideo. In the case of Cuideo Selección, since they're employed by families and not the platform, this gives rise to fragmented and individualised employment relations that inhibit union engagement.

There are several reasons why care workers in platforms like Cuideo do not engage with trade unions. Some have to do with the socio-demographic characteristics of these workers, mostly women from immigrant background with limited knowledge of trade unions back in their origin countries. Others are related to the type of isolated work they perform.

Following the example of other grass-root organisations in feminised activities like the so-called Kellys (organising chamber maids), that criticised the limited attention paid by the most representative trade unions to the situation of hotel cleaners, there has been an increase in grass-root organisations in recent years. Hence, some professional trade unions have appeared in recent years organizing care workers, with a different model of the most representative trade unions. Two of these trade unions have gained particular importance in the LTC sector:

- Sintrahocu – Trade union of domestic and care workers
- Sindicat SAD – Trade union of municipal professional caregivers

The unions SINTRAHOCU (Union of Domestic and Care Workers) and Sindicat SAD (Union for Home Care Workers) represent a new wave of labor organization characterized by a feminist, intersectional, and grassroots approach. These organizations emerge from within the home-based and domestic care workforce—composed largely of migrant women—with the aim of giving voice and bargaining power to a group historically excluded from union representation. Unlike UGT and CCOO, which are large national labor confederations that have incorporated domestic workers' rights as part of broader agendas, SINTRAHOCU and Sindicat SAD are exclusively dedicated to the care sector. This allows them to focus 100% on the specific needs of home-based care, including fighting structural racism, advocating for the regularization of migrant workers, and highlighting the emotional burden of care work.

Both unions engage in more horizontal forms of unionism, emphasizing assemblies and collective decision-making. Instead of focusing solely on collective bargaining (which is not their main focus of action) with employers or the state, they promote direct action, public campaigns, and collaborations with feminist, anti-racist, and housing movements. Both SINTRAHOCU and Sindicat SAD have developed campaigns to increase awareness about the legal limitations affecting domestic work in Spain. For example, despite recent advancements (such as inclusion in the general social security system since 2022), gaps remain—such as limited access to unemployment benefits and occupational risk protections. In response, these unions

develop their own tools for mutual aid and legal education, strategies less common among traditional unions. From that point of view, these grassroot unions have positioned themselves as alternatives to the large confederations like UGT and CCOO, whose demands have been sometimes misaligned with the needs of migrant and more precarious workers. For instance, while UGT and CCOO advocate for legal equality for domestic workers, unions like SINTRAHOCU also emphasize symbolic dignity, the right to the city, and the recognition of care work as essential and feminized labor, integrating the discourse of “the right to have rights,” even for those without legal residency. Yet, none of the Cuideo workers interviewed have reported any engagement with these grassroots unions.

3.3.11. Perceived Risks

The risks perceived by workers are very diverse and very much depend on the specific context where they work. The most important risks highlighted by workers are physical and emotional. Regarding physical risks, they stress physical strain due for instance to lifting patients or helping them navigating stairs. But they also mention psychosocial risks derived from situations like verbal abuse and emotional exhaustion as they deal with persons experiencing mental problems and all the situation of the family around. One of the persons explained how the family puts an additional burden on them when they explain to the worker all the problems they have.

The other risk most frequently mentioned by workers are those related to exploitation (for instance, by forcing them do other tasks not included in their contracts, for instance moving furniture, cleaning or even painting rooms) but also to unpaid labour or schedule overloading.

Finally, negative client ratings or complaints have also appeared as part of algorithmic fear. According to workers, bad client ratings can also jeopardize access to future assignments, regardless of their experience or capacity. Workers describe this rating system as a form of “blackmail” used to exert power over them.

3.3.12. Social Protection Needs

When it comes to social protection needs, workers are in principle covered by all regulations that arise from a formal employment relation. This gives them access to public health but also entitles them to other rights like unemployment protection or old-age pensions. The main problems reported regarding social protection have to do with paid (sickness) leave as well as other maternity/paternity protections. Again, the formal employment relationship gives them the right to claim paid leaves in these cases, but the reality is that often they encounter problems to have employers paying for them.

Related to the point on perceived risks, workers stress how social protection should also consider mental health support. Workers advocate for structured emotional care programs, similar to those available in publicly managed services. Current efforts, like WhatsApp emotional support chats among workers, are seen as inadequate “band-aid” solutions for systemic neglect.

4. The case of CARE.com

4.1. History and characteristics of the platform

Care.com is by far the most opaque platform, not only among the three cases included in this report, but also within the landscape of platforms providing domestic and care services in Spain. Compared to Cuideo and Senniors, Care.com offers a broader range of services. Among these, there are care services both for older persons and children. However care services provided through Care.com are mostly sporadic emerging out of punctual needs from families.

It is the branch in Spain of the multinational Care.com, Inc. a subsidiary of IAC (InterActiveCorp), a U.S.-based media and internet conglomerate. Care.com operates in over 17 countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and various Western European countries including Spain. The company has its European headquarters in Germany and has no employees in Spain. The exact date when the platform started to operate in Spain is unknown, but since it landed in the EU 2012 as a part of its international expansion, we estimate that started those years. Specific financial data regarding Care.com's turnover in Spain is not publicly disclosed. The company reports its revenues on a global scale, and regional breakdowns, including Spain, are not available in the public domain.

4.1.1. How It Works

Care.com functions as a two-sided marketplace, allowing families to search for, connect with, and hire caregivers. The platform offers tools for job posting, caregiver search, communication, and payment processing. It provides a platform where families can find caregivers for various needs, including childcare, senior care, tutoring, housekeeping, and pet care. The main features include a job posting service where families can create detailed job postings outlining their care needs. Moreover, they provide caregiver search tools where users can browse caregiver profiles, which include information on experience, qualifications, and availability. In order to communicate with users, the platform offers messaging systems for families and caregivers to communicate securely. Another service provided by the company is secure payment options for services rendered.

Once the client and the caregiver get in touch through the platform, it is up to them to decide the type of (employment) relationship they establish, working conditions, etc.

