

**Implications of Platform Work Organisation for Delivery Platform Workers in Georgia
(Case Study of Wolt and Glovo Couriers in Tbilisi)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delivery platforms are one of the largest, and the fastest growing industries in the gig-economy. These platforms use algorithmic management to assign tasks to couriers, control work and evaluate them. The way the platform work is organised creates the environment which is different from classic employment relations. Algorithmic management, precarious nature of work and worker classification issues are issues identified in the literature. The knowledge about the gig economy in Georgia is scarce. The studies about the delivery platform workers have been limited to several multimedia works. As this group has started protest movements asking for social, labour and occupational safety guarantees, it is interesting to find out, what caused this unrest. The interviews with the field experts and the couriers of two main platforms, Glovo and Wolt made clear that algorithmic management, precarious nature of work and the issues with the status is as much prevalent in Georgia, as literature suggests for other countries. Yet with some differences. Georgian couriers have more positive attitudes towards the rating systems, while asking for more transparency in their functioning. And what makes Georgian case different is the division of opinions regarding the issue of the employee status.

Key words: gig work, algorithmic management, platform work, delivery platforms

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION FORM

I, the undersigned, Ana Mikhelidze, candidate for Master of Arts in Public Policy, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research.

All sources have been properly credited in the text, notes, and the bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. Furthermore, I declare that no part of this thesis has been generated using artificial intelligence (ChatGPT).

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INTRODUCTION

“I am an actor, but ever since the market has regulated me as a courier, I ride 100-120 km per day with my scooter. Just in case you also decide to work as a courier, keep in mind: most people will not talk to you with courtesy.” So begins the story of a 23-year-old actor¹ (the author), which he wrote after working as a courier for a small business. He worked at three theatres. While acting in his 5th play of the day, he passes out of hunger. The pay for an actor per play is the equivalent of 4.5 Euros, so four to five is the number of roles is what is physically possible and what he has to play to make ends meet. Meanwhile, his family home has been taken by the bank as they could not pay the loan back, so now living in his uncle’s apartment, he was trying to collect money for the lease. In “Stories of a Courier” the author described his real personal experiences, which also is the reality of many young men and women in Georgia.

Georgian labour market does not offer a range of attractive opportunities to the workforce. Amongst all age groups, youth unemployment has been consistently high throughout the years, reaching 41% for the youth between 20-24 and 27.8% for the 25-29 age group (GeoStat 2021). Wage Indicator Foundation calculated living wage for Georgia (Decent Work Platform 2022) which equals to 1,770 GEL (the equivalent of roughly 600 Euros). In the meantime, the average nominal monthly salary has been below the living wage – 1,191 GEL in 2021 and reaching 1,591 GEL in 2022 (GeoStat). The size of the shadow economy (2015) is 65% and share of informal employment in total non-agricultural employment (2019) is 35% and the vulnerable employment (2019) is 49% (Danish Trade Union Development Agency 2021). In these circumstances, likelihood of emigration within the population, especially young citizens is relatively high, reaching 15% in 2023 (National Democratic Institute 2023).

¹ Temo Rekhviashvili published the book “Stories of a Courier” in 2021, describing his experiences of working as a courier. The book won the most prestigious literary award “Saba” and became a bestseller. The words “The market has regulated me...” have become the phrase of the generation, heard all over the country.

The rise of gig economy, was boosted by the introduction of two major delivery platforms in the country – Glovo and Wolt (Public Registry of Georgia)². Less bureaucracy and more flexibility³ attracted the workers of different backgrounds to move into the industry.

Since 2021 – post-pandemic period, the food delivery platform workers started large-scale and frequent protests. Their demands ranged from narrower issues such as pay rates, to more socially pressing issues of occupational safety and health insurance. Concurrently, couriers raised claims at Public Defender’s Office, as well as national courts.

As other forms of gig work, such as ride hail platforms, and crowd-work platforms are present in Georgia, no other groups have organised the resistance as much as couriers have. The presented work, thus, aims to answer the research question: “What are the implications of platform organisation for the delivery platform workers in Georgia?” This is an attempt to understand, what has led the couriers to organise and go out on the streets to protest.

The work starts with the literature review, which provides for the theoretical overview of the main findings about implications stemming from the algorithmic management, work conditions and classification (or misclassification) of the gig workers. Suggesting that while the organisation of gig work is cost-effective, flexible and found to even increase employment in the low- and middle-income countries, there is the other perspective to it. From the workers’ point of view, the industry has been found to exercise significant control over the workforce, causing power asymmetries between the companies and the workers; that the work is

² The registration documents of both of the organizations are available on the website of the National Public Registry of Georgia, Registry of entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities (https://enreg.reestri.gov.ge/main.php?m=new_index). The identification codes of the organizations are as follows: Wolt Georgia LLC - 405260042, Glovoapp Georgia LLC – 402099475

³ These points came up during the interviews carried out with the workers and the experts.

precarious; and the issues with the workers' status deprives the workers from social safety net. Yet, the latter can be challenged in the developing countries.

The methodology part describes brief background of the case, the reasoning for its selection, typology of the case, the sampling methodology for the interviewees, their short profiles, ethical considerations, positionality of the researcher and finally – concepts.

The paper utilizes thick description, which required the understanding of the local context. Hence, the first chapter introduces the companies, the couriers as social group described by the expert interviewees and the backgrounds of the courier interviewees as well. The work might resemble a reversed story, as the background also includes the timeline of the couriers' resistance, its characteristics and main arguments voiced.

The work proceeds to discuss the main theoretical categories identified in the light of workers' experiences. The 2nd chapter on algorithmic management discusses the workers experiences of algorithmic control, algorithmic transparency and the power asymmetry. The 3rd Chapter discusses the conditions, focusing on “flexibility narratives and precarious nature of work. The 4th Chapter provides the arguments circulating around the topic of classification of the workers, i.e., the issue of status.

Finally, the conclusion provides for the results and the limitations of the work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Roadmap of gig economy

The rise of platform economy (gig economy) has been fostered by increase in accessibility of the information communication technologies (De Stefano, 2015; Wood et al., 2018). There are different typologies of gig work. Duggan et. al. (2020) built on Cappelli and Keller (2013) and provided a summary of working arrangements. They categorize gig work as one of the types of contract work, which itself lacks the organizational characteristics of classic employment relationships. Gig work requires the presence of three agents – digital platform, worker and customer. There are three major types of gig work – capital platform work (e.g. Airbnb, Etsy), crowd-work (e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk, Fiverr, Upwork) and app-work (Uber; Deliveroo; Glovo; etc.) (Cappelli and Keller, 2013; Duggan et al., 2020). It has to be mentioned, that in food delivery sector, another agent is introduced. These are restaurants.

