Work Package 3 – Deliverable 1

LITERATURE REVIEW REPORT ON CARE PLATFORMS AND PLATFORM COOPERATIVISM

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Digital Labour Platforms in Home Care

Introductory Context

Gig work can be characterised as short-term jobs in which the workers are hired as independent contractors by a digital platform provider that digitally connects workers with individuals or businesses that require labour (De Stefano, 2016; Berg et al., 2018; Katz & Krueger, 2019). Despite the platform provider setting terms and conditions and exercising control over the work, often through the use of algorithmic management systems to track and evaluate worker performance, platforms are viewed as labour market intermediaries rather than employers (Prassl, 2018). While the flexibility afforded through these arrangements can be touted as beneficial, features of traditional employment relationships such as standardisation in hours, earnings and access to welfare entitlements associated with employee status are foregone (De Stefano, 2015; Graham et al., 2017). Gig workers face many challenges, such as no health insurance, being underpaid, being overworked, doing a significant amount of overtime, high-intensity work, and lack of training (Berg et al., 2023; Caza et al., 2022), and are also more susceptible to experiencing harmful social and physical environments and other occupational health and safety problems (Berg et al., 2023). Platform work now makes up a substantial part of the European labour force, with 28.3 million people working on platforms in 2022 and anticipated growth of 52 percent in this figure by 2025 (European Commission, 2022). While transport and delivery services make up almost two-thirds of the platform economy as a whole, domestic work and home services represent a further 22 percent of the platform economy (European Commission, 2022). Rapid population ageing in Europe has accelerated the demand for "Personal and Household Services" (PHS), which covers a broad range of activities that contribute to the wellbeing of families and individuals at home (childcare – CC, long-term care – LTC for the elderly and persons with disabilities, cleaning, home maintenance, etc.). This form of work is typically viewed as entailing tasks relating to social reproduction. Huws (2019) points to the views expressed by first-wave feminists who argued that, within the capitalist system, housework consisted only of unproductive work that created no value for the economy and that the advent of new technologies has the potential to eliminate the need for domestic labour. The rise of digital platforms in care and domestic work lays bare the flaws in the first-wave feminist view. Technology has increased the commodification of care and domestic work. Piletic (2024), drawing on Bakker (2007, p. 53), argues that platforms have been integrated into the daily lives of households, offering substitutes for key reproductive

tasks and, in so doing, becoming a coping mechanism to face the effects of decades of 'reprivatization'.

This research project examines digital labour platforms in the changing organisation of social reproduction. Within this research, social reproduction refers to work broadly related to the home and caring (childcare, elder care, healthcare), maintaining physical spaces and organising resources as part of an indirect process of care for oneself and others (cleaning, shopping, repairing) (Hester & Srnicek, 2018). Though technically classed as service sector employment, Meagher et al. (2016) argue that the relational nature of care work distinguishes it from more general service employment. This aspect of care work has also recently received attention in the literature on platform–mediated care work (Khan et al., 2023). Flanagan (2019) points out that service work relating to the care of human bodies and the maintenance of physical spaces (broadly termed the work of 'social reproduction') has had only a marginal presence in analyses of the gig economy to date. It has been argued that the platform economy is now conquering the domestic work and home care sector in countries of the global north as a response to the scarcity of affordable quality care services (Rodríguez–Modroño et al., 2022). The sector is interesting in that it differs from the typical sectors where platforms disrupt existing regulations and worker organisation. In contrast, this sector is, by and large, poorly regulated and characterised by a high level of informality. The informal economy refers to economic activities and transactions that are legitimate except that they are undeclared or under–declared to the state and circumvent legal and tax obligations (Horodnic et al., 2021). According to the European Labour Authority (2021), the rate of informality or undeclared work in personal and household services is 34% in the care sector but almost 70% in direct household employment. Although it is well established that the platformisation of work can be disruptive in a sector that was previously well organised and formally structured (e.g. ride sharing), less is known of the reverse, where platforms may have a formalisation and organising effect, with the potential of improvement of working conditions in a sector that is highly informal and unorganised (e.g. home care services/domestic work). The emergence of cooperatives that share similarities with the platform model has been able to reduce the level of precarity for American care workers (Berry & Bell, 2018). Bunders et al. (2022) define platform cooperatives as those which combine the online infrastructure of a platform to mediate social and economic interaction with the collective ownership and democratic governance of a cooperative enterprise. Kasparian et al. (2023) found that cooperative platforms bring a new approach to managing data. They do not resort to algorithms to control and penalise workers; instead, they seek to develop participative mechanisms to enhance women's involvement in how the platforms manage their working conditions, contributing to a more equitable digital economy.