4.2. Platform governance

4.2.1. Employees and Carers

The company has 2376 employees worldwide. As the European headquarters is in Germany, the company doesn't have any registered employees nor an official location / address in Spain.

Caregivers on Care.com are typically classified as independent contractors. The platform facilitates connections between families and caregivers but does not employ the caregivers directly. For this reason, the company doesn't have a direct control over the worker, nor any mobile app or tool to track the worker. As will be showed later, it is precisely this hands-off approach to the relationship between workers and users that opens the door to all kinds of employment abuses but also to informality.

The platform does not verify any information provided by the users in their profiles. Moreover, they disclaim any responsibility for the conduct of both customers and employees. Compared to Cuideo and Senniors, Care.com does not take a percentage of workers' earnings as compensation for the services provided, but instead monetizes access to job opportunities and communication between parties via premium subscriptions.

4.2.2. Contracts and Communication

The terms of employment, including wage rates, working hours, schedule etc. are negotiated directly between the two parties. But since the algorithm has great influence on the visibility of profiles, it is not a neutral and equal market and employment discrimination can occur. Visibility is often related to connectivity, response time, and positive reviews, and who is rendered visible mirrors preexisting inequalities. Care.com manages the hiring process by "sorting, ranking, and rendering visible large pools of workers". Workers have less control over the client matching process. (Fetterolf, 2022)

4.2.3. HRM and Algorithmic Management

The platform allows both parties to publish ads and contact each other if they pay for a premium subscription. The algorithm sorts profiles based on common criteria between supply and demand and enables the use of filters. In line with the platform orientation and goals, it allows greater filtering possibilities for clients. The algorithm then matches caregivers with suitable job postings based on various criteria.

Figure 2: Options to customise workers and clients profiles at Care.com

LAS OFERTAS DE TRABAJO MÁS RECIENTES (25)

– Filtrar

20 km radio

- ☐ Hogar y jardín (11 trabajos)
- ☐ Cuidado de niños (15 trabajos)
- ☐ Cuidado de mascotas (14 trabajos)
- ☒ Cuidado de ancianos (25 trabajos)
- ☐ Necesidades especiales (2 trabajos)
- ☐ Clases particulares (3 trabajos)
- ☐ Au pair (318 trabajos en todo el mundo)

TIPO DE CUIDADO REQUERIDO

Cuidado de ancianos

RADIO

20 km radio

UBICACIÓN

Idiomas:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ☐ Español | ☐ Inglés |
| ☐ Holandés | ☐ Alemán |
| ☐ Francés | |

Características:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Medio de transporte propio | ☐ No fumador |
| ☐ Acepta que haya mascotas | ☐ Tiene valoraciones |
| ☐ Solo empresas | |

4.2.4. Division of Labour and Complexity of Tasks

Compared to ‘pure’ care platforms operating in Spain, Care.com offers a wider range of caregiving services, each with varying levels of complexity and skill :

- **Childcare:** Duties may include supervising children, preparing meals, assisting with homework, and organizing activities.
- **Senior Care:** Responsibilities can range from companionship to assistance with daily living activities.
- **Tutoring:** Tutors provide educational support in various subjects.
- **Housekeeping:** Tasks include cleaning, laundry, and general household maintenance.

- **Pet Care:** Services encompass feeding, walking, and general pet supervision.

It is impossible with the available information to state which of these services is the most relevant from the point of view of transactions in the platform and number of workers offering services. However, it seems that housekeeping services are predominant.

4.2.5. Socio-Demographic Profile of Workers

Care.com predominantly employs women, with an overwhelming majority identifying as female across the caregiving services (childcare, elder care, housekeeping). A large proportion of these women are middle-aged migrants, especially from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. However, since the range of services extends beyond care, the percentage of men advertising services in the platform is probably higher mostly in cleaning and maintenance services.

From the analysis, two profiles of workers seem to emerge. First, young local university-educated women who look for an extra income by taking care of infants mostly, but also offering cleaning services. Older women, some of them also nationals, who want to supplement their family income by taking care of children or elderly people, but also do any domestic work. (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024).

An interesting point to note is that intersectional inequalities are amplified in Care.com, where visibility is controlled by ratings and profile verification status. For instance, workers who cannot afford to pay for premium services are systematically deprioritized, contributing to systemic exclusion despite experience or skills.

4.2.6. Occupational Trajectory of Care and Domestic Service Workers

Workers on Care.com generally come from diverse but often precarious occupational backgrounds. Many have experience in informal care work, domestic labor, or personal services prior to joining the platform. While some possess formal qualifications in nursing, childhood education, or gerontology, many operate without formal certifications, relying on their experience and soft skills to secure jobs.

The interviews reveal that, contrary to the case of Cuideo or Sennior, the platform is not considered a stepping stone towards formality or job stability. Workers are aware that the way Care.com operates facilitates the development of informal employment relations. In some cases this can also be a reason to select this platform as will be discussed in the next point. Moreover, several workers transition from informal to semi-formal employment through Care.com but without substantial improvements in benefits or protections. This continuity of precariousness characterizes the “gigified” nature of care work on digital platforms. A significant number of caregivers have faced underemployment or exclusion from formal labor markets due to immigration status or family obligations. These individuals turn to platforms like Care.com to re-enter the

labor market in flexible or part-time ways. However, the platform model doesn't always enable upward mobility; many workers remain stuck in low-wage cycles, with minimal opportunities for promotion or skill development.

4.2.7. Motivations Behind Platform Work and Choosing Care.com

The motivations that drive individuals to engage in platform-based care work are multifaceted, but based on the analysis, three dominant motivations emerge. The most frequent one is economic necessity. Many Care.com workers are single parents, migrants, or women returning to the workforce after caregiving responsibilities of their own. These workers face structural barriers in the formal labor market and see platforms like Care.com as accessible entry points, even if that access is conditioned by the ability to pay subscription fees.

