



SEAD Working paper 2024.01 - WP4 qualitative fieldwork

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SEAD

Sustainable Employment in the Age of Digitalisation:
challenges, obstacles and opportunities

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the qualitative fieldwork conducted between March 2020 and March 2024, with several distinct yet complementary objectives that contribute to a sounder understanding of the sustainability of platform work on an individual and collective level.

The research objectives comprised three primary components. First, to produce a typology of platform work in Belgium, by identifying the types of platforms active in the country and their main characteristics (spatial location, employment status, nature of work activities, etc.). Second, based on qualitative interviews and (participant) observations, to gather information on workers' profiles and trajectories; their work and employment conditions and the way in which workers subjectively experience them. This encompassed gaining a deeper comprehension of how platform activities intersect with other endeavours, whether professional or non-professional, and exploring the dynamics of workers' relationships with both platforms and customers. Finally, examining the existence and nature of working collectives in the context of a fragmented workforce alongside analysing the collective mobilisation strategies that are developed among platform workers and in collaboration with other organisations. This implies taking into account factors such as attrition and resistance within platform work.

2. Methodology

As a first step to our qualitative research, we established a typology of platform work and platform organisations. This typology was initially informed by a literature review and was then further refined through exploratory fieldwork. The fieldwork mainly involved conducting over a hundred interviews with people working via digital platforms. These interviews were categorised into various groups identified beforehand, with diversity accounted for in terms of geographic location to encompass different regions. A series of (participant) observations were also carried out with individual workers and groups of workers within the context of collective mobilisations.

2.1. Typology of platform work in Belgium

Our typology was largely inspired by a literature review (see induction paper) and existing typologies (Cañigüeral, 2019; European Commission, 2020; Berg & al., 2018; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Cingolani, 2021) and further refined through exploratory fieldwork. It was initially based on two key dimensions, namely, spatiality and work content (type/sector of activity).

This initial classification revealed four main groups of platform activities. The 'on-location/urban space' group covers mobile activities carried out 'on site', in urban space, and mainly 'on demand'. The 'on-location/in home' group covers diverse and multi-sector activities carried out 'on site', most notably in the customer's home. Finally, the 'online' group covers services provided mainly online activities and can be further subdivided into online 'freelance work' (professional services) and online 'microtask work' (low-qualified tasks). These categories served both a heuristic and operational purpose, enabling us to structure our fieldwork by guiding the sequencing of the interview campaigns and facilitating the implementation of tailored recruitment strategies.

Table 1: Typology of platform work in Belgium

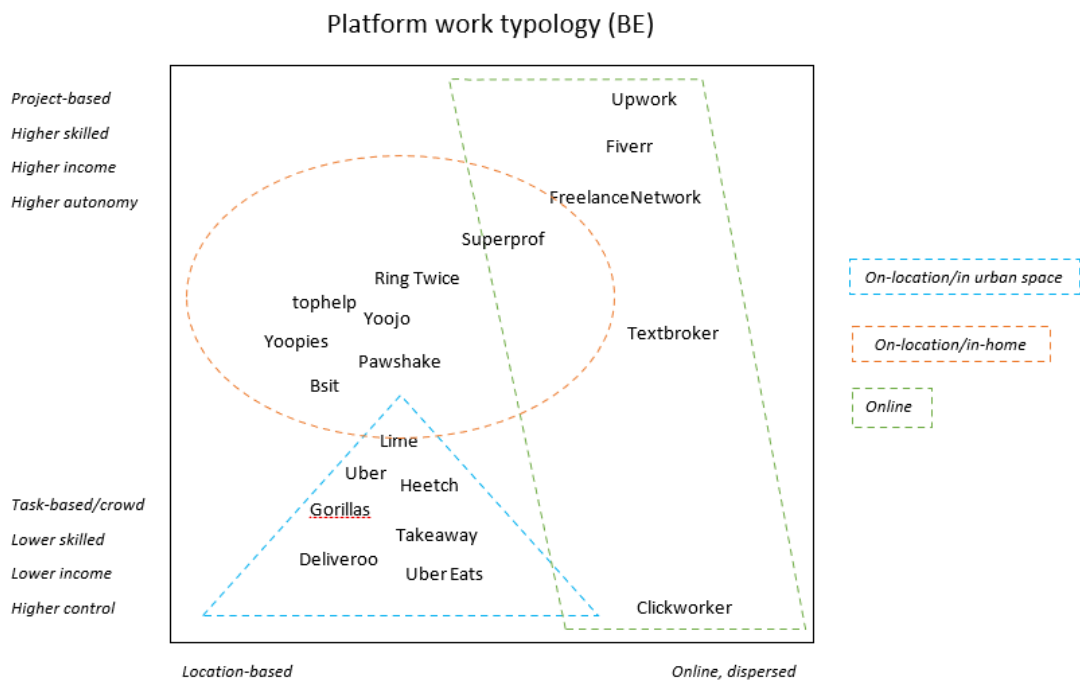
Socio-spatial category	Common characteristics	Activities/sectors	Labour platform examples
On-location/ 'urban space'	Spatially dispersed yet locally bound on-demand mobile activities that take place predominantly in (public) urban space and for the most part based on triangular relationships of multiple actors besides the platform	Food & grocery delivery	Deliveroo, Uber Eats, Takeaway, Gorillas, Shopopop
		Personal transportation	Uber X, Bolt, Heetch, Blacklane
		Package delivery & transport	Howdy, Shippr, Vengo
		'Sharing'/micromobility rental services	Lime, Dott
On-location/ 'in home'	Spatially distributed mostly locally bound labour that takes place predominantly at clients' residences and is mainly aimed at providing care or maintenance services	Multi-services ¹	Ring Twice, Yoojo, Yoopies, NeedHelp, Tophelp, Helpper, Pwiic, Care.com, StarOfService
		Tutoring	Superprof, Bijleshuis
		Petsitting	Pawshake, Holidog

¹ Multi-services platforms usually cover a wide range of services : childcare, petcare, housekeeping, tutoring, handiwork, IT, beauty & wellness, catering...

	to private individuals and households	Childcare	Bsit, Nanny Nina, Babysits, Toptata, Sitly
'Online'	Globally dispersed and often fragmented, predominantly online activities for private or corporate clients	'Freelance work'	Freelance Network, Upwork, Freelancer.be, Fiverr
		'Microtask work'	Clickworker, Microworkers, Appen, Textbroker

To further characterise platform work activities, we relied on the literature and the findings from the exploratory survey. By constructing a graphic typology, we were able to classify platform organisations operating in Belgium both spatially and according to a number of criteria related to employment conditions/relations and working conditions.

Figure 1: Typology of platform work in Belgium



The horizontal axis gives an indication of the spatial dispersion of activities. The platforms located on the left part of the frame offer services that are performed "on site", either in public space (meal delivery, personal transport) or in a private space (in a household's home or elsewhere). Those located on the right part of the frame offer (mainly) online services that can be carried out remotely from a computer.

The vertical axis gives us an indication of the characteristics of the work activity and the employment conditions/relations. The platforms located in the upper part of the frame offer relatively more complex, higher-skilled, better-paid services. Those are performed by 'providers' who are selected by the customers and who enjoy more autonomy in organising and carrying out the work. Conversely, at the bottom part of the framework, platforms mediate relatively simpler services or tasks that demand

fewer qualifications and are typically less remunerated. The tasks or gigs are allocated by the platforms, which often dictate the terms and conditions and exercise greater control over the work and the worker.

The three main groups of platform activities identified (and delineated on the graph by geometric shapes with coloured outlines), are relatively permeable. Indeed, some platforms or services transcend the boundaries between groups (e.g. some platforms offering both on-location and online services, or cover a wider range of qualification levels required to execute tasks). Some platforms are situated on the border between different groups. For example, a specialised platform offers tuition services that can be provided either remotely (online) or in person (on-location). Moreover, the 'tutors' and the services they offer tend to be rather qualified, which could assimilate them to professional freelancers². In the same way, some marginal tasks offered on micro-tasking platforms take place in a physical space (e.g. taking photos of products in a shop) and could therefore be assimilated to the 'on-location/in urban space' group.

2.2. Interviews

96 interviews with platform workers were conducted, distributed among different groups of activities and also dispersed geographically across three Belgian regions: Brussels-Capital, Flanders and Wallonia. The Brussels Capital Region was particularly well represented due to its notable presence of platform-based activities. In terms of repartition, 50 interviews were carried out with 'urban space workers', 39 with 'in-home' workers, and 7 with 'online' workers. With regard to geographical dispersion, 50 interviews were carried out with people working in Brussels, 31 with people working in Flanders, and 15 with people working in Wallonia.

Table 2. Distribution of interviews by groups of activities and region

Socio-spatial category	Brussels	Flanders	Wallonia	Total
On-location/'urban space'	29	18	3	50
On-location/'in home'	19	8	12	39
'online' (microtask and freelance) workers	2	5	0	7
	50	31	15	96

Recruitment strategies ranged from the mobilisation of existing networks and the snowball effect to on-site and online recruitment; and varied according to the groups of activities. Some of the 'urban space' workers were recruited either in urban space, or (marginally) through ride-hailing (in the case of taxi drivers), in which case the interviews were conducted in the vehicle during the journey. Some of the 'in-home' and 'online' workers were recruited directly through the platforms, by responding to advertisements or gigs we had posted. Finally, participants from all groups were also recruited via the online survey (after consenting to a qualitative follow-up interview in the questionnaire).

A **semi-structured interview guide** was developed and available in French, English, Dutch³ (see [Appendix 1](#)). It contained a series of key questions on their working conditions, employment relation with the platform, work trajectories and potential for collective action. The questions were sufficiently

² For practical reasons, those services will be assimilated to the 'on-location/in home' group in this report.

³ One interview was conducted in Pashto.

broad to encourage narrative storytelling, supplemented by a series of follow-up inquiries designed to delve deeper when necessary. Those could be adapted to each specific work situation, by changing the wording or the order of the questions.