The term "uberization" is now used to describe the phenomenon whereby a start–up or a new economic model related to the digital economy threatens to replace an old

model or system (Nerinckx, 2016; Towers-Clark, 2019). Dassori and Donini (2024) highlight the spectrum of forms that platforms can take. This can see a platform act as a simple enabler of matching labour demand and offer, while other types of platforms are used to outsource stages of the production process of goods or services. However, they point out that platforms are never passive entities since the actions of workers depend to an extent on the contractual terms set by the platform, even though the intensity of the platform's control can vary from the simple provision of matching tools to creating the general terms and conditions or defining conditions for performance. In this case, the approach is "offline work with online management" (Kampouri, 2022, p. 17).

Digital Labour Platforms

While accessing statistics in relation to care platform work is difficult, it is generally accepted that domestic help is an occupational field where platforms are growing significantly. Although the emergence of digital platforms in the domestic and care sector is a relatively new phenomenon (MacDonald & Charlesworth 2021), it has rapidly grown to €1.5 billion in 2020 from €0.8 billion in 2016 (Marzo, 2023). Ticona and Mateescu (2018) contend that care platforms have embraced the features of responsiveness and worker flexibility that are central to the gig economy model. A widely acknowledged layer of differentiation in the classifications of platform work is the location of work, which refers to whether the work is undertaken 'virtually' or 'in-person', remotely or locally (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Wood et al., 2019). In the case of care, the nature of the work requires that it be conducted locally and in-person. Platforms offering services that require in-person, local arrangements tend to operate either by allocating specific jobs to workers via an app or by providing a matching service whereby clients and workers can post and bid for jobs. In the case of care work, the latter approach tends to be more typical, where clients can select a preferred care worker via the platform (Williams et al., 2020; Mandl, 2019). Trojanksy (2020) describes three distinct phases that are involved in the care platform model: firstly, the "discovery" phase, involving the identification of the care seeker's needs and associated tasks to be completed by a care worker subject to experience, qualifications, and availability. Next is the "exchange" phase, where workers and clients are matched and tasks confirmed. Finally, the "relationship" phase refers to the possible development of a long-term relationship between the carer and the client. Arguably, it is at this phase that the process differs substantially from that involved in other platform-based services, since clients in few other services have a vested interest in developing a long-term relationship with the same worker.

Coyle (2017) emphasises that to be commercially viable, platform organisations must have a critical mass of workers in order to fulfil client demands. The availability of workers in the platform model is a crucial concern. Previous research has questioned the rudimentary and seemingly hyper-efficient recruitment processes of digital platforms (Williams et al., 2020; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). Fundamentally, however, platforms need a consistent stream of repeat custom in order to be viable. Therefore, maintaining client satisfaction tends to outweigh workers' demands. However, given that care is an essential need, the client has a vested interest in developing a long-term relationship with the care worker. Thus, platforms in this sector will need to find ways of balancing client and worker demands in order to ensure continuity of service. While the platform model claims to provide choice to clients, it also changes the relationship that exists between carer and client, from one being rooted solely in care activities to one that includes the management of arrangements between the parties, with minimum intervention from the care organisation or platform. The element of choice for the care recipient is emphasised in the platform context, yet the organisation retains a certain degree of influence in this regard through what information is provided. For example, Carr et al. (2017) found that clients rely on a certain amount of informational cues that they gain from workers' profiles to form an assessment of their suitability, for example, their photographs. However, Carr's research warns of potential attributions that clients may infer based on such informational cues that may or may not be related to the job. Williams et al. (2020) argue that platforms can simultaneously abdicate responsibility for decisions in the selection of workers to the clients, but at the same time maintain control over which workers the client has access to. Moreover, studies focused on labour process control (e.g. MacDonald et al. 2021) have noted that algorithmic ratings from clients impact domestic workers' experience, who are charged with extra pressure to render quality cleaning services (Sibiya & du Toit, 2022). MacDonald and Charlesworth (2016) point towards consumers having a high degree of choice, e.g. in terms of selecting the worker who will provide the service, and a lack of external control and monitoring of care labour and outcomes as issues in care work. The ongoing challenge of labour shortages in the care sector is further compounded by the phenomenon of care provision being increasingly displaced from developing to developed countries, which is emerging as a global concern (Schwiter & Steiner, 2020).