The second theme coming out is flexibility. The ability to set availability, accept or decline jobs, and maintain caregiving responsibilities at home makes platform work attractive. Flexibility here also refers to the possibility to provide different services, from pet care to cleaning, giving a false impression of more opportunities for the caregiver. However, this “flexibility” can be illusory, as availability is dictated by market demand and platform visibility. Moreover, some of the workers report that long periods of inactivity or turning down several job opportunities may affect negatively the probability of being assigned another job by the algorithm.

When choosing Care.com over other platforms, users and workers commonly cite its user-friendly interface. However, the paywall model (premium subscription required for communication) was frequently criticized. Reviews highlight dissatisfaction when premium payments did not lead to actual job opportunities, undermining trust in the platform's transparency.

4.2.8. Types of Work Performed

Care.com operates as a multi-service platform, offering a wide array of caregiving and domestic services. The principal types of work available include:

- **Childcare:** This encompasses full-time nanny services, part-time babysitting, after-school care, and occasional child supervision. Workers may also offer tutoring or homework help as part of this category.
- **Senior/Elder Care:** Caregivers provide companionship, mobility support, meal preparation, medication reminders, and sometimes basic medical assistance. Live-in care is also common for high-dependency clients.
- **Pet Care:** Pet sitting, dog walking, and overnight pet boarding services are included, catering to a different but growing demand sector.
- **Housekeeping:** Cleaning services, laundry, meal preparation, and general home upkeep are often provided by domestic workers.

- **Special Needs Care:** Specialized caregiving for children or adults with developmental disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Care.com allows workers to create profiles where they can highlight specific services, hourly rates, availability, and preferences. The website recommends posting a photo and offers advice on how to create a successful profile. It also offers a guide text for the advertisement and requires answers of at least 30 sentences.

Profile personalization enables some level of autonomy and branding, allowing workers to distinguish themselves. However, the site also includes standardized metrics like background checks, profile verifications, and subscription status that impact visibility.

Workers interviewed report that in order to enhance their chances to be hired, they provide general profiles showing they have experience and can do any of the services provided by the platform. In this way, the platform doesn't promote skill specialization.

4.2.9. Mechanisms Used to Control Workers and Reputational Systems

While Care.com promotes itself as a facilitator of independent work, it exerts some control over workers through indirect mechanisms—primarily via its digital infrastructure, algorithmic sorting, and reputational systems. Reputational control is accordingly central also for Care.com. Workers are ranked and displayed based on client ratings, number of completed jobs, background checks, and premium membership status. A caregiver's visibility in search results is determined by an opaque algorithm that prioritizes verified and well-rated users. As a result, poor ratings or gaps in profile information can significantly hinder access to work.

The platform uses a unidirectional reputation system where only clients can evaluate workers. This system generates pressure on workers, who adapt their behavior to avoid negative evaluations that could affect their prospects to get a new job. The analysis shows some clients using the threat of bad reviews as a disciplinary tactic. This reputational pressure discourages caregivers from setting boundaries, demanding fair pay, or not accepting working longer hours.

Finally, monetization structures such as paid messaging and premium tiers introduce a financial barrier to platform access. Non-paying members have limited ability to contact families, resulting in de facto exclusion for economically precarious workers. Even those who pay often complain of limited returns on investment if their profiles are not ranked highly or matched effectively.

4.2.10. Development of Professional Identity and Community

The type of profiles in Care.com and the way the platform operates, promotes a strong individualization and prevents any form of professional identity among Care.com workers. On one hand, since the platform provides a wide range of services, there is a

multitude of profiles and professional profiles. Moreover, the platform encourages individual competition and branding through detailed but multi-service profiles, client reviews, and certification badges. This, together with the very nature of gig work discourages long-term identity formation and professional community building.

A review of workers profiles shows how workers can present themselves with specialized titles such as “nanny,” “elder companion,” or “childcare expert.” This self-stylization supports some sense of occupational pride. However, these profiles tend to add the possibility to perform other services. Moreover, many workers describe themselves as “just caregivers” or “helpers,” indicating a lack of formal identity or collective standing in the care economy. Moreover, they often add several potential tasks that can perform in order to enhance probability to get a job. It is unclear whether having a more specialized profile vs a general one provides any advantage, but the general feeling is that specialization doesn’t pay in Care.com and more versatile profiles get higher chances.

Competition among workers comes out as a key aspect among Care.com workers. The competitive rating system discourages collaboration among workers, as profiles are individually ranked and rated by clients. This individualism reinforces precarity, rather than solidarity. It also contrasts with more formal caregiving sectors, where unionization or certification institutions play a role in professional identity formation. Only in some cases, caregivers developing long-term relationships with families through Care.com may build some professional identity, but these are context-bound and not transferrable across the platform.

4.2.11. Matching Process and Client Relationships on Care.com

The matching process on Care.com combines algorithmic suggestions, search filters, and user-driven engagement to connect caregivers with potential clients. However, this process has inherent asymmetries that impact workers’ agency and job security. From a technical standpoint, clients input preferences such as location, services needed, caregiver gender, hourly rates, and experience level. The platform then generates a list of matches based on these parameters. Workers can also proactively apply to jobs, but they can only message families if they hold a paid premium subscription—creating a two-tiered access system.

This creates a double asymmetry: first, the client initiates most engagements; second, platform logic favors higher-rated, premium, and recently active profiles. This system favors workers with higher income and medium to strong digital skills and penalizes those who cannot afford or understand the visibility algorithm.

Relationships between clients and workers are shaped by both human interaction and digital mediation. While the platform facilitates initial contact, subsequent negotiations (wages, hours, duties) occur privately. This leaves workers (but also clients) without

any form of legal support, not only at the moment of establishing the relationship, but more importantly as the analysis shows, in case of disputes. Workers report a sense of complete lack of resources and helplessness. The platform assumes no liability for contractual or safety issues once the match is made, leaving all responsibility to the two parties, and in particular, to the weaker part that are workers.

Moreover, the analysis shows how workers often experience clients who ghost them after initiating conversations or propose exploitative arrangements, in case the worker doesn't accept. This puts additional downward pressure on workers offering services in the platform to lower wage rates.

In some instances, strong matches lead to long-term working relationships and stable income. However, these are exceptions rather than norms, and the precarious nature of the match system incentivizes short-termism and competition.