In addition to the interviews with platform workers, **19 interviews with stakeholders** were also conducted : trade unions and workers' collectives (5), platforms' representatives and employees (11), cooperatives (2) and companies (1). They were supplemented by more informal conversations with researchers and activists.

Table 3. Interviews with stakeholders

Type	Name of the entity
Trade unions	CSC-United Freelancers
	FGTB-UBT/ABVV-BTB
	FGTB plateforme
Workers' collectives	Collectif des Coursier.e.s/KoeriersCollectief (food delivery)
	Coursiers en lutte (food delivery)
	Union des Chauffeurs de Limousine Belge (passenger transport)
Platform managers/employees	Speech Splash (babysitting)
	HappySitting (babysitting)
	Howdy Partners (transport/delivery)
	Bsit (babysitting)
	Ring Twice (multi-services)
	Deliveroo (food delivery)
	Takeaway (food delivery)
	NOWJOBS (temporary employment agency)
Cooperatives	Urbike (transport/delivery)
	Smart (freelance administration)
Delivery company	Urbeez (transport/delivery)

2.3. Thematic coding of the platform workers' interviews

The thematic coding process using NVivo software involved several key steps to systematically analyse the platform workers interview data. The process began with the main codes derived from the interview topic list, which served as the foundation for organising and categorising the data. Based on it, researchers identified main codes representing broad thematic areas relevant to the research objectives. We conducted initial coding by applying the identified main codes to segments of the interview transcripts, that best represented its content or topic. The process was iterative, with researchers revisiting and refining the codes as needed, new codes being created for emerging themes or sub-themes that were not initially captured by the initial ones. To enhance the reliability and validity of the coding process, peer review and validation were conducted: researchers reviewed each other's coding to ensure consistency and discussed any discrepancies or divergent interpretations.

2.4. (Participant) observations

In addition to shadowing a Lime 'juicer' (i.e., a person collecting and charging scooters for the e-bike platform 'Lime') at work on one occasion, a series of participant observations were made over time during collective mobilisations involving food couriers and drivers. These were supplemented by a

series of participant observations during meetings and activities organised by *La maison des livreurs*⁴ (in Brussels).

Table 4. Participant observations - collective mobilisations and forums

date & place	Event
February 2021, European Commission (Schuman roundabout)	Demonstration involving food couriers' collectives and trade unions in response to the European directive initiative on platform workers
November 2021, Uber offices in Brussels	Demonstration by drivers demanding better working conditions and jobs
November – December 2021, Brussels Parliament	Demonstrations by drivers in response to the ban on Uber and the introduction of temporary solutions pending the implementation of the "Taxi Plan" in Brussels.
October 2021 (La Tricoterie, Brussels), February 2024 (European Parliament)	Transnational forum on alternatives to uberisation (organised by the Left in the European Parliament)
September 2022 –, <i>La Maison des livreurs</i> in Brussels	Meetings and other activities at <i>La maison des livreurs</i>
October 2022, European Parliament	Demonstration in support of the European directive on platform work
May 2023, Uber offices in Brussels	Demonstration by drivers and couriers demanding better working and employment conditions

3. Overview: characterising the platform landscape in Belgium and respondents' profiles

3.1. 'On-location/in urban space' platform work

This group covers mobile and on-demand work activities that take place on site, mainly in urban areas. We conducted interviews with couriers (31), drivers (17) and 'juicers' (2).

Table 5. Distribution of 'on-location/urban space' interviews by activity and platform

Work activity	Platform(s)	Number of interviews
Meal/shopping delivery	Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Takeaway, Gorillas	31
Passenger transport	Uber, Heetch, Bolt, Blacklane	17
'Juicing'	Lime	2

⁴ *La maison des livreurs* was co-constructed by le Collectif des coursier.e.s and union representatives, as a space dedicated to welcoming all couriers, informing them about their rights, assisting them when they encounter problems and also organize them.

Platform characteristics

Interviews with 'urban space' workers covered platforms offering meal delivery hot meal delivery services (sometimes completed with shopping delivery services), personal transport services and 'juicing' (collecting and charging 'shared' e-scooters). Those platforms tend to exert a significant control over the work process, primarily through the implementation of algorithmic management systems. However, not all platforms have the same modus operandi, as is explained in further detail below. Both juicers worked for Lime, most of the food couriers worked either for Takeaway, Uber Eats and/or Deliveroo; and drivers worked primarily with Uber despite some of them also marginally used other platforms (Heetch, Bolt...). It should be noted that in Flanders, drivers can work both with platforms and (traditional) taxi companies with the same licence, and that personal transportation platforms were not active in Wallonia at the time of the study (but have since been implemented).

Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

- Participants ranged in age from 19 to 69 years old⁵. On average, couriers tended to be younger than the drivers.
- 32 out of the 50 respondents were not born in Belgium and came from the following geographical areas⁶: Central Africa (2), Central America (1), North Africa (12), Middle East (2), Asia (1), Central Asia (3), East Africa (2), West Africa (2), South America (1), North America (1), Europe (2).
- The majority of respondents were men, with only 4 women.
- 25 of them worked in Brussels, 3 in Wallonia and 17 in Flanders (3 persons worked in more than one region).

3.2. 'On-location/in-home' platform work

This group covers work activities that primarily take place in the customer's home. We conducted 39 interviews, covering several platforms and types of activity. The table below describes the distribution of interviews according to the main activity (the one the interviewee spends most time on), although people tend to multiply activities – particularly when using platforms offering a variety of tasks. In cases where a primary activity couldn't be determined, we categorised it as 'mix of activities'.

Table 6. Distribution of 'on-location/in home' interviews by activity and platform

Work activity	Platform(s)	Number of interviews
Childcare	Bsit, Babysits, Nanny Nina, Sitly, Toptata, tophelp	7
Pet sitting	Pawshake, Holidog, RingTwice	3
Cleaning	Yoojo, Yoopies, RingTwice	9
Manual work ⁷	RingTwice, NeedHelp	8
Tutoring	Superprof, RingTwice	3
Caterer	RingTwice	2
IT	RingTwice	1
Mix of activities	Yoojo, Yoopies, RingTwice	6

⁵ Age detail is unavailable 3 participants

⁶ Idem for the geographical origin

⁷ Plumbing, electricity, gardening, carpentry...

Platform characteristics

On-location/in-home platforms mainly take on the role – not necessarily impartial – of intermediaries between service providers and service seekers. The terms and conditions of the work are negotiated between these two parties, with a degree of flexibility that can vary from one platform to another. They cover a wide range of activities, including manual labour (gardening, plumbing, etc.), removal services, events, cleaning, childcare (including au pairing), pet-sitting, care for the elderly and paramedical assistance, private lessons, tutoring, wellness and beauty services, cleaning, ironing and administrative tasks. Some platforms also offer online services such as graphic design or legal advice. Some platforms offer qualified/professional services (such as teaching), while on other professionals and non-professionals alike can offer their services (in which case there might be a specific subscription process for professionals). We focused mainly on platforms where the matchmaking and payment were made through the platform itself.

Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

- The respondents ranged in age from 17 to 68 years old⁸.
- 17 out of 39 respondents were not born in Belgium and come from the following geographical areas: Europe (4); Central Africa (6); North Africa (2); Central America (1); South America (2).
- 27 of them were women, 13 were men.
- 19 of them worked in Brussels, 8 in Flanders and 12 in Wallonia.

3.3. 'Online' platform work

We conducted 7 interviews with workers on 'online' platforms: 5 working via professional services platforms, and 2 working on a micro-tasking platform.

Table 7. *Distribution of 'online' interviews by activity and platform*

Work activity	Platform(s)	Number of interviews
Micro-tasks	Clickworker	2
Game design	Fiverr, Upwork	1
Copywriting, translation	FreelanceNetwork.be, Textbroker	2
Marketing	Freelancer.be	1
Music composition, mixing, mastering	Fiverr	1

Platforms' characteristics

'Online' platforms mainly offer services carried out online, and therefore remotely. A large number of service providers from all over the world compete to offer their services and respond to requests on the platforms. These include 'freelancing' platforms and 'micro-tasking' platforms.

Freelance work platforms cover relatively skilled and complex tasks that require a fairly substantial investment of time. Although some platforms (e.g. FreelanceNetwork) offer some services that can be performed on-site (transport, photography, hairdressing, etc.), most jobs can be performed remotely. Typical job categories include administration and customer support, writing and translation, HR and training, development and IT, design and creation, sales and marketing, legal services, engineering and architecture, finance and accounting, etc.

⁸ Age detail is unavailable for one participant

Micro-task platforms, on the other hand, offer jobs that can be described as: "*tedious and datafied work that serves to train automatic systems*"⁹, or "*digital labour*" (Casilli, 2019, p. 14). It consists of a multitude of small, low-skilled or unskilled tasks – the result of splitting up larger, more complex tasks – distributed to a crowd of workers and mostly carried out online. This work is thus on the borderline between freelance work and on-demand uberised work (Casilli et al., 2019), characteristic of the 'urban space' group. A wide range of tasks are available: responding to a questionnaire, writing content, description of images or audio files, sentiment analysis, entering data on a search engine, categorisation and labelling of products, data extraction, content moderation, translation, assessing the quality of images, transcribing video or visual content, digitising documents, etc. Here too, some marginal tasks are carried out on-location (e.g. taking photos of products on a shop display or doing mystery shopping). Those tasks do not require any specific qualifications, even though some tasks require specific skills (e.g. language skills) or prior (unpaid) test or training.

Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

- The interviewees ranged in age from 24 to > 65 years old¹⁰.
- 4 were born in Belgium, 1 in the Netherlands¹¹.
- 4 interviewees were men, 3 were women.

4. Analysis¹²

The analysis is structured according to three main themes. First, we characterise the different worker trajectories and types of investment in(to) the activity. Then, we provide an in-depth analysis of their employment and working conditions (working status and regimes, work organisation and control, remuneration, working time and hours, and health and safety). Finally, we will address the issue of employment relations and collective bargaining, also discussing collective mobilisation strategies.