A significant proportion of platform workers are migrants. Migratory experience is another key descriptive characteristic of the platform workforce (van Doorn et al. 2020; van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). While a significant proportion of platform workers have migrant backgrounds, this is particularly crucial in the care and domestic sectors (Yin., 2024; Wiesböck et al., 2023), where platforms are observed to enhance historical processes of "outsourcing labour-intensive tasks to poorly paid workers in the global South" (Tandon & Rathi, 2022, p. 14). Orth (2024) highlights how platforms draw on a

workforce that consists of recently arrived young migrants with comparatively high education, language skills and digital literacy. Orth also argues that migration regimes shape a worker's ability to find work and, in turn, supply a workforce to the emerging platform economy. Therefore, to grasp the intricate matrix of inequalities that platforms contribute to reproducing, several scholars have invoked to adopt an intersectional approach (Rodríguez–Modroño et al., 2023; Tandon & Rati, 2022; Wiesböck et al., 2023).

Undertaking work in the invisible sphere of the private home increases their vulnerability. A distinctive feature of home care work is that it includes tasks classed as both family work and market work, performed in both private and public spaces, and can occur in both the formal and informal economy (Fudge 2012). The invisibility of the work in private settings creates challenges for inspection and has contributed to a lack of professionalisation in the sector (Cox, 2006). Platforms generally "make jobs more casual and without social protection and pay unpredictable and unreported" (Pulignano et al., 2023, p. 12). Sedacca (2022, p. 152) notes that "the provision of domestic services through online platforms has the potential to increase the work's visibility, which could be hoped to facilitate improved rights and valuation in the sector. Yet to date there has been little realisation of this potential, with visibility often failing to translate into increased benefits for those performing the work or to subject working conditions to more scrutiny". Pulignano et al. (2023, p. 5) highlight the difference between contexts of regulatory and legal ambiguity where platforms may enhance formality, as demonstrated by Mateescu and Ticona (2020) for the USA, and more formalised labour markets, where "platform–mediated domestic care work tends to be informal, not readily identifiable and overt, and not recognised as work". The persistence of employment relationships within domestic work platforms, moreover, is undermined by the ease with which users disintermediate the platform – what Nhleko and Tame call "platform leakage" (2023).

One way in which care platforms differ from platforms in other sectors is that the person seeking a service is not necessarily the same individual who ultimately receives it. In other words, it is the family of a person in need of care who arranges care. Once signed up to the platform, clients are given access to a list of carers based on geographical proximity. Tandon and Rathi (2021) also typify platforms as marketplaces that act as online job boards, where workers can create profiles which potential clients pay a fee to access but where the platform does not intervene in setting the terms and conditions nor responsibility for dealing with complaints from either side. In terms of how digital care platforms actually operate, Ustek–Spilda et al. (2022) outline three main formats that care platforms tend to use either singularly or in tandem. The first is a piece–rate approach where workers are paid only for the tasks completed, with a commission rate attached to each job they are assigned via the platform. Some platforms provide more of an employment model with a base salary

topped up with extra piece-rate payments. At the same time, some platforms operate on a subscription model where workers and/or clients pay a fee to use the platform. Blanchard et al. (2021), in reviewing the operation of care platforms in Spain, differentiate between two different models: digital placement agencies and on-demand platforms[1]. They found that digital placement agencies operate in a similar way to that of a traditional private placement agency, offering recruitment as well as ongoing, follow-up support for the duration of the service provided, for which they charge care clients an initial fee (this covers assessing client needs, matching with a carer, and conducting the legal and registration requirements), and monthly fee (covering administering payroll, finding substitute carers if needed and maintaining contact with the worker and family). Blanchard et al. (2021) found that differences exist even within the digital placement agency model, whereby some platforms do not accept clients who only want to use a platform to select a carer without subsequently establishing a formalised working arrangement with the carer and platform. In contrast, some platforms limit their involvement to contract paperwork and registering the carer on the social security system for the client. Another service provided is the option of formalising the working relationship for families who already have a carer working informally without a contract.

The second model is an on-demand platform, which Blanchard et al. (2021) found to have similar operating models to other on-demand platforms in different sectors. In this case, workers set their own hourly rates, with the platform taking a percentage as commission (e.g. Familiados). While Blanchard found that these platforms tend to specialise in urgent, one-off, short-term services without an intention to create a longer-term relationship between carer and client, there are examples where a commission-based approach also encourages the development of longer-term care relationships. Research from the Fairwork Foundation found that some platforms, such as Helpling and Careship, have created financial mechanisms to promote this continuity. For example, a platform may charge a higher commission for the first three jobs a worker takes from the same client, with the amount reducing thereafter, meaning that for workers, it is financially more beneficial to retain clients, which also benefits the platform. One of the problems identified by the Fairwork Foundation is that care work platforms failed to monitor whether the workers were paid in full.