4.2.12. Working Conditions and Work Organization

As pointed out earlier, Care.com positions itself as a mediator rather than an employer, leaving the setting of working conditions and the organization of work largely in the hands of individual workers and their clients. This opens the door to huge disparities between wage demands by workers, whilst leaving them powerless before clients' demands.

Contracts are informal in many cases. Although Care.com recommends written agreements, they are not required or monitored. This leaves room for unlawful practices. Some clients (but also workers, see below) prefer verbal agreements or under-the-table payments, further informalizing labor relations. The lack of enforcement mechanisms means that workers rely on personal negotiation and client goodwill. Many fear retaliation through poor reviews if they assert their rights. Furthermore, the platform's inability to intervene in labor disputes reinforces asymmetrical power dynamics.

The salary can be negotiated directly with the client but the platform suggests a predetermined hourly rate (9€/h) that can be adjusted within a range of 5€–50€/h. The workers have no prior information about the clients, only the address and telephone number, and as a consequence they face a strong uncertainty. As pointed out by workers, the hourly statutory minimum wage for domestic workers (9,26€/h) is often taken as a reference by workers and is in line with the recommendation made by the platform. However, the wages reported by workers vary significantly. In some cases, workers report earning around the minimum wage but since there is no employment relationship but a service relationship, they aren't entitled to overtime pay, paid leave, or even health coverage.

Since most workers do not have Care.com as their main job / occupation, they don't express much concern about all these problems. They see in terms of a take it or leave

it dilemma. Since they prioritise flexibility to earn some extra money, they almost assume that will earn below the legal minima.

Only some works express concerns about having total uncertainty about what they'll earn. These are mostly the most precarious ones, often undocumented migrants, that can't provide services in other platforms like Cuideo, since legal residence is mandatory. For this group, the platform performs like a zero-hour contract, with no certainty about income nor dedication.

The platform doesn't require any skill certification. All skills are self-reported by workers and not validated by the platform. Moreover, the platform doesn't provide any support in skill development or training.

4.2.13. Relations with Trade Unions and Other Interest Organizations

Taken into consideration the way all the characteristics of the platform, Care.com provides an extremely hostile environment for the development of any form of grass-root solidarity or union engagement. To the physical conditions of work performance, namely isolation and fragmentation, we must add the profile of workers in the platform and most importantly, the supplementary role of the platform for earnings of workers registered.

Since Care.com workers are qualified as independent contractors or private freelancers, this disqualifies them from most labor protections offered under national employment laws. Workers themselves are often unaware of their rights or reluctant to seek union assistance. Fear of being deplatformed, legal precariousness (especially among undocumented migrants), and lack of trust in institutions contribute to this disengagement.

4.2.14. Perceived Risks by Workers on Care.com

Workers on Care.com face a variety of risks—from financial, to physical, emotional, and reputational. These risks are magnified by the platform's minimal oversight and the lack of formal employment protections.

One of the risks that are most often reported by workers are physical. The way in which the platform works, opens the door to substantial physical risks for workers. In the absence of background checks on all clients, caregivers may easily enter unsafe environments. Unlike regulated care work settings, in-home visits arranged via Care.com lack consistent vetting or health and safety protocols. There have been cases of assault and intimidation once the worker gets to the work where they're supposed to carry out the activity.

The second main risk reported as financial, related to uncertainty about income. Again, this is only the case of a minority of workers in the platform for whom Care.com constitutes an important source of income. However, the interviews also refer to risks

arising from unpaid labor due to client no-shows or last-minute cancellations, or to wage theft from informal agreements without enforcement mechanisms.

4.2.15. Social Protection Needs of Workers at Care.com

The nature of work on Care.com exposes caregivers to significant gaps in social protection. These gaps are significantly more intense compared to the previous case study of Cuideo. First, as platform-mediated freelancers, they fall outside the scope of most national labor legislation, social insurance schemes, and workplace benefits. This exclusion highlights a growing structural challenge in the gig economy. But since many of them face informal employment relations, this automatically leaves them out of any form of social protection.

5. The case of Senniors

5.1. General characteristics of the platform

Senniors is a private startup company based in Madrid, Spain. It functions as an integrated care service provider rather than a simple intermediary or employment agency. According to its founders, Senniors positions itself as a "partner in home health" with a strong commitment to quality and clinical oversight, distinguishing itself from traditional domestic work agencies, including Cuideo.

Senniors was founded in late 2020 by Claudia Gómez Estefan and José de Diego Abad. Claudia, a former Deloitte tax attorney and Forbes-recognized leader, was inspired to create the company after navigating the disorganized process of hiring a caregiver for her child. This personal experience revealed inefficiencies, including lack of legal safeguards, unreliable contracts, and poor technological integration.

Initially intended as a childcare service, Senniors pivoted to eldercare after discovering high demand among families with aging relatives. It was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the urgent need for professional in-home care. Since its foundation in late 2020, Senniors has been successful in attracting through several rounds of investment. It has received backing from venture capitalists and strategic partners through participation accelerator programs. In 2023, the company raised over €5 million to support scaling operations and technological development.

Nowadays Senniors operates in over 100 cities in Spain with physical offices in Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga, and Valencia. Internationally, it is piloting services in Abu Dhabi as part of a health innovation program but has not launched full operations outside Spain. As of early 2025, Senniors has more than 80 full-time employees and a network of over 2,500 care professionals with active contracts. The platform has served more than 750 families with personalized home care plans. Though it is younger than other

competitor platforms like Cuideo or Qida, Senniors has grown rapidly and was ranked by Sifted as the number one European caretech startup to watch in 2024. It combines care coordination, clinical evaluation, and AI-based monitoring, giving it a strong reputation in the so-called Silver Economy.

5.1.1. How It Works

Senniors operates in the long-term care and health tech sectors, offering services for dependent elderly persons, often with chronic or neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or post-stroke disabilities. Senniors conducts an initial biopsychosocial evaluation and creates a tailored intervention plan involving caregivers, therapists, and family input. Caregivers are matched using algorithmic tools and supervised by care coordinators. Senniors employs its own staff for many services and collaborates with third-party professionals for specialized therapies. All administrative management (contracts, payments, replacements) is handled by Senniors.