4.1. Trajectories into and with platform work – a typology

The aim in this section is to highlight typical profiles emerging from our sample, associated with socio-demographic characteristics, socio-professional trajectories and different modes of commitment to platform work (investment, motivations, aspirations, etc.). The diversity of situations underscores the various ways in which platform work is integrated not only into individuals' professional lives but also into broader labour market dynamics. Each individual interviewee doesn't perfectly match any of the profiles, but rather aligns with a combination of profiles. This suggests that these profiles should be viewed as ideal types intended to effectively illustrate the diversity of various work trajectories. We have identified 5 structuring profiles: platform work as a supplementary income, platform work as a default option (most notably as a source of income for (undocumented) migrants), platform work as a refuge activity after a biographical upheaval, platform work as a stepping stone for self-employment and platform work as part of a portfolio of employment sources. On a broader scale, combining work through different platforms or using platforms as one client recruitment channel among others add to broader tendency to job fragmentation and makes it challenging to approximate platform work with more typical salaried employment. It also challenges narratives that depict platform work primarily as voluntary, flexible work or as a stepping stone to enter the labour market more durably.

⁹ Cit. en français : « *travail tâcheronnisé et datafié qui sert à entraîner les systèmes automatiques* »

¹⁰ Age details are unavailable for 2 participants

¹¹ Country of origin unavailable for 2 participants

¹² All the quotes from the interviews have been anonymized

Platform work as a supplementary income

Platform work constitute for many an activity "on the side", providing supplementing income from a primary job, from social benefits, or as one component of a spectrum of more or less unstable and precarious employment opportunities. It can be an essential supplement when other sources of income are insufficient to cover expenses, or merely as a means of earning "a little extra," offering a welcome buffer during periods of rising living costs. In these cases, the platforms provide flexible work opportunities to vulnerable workers, allowing them to make ends meet:

"You have to realise that I'm the only earner in the family. I'm the father of four children, and my wife doesn't work so she can look after the household a bit more, so sometimes it's a bit tight. I'm not saying that [my main job's] salary isn't accommodating enough, it's perfectly reasonable, but if you want to enjoy yourself on the side, and if you even want to entertain your children, well, I was kind of obliged to find a little extra" (Ismaël, 35, Uber).

Some people choose an activity linked to an intrinsic interest, a hobby or even a passion (see also Jourdain, 2018; Naulin & Jourdain, 2019):

"Yes, it's been several years since I started there via... ListMinut still back then. Actually a bit as a hobby. To also, for me, I also do a lot of gardening work. Mainly, what I earn in doing that, I use to buy additional equipment - professional equipment" (Aniek, 44, Ring Twice)

Others are attracted by the possibility of carrying out tasks that are relatively easy, even playful, don't require a big investment (in time, travel, material, etc.) and can be realized as soon as a window of time, however limited, is available. For example, Malik explained how he carries out micro-tasks at different times of the day and week, sometimes while doing something else or on the move, given that he can use different devices:

"At the end of the evening, at the weekend, when I've got the day off... Not all the time, but sometimes when I'm a bit bored, sometimes even on the move. It's something I do that doesn't bother me too much, because sometimes it doesn't require a huge amount of concentration... even when I'm watching a series or doing anything else...". (Malik, 26, Clickworker)

Flexible working hours that characterise platform work makes it often easily compatible with the fixed or variable working hours of a main job, and it can sometimes be used as an economic adjustment variable. For example, Léo decided to work for Uber Eats alongside his full-time job in a supermarket chain because he didn't have the option of working overtime. In this context, being able to log on whenever he is available makes both jobs compatible:

"No, the working hours [at his main job] are their choice. They tell me 'OK, tomorrow you'll work from 10am to 8pm', but you get a week's notice. And for example, today I've got the day off. So today at midday I worked [for Uber Eats] and in the evening I'm going to work too" (Léo, 30, Uber Eats).

Platform work as a default

Platform work is a source of income for migrants who come to Belgium as part of a higher education course, to join a parent or spouse, to find work, or applying for asylum. For students, it can meet the need to find a job with flexible hours, compatible with day or evening classes. Beyond these specific situations, the low entry barriers make it possible to generate income in a situation of discrimination on the traditional labour market (Graham & al., 2017). Numerous studies confirm that personal services, food delivery and personal transport are examples of low-threshold jobs that have become niches for racialized workers who face discrimination in the labour market or experience other barriers

when entering the traditional labour market (van Doorn, 2017; Mateescu & Ticona, 2020; Sophie Bernard, 2023b).

Yasmine, who came to Belgium about a year ago to join her husband, turned to home service platforms after applying several times for low-skilled jobs in retail, even though she has a law degree from her country of origin. For her, cleaning and housework gigs she finds through platforms enable her to maintain some kind of financial independence:

"My husband has a very good, stable job. He works as an IT consultant. He pays the rent, the electricity bills and all that. I tell him that I finance my own stuff, so I'm not really a burden. So what I earn on the app, even in a whole month, isn't even a quarter of his salary, so it allows me to finance my own stuff... I don't know... my clothes, paying my doctor's bills..." (Yasmine, 25, Ring Twice).

Meal delivery is another segment of the platform economy relying to a large extent on immigrants, especially men, often in irregular situations. For Karim, who rents an Uber Eats account for around a hundred euros a week, meal delivery was the only solution in the absence of alternatives, despite what he perceives as appalling working conditions:

"Because I don't have a choice, when you don't have a choice and you don't have a residence permit to work, what do you want? Because if I've got a residence permit, I've got lots of ideas about how to work, I've got a business, I could have a snack bar here, for sandwiches. I have no choice, I chose delivery because ... to earn 60, 70 euros a day to pay the bills and everything, that's all. For example, in winter it's really difficult... the rain, the cold, and the risks of cycling [...]" (Karim, 38, Deliveroo and Uber Eats)

The lack of fluency in one of the national languages is also a factor that drives foreigners to seek work through platforms, either because they facilitate access to an international clientele, because the tasks do not necessarily require communication skills, or simply because English is the working language. Takeaway, for example, attracts many young foreign students who are not yet familiar with French:

"I'm originally from [country of origin]. So I arrived here to Belgium like in January, and I didn't speak French at all. Like, no language at all, just English. So I needed to find a work in order that doesn't require me to talk in French. So I thought about that because many people that come to Europe talk about how working at delivery can be good. You can, you can survive like... like in pretty good condition" (Juan, 19, Takeaway)

Platform work as a refuge after a biographical upheaval

A number of people have turned to the platforms in a transitional phase, after having been temporarily or more permanently outside the job market. In this case, there are a variety of different situations, starting with the transition to retirement. Apart from topping up a pension that is deemed insufficient or limited, platform work can in this context be a way of keeping busy, maintaining social connections or a sense of social usefulness/value:

"[...] I'm a bit hyperactive; I always need to be busy. I'm full of energy, I'm still full of strength... so I need to have a schedule, I need to know why I get up in the morning... to have a goal... really to have a plan with my jobs, my clients, and so on. And the third thing is to see people. Meeting people, doing a different job every day... it's really very nice to... realise that you're doing something useful, that these people either don't have the health to do the garden any more... some of my customers are in their nineties, they can't do it anymore, but they trust me, I'm almost like a member of the family... Some have become friends. I've always been very... I was in public relations... so a dog in a hat and I talk to him. I need to see people, I need to feel useful, to talk to people... that's it. To be in contact with my customers" (Frédéric, 57, Ring Twice).

A second type of event is a sick leave due to illness (such as accident or burn out). Looking for work through the platforms is here perceived as a way of slowly re-entering the labour market on one's own terms, supplementing benefits deemed insufficient, or exploring new, more fulfilling work activities (career reorientation). For example, after suffering a burn-out and being off work, Nathalie explained that pet sitting is not only a source of additional income, albeit a very limited one, but above all an activity that suits her for multiple reasons:

"Firstly, because I have a job as a secretary, an executive assistant, but it's not the most fulfilling job, meaning that when you make mistakes you're told repeatedly, but when you do your job well, you often don't get any compliments. So there comes a time when you're 8-4 in the office, 8-6, fed up. I like nature, being outdoors, walking animals, the contact... it's a feeling I have, which can't be explained, that led me to this" (Nathalie, 53, Pawshake and Ring Twice).

In general, financial profitability is not the primary criterion in these situations, as there is a main source of income (pension, unemployment or health insurance benefits). However, in some cases platform work can also be employed a strategy for sudden unexpected unemployment. This was the case for Hilde, who lost her flexi-job during the COVID pandemic:

"I think that was early last year, during the second lockdown, or something like that? Yes... I had a flexi-job next to my regular job, which was cleaning in a sauna, and that fell away all at once. That was suddenly a whole lot less money and then you somehow start looking for something to earn on the side, right? So I looked for that... found some places. But in the meantime, I already have another flexi job on the side. If you want to work, you have too much work. That's the problem!" (Hilde, 56, Ring Twice)

Platform work as a stepping stone for self-employment

By providing instant access to a pool of potential customers, and giving non-professionals access to certain markets, platforms are a source of employment for aspiring independents. Indeed, platforms can constitute a mean of setting up a self-employed business in the absence of training, professional network and/or prior experience and before making investments and taking formal steps. In this regard, our interviews with drivers and drivers' collectives highlighted that most of the 'Uber drivers' started their activity with the platform.

The idealisation of independence and self-entrepreneurship is frequently encountered in interviews, especially with the urban space workers. Indeed, "being one's own boss" is one of the more emblematic (positive) conception associated with platform work in drivers and couriers' narratives:

"[...] when you work for other people, you have to work under them. When I work with UberEATS, I don't work for anyone, and that's why I like working for Uber. You are your own boss" (Farid, 25, Uber Eats)

The valorisation of entrepreneurship is often associated with a negative perception of salaried employment, and may reflect the influence of stereotyped discourses:

"I'd like to, yes, frankly I'd like to [become independent]. It's like I said, I don't know... That's why I told you I'm someone who doesn't like to be controlled, like I told you, in an office, because you're waiting for instructions "do this, do that, you've got to try and do this file here... do that". Sometimes that bothers me. I like to take my own initiatives, you know? Being creative, contributing something to society, you know what I mean? I like society to benefit from me, you know what I mean" (Hamza, 31, Uber Eats and Deliveroo).