De Stefano (2015) divides the industry in two large dimensions – crowdwork and work-on-demand via app. He defines the former as work, which is performed through online platforms, which allow businesses and individuals get in contact through online platforms. Whilst “work-on-demand via app” is connected to traditional work arrangements such as cleaning, transportation, running errands, etc. (De Stefano 2015). International Labour Organisation (ILO) classifies the gig-economy in two large categories: online web-based platforms, where the work can be carried out online or remotely and location-based platforms, which requires physical presence of the worker in order to perform the work. (ILO, 2021).

Platforms are presented as the mediums which enable unlimited number of consumers or “hirers” to place orders, which is then matched to a worker, who carries out the work. One of the important aspects in this chain is that the app in different ways (direct, technical, bureaucratic, normative, computer) controls the execution of the work (Gandini, 2019). These

digital companies are versatile and the types of work provided through them also differ. Yet, what unites them is the flexibility of workforce, which comes from erasing the brackets of classic employment relationship, and drastically reducing the managerial costs for the business (Johnston, 2017). The management in charge of the apps intervene in running the apps as little as possible, setting their standards for recruitment or service provision at the minimum (De Stefano, 2015). Firms only “hire” the workers to carry out specific tasks, which “granulizes” the contracts in gig economy as the former only buy the exact amount of labour they need (Bieber and Moggia 2021).

As any other application or computer software, platforms in gig economy work on algorithms. Lee et. al. (2015) identified these software algorithms used for allocation, optimization and evaluation of work, i.e. undertaking managerial functions as algorithmic management, or management-by-algorithm. A key factor, which distinguishes it from traditional managerial arrangements is having little to no human interaction in control of task execution and coordination (Möhlmann, 2021; Benlian et al., 2022).

Organization of work through algorithms

From business point of view, all of these mechanisms allow the companies to ensure the provision of services cost-efficiently and just-in-time (Pastuh and Geppert 2020).

A key argument in favour of the gig work is workers’ autonomy, as shown above is freedom of gig-workers to organizing their own world. Yet, recent studies, drawing from the experience of workers of gig economy companies, such as ride-hail platforms - Uber and Lyft, or food delivery platforms, such as Uber Eats, Doordash, Instacart etc. has made the extent to this freedom clear. As these companies vary from each other, the algorithmic management they exercise over the workforce also varies. Yet, on the conceptual basis, several points come up to the surface, which have been in the focus of latest studies of the field.

The extent of transparency of algorithms is essential for the right to information of a worker. The platforms provide for the general guidelines on how tasks are assigned. At times, however, explanation for why algorithms give the workers certain tasks is unclear for them. This lack of transparency has made drivers' online forums crucial for social sensemaking, information dissemination, experience sharing and at times, places of providing emotional support for the colleagues (Lee et al., 2015).

Lack of control over acceptance of the task, and determination of prices highlight the power asymmetries within the algorithmic management systems (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). The studies on Uber and Lyft drivers have shown that they do not have as much control over the selection of work activities as it is advertised (Lee et al., 2015) and the companies exercise the control over workers' time and their activities (Griesbach et al. 2019). The situation in the food delivery industry does not highlight any differences. The information and the logic of order distribution as well as the payment calculation is "black-boxed" outside of the workers' knowledge. The experience of being instructed by algorithms becomes somewhat similar to having a supervisor physically present (Griesbach et al. 2019). Despite the advertised advantages of platform work concentrating on being your own supervisor, the companies still exercise substantial control or supervision over the workers and work performance (De Stefano 2016).

Driver or food delivery courier rankings become a means for the companies to ensure the provision of homogenous service (Rosenblat and Stark 2016). Algorithmic management generates the ratings of the workers based on different factors, which includes consumer feedback, acceptance-rejection rate, etc. depending on the platform. The existence of the rating systems and incorporation of "management by consumer" is not universal in platform-economy, however, where it is, it affects the social interactions between the consumers and the

workers, and introduces a component, characteristic for the service sector – emotional labor (Gandini, 2019). Information asymmetry is prevalent not only in the task-division process, but in the performance-based control systems. Even though the platforms inform the workers about the possible positive or negative effects of respectively high or low performance rate, workers still tend to lack the comprehensive understanding of this control mechanism (Veen et. al., 2020). Finally, the rankings are found to be biased based on race, ethnicity, gender, etc. and where algorithms learn from the data available to them, the chance of them making biased decisions increases (Tan et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2015).

Nature of Work

The nature of work deals with the conditions at work, such as flexibility and precarity.

Flexibility can be understood in two main dimensions – task flexibility (picking tasks) and spatial flexibility (choosing the location of work) (Dunn, Munoz, and Jarrahi 2023). It has been found to be one of the reasons why persons enrol in gig economy (Rosenblat and Stark 2016) and often, it is considered to be value in itself (Broughton et al. 2018 cited in Tan et al. 2021). Companies, which are in charge of location-based platform work, such as delivery, emphasize the flexibility of the work, due to the fact that they perform the work independently (Won, Lee, and Lee 2023). No fixed working hours allow workers to perform the app-based activities along with other occupation such as study, family, leisure, etc. (De Stefano 2015).

As flexibility is thought to be inherent to gig work, a number of studies find the promise of it problematic.

Flexibility is less of a choice of workers, but rather the characteristic of the industry, which might result in detriments to workers' rights or even their well-being (Tan et al. 2021). As far as the diversity of the gig work goes, flexibility is not the feature of every kind of gig work at

the same extent. Location-based platform work, is characterized by low task and spatial flexibility (Dunn, Munoz, and Jarrahi 2023). Wood et al. (2018) perceive the gig work flexibility as “temporal flexibility,” find that earning a “decent income” required long hours of work, and argue that the extent of flexibility depends on worker’s structural bargaining power. Such power in gig economy is weak.

Another dimension of the nature of gig work is precarity. Work is precarious when it lacks the features which are guaranteed in the standard employment relationship. There is no universal definition for precarity, however, Olsthoorn (2014, cited in Eurofund, 2018 n.d.) distinguishes 3 characteristics of it: a) insecure employment (e.g. fixed-term contracts; temporary agency work, etc.); b) unsupportive entitlements; c) vulnerable employees (lack of other means of income).

The “perks” of gig work, such as flexibility of schedule, matching of tasks, etc. are one of the reasons which draws people to gig economy, yet the very same characteristics lead to the commodification of work forming the notions such as “humans-as-a-service”, and precarity (De Stefano 2015).

In the developing world, on the one hand, gig economy has been found to be offering flexibility and autonomy at some extent. In low- and middle-income countries it has been associated with employment growth and poverty reduction (Wood et al. 2018). In delivery and ride-hail platform work, burn out due to the long working hours and road safety concerns are prevalent (Dunn, Munoz, and Jarrahi 2023). Yet, Wood et al. (2018) argues that in the developing world expansion of these market-mediated terms have not been received as negatively, as the workers in these countries were not used to getting benefits from standard employment relationships either. Even so gig work allows for the employment of the workers who would not have an opportunity to have an employment or would have had worse, riskier options, yet, the fact that

it lacks the features of classic employment relations, essentially, labour protection, contributes to the precarity (Tan et al. 2021).