The types of tasks performed by platform domestic workers vary from support with shopping and cooking to more complex personal care-related needs. The platforms generally require carers to have demonstrable experience, past references, and some official care qualifications. Despite platforms offering a new approach and potential to provide care work differently, a growing literature suggests significant similarities and

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[1] Blanchard, O., Rathi, A., Juares, C., Hobden, C., Samman, E., Ticona, J., Arroyo, L., Rodríguez Fernandez, M.L. and Moreno Colom, S., 2021. Home care and digital platforms in Spain.

parallels between care work both in the gig economy and its non–digital counterpart, explaining the continued gendered nature of the work (Ustek–Spilda et al., 2022). Piasna et al. (2022) highlight the gender divide in platform work, showing that women represent a large majority of on–location workers (64 per cent). This category is dominated by young women performing care services. Similarly, Hunt and Samman (2019) address the gendered nature of gig work as a main interest for the research on platform work, as women face disadvantages related to poverty and intersecting inequalities. According to Rodríguez–Modroño and colleagues (2023, 2024), the penetration of digital platforms in the care sector represents a continuation of the commodification of reproductive activities. As platforms behave as mere labour market intermediaries, they have rapid access to a reverse labour army (2024) and incentive "nonprofessionalization and flexibilization in service provision and labor relations" (2023 p. 635).

Platforms introduce new forms of control conveyed through platform devices, among which the reputational mechanism assumes particular centrality (Sedacca 2022). Research shows that, in addition to being influenced by prejudice related to factors such as ethnicity, gender, and age, reputational mechanisms tend to disadvantage workers who have more caring responsibility; for example, through penalties for cancellations that they may be unable to avoid due to a lack of alternative care provision in their own situation (van Doorn 2021). The ratings assigned to care workers can have an impact on the price charged by the workers and result in increasing internal stratification (Hunt & Samman 2020). Therefore, workers who are engaging in domestic work in order to balance their own caring needs may be penalised for failing to take on more tasks or roles.

Governance

Governance can be considered at the internal and external levels. Firstly, within the platforms, Ticona (2022) highlights that platforms' approach to governance has borrowed heavily from the approach taken by social media sites. Ticona (2022) illustrates how social media platforms use flags to govern content posted by users and how such users are viewed as constituting a rhetorically constructed "community" of discourse. Crucially, though, as Ticona points out, users on these platforms are considered to be situated in formally equal relationships, with each user's flags carrying roughly the same merit. However, in the case of labour platforms, equal relations cannot be so easily assumed, as platforms bring together two distinct sets of users, clients and workers, each of whom navigates a different side of the platform. Ticona also points out that digital labour platforms borrow governance mechanisms

from social media platforms in relation to the crowdsourced detection of inappropriate content.

In terms of external governance, digital platforms, as novel forms of organisation (Grabher & Konig, 2020; Pais & Stark, 2020), act as private regulators (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Lehdonvirta, 2022), creating "their own institutional and societal embeddedness" (Grabher & van Tujil, 2020, p. 1012). The interplay between platform-based organisations and regulatory measures has been widely acknowledged. However, Karanovic et al. (2020) argue that much of the literature has failed to adequately focus on workers. Platforms are dynamic; the choices governing the rules managing access and control of a platform are rarely static, evolving with the pace of technical contributions from platform leaders and external participants, which, in turn, affects how the platform is used (Parker & Van Alstyne, 2017; Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; O'Mahony & Karp, 2021). O'Mahony and Karp (2021) point to the extensive body of literature illustrating that platform leaders create rules to enhance their own competitive advantage, with most controlled by a single proprietary firm and few distributing governance rights to the collective.

Haidinger et al. (2024) point to the importance of the sectoral context in understanding how platforms operate. They highlight how platforms such as Helpling navigate sectoral fields where other organisations already operate, a specific market structure already prevails and where regulation creates a number of features. Features can include industry-level collective bargaining agreements covering employment or regulations governing market access, standards requirements, and standards for service provisions. In addition, other public policies, for example, location-based policies, can affect service demand. Haidinger et al. (2024) state that platforms first circumvent or ultimately ignore existing regulations setting labour and service standards, finding alternative solutions and compromises that affect the industry as a whole.