However, these perceptions are often better understood in relation to their trajectories in the labour market, which can be marked by experiences of prescriptive work organization, discrimination, marginalization, exploitation, or precariousness.

Platform work as part of a portfolio of employment sources

For some workers, platforms represent one source of employment among others in the formal or informal “traditional” labour market. For self-employed workers, such as freelancers offering professional services, it's an opportunity to broaden their customer base:

"(...) I did think that it was a good initiative... with the development of everything online and and probably also, because I had maybe just a bit less work at the time. I thought "yes, maybe it's interesting to make other contacts". I absolutely don't like networking. I've had to do that all my life, and well that's part of it. But it's really not my thing. So if I can avoid that, then I will be very happy. Maybe that's been part of it as well. I'd rather not do that. And then yes, I immediately signed up for that platform and paid a membership fee for it too, and all with the assumption that if I get one assignment out of it, then I have that and that membership fee is money well spent" (Joanna, 62, Freelancer.be)

It can also constitute an additional source of customers for a student who usually finds babysitting or dog sitting jobs by word of mouth, or for cleaning workers. We could also think about a temporary unemployed plumber looking to practice while looking for an employment contract in a company. Rather than representing a source of completely new employment opportunities, we see a shifting of providers and clients to the platforms, and vice-versa. Indeed, in quite a lot of cases, the workers who found work through ‘in-home’ platforms end up contacting or being contacted by clients directly, thus by-passing the platform. This also puts into perspective the potential of ‘formalisation’ of undeclared work as a benefit from platform work (see Brodersen & al., [forthcoming]a).

4.2. Employment and working conditions of platform workers

4.2.1 Employment status and working arrangements

Multiple work statuses and regimes

Platform-based work takes place under a multitude of employment statuses or working regimes. In addition to employment, temporary work or self-employment statuses, the Belgian context allows for certain platform work activities to be embedded in the ‘collaborative economy’ or ‘peer-to-peer’ (P2P) regime. This regime, introduced in 2016 by the ‘De Croo Law’ to promote the use of digital platforms, allows people to earn income through digital platforms that have been approved by the FPS Finance, with an annual ceiling (€7170 in 2023) and a favourable tax regime (10.7% in 2023). As this is not a social status, providers are not protected by labour law nor granted social security benefits. Moreover, service providers do not need to carry out any administrative procedure, as the platforms automatically generate tax sheets that are sent to the financial authorities. As a result, it happens often that the workers don’t even know about this framework, which can prove to be problematic. Indeed, many couriers end up exceeding the authorized limit, which means their income is reclassified as self-employed income, with all its financial implications. This regime has been adopted by a large number of platforms¹³ covering a wide range of services, from “neighbourly” to more professional services, and sometimes services organised on a more industrial scale, as in the case of meal delivery with Deliveroo and Uber Eats. Besides the P2P regime, other workers worked either as self-employed, with an

¹³ <https://finances.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/127-economie-collaborative-liste-plateformes-agrees-20231107.pdf>

employment contract, or informally, that is when workers don't declare their income, when they bypass the platform in case of income limitation, or when they work under the identity of someone else.

The 'urban space' activities are those that involve the greatest diversity of employment statuses and regimes, particularly meal delivery. Deliveroo and Uber Eats couriers are either self-employed or work under the P2P regime, as is the case for the majority of them¹⁴. On the other hand, the couriers who work for Takeaway are employees. Initially hired mainly as temporary workers, they now also work as employees of the platform under student contracts, fixed-term contracts or permanent contracts. The company also offers opportunities to progress to other positions, such as captain or hub coordinator. Most drivers and juicers are self-employed, although some of them also work as employees. Indeed, those who own a company can subcontract with other employed or self-employed workers.

A large number of workers in the 'in-home' group work under the P2P regime. In fact, many home and personal services platforms have a 'collaborative economy' accreditation. When this is not the case, the services tend not to be declared or to fall into the category of 'domestic staff' and don't legally have to be declared if a certain number of conditions are met¹⁵.

Finally, service providers in the 'online' group are considered as independent contractors, who are responsible for declaring their income as required by law. Only part of them worked as self-employed.

Controversy over the status of platform workers

The work status of platform workers is a key issue that has given rise to an ongoing public debate. With the exception of some platforms that have opted for employment contracts, most of them consider themselves as mere (technological) intermediaries that "put *self-employed* people in touch with each other on *markets*" (Cingolani, 2021, p. 109). As such, they do not take on the responsibilities of the employer, and workers are supposed to assume all the risks and costs inherent in the job themselves. However, this stated neutrality, which would imply an absence of subordination of the service provider, is regularly challenged through collective and legal action. For several years now, a couriers' collective and trade unions representatives have taken action to have the relationship between Deliveroo and its couriers (and more recently Uber Eats) reclassified as an employment contract. As a result, the appeal court of Brussels has decided in December 2023 that the 115 Deliveroo couriers who joined the lawsuit are in fact employees in the transport sector¹⁶. It also judged that the company's activities weren't compatible with the collaborative economy regime. This decision might have important consequences for food couriers, but there are still uncertainties about the outcomes due to platforms' resistance, political blockage and questions regarding the means of enforcing.

At the legislative level, a proposal for a directive to improve the working conditions of platform workers was submitted by the European commission in 2021, based on a presumption of employment. After two rounds of 'trilogue', a provisional agreement was finally endorsed by the EU member states in March 11th this year¹⁷. In Belgium, a law containing various provisions relating to work, including a chapter on platform economy providing for a presumption of employment for platform workers based

¹⁴ According to a representative of United Freelancer, and the estimations by platforms, by 2022 around 80% of couriers were using the P2P regime.

¹⁵ Occasional activity, limited compensation, maximum 8 hours per week (source:

<https://www.groups.be/fr/actualites/articles-juridiques/personnel-de-maison-modifications-dans-le-statut-social-des-le-1er> consulted on 27/11/23;

<https://www.socialsecurity.be/employer/instructions/dmfa/fr/latest/instructions/persons/specific/householdpersonnel.htm> consulted on 27/11/23)

¹⁶ <https://www.lesoir.be/557147/article/2023-12-22/lavenir-de-deliveroo-compromis-en-belgique>

¹⁷ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698923/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698923_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698923/EPRS_BRI(2022)698923_EN.pdf) (consulted on 15/04/24); <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/03/11/platform-workers-council-confirms-agreement-on-new-rules-to-improve-their-working-conditions/> (consulted on 15/04/24)

on the European directive proposal, was also passed in October 2022¹⁸. However, although it has been in force since the 1st of January 2023, we haven't observed any effect so far. The necessary procedures to trigger the presumption, as well as the room for interpretation surrounding its application, which platforms can use to their advantage, constitute important obstacles in this regard.

In this context, the degree of autonomy of the worker in the organisation and performance of the work is a key factor. We will see that the type of relationship between service providers and platforms varies according to the groups of activities and the platforms that are characteristic of them.

4.2.2. Work organisation and control

We observe different degrees of interference by platforms in the organisation and the performance of the work, which can rely on different mechanisms. Certain trends emerge depending on the group of activities under consideration, but distinctions within groups must also be made. The level of experienced platform control and surveillance can have a strong impact on the perceived level of autonomy and sustainability of the work, however, this relationship is far from automatic.

'on-location/urban space' and 'online/microtask work : a high level of control by platforms

The 'urban space' activities are mediated by platforms that intervene in the organisation of work, impose the ways in which it is carried out and implement a series of control and surveillance mechanisms that leave workers little room for manoeuvre in the process. However, the degree of automation may vary.

In the absence of employment contracts, platforms such as Deliveroo and Uber use other levers to put the couriers to work and ensure their cooperation, i.e. a series of mechanisms that are part of what is called 'algorithmic management' (see Aloisi & Stefano, 2022; De Stefano & Taes, 2023; Stark & Pais, 2021). In this context, the platform monitors the work remotely through the app by collecting data (e.g. via geolocation). Concretely, couriers and drivers are put to work by accepting orders or rides, and must follow specific instructions, notifying the platform at each stage. The outsourcing of the evaluation through the rating system plays a crucial role, providing feedback on the workers' performance. The aggregation of these assessments, combined with other statistics (e.g. acceptance and cancellation rate), can lead to sanctions (temporary or permanent disconnection) if their behaviour does not meet the platform's expectations. Apart from the piece-rate payment, meaning that the time between deliveries and rides is not remunerated, another strategy used by the platforms to ensure that as many orders as possible are processed is informational asymmetry. Indeed, the choice for a courier or a driver to accept or refuse an order can only be made on the basis of limited information, as the platforms do not systematically communicate all the data necessary to make an informed choice (e.g. the final destination).

In the case of platforms such as Takeaway and Gorillas, on the other hand, we are dealing with a fairly classic employer-employee relationship. Although an algorithm is used to allocate orders, all the decisions involved in the work process are not automated. The coordination and supervision (in real time) of the work process is handled by superiors, with whom the drivers are in constant contact via a communication channel. Moreover, couriers regularly visit dedicated 'hubs' to get their equipment, eat, rest, etc. They are evaluated by 'captains' who give them a grade based on predetermined factors (e.g. whether they drive too fast or too slowly, whether they are wearing their uniform correctly, whether their battery is sufficiently charged). Although the work is relatively individualised, the fact that couriers feel supported by a working collective and have regular social contacts with colleagues is

¹⁸ https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/article_body.pl?language=fr&pub_date=2022-11-10&caller=summary&numac=2022206360, see CHAPITRE 4. - Economie de plateformes (consulted on 09/04/24).

often highlighted as positive. However, this does not mean that the work content is any less repetitive or 'alienating':

"In the beginning, the job is really nice because, you are just hanging around on a bike. Everything is new. The bike is electrical. Also, you get to you get the chance to know the city and yeah, everything is new, so it's nice. But after a bit, the job is, I don't know if this word is correct... alienating? [...] Like you always do the same thing, and you feel like, I mean, this is my experience. I feel like... Okay. I feel like a machine. I always have to go from the restaurant to the client and then repeat..." (Giorgia, 30, Takeaway)

The relationship between 'juicers' and the platform is a bit in between both models. Like Deliveroo and Uber, there is a piece-rate payment system and a high degree of control over the work process via the application: they are geo-localised, they have to follow instructions step by step, notify the platform, do the work within a certain period of time, and the work progression is tracked via the app. However, the juicers and the platform negotiate a collaboration contract beforehand, setting out the objectives (number of scooters to collect) and the means to achieved them (how many accounts are to be used), both of which can be renegotiated over time.