Anwar and Graham (2020) have found that the extent of flexibility and precarious nature of the gig work, can become impact factors for the stress levels of the delivery platform couriers. Long working hours, lack of occupational safety measures, pressure to deliver the orders in timely manner, so as to carry out as many deliveries as possible leads to the risky driving behaviours of the delivery platform couriers.

In a broader perspective, precarity can be the result of the relations between neoliberalism and industrial relations, where individual contractual agreements are prevalent, and hence, this leads to liberation of the companies from legal liabilities of an employer and transfers risks to the workers (Zwick 2018).

Eventually, flexibility and precariousness of the gig work are intertwined with each other and affect health and safety of the workers in the industry. There are differences in the attitudes towards precarity of work in gig economy in high- and lower-income countries.

Status of Workers

The existence of algorithmic management with the lack of direct human managerial supervision becomes central point when it comes to what kind of relations do the companies have with the platform workers. Companies treat workers as independent service providers for short-term “tasks”, “gigs”, “favours”, etc. anything other than “work” (De Stefano 2016). Even the income the workers earn through the platforms are referred to as “working benefits” (Xiao 2019). Moreover, with a few exceptions, status of gig-workers is largely unregulated on the state level. In combination, workers are classified or misclassified (Sprague, 2015) as independent contractors, which allows the companies to minimize the labour costs through

avoiding liabilities characteristic for the classic employment relations (Kaine and Josserand 2019). The agreements which are concluded between the workers and the platforms in many cases explicitly mention that the relationship between the two does not fall within the scope of the employment regulations (Xiao 2019).

Classic employment relations generally guarantee specific regulations in terms of employment protection, income, work and rest hours, overtime, long-term contracts, protection from discrimination, etc. Social welfare states, in addition, provide for benefits such as health insurance, unemployment benefits, etc. (Gandini 2019). Hence, where such systems exist, workers' agency focuses on gaining employment status (Todolí-Signes 2021). However, similar social safety net is not available for even classic employees in developing countries like Georgia (Diakonidze 2022).

Misclassification of the workers is one of the means companies use to empower themselves and further foster power asymmetries (Zwick 2018). Companies classify the workers as independent contractors, as it turns out to be economically efficient for them, yet, despite the classification, workers still have to act like employees (Sprague 2015).

Hypothesis

Taking the theory into consideration, several points which characterizes the gig work come up on the surface. The implications that the literature has identified goes as follows: algorithmic management causes significant power asymmetries stemming from algorithmic control and the lack of transparency of algorithms. There are questions regarding the flexibility of the work. Platform work is considered to be precarious. Misclassification of employees

The purpose of the paper is to explore whether the issues identified in the literature are present in Georgia, what are the differences and similarities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selection of the Case

Drawing from the experiences of delivery platform workers in Georgia the following work aims to explore - how delivery platform work is organized in the country and what implications does it have for the workers. The motivation to study the influence of peculiarities of platform work on the workers stems from the events taking place in Georgian platform work. Workers have shown unprecedented mobilization in the post-pandemic period, starting from 2021. The reasons of their discontent have been varying within a number of fundamental issues in couriers' day-to-day lives – starting from the pay rates, ending with insurance policies. Platform work, in its essence does not provide for a space for these individuals to socialize with each other, as it would have happened in a classic organizational setting. Taking account, organizing the protest becomes much more difficult for the couriers, yet for years they have been managing to self-organize and voice their needs. The strength and the intensity of the protest waves differ; however, they re-emerge and the demands voiced are substantially similar from one to the other. As I have done research in 2019 focusing on the ride-hail platforms, the protests raised my curiosity.

Georgia does not regulate the platforms and its workers, nor there is a specific policy suggestion on the political agenda. Simultaneously the court decision on a courier's case is pending in Tbilisi City Court. Consequently, there is no clear definition on the national level of who the platform workers are. In these circumstances, it is only necessary to learn how gig economy functions for platform workers, based on the personal experiences of the couriers.

The literature studying the topic in Georgia is scarce. Hence, there is a space and the need for contribution, which in the case of this work is the understanding the implications of platform

work for delivery platform workers, which could lead to understanding of what were the reasons for the protests and where it could lead to.

Typology of the Case

The following work studies a local case, as I decided to select the companies and events from my home country of Georgia. The purpose of the study is exploratory, as it aims to figure out how the specific phenomena are formed, what are the impact factors, how are the processes and outcomes in these phenomena formed, how are they related. Methodological choice of the case study is theory-testing, i.e., through exploratory research, the aim is to find out whether or not the theory formed in the literature applies to Georgian context or not.

The process of multiple, nested case study will be utilized. It only concentrates on two companies of the food delivery industry in the broad group of other platform operators. These companies are integral part of the broader picture, i.e., of the gig-economy.

Positionality of the Researcher

This paper is based on research conducted between March – May of 2023. The positionality of the researcher is interpretivist. Exploring the implication of platform work, while the literature on the local context is scarce would have been impossible without studying the personal experiences of the couriers working on delivery platforms. The discussion of the paper is based on the narratives of the workers and hence, they carry subjective features. Interpretation is based on the combination of the interview data collected from the couriers, in combination with the data from the expert interviews, with regards to the concepts and the indicators identified in the literature.

Research Methodology

The research was carried out through literature review, interviews and the analysis of social media and digital materials available, as information on the local context was scarce. The work requires the tick description.

In order to understand the local context, semi-structured interviews with field experts were carried out. The questionnaire comprised of exploratory, open-ended questions, which allowed the interviewees to not fall into the limits of specific questions and provide further, related and relevant information. Interviews were conducted online and in person.

Selection criteria for the interviewees was convenience sampling, snowball sampling and purposeful sampling. Three semi-structured interviews have been conducted with sociologists and a lawyer. Nana Kobidze is the author of the short documentary ‘Your Delivery is on Its Way’ is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University. Dr. Ana Diakonidze was referenced by Nana Kobidze during the interview. Dr. Diakonidze, an associate professor of Sociology at Tbilisi State University, specializing in the social policy and welfare in transition economies, and has concentration on new forms of labour. Her recent works provide some of the most comprehensive local knowledge about the platform work. Lela Gvishiani is a human rights lawyer in Tbilisi, Georgia, with more than ten years of experience of protecting the rights of vulnerable groups within the country, focusing on labour rights. She is the author and co-author of number of studies, guidelines and reports on labour policy, care work, social rights, etc.