The service provision begins with an in-home evaluation by a multidisciplinary team comprising neuropsychologists, occupational therapists, and social workers. This team develops a care plan that addresses physical, emotional, and social needs. Senniors then uses its proprietary algorithm and scoring system to pre-select suitable caregivers based on compatibility and experience. Final approval is made by HR professionals and clinical coordinators. Only caregivers with at least 2–3 years of relevant experience and validated references are considered.

The service includes digital health monitoring using standard connected devices (glucose meters, thermometers, etc.) and sensors for sleep or fall detection. These data feed into Florence, Senniors' AI platform, enabling preventive and predictive analytics. Reports can be shared with family and doctors. Family members access updates and communications through a shared digital platform, enhancing transparency and coordination.

5.2. Platform Governance

5.2.1. Employees and Carers

Senniors employs approximately 80 full-time staff, including service coordinators, HR specialists, IT developers, and clinical professionals. Roles of this staff include the coordination of social services, mental health advisors as well as care team managers, a profile that is considered critical for the platform's strategy and has been growing rapidly within the platform. In addition, Senniors maintains a database of 20,000 caregivers segmented by experience and training / skills. Among these, more than 2,500 were under active contracts by early 2025. Most caregivers are women aged

40–60, many of whom are migrant workers with previous experience in household care or formal social services.

5.2.2. Contracts and Communication

Similarly to other platforms analysed in this report, Senniors employs a mixed model:

- On the one hand, it employs directly some workers / caregivers and manages payroll.
- But the lion's share of operations take place through verified intermediation. For non-clinical or low-dependency cases, Senniors facilitates contracts between families and caregivers while retaining control over compliance and service quality.

Communication occurs through its web platform and mobile-compatible interface. Florence, the AI platform, enables data sharing and chat functions. A care team manager / coordinator serves as a point of contact for each family.

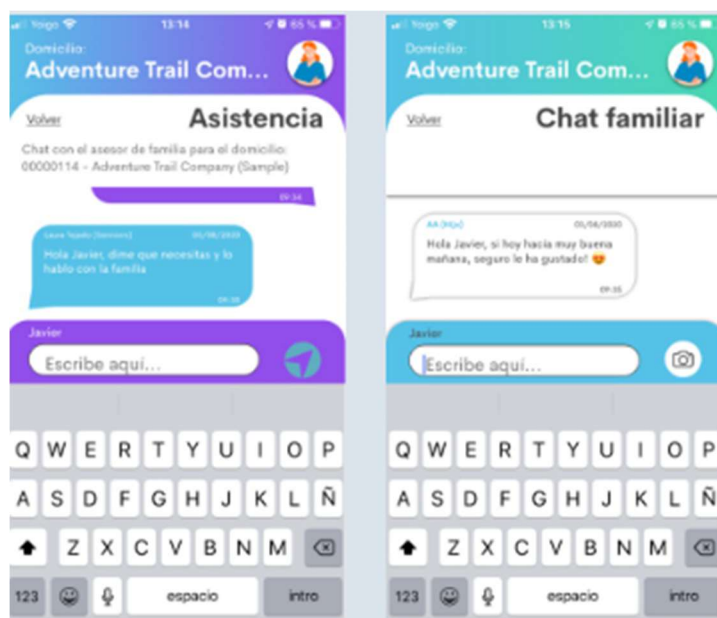
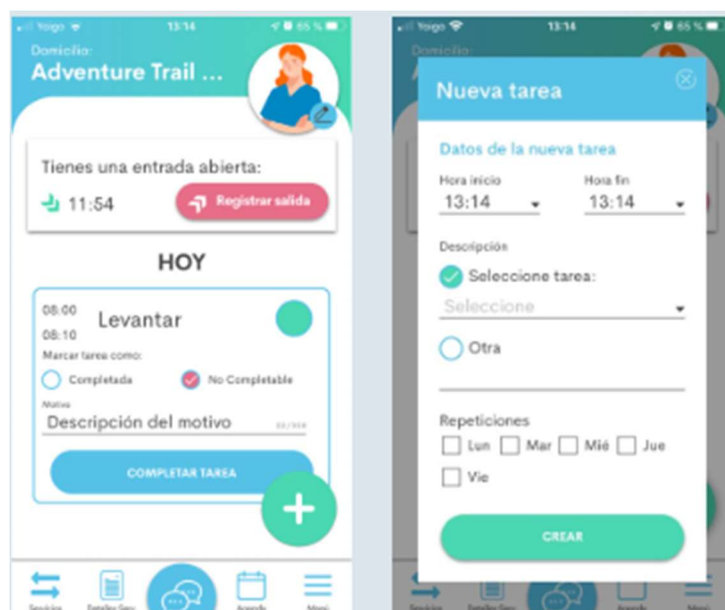
Senniors has a similar organization structure to other care platforms like Cuideo. However, it includes a health services department that plays an important role within the platform.

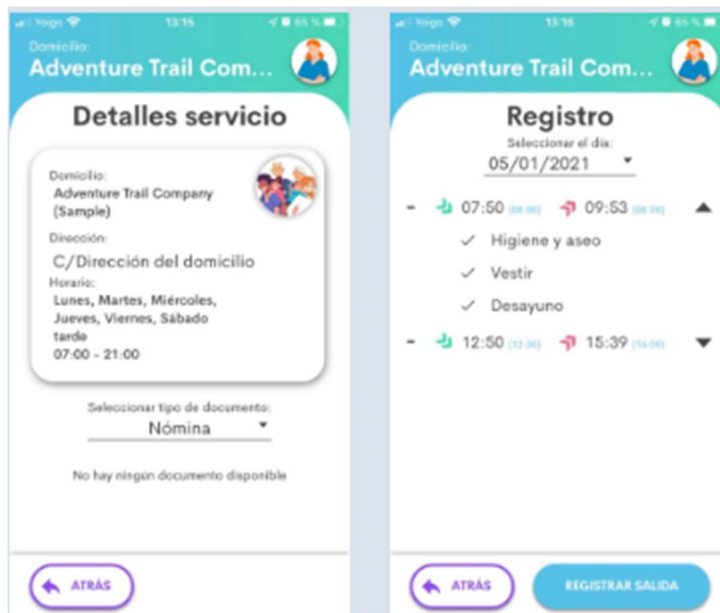
5.2.3. HRM and Algorithmic Management

Senniors shares with other care platforms operating in Spain an algorithmic matching tool to help connect demand and supply. The matching and selection process is semi-automated. First, the algorithm shortlists candidates using compatibility scores based on user needs, experience, and availability. On a second stage, the HR team conduct interviews and validate references to propose a final candidate.