On micro-tasking platforms, service providers usually don't have any direct contact with end customers at all, and the tasks to be carried out are also very formatted and standardized. As a result of the easy and repetitive nature of the tasks, micro-tasks platforms implement mechanisms to prevent workers to complete them randomly. For example, they use test-questions, i.e. dummy tasks which are used to assess the way in which service providers answers to different requests, and then grant them a 'spam' score. A score that is too low or too high might be considered suspicious and limit their access to certain tasks or to the platform. Sometimes, they get a warning while completing tasks:

"For each assignment, there are actually more checks to make sure you're not going too fast. Because you always tend to go through the assignment very quickly, answer very quickly, the answers are often just a click and you gain more, but you can be punished for that. That's why they often set a minimum time, say 20 seconds on average, to complete a task. But when you're working and you're taking an average of 15 or 10 seconds per task [laughs], at some point you get stuck and they say: "Yes, you're doing fine, but you're going a bit fast, we think you need to take a break and come back tomorrow if you want to continue". That's when you find yourself quite simply destabilised. Because you're going a bit too fast, because they're afraid you're not working accurately enough" (Johan, 60, Clickworker)

'on-location/in-home' and 'online/freelance work' : greater worker autonomy but not-so-neutral intermediaries

In the context of 'in-home' and 'online freelance work', the organisation and performance of work is largely outside the control of the platforms since most negotiations take place between customers and service providers. This gives workers greater leeway to shape relations with customers, define tasks and, in some cases, greater autonomy in organising work.

However, the workers' apparent room for manoeuvre does then not guarantee greater bargaining power or control over the work process, as it does not fundamentally challenge the inequalities built into the platform infrastructure or the gendered and racial boundaries of home service work (van Doorn, 2017; Mateescu & Ticona, 2020; Brodersen & al., [forthcoming]). Behind the apparent neutrality of platforms, their design and operating mechanisms, in particular the evaluation, rating and feedback systems, influence the balance of power between service providers and customers. For example, one-way assessment (from customers to service providers) gives customers considerable power to sanction and limits the ability of service providers to contest assessments they consider unjustified, or to report abuse. This is all the more problematic as a biased assessment (correlation

between perception of gender and race and assessment) can lead to bias in search algorithms (Hannák & al., 2017).

On 'freelance work' platforms, like 'in-home' services platforms, workers negotiate the terms and conditions for carrying out the work directly with the customer. The workers' profile and their level visibility – which in some cases can be monetised and purchased from the platform – will define their attractiveness to customers and increase/reduce their chances of being selected. Here, the same criticisms can be addressed regarding the unbalanced effects of the platform's design and functionalities, and in particular the rating system. For example, Antoine complained that it took only one negative rating to tarnish his reputation for a certain period. Having that in mind, he would rather not get paid than receive a negative review from a customer:

“He gave me one star. A star means that the gig is dead. It can be deleted. It will never again be highlighted, it will never again be shown to anyone. Whereas a star doesn't matter to him, he can delete his profile and make a new one. And apart from that, even a year and a half later I don't have 5 stars, I've got 4.7, because even with all the others, it's lowered my average so much, because even if I delete the gig I can't delete the grade [...] the first thing people are going to see is the rating, 4.7, and that's brought it down... I've had other ratings, but just the fact that I've had to delete my gig has really taken its toll...” (Antoine, 24, Fiverr and Upwork)

In addition, although professional service providers enjoy more autonomy in carrying out the work, they may still be subject to surveillance mechanisms imposed by clients (e.g. calculating the time they spent working in front of the screen, either manually or by using certain monitoring software).

The ambivalence of autonomy and flexibility in platform work

Autonomy and flexibility are often advertised as selling points by platforms and among the main motivations for platform workers to join and pursue platform work. However, looking more closely at their working conditions allows us to see how they end up restricted, to various degree depending on the platform' model. Indeed, we saw how drivers and (Deliveroo and Uber) couriers were submitted to a high degree of monitoring, prescription and rationalisation of work, leaving them with few or no room for manoeuvre to negotiate its terms (e.g. prices and organisation), and few control over the work distribution (and availability). In this context, the economic dependency on the platform often pressures them to accept gigs and work long hours in order to make a (decent) living. Therefore, the flexibility that is inherent to platform work does not necessarily grant freedom to the worker; rather, it *imposes* flexibility upon the worker (see Bernard, 2023a).

Despite this, as discussed in section 4.1., 'being one's own boss' is one of the more emblematic (positive) conceptions associated with platform work, especially in drivers and couriers' narratives. This perceived autonomy (sometimes formalized through the self-employed status) in the context of what can otherwise be considered “*renewed and even exacerbated forms of worker subjection*”¹⁹ (Abdelnour & Bernard, 2018, p. 2)²⁰ can be understood not only by the invisibilisation of the power relationship, but also in relation to their respective socio-professional trajectories and their (negative) relationship with (salaried) employment and the traditional labour market.

4.2.3. Remuneration

A series of key observations can be made regarding the way platform workers experience the pay and income received through platform activities.

¹⁹ Cit. en français: « *formes renouvelées, voire exacerbées, de sujétion des travailleurs* »

²⁰ see also Abdelnour & Méda, 2019; Bernard, 2020.

A first divisive factor is on what basis the remuneration is received. The majority of platforms' models include a piece-rate payment (by the gig), whereas workers who are employed either by the platform or through temp work agencies are paid hourly (e.g. Takeaway). The room for negotiation of tariffs is also variable. We observed that food delivery, personal transport and micro-tasking platforms were leaving no room for manoeuvre to the workers in this regard; whereas in the context of in-home services and online freelancing platforms, workers usually get to fix or negotiate their own prices with clients.

The level of remuneration also varies according to the group of activities considered and the level of qualification required. On microtasks platforms, the remuneration per task is usually very low. As an example, one interviewee reported that his tasks were on average paid between 1 and 20 cents on average. By cumulating many tasks, workers can sometimes reach 15-20 euros an hour. In addition, the more workers spend on carrying out tasks successfully, the higher are the chances for them to get access to "better tasks" (better paid, more interesting). However, this must be assessed in the light of the penibility associated with repetitive and alienating tasks, which may make it challenging to work for many hours in a row:

"In my opinion, you don't keep that up. For me, that's part of the varied work I do throughout the day. But if that's the only thing you do and you spend all day doing that, I think it drives you crazy. Always these short questions that you have to answer with "click here, click there", that can be done for an hour, two hours a day, that's fine by me. I think I would quickly get tired of doing that all day long" (Johan, 60, Clickworker)

Online professional services tend to be (highly) qualified, which is reflected in the remuneration²¹. However, the studies show that it is still comparatively less well paid than equivalent work done outside platforms (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019), which can probably be explained by the even greater competition that exist on those platforms. Some workers regret that in that context customers tend to choose the lowest bid over quality:

"Yeah, I don't see at what price others are offering services. Or I don't see how many people are subscribing to an assignment. I don't know that. All I can say is that I am out of the running because of my price. I also never get any feedback as to why someone has been chosen or something. There is never any feedback there. That might have been a useful thing that there will be a ... yes, some feedback somewhere. But that leaves me with the impression that it's purely about the price, the lowest price wins and so they might still take into account whether that someone is from the neighbourhood or from the other side of the country. I don't know" (Lysje, 62, Freelancer.be)

This downward pressure on pay is reinforced by the international competition on online platforms:

"The problem is that I'm competing with a lot of other people, particularly on the Indian subcontinent. So it's very difficult to compete with them because they offer much lower prices. I try to target between 20 and 40 euros an hour. But with 20, 40 euros, someone in India can live much longer than I can, so they can afford to work much longer hours than I can" (Antoine, 24, Fiverr and Upwork).

The remuneration of in-home services depends on the type of services. Especially, female-dominated care work services (e.g. cleaning and babysitting) tend to be less remunerated than the male-

²¹ One interviewee active on a freelancing platform reported that he asked between 20 and 40 euros per hour of work.

dominated activities (e.g. plumbing and handiwork), which is reflected in the average prices communicated by platforms²².

Given the prevalence of task-based payment, a common characteristic of all activities combined is that they involve a significant part of unpaid labour. Indeed, the time workers spend looking for work online, taking care of their profile, waiting for an order, doing a pre-assessment (to get access to a task), etc., is not remunerated, which is especially problematic for workers with little or no negotiation power over the rates. In addition, platforms actively encourage unpaid labour as part of establishing a client relationship and building individual client networks. Many platforms in fact impose, or at least suggest that service providers offer the first hour of service for free or encourage them to meet the client first (free of charge) before setting a deal on the service. It often happens that workers use it as a strategy to avoid problems later on, such as disputes with clients regarding the quality of the service, which can result in the absence of a retribution or bad review:

“They practically force you to offer your first hour [...] I offer it anyway, because often in the first hour you untangle the skeleton, you know what I mean? You say “uh, uh, uh”, and at the end of that first hour you say “yes” or you say “no”, you know? So I consider that... I'm happy to offer it so as not to... to avoid having problems later on, you know what I mean?”
(Sylvie, 60, Superprof)

Indeed, the problem of non-payment (of achieved tasks) is recurring among platform workers and is often the result of clients invoking their disappointment with the service. As mentioned above, given the imbalance of power generated by some platform design, especially the evaluation systems, workers are often in a difficult position to contest those practices, e.g because the platform doesn't offer them the support they need, or when having to choose between being paid or maintaining a good reputation and therefore not “upset” the client.