Additionally, four couriers (or former couriers) from the two major food delivery platforms – Glovo and Wolt were interviewed through individual semi-structured interviews. Three of the couriers were selected through stratified random sampling – surfing through the courier Facebook groups and TV news reports. I posted in several groups, with thousands of members,

however, as on daily basis, hundreds of posts are being placed there, it was difficult to draw attention. Hence, I randomly contacted approximately 10 couriers, out of which only three responded. Archil had been working on Wolt since 2018, leading several protest movements. He has recently emigrated to the United States. I got in touch with Giga through a Facebook group. John (changed name) has been working for both of the platforms for approximately two years. One more courier was selected through snowball sampling. Archil put me in contact with Nino, a female courier, who has led several protests.

Similar to the expert interviewees, the platform workers have been given the consent form, explained that the consent can be withdrawn at any time, which would oblige the researcher to conceal their input in the thesis. All of the respondents were given the option for staying anonymous. Only one of them – John requested to keep his name undisclosed. All of the respondents were enthusiastic to provide their invaluable input, stating that the main reason they agreed to my request was to help raise awareness about the topic in Georgia and outside of it.

It would have been a valuable addition to the work, to find out the position of the companies through the interviews. Yet, due to the companies' confidentiality policies, it was impossible to conduct interviews with their representatives. Thus, the information on their stance has been collected from online materials and their public statements.

Finally, for the additional data, archival sources, such as news articles and multimedia materials – news reports, documentaries, blogs published on online platforms, as well as, posts and comments on online forums, discussions in Facebook groups, etc. have been collected and analysed, including through discourse analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The interviewees were provided with brief description of the research, and consent forms. They were explained that consent could be withdrawn at any time. The disclaimer about anonymity was given all throughout the communication. The respondents were informed in advance about the audio recording. All of the respondents allowed me to keep their names disclosed in the work. Out of seven interviewees, only one person asked to keep his name undisclosed. I have not kept the information about his identity in any digital form – written or audio. The rest of the couriers allowed me to use their full names, yet, I will be using only first names, so as to avoid any complications from the companies.

Concept of the Paper

Based on literature review and the main categories identified within the literature, open ended questions were formed to understand what are the implications of gig work organization for the workers in Georgia. Thus, the main concept this paper is the organization of work.

Organization of gig work can be systematized as follows - the division of labour, the coordination and control of work (Eurofund 2023). In terms of gig economy, indicators for the organization of work – algorithmic control, algorithmic transparency (Lee et al. 2015), power asymmetries (Rosenblat and Stark 2016), company-worker relations, nature and conditions of work (Kaine and Josserand 2019).

Hence, the understanding the organization of work mainly would encompasses finding out what work is being done, who performs it and how.

1. BACKGROUND: DELIVERY PLATFORM WORK IN GEORGIA

1.1. The Companies

Glovo and Wolt are the local branches of the multi-national corporations represented in different countries across the world. Glovo is a Spanish company, which operates in more than 1,500 cities in 25 countries in Europe, Western Asia and Africa, with 61 thousand monthly couriers, or Glovers as they refer to them and 4,200 employees (Glovo Corporate 2023). Wolt was founded in Helsinki, Finland. In 2022 Wolt finalized an agreement with US-based delivery company DoorDash and as of 2023, they are represented in 26 countries outside of the United States. Companies distinguish between the employees and the partners. Former being the management, support teams, or other workers engaged in organisational matters, and the latter being the couriers.

The precise number of the partner couriers in Georgia is unknown, as they keep the it confidential. According to the general remarks made by the companies' representatives (BM.ge 2020), the information collected through the interviews, as well as, considering the number of members of couriers' social media groups, it is estimated that the number reaches approximately five to six thousand people. One thing that needs to be considered, however, is that some of the couriers, including two couriers out of four who have been interviewed for the purposes of this study, have accounts for both platforms. This practice has been confirmed in expert interviews as well. Another interesting trend, that was noticeable in social media groups, was that some of the couriers rent out the platform work accounts. Posts with such content were quite frequent - several per day. Hence, these trends make determining the actual size of the companies more difficult.

Companies are represented with local offices, who are responsible for managing and overseeing the operation in their specific work area (city, country). They are in charge of

communicating with couriers and briefing the information on local situation to regional and international management.

1.2. The Workers

The absence of statistical data on the people engaged in delivery platform work or gig work leads to the lack of information on the demographics of the workers. Dr. Ana Diakonidze, who is currently doing research locally, has carried out focus group interviews and online survey, with approximately 100 couriers. The larger ratio of the couriers are young males. Women appear to get more and more involved in the industry. Along with being a courier, most of them have other occupation.

Couriers specialize in different kinds of occupations such as arts, music, sports. There are students as well. Despite working on delivery platforms as their “second job”, from the expert interviews as well as the individual interviews with the couriers it turns out that what they earn from the delivery work is their main source of income. Nana Kobidze, while shooting her short documentary “Your Delivery Is on Its Way”⁴, interviewed several couriers, of whom some were musicians, some – female athletes. The shooting coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, when the tourism industry had to shut down. Delivery sector was one place where tourism workers could go and up until the country went back to the “normal life”, this remained the case.

The courier interviewees of this study are coming from the different professional backgrounds.

Archil had been a professional athlete since the age of 12. By the time he registered on Wolt application, he had given up sports, as he mentioned due to the “ridiculously low” income in the industry. He had won several championships, had been training younger athletes, however,

⁴ The movie is at the following address - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u52SoAPSL0A&t=158s>

in 2018, when Wolt entered the Georgian market, he registered as a courier. The main motivation for him was that back when he registered, one could earn decent living through working as a courier. Platform work was his main source of income.

Giga had followed number of occupations, while at some point also serving in Georgian armed forces. Now he also has a family and platform work is his main source of income. Giga registered on Glovo in 2022. As he mentions, he had not decided to become a Glover, however, as some things did not work out as he had planned, he had to do something. One of the factors that motivated him was the absence of direct supervisor. Platform work is his main source of income.

Nino is a musician, sound engineer, who speaks several languages and has worked in a number of industries. She decided to become a Wolt courier, due to financial difficulties. She specifically mentioned that starting a job at any of the supermarket chains was out of question back then, due to the infamous dire work conditions in the sector. For her, the fact that she would not have a “supervisor right there” where she worked made the work more comfortable. And she loved motorcycles, hence delivery platform seemed to be a good option. For Nino, platform work is a side job, she works two days per week.

John had previously worked in number of sectors, starting from supermarket chains, ended with construction sector. He has been working as a Glover for approximately two years. As he said, the main motivation was the pay. For John, platform work is a main source of income.

All of them single-handedly mention, that they opted for the delivery industry, as it was easier to get into, without lengthy bureaucracy of the employment relations.