As Gospel and Lewis (2011) state, regulation can be an effective vehicle for workforce development as well as better service delivery. Industrial relations scholars have started to claim that neither platform is immune to national regulations (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2023; Tandon & Rathi, 2021). In the cleaning sector, for instance, Koutsimpogiorgos and colleagues found that Helpling has adapted its business model to different national regulatory contexts. Thus, digitalisation processes need to be evaluated in relation to the dynamics they imply at the organisational and professional level, the competencies they presuppose (both from professionals and the population/users of a service), the communities they involve (or exclude), and the possibilities they offer for new practices to emerge at the organisational, professional, and everyday work level.

Platform capitalism and platform cooperativism

Drawing on institutional theory, Hinings et al. (2018) posit that organisations operate within a context of social expectations and prescriptions about what constitutes legitimate behaviour; critical actors shaping this view include regulators, professional associations and the media. Therefore, organisations are constrained by social expectations of their particular actions and ways of organising. Hinings et al. (2018) point out that platform organisations have been subject to criticism and restrictions from regulators as they deviate from existing categories.

The fungibility of workers is a relatively accepted part of the business model of digital labour platforms (McDonnell et al., 2021). Scholz (2016) proposes platform cooperativism as a replacement for platform capitalism, the former characterised by a communal ownership structure, democratic governance model, and equitable distribution of value. However, it is argued that the vision for achieving such a model is constrained by the absence of barriers to better-capitalised competitors that lack the constraint of community accountability (Schneider, 2020). Pentzien (2020, p. 5) argues that to "restrain dominant platform incumbents alone, it seems, is therefore not enough to initiate momentum towards a more democratic platform economy." As Bunders et al. (2022) outline, various models of platform cooperatives exist. At the minimal level, some enable gig workers who remain self-employed to also become members of a cooperative to gain access to shared services like co-working spaces, financial advice, or insurance. At the other end of the spectrum, some platform cooperatives establish a platform which allows workers to input the design. This enables them to benefit from lower commission rates, for example. However, as Bunders et al. (2022) point out, the issues of precarity are better resolved when gig workers are employed by the cooperative. An example of such a model in domestic work is "Up&Go" for cleaners in New York, United States. Bunders et al. (2022) found that in areas like domestic work platforms, cooperatives struggle to obtain capital to support their aims, given the low pay of such jobs and the scarcity of cooperatives as an example. Furthermore, workers' interests in joining a cooperative to participate in collective decision-making may be limited by the fact that they engage in the work as a source of additional rather than sole income. From a worker perspective, the advantages of platform cooperatives over investor-owned platforms have been examined. The research by Bunders et al. (2022) found that while operational challenges can be overcome by platform co-ops that organise transport and professional jobs, the situation is more challenging in food delivery, homecare and micro-tasking. However, despite these challenges, Bunders et al. (2022) point to the Equal Care Coop as an example of a cooperative that has been able to overcome such challenges through a strategy of including multiple stakeholders. The Equal Care Coop

was originally established on a pilot basis in one region of the UK as a digital product and accompanying service owned by and accountable to the communities using and sustaining it (Borkin, 2019). The venture has since secured additional investment, for example, from Resolutions Ventures as part of the Workertech Partnership, which aims to support innovators harnessing technology to improve the pay, prospects, power, and progression of low-paid workers (Resolution Foundation, 2023). Christiaens (2024) draws on examples showing that external competitive pressures on worker cooperatives in capitalist markets are to be overcome by supporting strict regulation of the gig economy and waiting for platform companies' investment funds to run dry. Cooperative platforms can, Christiaens argues, step in where a private platform fails to secure market dominance.

While the democratic merits of platform cooperativism are touted over that of digital capitalism, Sandoval (2020) raises the possibility that it risks being co-opted by it. Institutional isomorphism is a theory that explains the homogeneity of originations in the same field (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983; Pal & Ojha, 2017). Organisations have a tendency to become very similar to one another. Three mechanisms have been identified which may cause isomorphism: 1) coercive isomorphism, which is often the result of state action; 2) mimetic isomorphism, when an organisation may be operating in an uncertain environment and begins to mimic an organisation to reach its legitimacy, and normative isomorphism, this is when the professional standards shape an organisation, e.g. licencing or educational requirements (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983; Corby & Latreille, 2012). Mannan and Pek (2023) argue that the issue of democratic member participation goes to the heart of what makes a platform cooperative distinct from corporate platforms. Thus, if platform cooperatives begin to lose this key feature, their distinctiveness from commercial/investor platforms is limited.