But Senniors has incorporated an app that allows caregivers, families and patients to monitor the health status. This app incorporates an AI tool that helps identifying risks and recommends personalized intervention plans, that are nonetheless monitored by the care worker and the company. The Senniores is a mobile app, designed to help families monitor and manage the care of their elderly relatives, facilitating communication with caregivers and providing access to relevant information. The app offers families easy access to information about their loved ones' daily activities, interact with caregivers, and view the care plan. The app also facilitates direct communication between families and caregivers and real-time monitoring of care.

Figure 3: Some screen shots from the Senniors App





As will be seen later, even though it is mostly seen as a health monitoring tool, it nonetheless requires the workers to provide detailed information about the patient / cared person, including registering times for medication, exercises, walks, lunches etc. It accordingly registers a large amount of data about how and when tasks have been performed, therefore providing a powerful tool to control the activity carried out by the worker.

Within the care platforms landscape in Spain, Senniors distinguishes from other competitors that provide basic care, by offering a range of more specialised care services including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, etc. For this reason, it requires a more skilled profile for many of their carers. Additionally, the reliance on the app obliges workers to have a certain level of digital skills.

However, the use of the app can also be seen as a mechanism to divide complex tasks into simple ones, opening the door to potential deskilling process.

5.3. Role of Technologies and Data Processes

As has been showed before, one of the distinctive traits of Senniors compared to similar platforms operating in Spain is the intense use of technology for service delivery. Senniors stands out as a high-growth carettech platform. This technology is used in three main aspects:

- Matching and selection process. The platform uses an algorithm allowing to find a match between carers and families / clients. There isn't much information available on what parameters are more important, but from the interviews seems to emerge both skills and experience as the most relevant.
- Secondly, the platform has invested significant resources to develop intelligent algorithms in predictive and preventive medicine for the care of dependent

patients. For this reason it has built Florence AI, a central platform that aggregates biometric data and generates risk alerts. In order to get and monitor data, it relies on health IoT Integration, using bluetooth-enabled devices to monitor vitals. Senniors uses predictive analytics to identify early signs of health deterioration and adjust care strategies accordingly.

- Finally, it also has the Senniors app, allowing to monitor care activities and providing real-time information about the patient.

Because of the large amounts of data used and stored, the platform has a strong privacy and data protection policy, managed under existing GDPR regulations. Data is encrypted and stored securely. Only authorized personnel can access sensitive records.

5.4. Platform workers

5.4.1. *Socio-demographic profile*

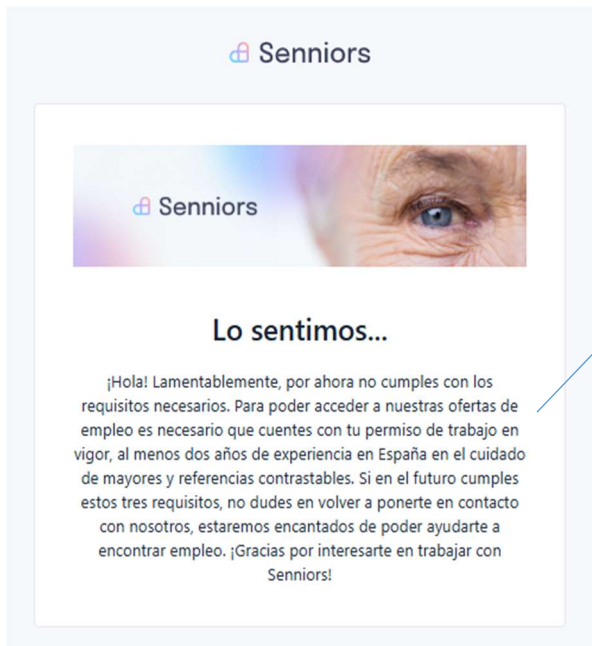
Senniors collaborates with over 20,000 caregivers, most of them women, many of whom are migrant women aged 35–55, a profile consistent with the broader care economy in Spain (Pimentel, 2023; Rodríguez, 2022). While the company does not publicly release full demographic data, its recruitment practices emphasize minimum 2–3 years of verifiable care experience, legal residency, and in some cases, certification in sociosanitary services. The latter apply especially to its more skilled services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy.

There is a segmentation in the profile of workers providing different services through the platform. For elderly care and basic house health assistance, there is a prevalence of migrant mostly unskilled workers. However, for the other more specialised / skilled services provided, the profile is slightly different, with a stronger participation of domestic younger skilled workers.

5.4.2. *Occupational trajectory*

Care workers on the platform have followed very diverse trajectories. The platform sets three necessary conditions in order to access the database and job offers. First, to have a valid residence permit. Secondly, to have at least two years of care experience (see Figure 4). Thirdly, to have verifiable references. These three requirements narrow down the profile of workers that may provide services for the platform, especially excluding care workers that have been working informally.

Figure 4: Necessary conditions to access job offers at Senniors



Source: Senniors webpage and own translation into English

WE'RE SORRY

Hello! Unfortunately, you don't meet the necessary requirements at this time. To be eligible for our job offers, you must have a valid work permit, at least two years of experience in Spain caring for the elderly, and verifiable references.

If you meet these three requirements in the future, don't hesitate to contact us again; we'll be happy to help you find a job. Thank you for your interest in working with Senniors!