In light of the labour rights, Lela Gvishiani described the group as a part in the workforce, who could not obtain decent conditions of work on the labour market, they try to find it through

self-employment. They could not find their niche on the Georgian labour market through their skills, occupation or education, have left indecent work environments with the hope for better remuneration. Yet, under the status of self-employed it also became impossible for them to obtain decent work conditions. They got engaged in more precarious, hard work

Overall, drawing from the available information, the couriers are younger men and women. These individuals come from different professional backgrounds. Seeking for decent work conditions and remuneration, they engaged in gig economy. For some, flexibility and no direct supervisor was appealing. The socio-economic situation, dire economic circumstances became a pushing factor to get in the industry. Even though they consider the work far from perfect, the reason they stay is that it provides better remuneration than any other option of employment available to them on the market.

1.3.The Resistance

Couriers' protests started shortly after the lockdown was lifted. According to the interviewees the ground for the protests had been growing as the terms and conditions under which they are working, have gradually worsened – the pay rates have lowered, the bonus systems have worsened, the health insurance was not available, etc. In the post pandemic period, their demand was not to improve the terms of work, but rather to return to the “old terms”, as after the lockdown was over, Glovo and Wolt unilaterally changed the terms for the partners.

In January 2021, more than hundred couriers of the food delivery platform refused to work (Publika 2021a). They were protesting difficult work conditions and inadequate remuneration tariffs. Allegedly, the company had reduced the delivery fees. The protesters claimed that the negotiations with the company were futile. Up to 50 couriers were denied access to the application by the company (Publika 2021b). Several months later, when the company and the couriers reached an agreement, the couriers who had been denied an access, were unblocked

and could use the app. Later in 2021, Glovo announced that they were setting a new standard (Publika 2021c). This included the policies on hourly rates, enhanced insurance packages, safety regulations, education and training.

In the absence of specific policies regulating gig-economy, the protests of couriers of different platforms continue. In February 2023, over 200 Wolt couriers started long-term protests. The demands voiced during these recent demonstrations are the same as previously – pay raise, health insurance, precise records of distance, and collective meeting (conference) with the company management.(Publika 2023a) Similar to previous cases, the protesting couriers got restricted from using the application. In their response, the company provided that the ban had not been imposed due to protests, rather because they hindered the smooth functioning of the service (Publika 2023b). On March 29, the company published a blog, a short Q & A, where they claimed, that the company did not have any obligations to the workers as the latter were not employees of the company, but rather independent contractors (further stressing, that the couriers were satisfied with such classification) (Wolt Georgia 2023).

During the recent protests, the issue of insurance has been stressed regarding the case of one of the Wolt couriers, Levan Mdzevashvili. Archil, Nino and John have all mentioned his name during the interviews. Mdzevashvili's case is widely known in the country. He was a 27-year-old father of three. He got in an accident while carrying out his duties in 2022, working on Wolt. He has been in coma since then, with multiple injuries on his skull, spine, heart, etc. As my interviewees mentioned, Mdzevashvili's family has sold all of their properties, as the insurance company "Aldagi" refused to cover the medical expenses, claiming that the family failed to provide all the necessary documents (Netgazeti 2023). The couriers started a public campaign to collect some amounts for the treatment to help the family out. In the public statement Wolt Georgia issued after the 2023 protests, they specifically addressed

Mdzevashvili's case. The company claimed that the issue should have been discussed between "Aldagi" and the courier's family and that Wolt does not have any responsibilities in this case (Wolt Georgia 2023). Eventually, the insurance company provided 70,000 GEL (equivalent of approximately 24,000 Euros) (BM.ge 2023).

The couriers in the interviews, especially the protest organisers pointed out the ignorance from the side of the company management. The phrases as "They do not listen"; "They do not care"; "They do not think we are humans" were mentioned by my courier respondents independently from each other, at several points throughout the individual interviews. They added that the protests cannot continue for unlimited duration, as everyone has families to take care of and financial obligations in the banks.

Building this resistance is more interesting, due to the nature of gig-work it is more difficult for platform workers to organize and form strong bargaining power (Wood et al. 2018; Anwar and Graham 2020). In the expert interviews it has been highlighted that for delivery workers, in Georgia, resistance has become possible due to the meeting points at the restaurants while they are waiting for the deliveries to be prepared. John in the interview mentioned "these are the places where we share all good and bad with each other, everything that has happened throughout the day." Nino and Archil consider these places crucial for "ripening the resistance" as in their practice, all the protests started from the waiting points at the restaurants, and then social media. They consider the protests as their civil liability. Yet, the hindering factors again become financial difficulties as they suggest. The workers have financial obligations with banks, families to take care of, hence they cannot afford to stop working longer.

2. ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT

Literature suggests, that organising workforce through algorithmic management can lead to significant power asymmetries, which happen through algorithmic control (Rosenblat and Stark 2016; Lee et al. 2015), lack of algorithmic transparency (Lee et al. 2015), and possible bias in rankings (Rosenblat and Stark 2016; Tan et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2015).

Glovo and Wolt applications turn out to differ in the extent of algorithmic control. Couriers who have worked for both companies suggest that Glovo controls more than Wolt. However, they also remarked that higher tariffs offered by Glovo is somehow a compensation for this. As couriers are describing it, Wolt does not control when you log in the system or when you log out, it gives more flexibility.

2.1. Algorithmic control and transparency

In a short documentary shot by Radio Free Georgia “Night Courier” (2021), one of the interviewees, a Glover, describes how high demand hours affect her. As the notification comes up at 1:00 AM, she says she has to work, otherwise it will affect her rating. If she declines the log in request several times when the demand is high, she will get less notifications later and high demand hours will not open up for her. This has been confirmed by Giga and John. They added, that Glovo has recently informed them about an option to decline the request for delivery unlimited times. However, as John observed, if he declines the request, the app does not allow him to receive new requests - “When I decline the offer, I get a notification that the application is looking for a Glover for the order I have declined, but sometimes it takes 40 minutes. Sometimes more. I have noticed that more I decline, the more time it takes to find a new courier. I do not believe it takes this much time to find a person who can take an order.” Glovers said that previously, they could only decline several orders in a row; in which case, the algorithm

would not allow them to work for the next hour. The couriers call it a red hour. “Now this practice seems to be over, however, I feel like this option of unlimited cancellations just covers up the situation. Instead of “red hour” they make you wait.” The complaints about this practice are prevalent in Facebook groups as well.