Fairness and organisational justice

The wealth of literature dedicated to perceptions of organisational justice among workers with a standard employment relationship is vast and nuanced. Such in-depth understanding has yet to be replicated in relation to worker experiences on platforms. However, there is some literature outlining how perceptions of fairness and justice affect participation and turnover intentions (Pfeiffer & Kawalec, 2020; Song et al., 2020; Liu & Liu, 2019). Perceptions of fairness matter since they influence attitudes, behaviours and performance (Colquitt et al., 2001). In sectors where a relational aspect between the client and the platform workers is less relevant, turnover and engagement may remain limited to the concerns of workers and the platform. However, in the care sector, clients, especially those with vulnerabilities, are more likely

to have a vested interest in maintaining continuity with the worker providing care or home support. The concept of organisational justice in the employment context is rooted in the notion of perceived adherence to applying fair rules in decision–making (Colquitt & Rodell, 2015).

Perceptions of organisational justice among employees are impacted by four dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice (Olsen et al., 2012). However, as the latter factors are typically grounded in exchanges between workers and managers, the former elements of distributive and procedural justice are more readily attributable in digital labour platforms to the platform itself through its design and governance approaches. Informational justice and procedural justice are inextricably linked in the digital platform context. For example, as Franke and Pulignano (2023) assert, platform companies tend to withhold critical information from workers as a control strategy. Lee (2024) points out that, unlike traditional work environments, where colleagues serve as referent others, the solo nature of platform work makes comparison problematic and, therefore, raises questions about how platform workers construct perceptions of distributive justice. In terms of procedural justice, the nature of algorithmic decision–making has been questioned in relation to fairness (Rani & Furrer, 2021). In particular, the extent to which workers have opportunities to appeal algorithmic decisions (Griesbach et al., 2019). Indeed, Williams et al. (2020) found that carers on platforms regard the assigning of workers to available work as an opaque system. Finally, Wiesbock et al. (2023) argue that information asymmetry is created between customers and workers through the platforms, where workers primarily receive job–related information, but customers receive more person–specific details about workers and wield greater power through the rating systems applied.

Despite the algorithmic nature of decision–making in platforms, the concept of interactional justice has been largely overlooked. Lee (2024) argues that despite the absence of face–to–face interactions between workers and platforms, platform workers occasionally interact with real people to resolve issues that cannot be addressed by automated systems. Furthermore, clients can also affect perceptions of interpersonal justice. Consequently, more research is warranted regarding platform workers' perceptions of dignity and respect in their working environments, particularly in settings where repeated interaction with the same client is a feature, such is the case in care/domestic work. To the best of our knowledge, a significant gap in the literature exists regarding how digital labour platforms attempt to ensure interactional justice for workers, for example, how platforms design or manage policies for client behaviour toward workers beyond a user rating system. Though such an approach may work in sectors such as transport and delivery services to nudge client behaviour, the futility of such an approach may be limited where care is coordinated by family members, and thus, interaction is between the client, worker, and person being cared for.

Conditions in care work are generally categorised as precarious, notwithstanding the additional complexity of working via labour platforms. Cameron (2024) points to the body of literature, which highlights how social relations with coworkers and managers contribute to making jobs more tolerable for those working in precarious, bad conditions. While home care typically lacks the opportunity for social relations with other workers, interaction with managers and supervisors is somewhat more prevalent. However, digital platforms facilitate an electronically mediated exchange, which reduces opportunities for social interaction as workers have less contact with managers. Almost inherent to our understanding of the traditional employment relationship is the assumption that there exists some element of interpersonal or relational interaction between the parties providing labour and managing labour between the parties. However, as Tubaro (2021, p. 934) argues, labour becomes dis-embedded from social relations in the platform sphere, where platforms acting as market intermediaries with a focus on economic ties result in "completely de-personalizing the labour relationship". More recently, Alacovska et al. (2024) applied a relational work perspective to platform–mediated work. By relational work, they mean the process in which people try to form 'good matches' between types of economic exchanges and types of social relations. Although their work is focused on creative workers, the findings are of relevance to care and domestic workers also. They found that rather than being entirely controlled by depersonalised and algorithm–driven forces, work is also infused in relational infrastructures, but the upkeep and durability of this depend on the emotional efforts undertaken by workers to match economic transactions and exchange to meaningful client relations. They found that this contributed to additional emotional burden and overwork.