Educational attainment varies among workers in the platform. The interviews reveal how some of the migrant workers have been able to obtain professional certificates through accreditation processes of work experience. According to the platform, professional development is not uniformly required; rather, experience, soft skills (empathy, patience), and references from families are prioritized.

5.4.3. Motivations for choosing Senniors

Workers' motivations for choosing Senniors align with broader findings in platform labor literature: flexibility, immediate income, and stability. However, many workers perceive Senniors as more ethical and regulated compared to competitors like Care.com or even Cuideo. The platform markets itself not as a job board, but as a care ecosystem, and distinguishes itself by providing care planning, tech support, and supervisory structures (Gómez, 2023).

The interviews see working at Senniors as a valid alternative to work in other conventional health sector companies. As a matter of fact, work experience at Senniors is perceived as helping them to progress in their careers, not as a second option job.

5.4.4. Nature of work conducted via Senniors

Compared to other platforms, Senniors not only has a more structured and specialised catalogue of services, but it also has a wider range of them. This means that in principle, workers could be matched with service requests that are better aligned with their

skills and experience. However, the number of activities that will be carried out varies depending on the service. For instance, the tasks of those providing care services to old persons, will range from basic activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, and meal preparation—to medical monitoring, medication supervision, emotional support, cognitive stimulation, and companionship. By contrast, workers involved in more specialised services, will carry out a significantly narrower range of tasks.

But there are two elements that differentiate Senniors from other platforms like Guideo. First, the customised caring plan that is designed by the platform in order to meet the needs of clients. This plan already establishes some elements related to the type of tasks to be performed. Second, the use of an app to monitor the development and implementation of this plan also serves to structure the tasks carried out.

5.4.5. Platform Control and Reputation Mechanisms

There are no a priori direct digital control mechanisms over workers. However, there are many instances of indirect control and even evaluation. Thus, while control is not overtly coercive, it effectively shapes caregivers' behavior through several mechanisms, including reputational mechanisms in the selection and matching process, datafication of care through the Senniors care monitoring app, and performance scoring. All together, we could conclude that Senniors is probably the platform where management can exercise a higher degree of control over workers.

A first instance of control is the one taking place through algorithmic matching and selection. In principle, the matching takes place taking into consideration aspects like previous experience, skills etc. However, the scored given by clients and health team coordinators also plays an important role in this process. A second instance consists in digital reporting via the Sennior app, where the worker provides real time info about the different tasks performed according to the care plan established and communicates with families and health coordinators. Finally, there is also a routine supervision by coordinators and visitations to the client's home.

The use of all these technologies, allowing real-time monitoring, data integration, and predictive alerts through IoT devices, means that workers interact with connected tools (e.g., wearable monitors, smart scales) and input updates via the Florence data management tool. While caregivers report that this hybrid model ensures quality and support, it also introduces new forms of digital surveillance. Their actions, judgments, and even emotional responses become part of a quantifiable performance matrix. This leads to a sense of accountability but also potential stress linked to being constantly evaluated, even if indirectly.

Overall, all these mechanisms allow us to say that Senniors is a platform with an medium-high degree of control over the worker. All these mechanisms act as

reputation-based filters: only workers who maintain high ratings and fulfill procedural requirements remain visible for matching.

5.4.6. Professional identity and worker communities

Due to its orientation to provide customised quality care combining skilled workers with digital tools, Senniors is perceived to foster professional identity formation. As a matter of fact, workers are referred as part of a “care ecosystem”. The visibility provided by data-driven tracking and integration into formal care plans (including medical coordination) contributes to workers' sense of legitimacy and to a certain extent, professional reputation. However, there are no signs of Sennior worker communities. Interviews reveal that caregivers value being seen as health agents, not just domestic help. Some report improved self-esteem and greater participation in professional networks, but still lack access to formal professional communities, especially in the case of those workers providing ‘standard’ care for older persons.

5.4.7. Matching and Client Relationships

As pointed out in Section I, matching in Senniors occurs through a multi-phase process. The first step consists in the an evaluation of care needs by the Senniors staff. This is followed by the use of algorithmic matching based on the database of over 20,000 caregiver profiles. In a third step, there is human verification by a gerontology or HR expert and based on this a decision is made. Once the worker and the client get in touch, there is a trial period and feedback loop from the client to the platform. It's not clear which parameters are the most important in the matching process. In principle, skills and experience are the key elements considered by the platform and the algorithm. However, it also considers other elements including language, and preferred schedule (see Figure 5 below)

Figure 5: Screen shot of customization of workers' profiles at Senniors

Preferencia horaria *

☐ Interna semana
☐ Interna fines de semana
☐ Externa jornada completa
☐ Externa por horas
☐ Externa fines de semana
☐ Externa mañanas
☐ Externa tardes
☐ Externa noches
☐ Externa noches fines de semana

Cursos formaciones *

☐ Ninguno
☐ Formación Sociosanitaria de menos de 200 horas
☐ Certificado de Profesionalidad en Atención Sociosanitaria a Personas Dependientes (CP)

Relationship with clients are managed through different tools. The most important one is the app, whereby workers report any activity and provide real-time information. The app incorporates a communication tool with clients and the care coordinators at Senniors. Moreover, workers may contact the platform in case any problem or conflict with the families.

According to the platform, relationship-building between workers and clients is a central part of the care model. Therefore, Senniors prioritizes long-term continuity, and caregivers often become “family-like” figures, particularly in cases of dementia or terminal illness. Coordination between the platform and families is maintained via regular video updates and joint sessions with families.

5.4.8. Working Conditions and Organization of Labor

Similarly to other platforms, Senniors does not directly employ most of its caregivers; rather, it acts as an intermediary, assisting with contracts and payroll via third parties. Caregivers thus remain legally tied to the families rather than to Senniors. This means that working conditions are not directly established by the platform. However, through the care plan devised by the platform for families, they indirectly set length of contracts, working hours etc. Caregivers in the platform are hired under the domestic workers legal framework. This legal category, although providing a formalised environment for the employment relationship, offers fewer protections compared to contracts under the general social security regime. In particular, it has a more

stringent framework for accessing unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, and occupational hazard coverage.