Another hinderance in the functioning of the algorithm which came up in the Facebook discussions was the division of city into zones. Previously, the whole city of Tbilisi was one zone, which covered the 502 square kilometres (Tbilisi City Hall). This meant that the couriers could get one order at one end of the city and another order from another part of the city, which was exhausting and financially damaging for them. The couriers were happy with the news about the division, however, more recent posts appeared to have identified some issues in the system, upon which they have not been notified by the company. Giga and John both touched upon this topic during the interviews, mentioning that since the city got divided into zones, Glovers can choose the area where they wanted to work. The email sent by Glovo stated that in case the algorithm would allow the orders from outside of the working zone of a courier, the next order would be from within the zone, so that couriers would be able to get back in the zone. Yet, in practice, it became clear that once the algorithm would allow you out of the zone, there was no guarantee that it would bring you back. Both of the Glovers mentioned how they would start the day in their own zone and in the complete in in opposite side of the city. They consider this as one of the more stressing issues – “Sometimes it can take me 1.5 hours to get back home. The whole point of division was to avoid this, and it still happens.”

The couriers who have worked for Wolt described how, for a particular period, the algorithm would only count aerial distances. “Nobody would take an order from the settlements of Mtatsminda⁵ as the algorithm would only count one or two kilometres, yet, to get there, you

⁵ “Holy Mountain” adjacent to the historic, central part of the city.

would need to drive 12-13 km” (Archil). Generally, problems with counting the real distances covered are prevalent in both of the algorithms. Couriers mentioned how the program would take them through wrong ways and passes, at times even leading to traffic violations. However, whenever they felt like the algorithm unfairly cut the kilometres covered, company in most cases would react adequately, reimbursing the amounts for the real distances covered.

2.2. Rating system

Another important point that couriers highlighted during the interviews was a rating system. Glovo has been using the ratings actively and even mentions on their main page that the compensation depends on “your experience and ratings.” Wolt did not use to have a rating system, however, Nino mentioned that they have introduced it just recently. All of the couriers mentioned that they do not mind the existence of the ratings. Archil, who had led the couriers’ protests, said that the protesters were even asking for its introduction. Nino said she preferred ratings, as doing a good job, she would feel more appreciated. Glovers did not mind the ratings either. John pointed out that the existence of the system was acceptable for the majority, the issue is the obscurity over how the system functions – “I feel like it subtracts the points very easily, while one has to work super hard to improve the ratings. I know what the components of my rating are, however, I do not know how strongly these components affect my rating, I do not know which has more weight.” Everyone assumed that they felt like consumers’ feedbacks affected the ratings the least, yet the most damaging factor was declining the orders.

2.3. Power asymmetries

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that more than the algorithm, the couriers would stress on the ineffectiveness of the management. During the conversations, all the points raised about the algorithm, ended up with the courier respondents expressing dissatisfaction and even frustration with the management. Regardless of the companies and completely independently

from each other, while reflecting on their experiences of the relations with the companies, one phrase stood out to me – “They do not consider us as human beings.”

The couriers are dissatisfied with the amount of information they get, the form of information they get, means and the forms of communication. They seem to be even more frustrated with the fact that they have voiced their concerns with the management a number of times, yet, mostly, the issues remain unaddressed.

All of the courier interviewees regardless of the company, mentioned that they actively use emails to communicate with the management, yet they need a lot of effort to get the comprehensive information on the questions or solutions to their problems. “They send us emails, but these are just templates.” When it comes to the algorithm, transparency is an issue. The documents and information about the algorithmic management of the companies – control and transparency, are available on Glovo (‘Glovo - Algorithms’ 2023) and Wolt (‘Transparency at Wolt’ 2023), yet, either much little or no information about this topic is available in Georgian.

Workers’ experiences with the algorithm showcases how it software is used to subtly manage their behaviour. On the surface, it seems at a glance that couriers are given the options to choose their own work zone or their own working hours, their choice still has to be in line with the company preferences. If they do not work in high demand hours, their ratings lower; if there is a high demand outside of their working zone, the algorithm sends them there, yet, does not give them relevant delivery orders to get back in the zone of their preference. It is concerning for the workers as well, that the information they get from the companies is incomplete and the feedback they give to the company is not reflected in practice. “I do not think the algorithm is a problem. Algorithm is written by people and these people make miracles. So, I cannot believe,

it is impossible to solve a problem, especially when we have told them that there are issues like this,” says Giga.

Even though the interviewees identify the problems with the algorithm, they were more concerned with the management behaviour. This is one of the differences between the observations made in theory (Lee et al. 2015; Wood et al. 2018; Rosenblat and Stark 2016) and the conclusions I could draw from the workers’ narratives.

3. CONDITIONS OF WORK

3.1. Flexibility

Similar to many other countries across the world, flexibility is advertised by gig economy companies in Georgia as well. As one opens up Glovo website, the message says - “Collaborate with us. You choose when you want to log in at your convenience, and what orders you want to deliver.” Couriers’ experiences with Glovo showcase that the company does not allow as much flexibility as promoted. According to Nino, working with Glovo was quite the opposite of flexible, which was the reason she switched to Wolt. All of the couriers who have worked for Wolt state, that as the company is more flexible, the pay is less.

There might be a difference in how much flexibility these platform companies offer, yet, they offer more than any other business on the market. In the “Night Courier” (Radio Free Georgia 2021), a Glover suggested, that while being a student, no other company setting allows her to study and work, and have a “normal wage” all at the same time. John, as he works on both platforms, while comparing the extent of flexibility of the platforms, confirmed what I had heard from previous respondents. For him, Glovo is less flexible, yet the pay is higher, which is the reason he chooses to continue the work there.

The respondents did not concentrate much on the flexibility component. I could infer from their narrative, that even if they do not feel completely in charge of their own schedule in platform work, they still prefer it over the other available options on the market.

3.2. Precarity

Labour in gig economy is characterised by precarity (De Stefano 2016; Rubery et al. 2018; Wood et al. 2018; Tan et al. 2021). As there is no universal definition of precarious work, the literature largely refers to what is lacking from standard employment relations (Olsthoorn

2014; De Stefano 2015) – security of employment, unemployment benefits. Precarious work makes the workers vulnerable (Eurofund, 2018 n.d.). During the interviews, the insecurities in terms of job and sufficient income became clear.

John started his interview stating that a lot of workers have two accounts, so that when one gets blocked, they still can work on that day. Workers can get blocked for a number of reasons. At times, they are unknown and unexpected - „I once got blocked after working the whole day in the rain. I was so exhausted; I did not look like a human being. And I still got blocked, without knowing the reason” (John).

They contact the support and get the answer that the algorithm has decided so. If the reasons is a consumer’s feedback, it is clear, however, Glovers shared that in their personal experience, this happened rather rarely. The couriers state that they can appeal the block by going to the office and request for unblock, however, the process is not uniform, it can take different amount of time in individual cases.

Restricting couriers from the system is a widespread practice during the courier protests. The companies’ state that this does not happen due to strikes, but rather due to the “hinderance of the smooth functioning of the platform” which is a part of their agreement (Publika 2021b; 2023b).