As discussed above, the lack control over the availability of work and the piece rate payment, especially when tariffs are low and non-negotiable, induce income uncertainty and pressure workers to accept gigs, especially when they are economically dependent on the platform.

4.2.4. Working time and hours

A central feature of platform work is the highly flexible working time and hours. As discussed above, flexibility is a central motivation to engage in platform work, as well as a central argument put forward by the platforms themselves. Indeed, platform work is often conceived as a “side job”, in which case the flexibility of working hours makes it compatible with other job(s). For many workers, the appeal also lies in the fact that the working time and hours are not (formally) imposed on them, which can give them a sense of freedom. For example, the freedom to choose when to dedicate time for non-work-related activities :

“[...] I can use my time as I like... I want to go home, I want to sleep, I want to carry on... I've got things to do during the day, for example banking, or insurance or whatever, and then I carry on working. That's what I want, to have time for myself, I've got two dogs, I want to go to the park and all that [...] I don't want to work 8 hours every day, 8am to 4pm isn't my thing, doing the same thing every day. Even if I collect the scooters every day, it's different, you know, it's not [in the same place] every day, there are things, I can do other things, I can, for example if I start at 2am, if I feel a bit tired at 5am I drink a coffee, I relax, for 30 minutes and then I carry on, or I go to sleep if I want. But that's what I want, to have flexibility and freedom to manage my work” (Jalil, 37, Lime).

²² See for example <https://ringtwice.be/fr/services-ideas> (consulted on 22.02.24)

However, as mentioned earlier, this flexibility is in fact increasingly limited as the workers become economically dependent on the platform work incomes and have few control over the work process. This might in return be reflected in the number of hours dedicated to platform work, which varies greatly among workers but also according to the activities. Indeed, workers providing in-home services and online workers tend to work more sporadically and less hours than couriers and drivers we encountered. Indeed, many of the latter were working 'full time', which often far exceeds 38 hours a week. Here, the ambivalence lies in the tension between the positive value of being able to 'choose' when to work, or eventually being able "work more to earn more", and the actual necessity of having to work many hours a week in order to make a living:

- *"[Interviewer]: And couldn't you decide to work six days a week? Isn't that an option?"*
- *"No, it's an option. If I feel like it, I'll work three days, four days, five days. But at the end of the month, you understand, it's a problem. I can't pay all the bills" (Aris, 40, Uber & Bolt)*

In this case, the working time often becomes an adjustment variable as a result of the income fluctuation:

- *"[Interviewer] : How much time do you devote to the platform, and what does it depend on?"*
- *"Well, it depends mainly on how much I want to work... And also on how much money I need to live on... And on the weeks when I've done enough. For example, the first week of August, I did 7 days, and I made something like €1000. So the second week I was a bit more relaxed, I did 3-4 days and made about €500. Yes, that's how I divide it up depending on how much money I've made, so I work a bit less this week and a bit more that week" (Guillaume, 29, Uber Eats)*

While the employment contract comes with some insurance (in terms of working time and income), the level of flexibility may still vary according to the type of arrangement proposed by platforms. For example, Takeaway couriers can have fixed or variable working time and hours, and can be employed directly by the platform or through a temporary work agency.

Finally, some workers are more confronted to 'unusual' working hours (working in the evening, the night, the weekends) than others. This can be the result of the nature of the job itself (meal delivery, passenger transportation), but another factor plays a role in the context of online work, that is the international provenance of clients and service providers. This can have various consequences for the latter, such as 'interesting' tasks only being available at night, or clients in a different time zone having unrealistic expectations.

As a consequence of the flexibility of working hours and the 'casualisation' of work (Cingolani, 2021), platform work participates to further blurry the line between private and working time.

4.2.5. Health and safety

Since most of platform workers are not working with an employment contract, they are not covered by collective regulations related to health and safety in the workplace. Moreover, workers working neither with an employment contract nor as self-employed are not protected in case of accident, except by the insurances that are sometimes provided by the platforms themselves, that is unless they work informally. This is particularly problematic if we consider that the generalized lack of health and safety training, associated with as a lack of professional skills, increases their exposure to health and safety risks (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. et al., 2021).

Couriers typically face multiple risks due to the nature of the work, which is physically demanding and expose them to traffic accidents. Even when employed and not being under too much pressure to go fast, some workers are subjected to important physical pain and injuries:

"I think I enjoy the job maybe for the first 30 minutes and then I just want to quit because I, I developed, how do you call it? It's not a real injury, but I have pain because of the bike and my knees or in my back. And I'm not the only one. So I think it's really common [...] I've always been a weak person, but it started with Takeaway. Yeah, because of bikes, because of too many hours on the bike [...] Now I'm doing 20 hours a week. The first, maybe three months I used to do maybe between 10 and 15 hours a week. And I tried also to do 24, 28, but it was really too much. I had to stop and go to the, how do you call it, the physiotherapist? Because of the problem on my knees. So I stopped for one month or maybe two months. I tried to fix the problem on my knees, but no..." (Giorgia, 30, Takeaway)

However, those risks were particularly high for 'urban space' workers who are submitted to algorithmic management. Indeed, we have seen that couriers tend to adopt risky behaviour while delivering: speeding, non-compliance with the highway code, endangering oneself in traffic, etc. Le Lay and Lemozy consider this behaviour as one of the manifestations of a 'self-acceleration' phenomenon occurring in reaction to a combination of factors which characterises the production model of platforms such as Uber or Deliveroo: lack of control over the organisational process, economic uncertainty, isolation in the face of risk and a competitive environment (Le Lay & Lemozy, 2022). As highlighted in our interviews, those behaviours often lead to traffic accidents, or to even more dramatic consequences, such as the tragic death of a courier in Brussels in February 2023²³.

While some platforms provide basic insurance to cover workers in case of an accident, it was often pointed out by couriers, collectives and unions representatives that those were very difficult to trigger. For instance, in case of accident, couriers working for Uber and Deliveroo need to go through many complicated steps to make an insurance claim: they have to gather the evidence themselves, put together a file, and send it to a foreign company. In the process, they usually cannot make contact with a physical person and have no alternative but to communicate in English²⁴.

Besides physical risks, such as the risk of injuries due to navigating in the traffic or musculoskeletal troubles as a result of doing repetitive moves (e.g. when loading and unloading a dozen electric scooters weighing 25 kilos each on a van, several times a day) or spending a lot of time in front of a screen – especially with non-ergonomic work environment –, platform work can be associated with mental health risks such as stress, anxiety or depression. For example, some micro-taskers are regularly exposed to violent and possibly traumatic content when doing moderating tasks, without having any psychological support at their disposal:

"Sometimes we're also exposed to content that's hard to manage, whether it's the moderation of racial slurs, extremely difficult comments, pornographic pages, sometimes even child pornography. These are things you can run into. And there's nothing compared to that, it's part of the job on these platforms, but it's still not nothing, so there you have it, I think it's a situation that... that's very bad for workers overall " (Malik, 26, Clickworker)

The Belgian law in force since January 2023 contains provisions on the protection against accidents on the workplace, however it doesn't apply to those working under the P2P regime since they are not considered to be in an employment relationship. In addition, the royal decree required for the application of that principle hasn't yet been adopted.

²³ <https://www.rtbef.be/article/le-livreur-a-velo-sultan-zadran-meurt-ecrase-par-un-flibus-le-dossier-classe-sans-suite-par-le-parquet-11280226> (consulted on 09/04/24)

²⁴ See also <https://www.econospheres.be/Livresseurs-de-plateformes-et-accidents-plus-exposes-moins-couverts> (consulted on 27.02.24)

4.3. Employment relations and bargaining power

Except from those who are covered by an employment contract, the majority of platform workers don't have access to collective bargaining or representation. Despite this, the capacity to negotiate or contest working and employment conditions or unfair treatment still vary across groups and platforms models, as some mechanisms to help workers in case of problems, resolve conflicts or collect their opinion may or may not exist.

4.3.1 (Individual) contacts and feedback opportunities

In general, online or on-location workers dealing with multinational platform companies tend to have limited possibilities to contact the platforms in case of problem, to complain or give feedback. For example, Deliveroo and Uber couriers and drivers have no option but to communicate through formatted contact forms or chatbots. The difficulties to reach a contact person is particularly problematic in case of an emergency (e.g. an accident, an error in the client address), or when workers have trouble with their account or get disconnected, leaving them without any possibility of contesting the automated decision and depriving them of their livelihood:

"When I take the order to people's homes most people are very racist. They don't talk in a good way to me and when I deliver the order, they look at me in a very disrespectful way. They report me to the Uber app for no reason and I got blocked. I didn't know why I got blocked so I contacted UberEATS for details, but they never responded to me. For the past six to seven months my account is blocked. Now I am using someone else's account to work" (Farid, 25, Uber Eats).

Both juicers working for Lime, on the other hand, had direct contacts with representatives of the platform on a regular basis:

"Yes, yes, yes. But I learned all the work and all that, so I had experience, and then I spoke with the chiefs, the bosses at Lime, and... they know me very well... they know me because I see them every two, three days... they know I'm a good worker and all that so... [they trust me], so... I've already signed the contract, and I've got two profiles, so I can have another one working with me...". [they trust me, so... I've already signed the contract, and I've got two profiles, so I can have another one working with me...". (Jalil, 37, Lime)

An important feature in the in the specific context of a Belgian, multi-service platform, is that workers reported a much more direct relationship with more responsive, available and accessible support staff and more visible platform management than is generally the case in transnational platforms. Several of our participants mentioned that they were able to contact someone easily if they had a problem with the platform interface or the job itself, which may include the possibility of disputing a negative review. Platform management was incarnated to the extent that a specific individual (an operation manager) made an appearance throughout participants' narratives; the workers in question portraying interactions with her as being overall rather productive:

"Very good! It was like that was someone who knew me. I thought that was a very personal contact. So really someone who says, 'Voilà, is it settled? Can you move on now?' Yes, no problem. Because I thought, 'Oy, they say I have to email.' But no, you could just reach her by phone and I thought that was very good" (Aniek, 68, Ring Twice)

Having access to a 'real face' provides some level of accountability and leverage for the platforms and the workers respectively. While this may be perceived as being synonymous with a greater agency for workers, this does not, however, guarantee greater bargaining power or control over the work process, as it does not fundamentally challenge inequalities built into the platform infrastructure.