In terms of control, the nature of domestic work poses some problems in the extent to which it can control workers' actions. Although domestic work is organised through a third–party–owned digital app (platform), the work itself is performed in real–time within households. Therefore, the capacity for what is referred to as platform leakage is greater in domestic work. Platform leakage refers to the practice of platform workers bypassing the intermediary and avoiding platform service charges by transacting offline, having already created a favourable impression with clients (He et al., 2020; Nhleko & Tame, 2023). The benefit of doing so for workers is the ability to exercise greater control over their working conditions and earnings without incurring the service charges associated with the platform (Chinguno, 2019; Nhleko & Tame, 2023). That being said, forms of control that exist on platforms more commonly associated with food delivery and ride–sharing are also found on domestic worker platforms. For example, in a study of domestic workers in Austria, Wiesböck et al. (2023) found that the visible oversupply of profiles on digital platforms increased the difference in power dynamics between workers and clients/the platform. This

increased pressure on workers to immediately respond to requests due to fear of being replaced by other workers if they areslow to respond or forced to cancel a gig. Finally, a somewhat overlooked aspect of platform workers' vulnerability is the extent to which workers can fall victim to fraudulent scams. Ticona (2022) describes how some care workers have experienced fraudulent user profiles being established, falsely claiming to be seeking domestic support but, in fact, using care workers as a way to extract funds, which would not be possible without the funds initially passing through a third party (the care worker) as the law requires banks to make funds from checks available before they can be verified. Care workers can then inadvertently become caught up in elaborate money transfer scams. Ticona (2022) found that while platforms are proactive in warning workers of the risks of such scams, their discourse emphasises individual responsibility for being alert to them. For workers, trying to avoid engaging with scam accounts can come at a cost. Being vigilant and hesitant in responding to clients may lead to them having longer response times, which, in turn, could impact their ratings negatively, thus penalising them for exercising caution.

Providing a safe place of work

Lenaerts et al. (2021) argue that platform workers may be more exposed to greater risks than workers doing comparable tasks outside the platform economy; compared with traditional work, platform work often involves extra tasks and/or a different combination of tasks. They also argue that the use of algorithmic management can undermine workers' autonomy, job control, and flexibility, which can lead to negative health and wellbeing impacts such as exhaustion, anxiety, and stress. Garben (2019) points out that pay not being continuous but contingent on the completion of the tasks adds time pressure. The nature of platform work can further heighten this risk, as Boden et al. (2016) argue that the separation of control of the work environment from the employment relationship can be a threat to worker health and safety. Although looking primarily at transport–related gig work, Cox et al. (2024) argue that gender differences in gig workers' safety remain underexamined.

Given the isolated and private setting in which domestic work takes place, workers are at increased risk of encountering situations which compromise health and safety standards, as well as being more likely to experience employment–related abuse and exploitation (Murphy, 2013). Additionally, Wiesböck et al. (2023) found that working in the gig economy expands the risk for domestic workers of experiencing harassment in the digital sphere. Their study found that workers perceived that their visual appearance had taken a growing importance for job opportunities. Wiesböck et al. (2023, p. 268) found that 'lookism' can be reinforced through the design logic behind

platforms, which can constitute an additional form of labour market discrimination for domestic workers. They also found that a lack of support from platforms regarding safety and protection made it particularly difficult to prevent and fight mistreatment. Furthermore, Lenaerts et al. (2021) emphasise that difficulties associated with identifying and accessing the platform workforce further complicate the implementation of preventive measures to ensure health and safety standards are met.

Shaping future conditions

Within the European Union, the right to affordable long-term care is set out in principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, a criticism of the current approach to care provision is that it is built around a low-investment, low-access and low-quality model. The development of home care services and policies is uneven across Europe, being shaped mainly by national "care regimes" and welfare mix models leading to different features of both home care provision (e.g. type of services delivered, funding strategies, private and public responsibilities, and organisational patterns) and carers employment and working conditions (Bettio & Plantenga, 2008; Saraceno & Keck 2010). Care regimes define what type of care is most appropriate and desirable, including who should provide care, and while care regimes vary across Europe, there has been a growing convergence in moving away from traditional forms of care provided by the family. The European Care Strategy aims to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services and improve working conditions for care workers, including domestic workers and live-in carers. This strategy is embedded in a bigger framework of European social pillars, recommending the promotion of collective bargaining and social dialogue, the improvement of occupational standards in terms of health and safety, the provision of adequate education and training to workers, the addressing of gender stereotypes and finally the ratification of the ILO convention 2011/189 on domestic workers in all the European Member states. The ILO Convention 189 offers "specific protection to domestic workers. It lays down basic rights and principles and requires States to take a series of measures with a view to making decent work a reality for domestic workers". The strategy refers to a person-centred approach to care, entailing offering a choice of services. To meet care demands, both public and private investments in care services will be needed, but the strategy emphasises the importance of a clear regulatory environment that takes into account the social value of care services and the need to uphold the fundamental rights of persons both receiving and giving care. Ravazi (2007) refers to the 'care diamond' in evaluating how care responsibilities are shared across four different welfare sectors –