“They tell us, if you do not like the way this business is done, you can go, there are plenty more people who want to do this job. And then, they announce a call and there are endless lines of people who want to start a job there. Everyone needs to work. And the we, the ones who are protesting cannot even protest too long, as we all have some financial or family obligations” (Archil).

The practice is the same in Glovo as well. “When I started a job, I did not have to do much. They did not ask me anything. They needed couriers, as large number was protesting and the application was not working because of this. I needed a job, so....” - tells Giga.

Another insecurity stems from uncertainties with the pay rates. John, emphasized that the pay was not attractive because it was decent, but rather, it was better than anywhere else - “I have to work hard and overtime anywhere. At least these platforms pay better than anyone.”

The couriers talked about uncertainty in pay rates and unilateral contract modification from the companies’ side. And the cause of the protest movements initially was pay rates, which was unilaterally changed by the companies after the pandemic. Regarding the payments, the workers did not ask for anything new. The request was to bring back the “old rates”, as they call them. All of the couriers have remarked that the conditions in terms of the pay have been gradually worsening.

Couriers’ another concern is that the program does not count the distances properly, thus they get paid less. The application of aerial distance in Wolt’s case has been finally changed, however, the problem of counting the real distances remained according to the workers. In the cases where the cut distance was too obvious, company would made corrections.

Waiting time at the restaurants were also problematic for them. affects the workflow of the couriers, they specifically concentrated on fast food chains, stating that they have to wait the most there, never knowing exactly when the order is going to be ready for the pick-up. Instruction from the companies in such cases is “Smile and let us deal with it.” Then companies communicate with the restaurants and couriers are told to wait “...for a little more. The order is going to ready soon.” Soon can last for 1.5 hours when the demand is high. Couriers were concerned about this information vacuum they have to be in and remain calm. For all of them, knowing the waiting time is crucial to decide whether they want to deliver the order or not.

Overall, reduction of rates, long waiting hours and less consideration of climate conditions lead to longer working hours of the couriers. All of the couriers, for whom this work is the main source of income have been working 12-13 hours per day.

Nana Kobidze and Lela Gvishiani emphasized the hazardous nature of the work, need for occupational safety measures, and the importance of health insurance. Courier interviews made this clear as well. Each of the respondents referred to different factors such as emissions, long term health effects of weather conditions and constant vibration of the moped, the high chances of getting in the accidents. They stressed the importance of not only the insurance for accidents, but rather general health insurance. As it is stated on Glovo website, the company offers health insurance and accident insurance, as well as benefits for sick leave and maternity leave. However, when I asked about the insurance conditions, Giga had no information at all. John had previously inquired about the conditions, as he once had a small accident and for him the procedures were so complicated, he gave up. According to Archil, as the company did not give him an option of general health insurance, he tried to get one on his own. He only found one insurance company, which provided service for the moped drivers, however, the fee was overly expensive for him to afford. Nino added, that the process of insurance is complicated and one has to allocate a lot of time to familiarize themselves with terms and conditions. Yet, even this is not enough. Along with Mdzevashvili's case, which has been mentioned by all of my respondents – experts and the couriers, Nino and Archil remembered a story of a courier, who got into an accident, requiring 3000 Euros for treatment, which was confirmed by the medical documents, however, the insurance company only remunerated 3 Euros.

4. STATUS

4.1. Discourse about the Status

Employment rights are tied to the relevant status. Literature suggests, that in order for a person to benefit from labour rights, unemployment protection and other social benefits connected to it – e.g. health insurance, it is essential that the person has an employee status (Gandini 2019). The topic of status itself is a subject of comprehensive legal research, as there is no universal agreement on what the world of labour is dealing with and how it should be regulated. With the brief discussion of existing approaches locally, the focus of this paper when discussing the status is how the workers look at it. As this point in Georgian reality has one peculiarity.

Before contacting the interviewees, I analysed the demands voiced during the protests. In this process, I noticed that in the post-pandemic wave of protests, Wolt and Glovo couriers never voiced the issue of “status”. Question is, if the protest waves in the EU the central point was the status and in the proposal for the EU Directive on Platform Work (European Commission 2021) status is the central point, why do the Georgian couriers do not concentrate on this issue?

First, we might look for the answers in Georgian legislation. It does not provide form strong social safety net – the Labour Code does not provide for any obligation in terms of insurance, or unemployment benefits; as for the Organic Law on Occupational Safety – it only lays down the requirement of insurance of accidents in hazardous workplaces (Article 5.9, Organic Law of Georgia on Occupational Safety). There are no unemployment benefits. Presidential Decree N351 issued in the 1999, sets 20 GEL (equivalent of 8 Euros) as a minimum wage per month.

In 2021 however, a group of Bolt Food couriers raised a claim in Public Defender’s office, pointing out, that the company had denied their access to the application due to their protest for labour rights. The company denied the existence of employment relationship, as they

considered the workers as partners. In addition, company claimed that they had not restricted an access to the application due to their participation in the protests, but for the reason of organized activities, which hindered the proper functioning of the app. In accordance with international standards, the Public Defender found, that the relationship between the couriers and the company in fact was an employment relationship, similar to any other employment contracts. The Ombudsman established that the termination of the contract had taken place on discriminatory grounds (The Public Defender of Georgia 2021). Ombudsman's decision is of recommendatory nature. The court case briefly mentioned previously is pending in Tbilisi City Court. Here, a Wolt courier's claim, among others, also asks for the employee status. The legal assistance is provided by the Georgian Trade Union Confederation. In the recent press conference, with reference to the International Labour Organisation Recommendation N198, stated that one of the demands definitely is definitely the employee status and the Confederation is actively advocating for the legislative guarantees of the status.

According to Lela Gvishiani, the reasons why the couriers have not actively asked for the employee status should be sought within the social, employment and tax policies. Which is that employment status comes with tax obligations – 20% income tax. On the other hand, even if the employees' income is taxed, they do not get any benefits from the state in return.

The issue of the status was one of the key points in the interviews with the Glovers and Wolt couriers. Everyone was well aware, that the employment status means bearing an income tax. All were unwilling to undertake this obligation. Nino and Archil mentioned that while organizing the protests, they consciously made a decision not to put the status issue in the demands. According to my respondents, whether they will be named employees or not, will not change much for them, if the issues with communication, algorithm and health insurance remains unresolved.

4.2. Regulatory Points

It became clear from the interviews that the companies encourage couriers to register as individual entrepreneurs. At Glovo this turns out to be a requirement, at Wolt – it is optional. The Decree N999 of the Minister of Finance on the Application of the Special Taxation Regime provides the tax exceptions or lower taxes for micro businesses, small businesses, etc. Depending on the size of the and the profit the tax rate can range between 1% and 3%, which is much less than the income tax employers deduct from the employees' salaries – 20% (Article, 42, Tax Code of Georgia).