4.3.2. Collective mobilisations of platform workers

The possibilities for collective mobilisation of platform workers come up against a series of obstacles: the atomisation of work and employment (Bellini & Lucciarini, 2019; Bogliacino et al., 2020) and the lack of enrolment in a system of representation and collective bargaining (Brugière, 2019; De Stefano & Taes, 2023), the spatial dispersion of workers (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020), and the algorithmic governance and individualised control (Aloisi & Stefano, 2022; Brugière, 2019). In spite of this, platform workers, with varying degrees of alliance with established trade unions, have organised and mobilised collectively to defend their rights and express demands in terms of working and employment conditions.

In this regard, our fieldwork gave us the opportunity to better understand the dynamics behind the mobilisations of couriers and drivers in Brussels, by attending multiple representation and organization efforts by worker's collectives and trade unions (see Brodersen & al., [forthcoming]b). In Belgium, and more specifically in Brussels, the mobilisations indeed mainly concern sectors of activities performed in the urban space, i.e. couriers and drivers. This can be explained, among other things, by the greater visibility and visibilisation of these workers, other than the fact that they experience very similar work situations. However, until recently, their history of mobilisation has been following dynamics in relation to their respective historical contexts. On the one hand, food couriers' struggles have largely been structured between workers and platform companies, with a questioning of the social model of platforms and demands for rights associated with salaried employment. This is explained by the fact that when the first delivery platforms were implemented in Belgium, couriers had an employment status via the cooperative SMart²⁵. When, in 2017, Deliveroo decided to switch model and work only with self-employed workers on a task-based payment, Le Collectif des Coursier.e.s, founded in 2016, organized multiple strikes and mobilisations with the support of the CSC-ACV (CNE and Transcom) to contest this decision. Then, the adoption by the company of the 'peer-to-peer' regime (see above) meant the defeat of the collective and maintained a legal vacuum by not granting couriers an employment status. Later on, the creation within the CSC of a specific trade union section 'United Freelancers' (UF) marked a new phase more focused on legal action and the question of employment status. However, given the evolution of the courier's profiles (towards a more racialised and precarious workforce, as a consequence of the degradation of the employment and the working conditions, their organisation proved to be more difficult. As a reflection of this evolution, a second collective was also temporarily formed by the MOC²⁶ and food couriers in 2019 around the issue of discrimination against racialised and undocumented workers. Finally, in December 2022, *La maison des livreurs* opened in Brussels, as the fruit of collaboration between le Collectif des coursier.e.s and trade unions. It is meant to welcome all couriers, give them legal information and help them with the problems they encounter (e.g. disconnection, account blocking). Although the more long-term goal is to organize them, individual help is a first step:

"Now that the place is better known, workers come here to explain their situation [...] Most of the time, the problem they encounter is a blocked account. So we approach the platforms. But it's difficult because they don't want a channel of communication [...] But it's still when it comes to unblocking accounts that we're most effective" (representative at La maison des livreurs)

For the 'platform drivers', on the other hand, collective action was focused on issues of access to the passenger transport market and the (legal) conflict with taxis until a reform of the sector ('Plan taxi') was implemented in Brussels in 2022. In this context, the collectives' demands were mainly addressed

²⁵ Smart (Smart) is a worker cooperative providing freelance workers the advantages of the employment status as well as a series of mutualised services

²⁶ Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien

to political leaders and not aimed at the platform, considered an allied. In 2018 and 2020, the first mobilisations of drivers took place, organized by the collective ABCL²⁷, as an answer to legal action taken by taxi federations. In 2021, the decision of the Brussels court of appeal to ban LVC drivers from using the Uber app led to massive mobilisations (demonstrations, traffic disruption) involving multiple drivers' collectives (ABCL, UCLB²⁸, USCP²⁹). Unlike couriers, platform drivers had little contact with the traditional trade unions until the sector was unified. Indeed, these workers were not rooted in a collective bargaining system associated with salaried employment, and trade unions were initially aligned with taxis in opposition to the 'uberisation' of the sector.

In recent years, however, le Collectif des coursier.e.s and the UCLB have been working together to defend convergent interests on several occasions. Both collectives were regularly represented at demonstrations supporting the European directive proposal on platform work. In October 2022, they publicly opposed the social dialogue agreement concluded between Uber and the UBT-FGTB, denouncing its lack of transparency and the absence of consultation with workers and collectives:

"We'd like the platforms to respect our rights and not come up with secret agreements that will crush us even more [...] And where was UBT-FGTB all those years when we were fighting on our own? We self-employed drivers had to set up an ASBL to defend ourselves [...] Do they know what the drivers want?" (UCLB representative during a mobilisation at the European Parliament, 25/10/22)

In May 2023, they protested in front of Uber's headquarters in Brussels, expressing a series of common demands: the publication of the full description of orders before they have to accept or decline them; the introduction of rules and/or a mediation mechanism to govern the blocking or disconnection of accounts; an increase of the remuneration, and better accident insurance.

However, this circumstantial convergence of interests does not necessarily reflect an alignment of interests, particularly on the issue of employment status, as shown by this statement from a UCLB representative :

"We've also forged links with them [the Collectif des Coursier.e.s], because we know we have a common interest. Why? Because they too are platform workers. Because they too are platform workers. Because the platform we work with also delivers couriers. We also know that we have to fight for more or less the same conditions, [...] we have to unite to be stronger, to be heard more. Because couriers are like drivers [...] they may not have the same commitment or the same status, because a driver is automatically self-employed, he has a company, he has a car, it's a big investment, but it's more or less the same partnership" (UCLB representative)

4.3.3. Unions' strategies

The unions have taken up the issue of platform work using different strategies, mostly focusing on couriers and drivers. As mentioned before, the couriers' collectives established close links with various CSC branches, which lasted beyond the first mobilisations, in particular because of United Freelancers' desire to revive collective action by relying on workers who assumed continuity in the context of a high turnover. On the other hand, there was little contact between the platform drivers and the historic unions until the sector was unified by the 'Plan taxi', since workers were not rooted in a collective bargaining system associated with salaried employment, and because of the conflict opposing them to the 'traditional' actors of the sector: the taxis.

²⁷ Association Belge des Chauffeurs de Limousine

²⁸ Union des Chauffeurs Limousine Belge

²⁹ Union Syndical des Chauffeurs de Plateforme

Three types of union strategy for representing platform workers could be identified in this context. The FGTB-ABVV, and more specifically its transport division (UBT), has pursued an established sectoral logic in terms of internal structuring and demands by concluding a social dialogue agreement with Uber as the central body responsible for transport workers; which was criticised both internally (within the FGTB) and externally (by platform workers' collectives and CSC representatives). A second direction is the organisational innovation, which has resulted within the CSC in the creation of *United Freelancers*, a new transversal service aimed at the 'dependent self-employed'. According to one of its representatives, this label enabled them to reach out more easily to workers who were distant from trade unionism, offering them a range of services as well as structural and logistical support during mobilisations:

"It allows us to approach new sectors and new audiences with a fresh and new hat. UF aims to affiliate freelancers in companies where we already have a union presence, but also in sectors where the union had very little presence [...] For these new sectors, we have seen that having a label [...] that is not CSC but rather United Freelancers, can help" (United Freelancers representative)

A third strategy is taking legal action, which consists of accompanying requests for status to be reclassified as an employment contract. So far these mainly concern couriers (only one request concerned a driver), in the context of the 'Deliveroo trial'.

4.3.4. Platforms' initiatives

Facing criticism regarding the lack of access to collective bargaining, Uber and Deliveroo have developed various strategies to improve their image. While Uber has concluded a collective representation agreement with UBT-FGTB, Deliveroo has launched its 'rider forum' in November 2021, in which they invite couriers' representatives – elected by "more than 700 couriers" – to exchange on a variety of subjects³⁰.

Forums intended for online workers to find support among an online community are also quite common. Although they could be perceived as an opportunity to point out collective issues and build solidarity among workers, they are often monitored by the platforms themselves, limiting workers' ability to express criticism:

"That's really just a discussion forum, broken down by topics, different languages and where you can get information and so you can exchange some experiences. That is anonymous. But yes, it is actually controlled by Clickwork, because it is completely organised and monitored by them. So if someone there, it happens sometimes.... I'm not often active on there. I'm actually not active on it, but I look at it sometimes. It sometimes happens that someone asks a critical question about the payment and especially about the low payments and that they would like to earn a bit more and so on. And then you also notice from that forum that in no time such questions or comments are deleted. So in that sense, then you know that Clickworker also controls that. So the critical comment is then not really appreciated" (Johan, 60, Clickworker)

4.3.5. Future perspectives

As James Farrar³¹ declared during a conference on the trade union practices in the platform economy, defending platform workers' rights cannot be achieved with one "silver bullet" strategy, but rather a combination of strategies: litigating (reclassification), organizing (demonstrations, strikes) and

³⁰ <https://riders.deliveroo.be/fr/news/deliveroo-rider-forum--compte-rendu-du-16112021>

³¹ James Farrar is an English former Uber driver who brought the company to courts, and the founder of Worker Info Exchange, "dedicated to helping workers access and gain insight from data collected from them at work" (<https://www.workerinfoexchange.org/>, consulted on the 16/12/23)

regulating (legislative initiatives). The Belgian and European directives, although they represent a huge step forward in this regard, also have important limitations, and multiple observers have expressed concern regarding their applicability and effects. Indeed, the triggering of the employment presumption might prove difficult given the number of criteria that need to be met. Moreover, in absence of a general presumption, the workers still have to go to court, which potentially constitutes an obstacle (cost, length of the procedures...). Other strategies have been explored and could be pursued, such as the convergence of struggles (e.g. with the domestic workers league or undocumented migrants' associations) and focusing on the digital rights of workers: algorithm transparency, access to data, rights in relation to automated decision-making, etc.