The platform offers a wide range of service formats and is flexible regarding the hours, including hourly care to 24-hour live-in arrangements. Hourly caregivers typically enjoy better control over schedules, although the short duration of contracts (e.g., 3-hour daily shifts) exposes them to more precariousness, especially since they more likely have to take more jobs in order to achieve a decent pay. Live-in caregivers have in principle more wage security, but the main problems reported related to longer hours, restricted rest time, and emotional labor saturation, despite being framed as “companions.”

Pay levels vary depending on the care modality / intensity and whether the caregiver is hired as an internal (live-in) or external (hourly) worker. The analysis suggests that wages move around the statutory minimum wage, although Senniors clients may pay slightly higher for specialized tasks. However, caregivers often lack bonuses, overtime, or stable salary increases.

5.4.9. Skills and Training Support

Because of the orientation towards the provision of a more specialised and individualised care and the intense of technologies, skill requirements for workers are higher compared to other platforms. First, some of the services provided by the platform require certified skills and training. But even for basic elderly care, the platform requires minimum digital skills in order to be able to work with the app and use some of the devices that may help to monitor health of the cared person.

As showed in figures 6 and 7, the platform doesn't always require certified skills. This to a large extent depends on the assessment made by the platform as to the needs of the person. In the first case, there is no need to proof skills, whilst in the second case of a person with reduced mobility and respiratory problems, the platform requires some courses and training.

In line with other platforms, a major problem of the platforms is their limited commitment to training of caregivers. Even though some training is offered internally or through partners (e.g., HumanITcare, Fitbit), the platform does not guarantee systematic upskilling for all workers. This gap reflects wider challenges in the platform care economy, where certification is encouraged but not enforced.

Figure 6: Screen shot of client announcement at Senniors

BUSCO CUIDADORA EXTERNA

Senniors

589 € a la semana

Solicitar ahora

Cualificaciones

- Cuidado para personas mayores: 2 años (Deseable)

Descripción completa del empleo

Hola, somos una agencia de cuidados a personas mayores a domicilio y estamos buscando una persona para cuidar a una persona mayor en . El horario es de lunes a viernes de 9hs a 11hs y de 19hs a 21hs , con un salario de 589,17 euros más alta en la seguridad social y derecho a 30 días de vacaciones. Necesario tener papeles, referencias y experiencia con mayores. Contactar al

Tipo de puesto: Media jornada

Experiencia:

- Cuidado para personas mayores: 2 años (Deseable)

Ubicación del trabajo: Empleo presencial

Figure 7: Screen shot of client announcement at Senniors

¿Qué buscamos?

Estamos buscando una cuidadora externa para las mañanas en Madrid, . Cuidado de una señora mayor con movilidad reducida y oxígeno. Tareas a realizar: Apoyo en la movilización, higiene personal, control de medicamentos, apoyo en las tareas básicas del hogar, preparación de comida, paseos y recados, compañía, etc.

Salario: 525,59 Eur/mes + Seguridad Social + 30 días de vacaciones.

INSCRIBIRSE EN ESTA OFERTA

Condiciones:

Incorporación inmediata.

Horario: De lunes a viernes de 09:00 a 13:00

Salario: 525,59 Eur/mes + Seguridad Social + 30 días de vacaciones.

Funciones:

Supervisión y apoyo en todas las actividades de la vida diaria; cuidados, higiene, administración de medicamentos.

Acompañamiento a citas médicas, actividades de ocio, paseos

Requisitos:

- Necesario tener experiencia con personas mayores.
- Necesario tener el curso de atención sociosanitaria o similar.
- Necesario tener papeles.
- Necesario tener referencias.

5.4.10. Relations with Trade Unions and Interest Groups

In line with findings from other platforms, Senniors caregivers exhibit limited not to say inexistent, engagement with trade unions and other interest groups. As semi-independent contractors or household employees, they fall outside the scope of

conventional union representation. There is no evidence of collaboration with other domestic worker collectives that have contributed to give visibility to the problems affecting workers in the sector. This doesn't only apply to the low-skilled profiles in the platform, but also to the more skilled ones. The reasons for this lack engagement explained by workers are multifarious and they go from lack of knowledge and direct contact with trade unions.

5.4.11. Perceived risks and social protection needs

Workers at Senniors face several risks, some of them shared with other similar platforms in Spain. One of the most salient risks is the precarious employment framework under which most caregivers operate. Most caregivers are hired under the "empleado/a del hogar" legal category, which provides limited protection compared to healthcare or public sector employment contracts. This status often excludes them from full unemployment benefits, occupational accident insurance, and paid sick leave. In cases where care relationships terminate abruptly—due to the client's hospitalization, death, or family decision—caregivers may be left without compensation or notice.

Another risk mentioned by workers is the physical and emotional burden, which is often intensified by the nature of the conditions faced by clients—many of whom suffer from advanced-stage degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or ALS. Tasks include patient transfers, hygiene support, all of which can lead to musculoskeletal injuries over time. The emotional labor involved in forming close ties with care recipients, especially in end-of-life or palliative care scenarios, contributes to compassion fatigue, anxiety, and burnout. Although Senniors highlights the importance of empathy and affective relationships in its care model, it does not clearly delineate mechanisms for psychological support or emotional resilience training for its workers. Without structured interventions, caregivers are left to absorb the emotional burden in isolation, which, over the long term, can result in mental health deterioration. Workers also mention risks linked to the digital oversight through the care app and the Florence platform, which compiles and tracks caregiver performance, patient health metrics, and compliance with care protocols. Though this is not intended to be a mechanism to monitor workers' performance, the reality is that workers may feel pressure to constantly perform and report according to platform standards and hence increase stress

5.4.12. Social Protection Needs

In terms of social protection needs, several gaps are mentioned. First, caregivers, especially those with part-time contracts, require a safety net that ensures income stability in periods between assignments. Second, there is a need for universal access

to occupational risk coverage, especially for live-in workers who are exposed to accidents at any time of day. Finally, caregivers face exclusion from union representation or collective bargaining protection due to their legal classification, thereby lacking avenues for collective bargaining or grievance mechanisms.

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