With the employee status, Labour Code provides for a number of important entitlements such as the organisation of working time, information obligations, prohibition of unilateral amendments in the essential terms of the contract, protection from discrimination, rights to collective bargaining, rights to safe work environment, rules for termination of the contract, right to strike, etc. (Labour Code of Georgia (As amended in 2020)). The Organic Law on Occupational Safety provides for rights and obligations of employers and employees to ensure safe work environment. The enforcement mechanism is the Labour Inspection Service, which oversees the implementation of laws and by-laws in labour rights and occupational safety (The Law of Georgia on Labour Inspection Service).

As there is an absence of statutory regulation and practically no legal practice, in the legal discourse, the reference is made to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Recommendation N.198 calling for the primacy of facts with regards to qualifying the relations between the parties as an employment relationship. The recommendation states that regardless of the name of the contract, the set of criteria shall be taken into consideration to determine the nature of the relationship. Such criteria go as follows (is not limited to the them):

“(a) the fact that the work: is carried out according to the instructions and under the control of another party; involves the integration of the worker in the organization of the enterprise; is performed solely or mainly for the benefit of another person; must be carried out personally by the worker; is carried out within specific working hours or at a workplace specified or agreed by the party requesting the work; is of a particular duration and has a certain continuity; requires the worker's availability; or involves the provision of tools, materials and machinery by the party requesting the work;

(b) periodic payment of remuneration to the worker; the fact that such remuneration constitutes the worker's sole or principal source of income; provision of payment in kind, such as food, lodging or transport; recognition of entitlements such as weekly rest and annual holidays; payment by the party requesting the work for travel undertaken by the worker in order to carry out the work; or absence of financial risk for the worker.”

Information obtained throughout this research, under the light of this criteria shows, that in the organisation of platform work, some features, such as instruction and control, availability of the workers, duration and continuity of the work, provision of tools and materials, principality of the income is evident. Meanwhile some criteria can be the subject of interpretation, such as integration in the organisation, specific working hours, performance of work personally by the worker (as briefly mentioned in the beginning of the paper, couriers actively rent and rent out their profiles), etc. While some criteria, such as absence of financial risk for the workers is completely absent. However, the recommendation suggests that the criteria are not supposed to be present cumulatively in order for the relations to qualify as employment.

The rights stemming from the employment status can play crucial role in terms of entitlements to information, power asymmetries, workers' bargaining power, and elimination of the precarious nature. As Nana Kobidze mentions in the interview, protests with specific demands, without asking for employment status seems like "fighting with symptoms". Yet, all of the expert interviewees, as well as the couriers themselves underline that to the workers, what is gained through the status, is not equivalent to the tax burden they will have to bear in exchange.

To conclude, the opinions about the status seems to be somewhat divided even between the couriers. As all of my respondents were not in favour of the status, the Bolt Food case at the Ombudsman's office and the Wolt courier's case in Tbilisi City court show the opposite opinion. However, as it is evident that the 20% income tax rate seems intimidating for a number of workers, especially when they do not get the equivalent social benefits in return.

CONCLUSION

Findings

The research has led to interesting findings, proving what has been already established in the literature, as well as leading me to find out the differences, which are particular to the Georgian context.

The delivery platform workers in Georgia are mainly young people, with different professional, occupational, educational backgrounds, who have been transferring into the gig economy due to the lack of employment opportunities with decent conditions. The main reasons to start platform work for them is the flexibility, the pay and the absence of physical supervisor.

As the literature suggests, the organization of platform work can cause negative implications for the workers (Lee et al. 2015; Rosenblat and Stark 2016; Veen, Barratt, and Goods 2020). Was confirmed to be true for Georgian couriers as well. It turns out that management through algorithms create power asymmetries through algorithmic control and lack of transparency in the algorithms. The workers experience different extent of control and thus have different extent of flexibility in terms of setting up their work schedule.

As the scholars have found the ratings to be affecting the workers significantly, in terms of discrimination or emotional labour (Tan et al. 2021), Georgian workers did not seem to bother with the existence of the system. Even more, where there was not a rating system, the couriers remarked that it would have been better to be introduced. The workers were more concerned with not being familiar with what components affected their ratings to what extent. They knew what the rating was consisting of, and assumed that the consumer feedback mattered the least, while order cancellation-acceptance rates mattered the most.

Another point, which stood out during the courier interviews, which was peculiar for a Georgian case was the relationship of couriers with the management. The workers stated that the management was not efficient in the communication. The means and tools of the communication were inefficient.

For Georgian Glovers and Wolt couriers, the work is precarious. They experience insecurities in terms of pay, as the companies are capable of changing the terms unilaterally. There are cases of restricting the couriers from the platform after or during the protests. Obscurity of the algorithm adds to the insecurities. The couriers can get restricted from the system unexpectedly. As they cannot afford to stop working, some of them are registered both on Wolt and Glovo.

Finally, what makes Georgian case different is the division in terms of whether the workers should have the status of employees or not. Experts suggest that the unwillingness of a certain group of employees is caused by the social, employment and tax policies, where the employees bear 20% income tax, yet the social guarantees stemming from the status does not seem to be worth it for the workers.

Limitations

The work is based on the workers experiences in gig economy. The number of couriers interviewed for this work is little. Hence the opinions might not be representative of the population, as well as the experiences. The study on the larger scale would provide more diverse data to substantiate the arguments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. – Expert Interview Questionnaire

- Who are the couriers/platform workers in Georgia?
 - College educated? Skilled workers? What's their social-economic background?
- Why do they enrol in this industry?
 - Flexibility? Pay? Is this usually a side-job or has it become main occupation and hence the source of income for them?
- What are the characteristics of the courier-platform relations?
- What are the characteristics of courier consumer relations?
 - evaluation, ratings, bias?
- What are the characteristics of the relations between couriers?
 - solidarity, knowledge exchange, socialization, organization.
- Courier-restaurant (or other entities) relations? – waiting time issues, etc.
- Reasons behind the massive courier protests (The role of pandemic?).
- Main demands. How the companies meet the demands (Do they participate in collective bargaining?)

Appendix 2. – Courier Interview Questionnaire

- Introduction
 - Educational or professional background
- What were the reasons for your enrollment in this industry?
 - Flexibility? Pay? Is this usually a side-job or has it become main occupation and hence the source of income?
- How would you describe the relationship with the company?
- What is your experience of working with the consumers?
 - evaluation, ratings, bias?
- How would you describe the relationships with fellow couriers?
 - solidarity, knowledge exchange, socialization, organization.
- What are the characteristics of the courier-restaurant relations?
- Reasons behind the massive courier protests (The role of pandemic?).
- Main demands. How the companies meet the demands (Do they participate in collective bargaining?)