Discussion: On what conditions is employment in the platform economy sustainable?

The sustainability of employment and working conditions in the platform economy must be appreciated by considering the diversity of profiles, types of investment, activities and relations of intermediation. As a conclusion of our qualitative research, we would like to draw attention to what we think should be the minimum conditions for platform work to constitute a more sustainable form of employment.

The flexibility should benefit the workers and cannot be the counterpart of uncertainty. We saw that the flexibility was one of the main motivations for people to engage in platform work, either because they appreciated being able to choose when to work or not, or because they could easily combine it with other job(s). However, the flexibility of work rapidly translates into the flexibility of the workers whenever they have few control over the work process (distribution, organisation, rates...) and are economically dependent on the platforms' income. In addition, the 'casualisation' (Cingolani, 2021) of work and the 'rationalisation of time' (Abdelnour & Méda, 2019) that characterise platform work platforms results in further blurring the line between productive and non-productive time.

Workers should have access to minimal labour protections. Except for some platforms hiring workers as employees or relying on temporary workers, most of the platforms rely on 'independent' service providers, either self-employed or without employment status. By doing so, they contribute to the individualisation of labour and employment relations, and to the proliferation of atypical forms of employment excluding workers from a system of representation and collective bargaining, therefore depriving them of social protection (De Stefano, 2020; Brodersen & Martinez, 2022). In this context, multiple **initiatives to support independent workers** by providing them customized solutions have emerged. For example, WorkerTech has been created as a *“digital service offerings that harness the power and convenience of technology to provide independent and flexible workers with personalised benefits and greater access to protections and rights”*³². **Health and safety measures** are of utmost importance, since platform workers are often (over)exposed to risks of injuries, musculoskeletal troubles and mental health problems, without being insured and/or properly trained to work safely.

Access to collective bargaining and representation should be guaranteed. Platform workers must have the capacity to participate in collective bargaining on their working and employment conditions, being represented either by workers' collectives or by established unions, and **regardless of their working status**. Platforms' representatives must be accountable for the automated-decisions and sanctions that affect the workers (disconnection, blocking, evaluations...), by introducing **rules and/or a mediation mechanism** and giving workers access to a direct and **human channel of communication**.

Working conditions need to be aligned with the work status. In some cases, we have seen that workers considered by the platforms as independent contractors lacked the autonomy they should be enjoying, falling into the category of bogus self-employment. This become even more problematic when the workers are *“economically dependent on their matchmaking services”*³³ (Brugière, 2019). Recent legislative developments in Belgium³⁴ and Europe³⁵ seek to address this issue by introducing a **legal**

³² <https://www.inlinepolicy.com/understanding-workertech> (consulted on the 22/12/23)

³³ Cit en français : « économiquement dépendante de leur service de mise en relation »

³⁴ https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/article_body.pl?language=fr&pub_date=2022-11-10&caller=summary&numac=2022206360, see CHAPITRE 4. - Economie de plateformes (consulted on 09/04/24)

³⁵ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698923](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)698923) (consulted on 09/04/24)

presumption of employment for platform workers. While this aims to enhance working and employment conditions for platform workers by combating false self-employment and proposing a viable alternative to intermediary ('third way') employment regimes which have proven problematic³⁶, it also creates a delicate balance concerning the contrasting realities in which these workers are anchored (e.g. some platform workers aspire to maintain their independence, and undocumented workers don't want to see their sole source of income jeopardized in the absence of regularization). An alternative approach involves prioritizing **fair employment practices and social protection for all workers irrespective of their status** (e.g. transparency regarding algorithms and automated decision-making processes, data protection, clearer terms of service and equitable remuneration) (ILO, 2024).

The use of automated decision-making and control mechanisms based on tracking technologies data collection should be limited or avoided, since they raise a number of ethical and legal issues (De Stefano, 2020). First of all, the extensive and continuous nature of the control based on new tracking technologies is unprecedented, posing a threat to privacy rights. Second of all, the automation of the decision-making process, although informed by human choices, occults their responsibility, leaving workers with a black box whose operation remains largely opaque. **Fair working conditions imply algorithm transparency and accountability**. Furthermore, the algorithms perpetuate biases that can be vectors of discrimination. For instance, bias in the social feedback can lead to bias in the search algorithm. In this regard, **platforms can make design choices that mitigate or counterbalance bias effects** (see Hannák et al., 2017). Finally, the use of the technological interface and algorithmic management might result in the dehumanisation of workers (De Stefano, 2015) and the invisibilisation of human work (Carbonell, 2022; Casilli, 2019).

The platform's lack of intervention that is characteristic of the home services platforms can also be a key factor in exposing workers to unfair treatment, arbitrary sanctions, exploitation or abuse by customers. The effects of this situation vary greatly from one platform to another, but also from one worker to another, depending in particular on their level of dependence on the activity (Schor et al., 2020), and also on their gender (Brodersen & al., [forthcoming]a). Indeed, enforcing limits, contesting assessments or claiming payments may prove more problematic for women in female-dominated segments of home/domestic services. This is even more true for workers who depend on platform work and more particularly for those who combine several factors of vulnerability and discrimination on the labour market (van Doorn, 2017). **Support and help mechanisms implemented by the platforms can prove to be very important to protect the most vulnerable workers**. Among others, we can think of a direct channel of communication with the platform managers with the possibility to report client abuse or contest a review.

As argued repeatedly, **guarantee fair treatment, protection and access to labour rights are even more crucial for the most vulnerable workers** given their lack of negotiation power, e.g. those who are economically dependent – who cannot rely on other source of employment and income – and for whom there is little or no alternative.

As a final takeaway message, we would argue that **those threats concern all workers beyond the platform economy**, i.e. all the sectors of the labor market that are concerned by the shifting of the companies' employment models, the externalization of the workforce, and the progressive disappearance of the employer as a social dialogue interlocutor (Brodersen & Martinez, 2022; Piasna, 2024; Carelli & al., 2022). While it has been pointed out that digital tools have contributed to the exacerbation and systematization of such trends that have been underway for decades (Rahman & Thelen, 2019), we could argue that the platform economy mainly contributes to the *invisibilization* of

³⁶ See above for discussion of Belgian P2P regime; see also Aloisi (2022) for examples from other countries.

labour and labour relationships (Casilli, 2019; Cingolani, 2021; van Doorn, 2017). In other words, digitalization issues go beyond the platform economy, and the platform economy issues are not limited to digitalization. The apparent draw of platform labour thus needs re-examined in light not only of ideological shifts in relation to work, but also of otherwise adverse labour market conditions, social policies and migration policies.

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Appendix: WP4 Interview guide for platform workers

<i>Understanding the motivations for getting involved in platform work</i>	How did you come to work for [the platform]?
	How long have you been providing services via the platform?
	How did you hear about the platform?
	What made you want to work via this platform?
<i>Understand how platform work fits into a broader life/work trajectory</i>	Could you tell me about your professional experience?
	Have you had other work experience before? Which ones?
	How does your platform work fit into this?
	Have you already worked via other platforms?
	Are you currently working for other platforms?
<i>Describing the work activity, understanding the multi-activity situation</i>	Could you describe a sequence of work using the platform?
	What initiates a work sequence and how does it unfold?
	What type of work do you do via the platform?
	Where are they produced?
	How much time do you devote to working via the platform and what does it depend on?
	How is your work spread out over a day/week/month?
	How are your working hours defined?
	Are your working hours compatible with your family life and other activities?
	How are you remunerated? What is the remuneration per task/hour, and what does it depend on?
	Are you insured via the platform?
	Do you have access to other benefits?
	In your day-to-day work, what kind of relationship and contact do you have with the platform?
	What kind of interaction do you have with the platform/application?

<i>Understanding the (power) relationship with the platform and customers</i>	What kind of relationships and interactions do you have with customers?
	In your day-to-day work, do you feel the presence of the platform and how?
	Do you think the platform monitors your work? How does it do this?
	What happens if you don't accept a task/assignment? If you cancel a task/assignment?
	Is there an evaluation system in place?
	Do you know whether these assessments can influence your future work?
	Can you influence these assessments?
	What status/regime do you work under via the platform?
	Have you invested financially/materially to be able to work via the platform (e.g. equipment)?
<i>Understanding the room for manoeuvre and the strategies used in the event of conflict, as well as the relationship with collective action</i>	Have you encountered any difficulties or negative experiences when working via the platform?
	If so, how did you manage these situations?
	What happens if you disagree with something in the context of your work on the platform?
	Do you ever do things in the course of your work that are not permitted or provided for by the platform? Why or why not?
	Who can you turn to if you have a problem?
	Do you have any colleagues working on the platform?
	What kind of relationships/interactions do you have with other workers?
	Do you think they have similar experiences/problems with this job?
	Are there places where you can discuss, exchange ideas or talk about a problem at work?
<i>Assess satisfaction with working and employment conditions, level of dependence on the</i>	Do you see yourself working via this platform in the coming weeks, months or years?
	Would you change jobs if you had the chance?
	Would you like to work more or less via the platform?
	Would you be able to manage without the income received via the platform?
	Have you ever had a work-related accident? A health problem?

<i>platform(s), aspirations</i>	Do you feel that you have learned things that could be useful to you later on (in a professional context)?
	What would you change to make working via the platform more satisfying?
<i>Describe the socio-demographic profile</i>	Questions about the interviewee's profile...
	How old are you?
	What was the last qualification you obtained? Have you taken any training courses since?
	What is your nationality? What is your migration history?
	What is your living situation (living alone, with a partner, sharing a flat, with parents, with children, etc.)?
	(If there are other people in the household): can you rely on income/allowances from other members of the household to live?
<i>Additional thoughts or information</i>	Would you like to add anything? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is worth mentioning?
<i>Ask the interviewee if they have any contacts</i>	Do you know anyone who also works via a platform/app that we could contact for an interview?
	Would you agree to share this contact with me or to ask this person if he/she would agree to an interview?