families, the state, the market and the voluntary sector. Platforms further add to the complexity of the care diamond.

The level of training required for care workers remains a grey area, an aspect of the regulation that has allowed for the emergence of these models of care. While both the platform and cooperative refer to employing experienced and qualified care workers, there is no regulatory expectation for them to do so. Allowing the employment of unqualified care workers facilitates creating a broader pool of workers, which, on the one hand, may be important in a short-term view of resourcing in the sector but, in the longer term, is insufficient to enhance the quality of jobs. Mandating for stricter requirements for qualifications has been argued as a strategy that can support better work and pay in the sector (MacDonald & Charlesworth, 2021; Ryan & Stanford, 2018). As yet, relatively little is known about human resource management (HRM) practices in care work platforms beyond the basics of recruitment and pay. For example, practices in relation to knowledge transfer could fundamentally improve the quality of service delivery. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in knowledge in relation to understanding how cooperatives can develop their management capacities. Basterretxea et al. (2019), for example, have pointed to the conflict between employee ownership and HRM. Limited managerial sophistication in care cooperatives may, in fact, limit their potential growth or ability to deliver positive outcomes for workers.

Finally, to date, the informal economy and the platform/gig economy in care and domestic work have been treated as largely separate issues. However, recent work from Matcu et al. (2023) has linked these issues to examine platform workers undertaking undeclared work. They found that the most prevalent undeclared activities conducted on digital labour platforms belong to the sectors where undeclared work is already conducted more frequently, with undeclared activities through platforms being most prevalent in domestic services. One of the reasons cited for undertaking undeclared work includes the marginalised status of workers excluded from the formal economy (Williams & Horondic, 2017). They also refer to economic rationale as a reason for engaging in undeclared work where individuals perceive the benefit of doing so as outweighing the risk. Williams et al. (2020) found no empirical evidence that employers from the platform economy are more likely to hire undeclared employees than other employment contexts, but unintentional non-compliance could feature.

Conclusion

A significant concern in this stream of research is the extent to which care and domestic are interchangeably and relatively homogeneous. The National Domestic

Workers Alliance (2020) found that labour categories in this sector tend to be fluid, and most domestic and care workers move frequently from cleaning to the domestic sector and from there to child and elderly care, using different formal and informal networks and arrangements to find clients and negotiate more profitable payments and working conditions, however, some platforms which cover both forms of work potentially increase the likelihood of this occurrence. Coupled with this, McDonald et al. (2023) found that the income of care workers depends on how much they work and their potential for individual agency in negotiating pay rates with clients. They found that care workers on digital platforms lack the institutional and structural support available to workers employed by traditional care agencies who scaffold negotiations of payment with clients. It was noted by McDonald et al. (2023) that the care workers study did not refer to experiences of collective attempts to improve income and conditions, and in fact, it was not explicitly noted as a possible course of action. This points to the importance of greater research on the role of trade unions and collective actors and approaches to organising workers in care platforms. Indeed, Christiaens (2024) draws on examples from the Netherlands to illustrate the importance of having worker power in more than one form to overcome the challenge of creating decent work on digital platforms. Christiaens (2024) cites the example of Deliveroo and Helpling's withdrawal from the Dutch market but contrasts the effect on workers in both situations. When Deliveroo withdrew, workers seized the opportunity to create a cooperative platform, 'BestellenBij', with more democratic worker self-government and fairer remuneration rules, absorbing unemployed Deliveroo couriers. In contrast, when Helpling withdrew due to a reclassification lawsuit where its workers were redesignated as temporary workers rather than self-employed entrepreneurs, labour market experts expressed concern that domestic workers would be forced into the informal economy. Therefore, as Christiaens (2024) argues, union activism alone might generate unintended side effects and alternative and supporting mechanisms are needed to ensure workers are not left in even more precarious situations.

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